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FOREWORD FROM THE MINISTER



I am very pleased to introduce this 2004 Annual Report of the Department.

The Department is central to the social and economic life of this country. Through its range of schemes – from Maternity and Child Benefit, across its Social and Family Services, to Old Age Pensions – it touches on the life of practically every person in the state at some time or another.

This Government is proud of our investment in social provision. In 2004, spending on social welfare reached €11.29 billion – the highest ever – or almost 29% of all Government expenditure. Each week, the Department made payments to around 960,000 persons while a further 540,000 families received Child Benefit each month.

Since becoming Minister for Social and Family Affairs in September 2004 I have become more directly aware of the vital role of the Department in the life of the nation. Enormous progress has been made in the development of the social welfare system, and the progress made during 2004 is outlined in this report. There is much work still to do and my priority, as Minister, is to look behind the payments and services which the Department provides and seek to address the key challenges facing the country whether in the areas of pensions, long-term care, provision of opportunities for employment, education and further development for recipients of those payments, tackling child poverty and so on. I am confident that we will be able to make sufficient progress in these key areas in the period ahead.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Seamus Brennan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Seamus Brennan, TD
Minister for Social and Family Affairs

INTRODUCTION FROM THE SECRETARY-GENERAL



This is the second report on the Department's Statement of Strategy 2003-2005 "Promoting a Caring Society". It outlines the progress we made during 2004 on delivering on our commitments under the strategy.

The Department was responsible for expenditure of some €11.3 billion in 2004. Our main priority is the continued delivery of social welfare payments in an efficient and effective way and the implementation of changes in services as required. The quality of the service provided by the Department's staff in challenging circumstances during 2004 was of a consistently high standard. In addition a number of significant improvements were made in service delivery during the year.

The Department also has a major input into policy making both in relation to social welfare schemes and more generally in the context of the social policy and social inclusion agendas and a number of important developments in this regard are outlined in the report.

Investment in new technology and support for the e-Government agenda is a major aspect of the Department's work and we have made good progress in the development of our IT systems and contributed in a significant way to the wider e-Government agenda, as outlined in the report.

The programme of decentralisation announced by the Government in December 2003 has major implications for the Department with 1,300 posts to be decentralised to Drogheda, Carrickmacross, Carrick-on-Shannon, Sligo, Donegal and Buncrana. Planning and implementation of this programme has been and will continue to be a priority.

Ensuring that governance and risk management arrangements are adequate for business continuity and implementation of the major changes facing the Department is another important priority and a number of measures were put in place in 2004 to strengthen the Department's risk management and control systems.

We are conscious of our role as a public service organisation, of the particular importance of the services we provide and of the need for those services to be provided to the highest standard. It is to the credit of the staff of the Department that, despite the challenges we faced and the increased demands on our services, we were able to maintain and, in a number of respects, improve our overall service during 2004.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Hynes". The signature is written in a cursive style.

John Hynes
Secretary-General

CHAPTER 01

THE DEPARTMENT

THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND FAMILY AFFAIRS

→ The main functions of the Department are:

- to formulate appropriate social protection policies;
- to administer and manage the delivery of statutory and non-statutory social and family schemes and services; and
- to work with other Departments and agencies in the delivery of Government priorities.

The main business of the Department continues to be the provision of income support, including insurance (PRSI) based payments, social assistance (means tested) payments, associated secondary benefits and Child Benefit. Increasingly, the Department's emphasis is also on meeting the diverse needs of our different customer groups by not only developing a range of services that give our customers financial security in a prompt and efficient way but also encouraging them to maximise their participation in society, at whatever level their skills and abilities permit. This requires collaboration with other Government Departments and Agencies and the voluntary and community sector.

→ Organisation of the Department

The Department employs 4,734 people (4,289 full-time equivalent posts) and is structured on Aireacht/Executive lines.

The **Aireacht** provides a range of corporate services comprising Personnel (including the Employee Assistance Service), Corporate and Staff Development Units, Finance, Facilities Management and Internal Audit. It also includes the policy area – the Planning Division – which is responsible for the formulation of social protection and other social support policies, the

preparation of legislation and for the provision of policy support and advice to the Minister.

Social Welfare Services (SWS) is the executive arm of the Department and is responsible for the administration and management of social welfare schemes and services through a network of local, regional and other offices. Our main offices are located in Dublin, Dundalk, Letterkenny, Longford, Sligo and Waterford.

Regional Structure: The local delivery of some services is structured on a 10-region basis with offices in Cork, Dundalk, Galway, Limerick, Longford, Sligo, Waterford and three in the Dublin area. Within these regions there is a network of 58 Social Welfare Local Offices (SWLOs) and 68 Branch Offices (SWBOs).

Social Welfare Appeals Office is the independent Office responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

The **Reach** agency (www.reachservices.ie), which reports to the Department, has as its aims to radically improve the quality of service to personal and business customers of Government and to develop and deploy the Public Services Broker (PSB) to help agencies achieve that improvement. In particular Reach is to develop and implement an integrated set of processes, systems and procedures to provide a standard means of access to public services, to be known as the Public Services Broker.

MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE



JOHN HYNES
Secretary General



BERNADETTE LACEY
Director General



GERRY DALY
Assistant Director General



TOM MULHERIN
Assistant Secretary



ALICE O'FLYNN
Assistant Secretary



BRIAN O RAGHALLAIGH
Assistant Director General



VERA DERVAN
Director



GERRY MANGAN
Director



NIALL BARRY
Director



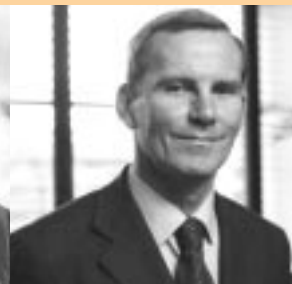
MAUREEN WALDRON
Director



EOIN O'BROIN
Director



OLIVER RYAN
Director – REACH



BRIAN FLYNN
Director

→ Statutory Agencies

There are five offices which come under the aegis of the Department:

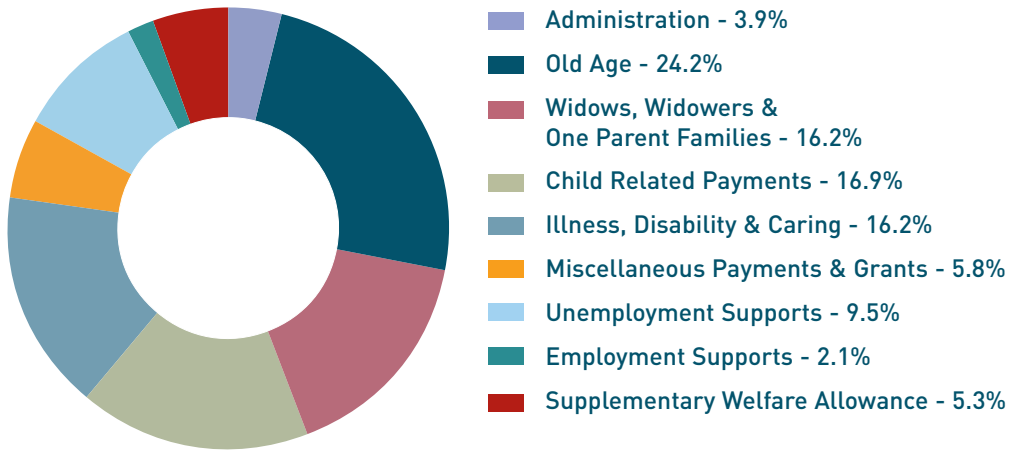
- **Comhairle** which has responsibility for supporting the provision of independent information, advice and advocacy services for all citizens throughout the country. OASIS (On-line Access to Services, Information and Support), is a public service information system provided over the Internet by Comhairle (www.comhairle.ie);
- **Combat Poverty Agency (CPA)** which has responsibilities in the areas of advice to the Minister, research, action programmes and information in relation to poverty in Ireland (www.cpa.ie);
- **Family Support Agency (FSA)** which is responsible for the provision of a family mediation service, the support, promotion and development of marriage and relationship counselling and other family supports, and the Family and Community Services Resource programme. The Agency's responsibilities also include undertaking research, providing and disseminating information about parenting and family issues, and providing advice to the Minister on matters relating to families (www.welfare.ie);
- **The Office of the Pensions Ombudsman**, which investigates complaints of injustice due to maladministration, disputes of fact or law, in occupational pension schemes. The Pensions Ombudsman is a statutory officer and exercises his functions independently. He reports to the Houses of the Oireachtas (www.pensionsombudsman.ie); and
- **The Pensions Board** which is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Pensions Act which concerns the security and development of occupational pensions, and for the development of occupational pensions (www.pensionsboard.ie).

→ Finance

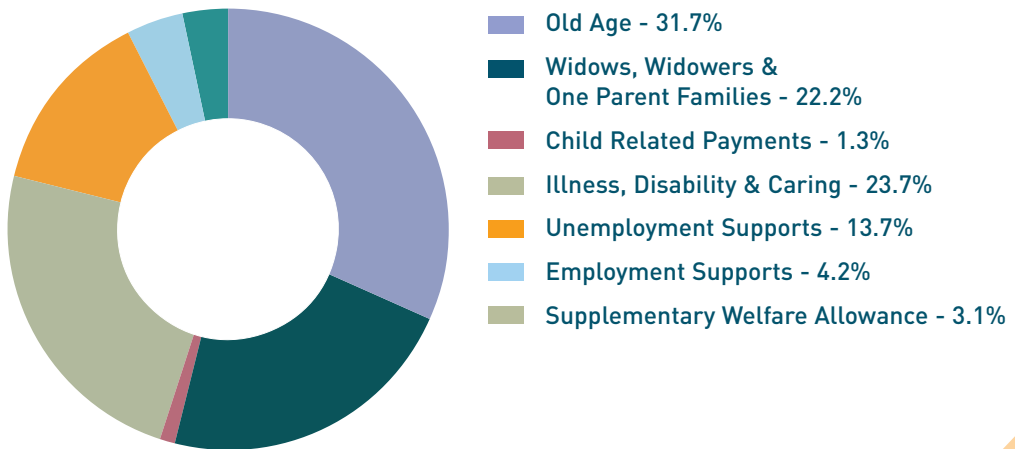
In 2004, total expenditure by the Department amounted to over €11.29 billion. The charts below illustrate the sources of finance in 2004 and the programme areas where this money was spent.

For a full breakdown on expenditure, please turn to Appendix 3 (page 77).

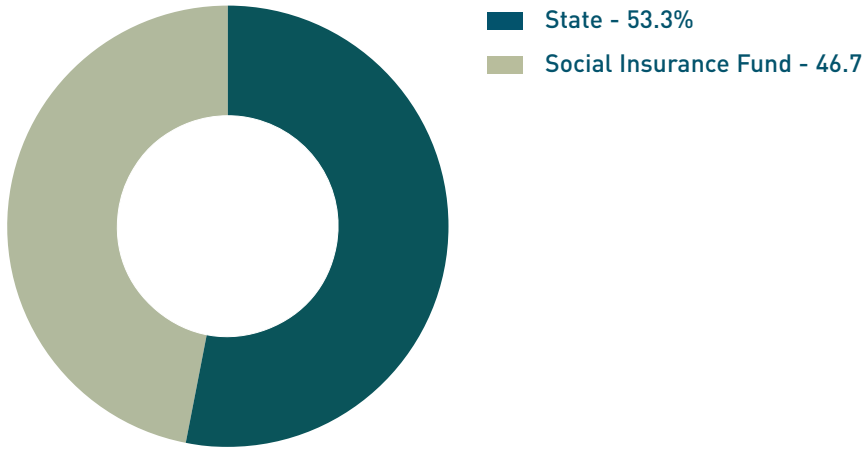
EXPENDITURE ON SOCIAL WELFARE BY PROGRAMME 2004



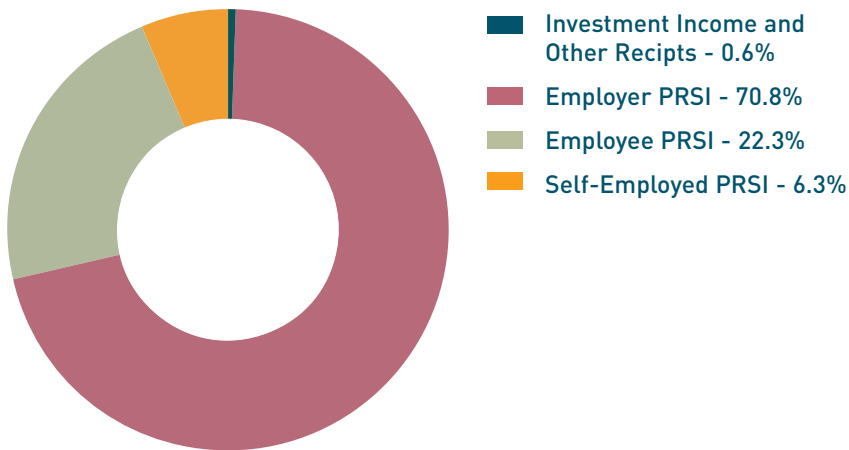
NUMBER OF RECIPIENTS OF WEEKLY SOCIAL WELFARE PAYMENTS BY PROGRAMME AREA, 2004



FINANCING OF SOCIAL WELFARE EXPENDITURE 2004



FINANCING OF THE SOCIAL INSURANCE FUND 2004



CHAPTER 02

2004 - A YEAR IN REVIEW

2004 - A YEAR IN REVIEW

2004 was a busy and eventful year for the Department. As always, the nature of our business means that change is a constant feature as the social welfare system has to be responsive to other changes happening in society and be flexible enough to deal with such change.

The Department's policies in 2004 were shaped by the Programme for Government launched in 2002 and reviewed in 2004, the Social Partnership Agreement 'Sustaining Progress' which was reviewed, mid-term, in 2004, and in the National Action Plan to combat poverty and social inclusion.

→ EU Presidency

A particular highlight of the year was the sixth Irish Presidency of the European Union which began on 1 January 2004.



During the Presidency, the focus for the Department was to advance the EU social policy agenda generally and, in particular, to make progress in realising the ten-year goals set by the Lisbon European Council in 2000.

One of the goals of the Lisbon Agenda is to achieve greater social cohesion. Based on an analysis of the second round National Action Plans on Social Inclusion (2003-2005), a report on Employment, Social Protection/Inclusion and Gender Equality was adopted by the Council of Ministers in March and reflected in a Key Messages Paper to the Spring European Council.

The four key social protection/inclusion messages relate to:

- strengthening social inclusion;
- making work pay (which was the subject of a special Ministerial meeting in January);

- ensuring that pension systems support longer working lives; and
- ensuring accessibility, sustainability and quality of health care and long-term care for the elderly.

One of the priorities of the Irish Presidency was to secure agreement with the European Parliament on the **reform and simplification of Regulation 1408/71** which coordinates the social security rights of migrant workers, and members of their families, when they move within the Union. Following acceptance by the European Parliament and the Council the new Regulation was adopted on 29 April 2004. In addition, the Minister hosted a special conference in Budapest on 7 and 8 May, in co-operation with the Hungarian Government and the Commission, which addressed both the future implications of the new simplified Regulation for all 25 States and the particular immediate challenges facing new Member States in implementing the existing Regulation.

The issue of migration was also a priority for the Department during the Irish Presidency. On 1 and 2 April we hosted a conference in Bundoran on the theme of "**Reconciling Mobility and Social Inclusion**". The main focus of the conference was on the role of social and employment policies in achieving social inclusion for people moving within the EU and it concluded that clear and comprehensive strategies are required at national level to promote employment and social inclusion of immigrants. Further details regarding this conference, including conference papers and conclusions, are available on the OSI website – www.socialinclusion.ie (in the publications section), or directly from the Office for Social Inclusion, Department of Social and Family Affairs, Áras Mhic Dhiarmada, Store Street, Dublin 1. Tel: +353 1 7043851.

In the area of Family Policy and to mark the 10th anniversary of the UN International Year of the

Family, the Irish Presidency hosted, with the support of the EU Commission, a major international conference on the theme "**Families, Change and Social Policy in Europe**" (Dublin, 12-13 May). The conference confirmed the high value placed on families throughout Europe. Families remain among the top sources of individual well being and social cohesion, and as such are a major source of social capital.

However, new pressures placed on families include the fact that the employment of both parents is becoming the norm and these new arrangements are leading to difficulties from the competing demands of work and family. Families at risk of social exclusion throughout Europe include those headed by lone parents, large families, jobless households and older people living alone. Ways discussed for meeting the challenges faced include more family friendly practices, the development of the right mix of income support and other family services and the provision of special targeted measures to assist more vulnerable families. The conference papers are available at www.welfare.ie/topics/eu_pres04/fam_conf/

The Irish Presidency also progressed an initiative taken by previous Presidencies by hosting a **third meeting of people experiencing poverty** in Brussels at the end of May. One of the key messages to emerge was that effective participation by people experiencing poverty is taking place and is being developed across all Member States to help make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and achieve greater social cohesion. Conference papers and conclusions are available at www.socialinclusion.ie (in the publications section), or directly from the Office for Social Inclusion, Department of Social and Family Affairs, Áras Mhic Dhiarmada, Store Street, Dublin 1. Tel: +353 1 7043851.

→ Programme for Government

Specific commitments were given for achieving target rates in the Programme for Government for the lowest social welfare payments, setting the appropriate equivalence level of child income support and achieving a basic State pension rate

of at least €200 per week. The total funding for social welfare, at over €11.29 billion in 2004, was the largest ever committed. (Details of the social welfare budget package are contained in Chapter 3 and Appendix 3).

→ Activation measures including Employment Supports

Unemployment levels have reduced from over 12% in 1995 to less than 5% at present. The labour force is projected to grow from 1.98 million in 2004 to between 2.27 and 2.37 million by 2016. It is anticipated that, over the medium term, the current buoyancy in the labour market will continue.

The Department's customers include large numbers of people of working age. We are committed to delivering income support schemes to all customers who qualify, in an efficient and customer-friendly way. In addition, helping welfare customers to get back into employment, education or training, where appropriate, is a key role of the Department with programmes such as the Family Income Supplement (FIS), Back to Work Allowance (BTWA) and the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) being examples of specific supports to people to access or remain in work. Developments with these schemes are covered in this report (Chapter 4).

→ Families and family support services

Ireland has seen huge social change over the past decade and significant changes have taken place in family formation and family structures. Overall there has been a shift towards a greater diversity of family types, a growing incidence of later marriage, cohabitation, marital and family breakdown and lone parenthood. There is also a greater and growing number of one-person households. The increase in diverse family forms in Irish society raises issues in relation to the current structure of social welfare payments.

The Government has begun a strategic process under which issues affecting families would be

addressed in an integrated way across the range of Departments and agencies. These include a public consultation process by way of five regional fora which gave rise to the publication of "Families and Family Life in Ireland: Challenges for the Future" in 2004 (available on-line at http://iyf2004.welfare.ie/Family_Life_FINAL.pdf). This report, in conjunction with the report of the Irish EU Presidency Conference (see above) will inform the Interdepartmental Committee which was established during 2004 (the 10th anniversary of the UN International Year of the Family) to oversee the development of a strategic approach to strengthening families (Chapter 5).

→ Social Inclusion Measures

Good progress has been recorded against many of the targets in the Irish National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusions – see Chapter 6 for further details. The first annual report of the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) contains a wide range of activities and strategies indicating the range and breadth of programmes aimed at tackling social exclusion. Some examples include:

- The launch in September 2004 of the National Disability Strategy;
- The extension nation-wide of the FÁS High Support Process for jobseekers suffering personal barriers to employment;
- Additional funding for childcare under the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme; and
- The establishment of the first National Council for Special Education.

→ New Technology and e-Government

The Department invests significantly in programmes to maintain and modernise existing service delivery systems. This involves, in particular, continuing investment in technology and new systems to provide services more effectively and efficiently. The Department's programme of service delivery modernisation is being implemented – details in Chapter 7 – with very good progress being made over the different elements of the programme.

A notable development was the enactment of the Civil Registration Act in February 2004 and completion of the rollout of the Civil Registration Modernisation Programme. The integration of birth registration and Child Benefit claim processing was progressively extended as registration offices went live resulting in Child Benefit for nearly 32,000 children being automatically processed and average processing time from birth registration to payment of Child Benefit reduced from 10 weeks to a few days.

→ Meeting Customer Needs

The bulk of the Department's activity is in the delivery of direct service to the public. This involves a considerable level of interaction between Department staff and the public, whether in person, by phone etc., and with their representatives. We are committed to meeting the needs of an increasing and diverse customer base and our new Customer Action Plan 2004-2007 and our first Customer Charter demonstrate our strong commitment to customer service (Chapter 8).

Keeping in touch with our customers informs our service delivery approach. We do this in a variety of ways – sample surveys by independent market consultants, customer panels, a formal Comments and Complaints system and touchscreen surveys at our local and branch offices. The most recent of these (October 2004) indicates that there is generally a high level of satisfaction – for example:

- 92% were satisfied with the service received;
- 74% found it easy to complete our forms;
- 80% were satisfied that their claim was dealt with quickly;
- 83% were satisfied with the level of privacy given to them; and
- 81% were aware of our information booklets and leaflets.

→ Social Partnership and the Civil Service Modernisation Programme

The national Social Partnership Agreement "Sustaining Progress" was reviewed in June 2004 and extended until June 2006. Pay in the public service is being determined by a benchmarking exercise which relates pay increases to commitments to change and to productivity dividends by the civil service which are verified by an independent performance verification group for the sector.

The Department is heavily engaged in a change and modernisation programme which is linked to 'Sustaining Progress'. The two key business drivers for the Department are a strong customer focus and an emphasis on cost effective delivery of services. Our Modernisation Action Plan was agreed through our workplace partnership and reports on the progress achieved in meeting the commitments in the Plans are regularly submitted to the Civil Service Performance Verification Group. The Plan is a very detailed document containing over 90 commitments ranging from process improvements to ICT initiatives. Priority areas identified in our modernisation programme include:

- Maximising the benefits of new technology and e-Government to deliver consequent efficiencies and flexibilities – this includes implementation of the Department's Service Delivery Modernisation (SDM) programme and associated projects (e.g. the civil registration modernisation programme, the Public Service Broker and the development of public service identity management). There has already been substantial progress in each of these areas;
- Continuing the programme of process improvements – for example, delivering services at local level to one-parent families to provide better service to the customer, stronger control and facilitating access to an increasing range of supports in particular activation measures to re-enter the labour market;

- Ongoing improvements in external and internal customer service;
- Maintaining business continuity in the context of, in particular, preparations for decentralisation;
- A range of initiatives in the Human Resources area including continued, effective implementation of the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS); and
- Financial Management, Programme Evaluation and Regulatory Reform.

The revised Modernisation Action Plan, which reflects these priorities, contains a range of initiatives to improve our organisational capacity in support of top quality service delivery in all aspects of the Department's activities. Very good progress and significant levels of success were achieved in implementing our change programme during the year, details of which are reflected throughout this Annual Report.

CHAPTER 03

GOAL 1: INCOME SUPPORT

GOAL 1: INCOME SUPPORT

Promoting the development of adequate, secure and sustainable income support and related services and delivering appropriate services to the highest standards, in co-operation with other relevant agencies, and responsive to people's changing needs and entitlements, taking account of our responsibilities to contributors and tax-payers.

→ Introductory Statement

The Department has set out in its Statement of Strategy 2003-2005 a number of high level goals covering the main areas of its work. This Report includes an account of the Department's progress in 2004 towards the delivery of these goals.

The developments during 2004 in pursuit of this Goal are set out under the relevant objectives, as follows:

→ OBJECTIVE 1

To meet effectively the income support and associated needs of defined customer groups.

→ Review of Schemes

The Department reviews schemes and services on an ongoing basis and these reviews help to inform the decision-making process arising in the context of annual Estimates or Budgets. In 2004, the measures introduced in the context of Estimates 2004 were reviewed and a number of alleviating initiatives were announced in Budget 2005 which included:

- a reduction to 12 months in the qualifying period for Back to Education Allowance (third level) and an increase of €146, to €400, in the Cost of Education Allowance.
- the introduction of transitional payments; of a duration of six months for one-parent family payments;
- an increase of €50 per week, to €350 per week in the spouse's income threshold for entitlement to half-rate child dependant allowances;
- changes in the conditions for Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) rent supplement payments;

- The provision of an additional €2.3million in 2005 to fund Crèche Supplements and the support of community crèches;
- Special additional funding for the Money Advise and Budgeting Service (MABS) equivalent to the funding previously provided for MABS Supplements; and
- Discontinuance of additional half rate benefits for recipients of lone parents and related payments.

These measures generally, come into effect in 2005. In addition, entitlement to additional half rate benefits for recipients of lone parents and related payments was restored with full retrospection in the course of 2004.

→ Increases in Weekly Rates of Payment

The 2005 Budget was announced in December 2004 and made provision for significant improvements in weekly rates of payment. These increases were provided for in the Social Welfare Act, 2004, to come into effect from the beginning of January 2005.

The principal improvements were:

Personal Rates of Payment

- An increase of €12 per week for all pensioners aged 66 and over. This increase brought the level of Old Age Contributory and Retirement Pensions from €167.30 to €179.30 per week.
- A special increase of €14 per week in the personal rate payable to all other recipients of social welfare payments. This brought the level of the lowest rate of payment to €148.80 per week, an increase of 10.4%.
- The minimum rates of Maternity and Adoptive Benefits also increased by €14 per

week. In addition, the basis for calculation of higher rates of these benefits was increased from 70% of reckonable weekly earnings to 75% resulting in an increase of €16.60 per week in the maximum rates.

Qualified Adult Rates of Payment

- The weekly rates of Qualified Adult payments increased by amounts ranging from €7.90 to €10 per week.

Support for Children

- In 2004, child income support continued to be focused in ways to avoid contributing to work disincentives and poverty traps. The Government continued its programme of multi annual increases in Child Benefit during 2004. Child Benefit was increased by €6 per month and €8 per month in the lower and higher rates, respectively, with effect from April 2004. Further increases of €10 and €12 in the lower and higher rates, respectively, were announced in Budget 2005, to come into effect in April 2005. These increases bring the Child Benefit rate to €141.60 per month for each of the first two children and €177.30 per month in respect of the third and subsequent children.
- In January 2004, the Family Income Supplement (FIS) income thresholds were increased by €28 per week. Budget 2005 provided for a further increase of €39 per week from January 2005. The latest increases in the FIS thresholds are the highest ever and result in an average increase of €23.40 per week to the payments of almost all FIS recipients from January 2005.
- Additional funding of €1 million was also provided in 2004 for the School Meals schemes.

Carers

- The weekly income disregard on the Carer's Allowance means test increased by €40 to €250 for a single carer and by €80 to €500 for a married carer, with effect from April 2004. It was announced in Budget 2005 that these disregards were to be further increased to €270 and €540 respectively

with effect from April 2005 thereby making significant further progress towards achieving the Government commitment to increase the level of the disregard for couples up to the average industrial wage.

- The annual Respite Care Grant which is paid with both Carer's Allowance and Carer's Benefit increased by €100 to €835 and carers caring for more than one person received a double Respite Care Grant of €1,670, with effect from June 2003. A further increase of €165 in the Grant was announced in Budget 2005 to come into effect in 2005. In addition, it was also announced that the Respite Care Grant would henceforth be paid in respect of each care recipient, as distinct from a maximum of two which had previously applied.
- In Budget 2005, it was also announced that a Respite Care Grant would be payable to all persons providing full time care and attention, subject to certain employment related conditions. This change, coming into effect in June 2005, will mean that entitlement to a Respite Care Grant is no longer dependent on also being in receipt of Carer's Allowance/Benefit or Domiciliary Care Allowance (payable by the Health Service Executive).
- The income threshold for people in receipt of Carer's Benefit who wish to engage in limited employment or self-employment was increased from €250 per week, to €270, with effect from April 2005. It was also announced that, with effect from the same time, the condition that a recipient of Carer's Benefit must have been in employment in the three months prior to the commencement of full time caring is abolished.

Assessment of Capital

- The present arrangements for the assessment of means for social assistance purposes takes into account any cash income the person may have, together with the value of capital and property. An initial amount of capital is disregarded and the balance is assessed by reference to a formula. It was announced in Budget 2005,

that the initial disregard is to be increased with effect from June 2005 from €12,697.38 to €20,000, an increase of just over €7,300.

- This measure is designed to ensure that the social welfare means testing arrangements do not act as a disincentive to claimants to become savers or to harshly penalise those who have been regular savers in the past.
- The enhanced disregard applies to all capital regardless of where it is held, be it in an SSIA, a Credit Union, with An Post or any other account with a bank or other financial institution.
- The new arrangements will mean that a single non-contributory pensioner can have savings of up to €28,000 and still qualify for a pension at the maximum rate. This figure is doubled in the case of a pensioner couple.

Unemployment Assistance – Benefit and Privilege Assessment

- For Unemployment Assistance purposes, the value of the benefit and privilege derived from residing in the parental home has been assessable for means testing purposes. In 2003, the assessment of such benefit and privilege was abolished for all persons aged 29 and over. This was further reduced to 27 years of age in 2004 and will be further reduced to 26 years in 2005.

People with Disabilities

- It was announced in Budget 2005, that entitlement to a personal expenses rate of Disability Allowance of €35 per week would be extended to certain persons in residential institutions who heretofore had not been entitled to a payment. This measure comes into effect in June 2005.
- It was also announced that entitlement to a Smokeless Fuel Allowance was to be extended to those in receipt of Occupational Injury Benefit for more than 13 weeks, thereby bringing these arrangements in line with those already applying to Disability Benefit.
- €1 million was allocated to Comhairle to begin preparatory work towards the setting

up of a personal advocacy service for persons with disabilities.

After Death Payments

- Budget 2004 addressed the remaining anomalies in the after death payments scheme whereby the spouse or partner of the deceased person is in a worse financial situation for the six weeks after the death of the pensioner.

Household Benefits Package

- *Free Lifetime Television Licence:* From 1 August 2004 a customer who newly qualified for the Household Benefits Package received an award notification from the Department incorporating their free lifetime Television Licence. Customers already in receipt of a free licence at that time are issued with a lifetime licence as these licences fall due for renewal. By August 2005 all customers should be in receipt of their lifetime licence. They remain entitled to this licence while they still have an entitlement to the Household Benefits Package.
- *Telephone Allowance:* From July 2004 the department was able to facilitate customers who wanted their Telephone Allowance (on a fixed land line) applied with a service provider other than Eircom.
- *Free Travel and Luas:* From the opening of the first Luas line (Sandyford to Stephen's Green) on 22 June 2004 all Free Travel pass holders can avail of free travel. This also applies on the second line (Tallaght to Connolly Station) which opened on 28 September 2004.

Rural Transport

- The Department again contributed €500,000 towards the 34 pilots in the Rural Transport Initiative (RTI). This ensures that Free Travel pass holders can travel free of charge on these pilots and enables persons who had never been able to use their Free Travel Pass because of lack of transport, to do so.

→ OBJECTIVE 2

To continually improve and update our system of service delivery.

→ The Official Languages Act 2003

The Official Languages Act 2003 came into effect and the Department is taking necessary steps to improve service provision through Irish. This was evidenced by the provision of specialised training in the Irish language for front-line staff. The range of forms and information leaflets available in Irish on the Internet increased during the year. The Department's scheme, detailing the services which will be provided in Irish, bilingually and in English, as required under the Act, is being prepared and will be finalised in 2005.

Approximately 65% of all social welfare information leaflets and application forms had been translated into Irish at the end of 2004.

→ Data Quality Management

In line with the Departments ongoing commitment to obtain, retain and maintain high quality customer data Client Identity Services undertook an audit of the quality of the identity data on the Central Records System (CRS). This audit facilitated the targeting of necessary data quality improvement and management tasks which, once completed, will improve customer service through the availability of accurate data and allow for the progression of strategic Departmental projects such as the Service Delivery Modernisation (SDM) and the development of Public Service Identity (PSI) services which are dependent on this data.

→ Payment Services

The Department issued in excess of 58 million payment transactions in 2004. Over 39 million payments were issued via An Post, a further 7 million by cheque and 12 million by EFT into customers' accounts. Discussions took place with the Department's payments service providers to discuss payment related issues including service

delivery and future developments in the payment infrastructure. A strategic study of the Department's future payment options commenced.

→ Garda Signing

Garda involvement in certification of unemployment ceased in November 2004. This was replaced by the introduction of a revised signing arrangement which saw the boundary for the designation of postal customers extended from 6 miles to 10 miles. These customers are now required to attend their local or branch office for signing purposes once every four weeks.

Customers living beyond 10 miles are required to self-certify every month and attend at their local office for certification purposes once every 12 weeks. Special arrangements were also introduced for customers on off-shore islands and other remote areas. In general, these people self-certify and are not normally required to attend a Local Office.

→ Lunchtime Opening

During 2004, a lunchtime service began in 33 of the Department's Local Offices. These are now providing a service to the public each day from 9:30am to 4:00 pm. A full customer service, other than certification, is being provided through lunchtime opening hours. The remaining offices do not have the level of activity to warrant the extension of opening hours.

→ OBJECTIVE 3

To provide comprehensive and accurate information in a clear and easily accessible manner to customers, employers, staff and external partners.

→ Information Services Strategy

The Department's Information Services Strategy 2003-2006 has as its primary purpose the provision of comprehensive and accurate

information in a clear and easily accessible manner to customers, employers, staff and external partners.

→ Plain English

In 2004, the Department's "Plain English" policy continued to be implemented and over 80 forms and leaflets were amended with the assistance of the National Adult Literacy Agency thus ensuring the use of plain English in all information material for our customers.

→ Publications in 2004

A new information booklet titled 'What Now' was published by Information Services in co-operation with the Prison Service, Probation and Welfare Service, FÁS and Comhairle to meet the information needs of prisoners, ex-offenders, their families, friends and the many groups who provide support for prisoners on their release.

A number of existing information booklets were also revised and up-dated.

→ Seminars

An Information Seminar was held in Dublin in May 2003 for all Departmental front-line information providers. It included a presentation on the information needs of immigrants.

In pursuit of the commitment to addressing the information needs of emigrants, Information Services funded and participated in an Information Seminar in London in partnership with the Federation of Irish Societies. The purpose of this Seminar was to up-date Advice Workers in the Irish Centres in the UK on current Social Welfare Legislation and entitlements. We continued with our support for the Coalition of Irish Emigrant Centres in the USA.

An information seminar was held in Killybegs in July 2004, in partnership with the Revenue Commissioners, to address the PRSI/Tax information needs of share fishermen and the PRSI/Tax liabilities of boat owners.

→ Advertising

Two major publicity campaigns were conducted in 2004 (a) to promote public awareness of the Carers Benefit scheme and (b) to advise customers approaching retirement age to apply for their Retirement/Old Age pension on time.

→ Dublin Public Office

A review of the role and functions of the two Dublin Public Offices resulted in the amalgamation of the Gandon House Public Office with the Public Office in Oisín House, Pearse Street, ensuring a more cost effective and comprehensive delivery of information provision in Dublin city centre.

→ Exhibitions and Presentations

Staff participated in various exhibitions throughout the country and made information presentations on a wide variety of schemes and services to numerous groups and national organisations.

→ Information Grants

A total of €0.42 million was allocated to various national organisations and voluntary groups for information dissemination projects to our customers and to address the information needs of emigrants and immigrants.

→ Accessibility Improvements

A databank of Blind Pension customers was developed in the Pensions Services Office (Sligo) which indicated requirements for information in Braille, audio cassette, email, large print, etc. Applications for Blind Pension and the Free Schemes are now accepted, over the telephone, from visually impaired customers who are notified of the outcome of their applications in the same way.

→ Freedom of Information (FOI)

In 2004, in addition to the administration of FOI in the Department and the provision of ongoing support and advice to staff, activities in the FOI Unit included the publication of an FOI information bulletin and presentations to the Medical Review and Assessment Section and Local Office Managers.

The Department was one of the Public Bodies on which the Information Commissioner reported in 2004. The Commissioner concluded that the FOI Act was being operated in a fair and balanced manner.

During 2004, a total of 558 FOI requests were received in the Department. This represents a 6% decrease on the number (593) of requests received in 2003. Of the requests received in 2004, 536 (96%) were from members of the public seeking access to personal records, including 28 requests from staff members for personnel records. The remainder were for non-personal records. A total of 514 (93%) requests were granted in whole or in part.

→ OBJECTIVE 4

To ensure that any person who is dissatisfied with the decision made on his/her social welfare entitlements is provided with the means to have such decisions reviewed.

→ Decisions Advisory Office (DAO)

The DAO continued to play a pro-active role in the provision of advice and support to Deciding Officers in the Department, to ensure decisions in regard to applications, or reviews on continued entitlement to Social Welfare payments, were carried out in a consistent and high quality manner.

The introduction in 2004 of the Habitual Residence Condition (HRC), which is applicable to 10 schemes, involved a significant body of work with the preparation of guidelines, training and information dissemination. From 1 May 2004, the requirement to be habitually resident in Ireland

was introduced as a qualifying condition for a range of social assistance and child benefit schemes operated by the Department. Any person, regardless of nationality, who makes a claim for these payments is subject to the new condition. The basis for the restriction contained in the new rules is the applicant's habitual residence. The question of a person's "habitual residence" is decided in accordance with European Court of Justice case law, which sets out the grounds for assessing individual claims. Since its introduction some 20,700 cases have been decided.

During 2004, training by the DAO focused on HRC, Deciding Officer training and training for Local Office Trainers.

Over 900 requests relating to decisions by Deciding Officers, including the interpretation of the legislation, were dealt with by this office. The office also liaises with the Social Welfare Appeals Office in relation to the outcome of social welfare appeals.

→ Social Welfare Tribunal

The Tribunal adjudicated on 2 cases in 2004. In one case, the employer requested a review of the adjudication where the Tribunal found in favour of the employees. Following a review of this case, the Tribunal upheld the original decision.

→ OBJECTIVE 5

To ensure our income support programmes and associated supports are relevant, adequate, efficient, effective, recognising the needs of diverse customer groups and effectively address poverty and social exclusion.

→ Programme Expenditure Reviews

The expenditure review process was launched in 1997 to provide a systematic analysis of expenditure and a basis for informed decision making on expenditure priorities. The Department has completed 18 expenditure reviews since the start of the programme. The review of the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance scheme

and the review of the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme - phase 1 were completed in 2004.

→ Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance

The scheme is administered by the Health Services Executive on behalf of the Department. While the review made a number of recommendations in relation to the development and delivery of the scheme, its primary recommendation proposed that the scheme should provide more targeted support to low income families.

→ Supplementary Welfare Allowance

Phase 1 of the review of the Supplementary Welfare Allowance explored the background and challenges arising in relation to each of the elements that make up the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme. In the second phase of this review each of the elements will be reviewed in detail and recommendations will be made regarding the further development and delivery of each component and in relation to the overall scheme.

→ Reviews Underway

An Expenditure Review of the Back to Education Allowance (see also Chapter 4) commenced in September 2003 - the Review will be completed with a report published in Autumn 2005.

→ OBJECTIVE 6

To promote the provision of social protection through the social insurance system in accordance with Government policy by extending coverage where appropriate and adapting benefits to meet emerging needs, while ensuring the financial stability of the Social Insurance Fund.

→ Social Insurance Fund

The surplus of the Social Insurance Fund income over expenditure in 2004 was €377 million,

leading to a cumulative surplus of €1.906 billion at the end of the year.

→ Social Partnership Working Group

A Working Group comprising of representatives of the social partners examined approaches for reform of social insurance to ensure it continues to meet the changing needs of workers and their families in Irish society. The Working Group was first established in 2002 under the PPF and continued its work under Sustaining Progress. The report includes an overview of a changing labour market, identifies issues to be addressed to assist workers to build and maintain their contribution record and examines how workers with interrupted work patterns are treated within the system. The report is being prepared for publication.

→ Other Developments in PRSI

The earnings ceiling for PRSI increased by €1,740 from €40,420 to €42,160 per annum. New arrangements for the deduction of PRSI on non-pecuniary from benefits received by employees and the self-employed were introduced smoothly with effect from 1 January 2004.

→ OBJECTIVE 7

Development of a comprehensive pensions system (to include both State and supplementary arrangements) taking account of and finding a balance between the following (sometimes competing) factors of adequacy, sustainability and modernisation.

→ Pensions Awareness Campaign

The National Pensions Awareness Campaign continued in 2004. The campaign is financed by the Department and is run by the Pensions Board. The campaign featured a range of measures including TV and radio advertising as well as special initiatives aimed at particular groups. In this regard the Womens Mini Marathon in June was the focus of a special effort to promote

pensions coverage amongst women. The campaign culminated in a National Pensions Awareness Week in September.

→ Personal Retirement Savings Accounts (PRSAs)

2004 was the first full year of the operation of PRSAs and the number of accounts opened continued to grow throughout the year. By December 2004 just over 46,000 accounts had been opened with an asset value of €178 million. A particular focus of the work in this area was the enforcement activity relating to employer obligations to provide access to PRSAs for employees. Legislation was passed to allow the Department's inspectorate to assist the Pensions Board in this area by identifying cases for investigation as part of its normal control activity.

→ Funding Standard

The funding of defined benefit pension schemes continued to be a major issue in 2004. As well as market difficulties, increased longevity, wage increases and low interest rates are all serving to increase the liabilities of schemes at a time when their asset values are only starting to improve after the heavy losses to 2003.

The Pensions Board completed its review of the Funding Standard, which is used to determine the health of defined schemes, and submitted a final report to the Minister for consideration. In general, the Board recommended retaining the requirement for schemes to hold sufficient assets to cover liabilities in the event of a scheme winding up. However, it recommended retaining the temporary relief measures, introduced in 2003 and which allowed schemes in difficulty extra time to restore full funding, and expanding the grounds on which extensions can be granted.

→ Long-Term Care

In order to progress the proposals in the Mercer "Study to Examine the Future Financing of Long-Term Care", a consultation document was circulated to over 70 interested parties. This

document focused all interested parties on the specific issues and recommendations contained in the study. These issues related to benefit design, cost and financing of long-term care. The feedback from this process has been compiled and is now being used to help identify the policy options for a financially sustainable system of long-term care.

→ OBJECTIVE 8

To implement controls on a cost-effective basis to ensure that error, fraud and abuse are prevented, detected and deterred and any monies incorrectly paid are recovered.

→ Control Strategy

The Department's control policy aims to keep fraud and abuse to a minimum by promoting control as an essential element of the day-to-day work of the Department. A four pronged approach is taken to the control of schemes namely prevention of fraud and error at the initial claim stage, early detection through effective review of claims in payment, measures to deter fraud and the pursuit and recovery of overpayments.

The introduction of systematic risk analysis of major schemes is now a key element of the approach to tackling fraud and abuse in the Social Welfare system. Furthermore fraud and error surveys of schemes are undertaken to establish baseline levels of fraud and abuse and the Department is committed to undertaking at least two such surveys annually.

→ Public Awareness

During 2004, the Department continued to raise public and staff awareness in combating fraud. In this regard, emphasis was placed on the Department's determination to recover monies received fraudulently or without entitlement and to prosecute those who defrauded the social welfare system and employers who failed to comply with their statutory obligations to comply with social welfare legislation. In an effort to raise

public awareness of the Department's control policy, regular press releases are issued detailing the outcomes of the Department's control activity and the outcomes of court prosecutions were, where possible, publicised in local and national press.

→ Identity Fraud

Particular emphasis is placed on combating identity fraud with a specific focus to ensure that persons do not use false identities to obtain PPS numbers or to facilitate the fraudulent receipt of social welfare benefits. During 2004, a training programme for local staff, combined with internal back-up services contributed to the continued detection of false applications. A total of 69 persons were arrested in connection with offences under the Criminal Justice (Theft and Fraud Offences) Act, 2001 by an Garda Síochána for possession of false/forged documents following detection by staff.

→ Debt Recovery

Considerable effort continues to be put into improving the effectiveness of debt recovery measures and pursuit of defaulters. Work is continuing on the design of a comprehensive computer system to handle overpayments and debt recovery across all schemes.

→ Outcomes

Gross savings from the control activities on scheme payments amounted to €374.7 million in 2004 (see chart below). Some 305,700 claims were reviewed in this process. In addition inspections of employer records identified arrears of PAYE/PRSI amounting to €11.3 million. Overall savings from control activities were some 26% higher than in 2003:

| Savings | €m |
|---------------|------------|
| Unemployment | 119.7 |
| Illness | 55.9 |
| Pensions | 172.1 |
| Child Benefit | 18.7 |
| Carers | 5.7 |
| PAYE/PRSI | 11.3 |
| Others | 2.6 |
| TOTAL | 386 |

During 2004, in a continuation of the new focussed approach to the criminal prosecution of alleged offenders, a total of 503 cases (up 24% on 2003) were forwarded to the Chief State Solicitor's Office (CSSO) for the initiation of court proceedings. A total of 284 criminal cases were finalised in court with the following results:

| Outcome | Number |
|------------------------------------|------------|
| Fined | 159 |
| Imprisoned | 10 |
| Suspended Sentence | 26 |
| Community Service | 3 |
| Probation Act | 44 |
| Bound to the Peace | 7 |
| Adjourned/Liberty to re-enter | 8 |
| Struck out/dismissed | 20 |
| Maintenance Recovery Order granted | 7 |
| TOTAL | 284 |

In addition 27 civil cases were sent to the CSSO for court proceedings to facilitate the recovery of overpayments and the enforcement of maintenance recovery orders against the liable relatives of one-parent family recipients. No civil cases were finalised in the courts.

→ EU/INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION

Other than the EU Presidency, full details of which are in the highlights chapter, the Department had a very busy year on the international front.

→ EU – Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council

The Minister and officials participated in four formal meetings of the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council in 2004. These meetings were held on 4 March, 1 June, 10 October, and 6 & 7 December. In terms of social protection, reform and simplification of Regulation 1408/71 continued to be a significant issue. Other items of relevance to this Department included:

- a) Promoting social cohesion in an enlarged Union;
- b) Streamlining the Open Method of Co-ordination in the field of Social Protection; and
- c) The review of the Lisbon Strategy.

In addition, there were Informal meetings of Ministers for Employment and Social Policy in Galway on 15 & 16 January, which concentrated on the issue of "Making Work Pay", and in Maastricht on July 8 – 10, where the focus was on development of a new Social Policy Agenda for the EU.

→ EU – Social Protection Committee

The Department actively participates in the work of the Social Protection Committee. This Committee was set up by a Council decision of June 29th 2000 and had its first meeting in December 2000. As a result of an Irish initiative a legal basis for the Committee was included in the Nice Treaty.

In June 2004, the Council reached political agreement on a draft decision, which essentially re-establishes the existing Committee in line with its new legal basis after the entry into force of the Nice Treaty. The first meeting of the reconstituted Committee took place in December, 2004, at which the Irish representative, Mr. Tom Mulherin, was elected as Chairperson for a two-year period.

Key activities of the Social Protection Committee in 2004 included:

- A study on pensions and planning for a new study on second and third pillar pensions.
- The preparation, in co-operation with the Employment Committee, of a key messages paper on employment, social protection/inclusion and gender equality. The social protection/inclusion key messages involve strengthening the drive for social inclusion, making work pay, ensuring that pension systems support longer working lives, ensuring accessibility, sustainability and quality of health and long-term care for the elderly.
- Preparing a Joint Social Inclusion Report for the Spring Council, which reflected progress and wide-ranging action planned by Member States to combat poverty and to promote social inclusion across the EU for the period to 2005.

→ EU – Social Security Rights for Migrant Workers

In December 2003 the Council had reached political agreement on a Commission proposal for a regulation to reform and simplify Regulation 1408/71 EEC on the application of social security schemes to employed persons and their families moving within the Community. Regulation 1408/71 aims to protect the social security rights of insured persons moving within the Community. The objective of the proposal was to reform and simplify the existing Community provisions which date back to the early years of the EEC. Substantial work was done by each Presidency since 1999 in their examination of this complex proposal.

As indicated in the highlights chapter, a key priority of the Irish Presidency was to continue this process of reform with a view to reaching co-decision agreement with the European Parliament before the end of its parliamentary term. A Common Position was adopted by the Council on 26 January 2004 and this was presented to the European Parliament. On 26 April 2004, the Council accepted a number of amendments made to the Common Position at Parliament's Second Reading, allowing for formal adoption of Regulation 883/2004 on 29 April 2004.

This new Regulation will come into effect following adoption by Council and Parliament of a new Implementing Regulation to replace the current Implementing Regulation 574/72.

→ Pensions

The Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2004 included an amendment to the Pensions Act, 1990 in order to provide for the transposition of two EU Directives in so far as they relate to occupational pension schemes -

- Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 (establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation on grounds of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation) which required transposition by 2 December 2003, and
- Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 (implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin) which required transposition by 19 July 2003.

Part VII of the Pensions Act as it relates to gender equal treatment was also revised and updated to mirror broadly the requirements of the Employment Equality Act 1998.

Part VII was also amended to fulfil a commitment in social partnership agreement "Sustaining Progress" to extend the equality provisions of the Pensions Act to all the grounds covered by the Employment Equality Act, 1998. The additional grounds required to fulfil this commitment were marital status, family status and the traveller community.

→ UN

The 42nd Session of the UN Commission for Social Development was held in New York in February 2004. As Ireland held the Presidency of the EU at that time, the Irish delegation, which included officials of the Department of Social and Family Affairs, had responsibility for co-ordinating the position of the EU at the session. This included

preparation of agreed statements and acting as spokesperson for the EU group at formal meetings of the Commission. It also included co-ordinating the EU group's position on the main themes for consideration at the session and leading for the EU delegation in negotiating outcomes on these themes with delegations representing the other World regions. The Commission's priority theme for 2005 will be the review of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action on the eradication of poverty on the occasion of the Tenth anniversary of its adoption at the World Summit for Social Development, 6-12 March 1995.

→ OECD

The Department participated in the OECD Working Party on Social Policy and the Interdepartmental Committee on OECD Affairs. The Working Party focussed on preparations for the Meeting of OECD Social Affairs Ministers scheduled for 2005 on the theme "Extending Opportunities: How active social policy can benefit us all". The issues for discussion include: How best to invest in families and children, How can we get a better social policy balance between generations, and More active social policies to tackle poverty: what challenges for social protection systems?

There will also be a Forum involving the social partners and NGO representatives on the theme: What are the appropriate rights and responsibilities for different parts of society in delivering social protection.

→ Bilateral Relations with Other Countries

The Department welcomed visitors from a number of countries during 2004, including Australia, Montenegro, Moldova, New Zealand and Poland.

A UK/Ireland Bilateral Agreement on social security was signed in December 2004 in Dublin which will be ratified in London in 2005. The primary purpose of the Agreement is to

consolidate the terms of earlier Agreements and to modify them to take account of legislative changes that have occurred in both States and, in particular, to extend their scope to the Channel Islands.

In addition, the bilateral agreement on social security with New Zealand was reviewed and proposed amendments are being considered.

→ North/South Co-operation

In partnership with the Department of Social Development (Northern Ireland) an Information Seminar entitled "North/South Benefit Information Day" was held in Letterkenny in December 2004. The purpose of the Seminar was to provide frontline information staff with adequate knowledge to address the Social Welfare information needs of those wishing to migrate North/South. The Seminar focussed on the themes of carers and lone parents. It was attended by over 150 staff from the two Departments and included representatives of the Voluntary Sector.

Under the reciprocal Staff Exchange Programme established between the Department and the Northern Ireland Social Security Agency, six fraud investigators from the Northern Benefits Investigation Services visited this Department for one week in 2004.

→ International Social Security Association (ISSA)

During the triennium 2002-2004, the Technical Commission on Unemployment Insurance and Employment Maintenance undertook to examine the issue of 'Flexibility and Security in the Labour Market'. This was decided upon in order to establish to what extent increasing flexibility in the labour market is accompanied by measures which allow workers to organise their professional, social and family lives, while providing maximum security in terms of social protection and working conditions.

The Technical Commission thus decided to have a comparative study conducted on this topic. A working group composed of representatives from Belgium, France, Ireland and the General Secretariat of the International Social Security Association (ISSA) was established to examine and report on the matter. This work is ongoing.

CHAPTER 04

GOAL 2: SUPPORT TO WORK

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Facilitating return to work or participation in training or further education by people in the active age groups dependent on State income supports, through a range of supportive measures, including referral to other agencies as necessary.

→ Labour Market

The Labour Force increased by 52,200 to 1,987,000 in the year (Quarter 3, 2004), and accounted for 61.8% of all persons aged 15 and over compared with 61.3% in Quarter 3 of 2003.

There were 1,893,600 people in employment in Q 3 of 2004, an increase of 57,200 or 3.1% in the year. This is the highest level of annual growth recorded since the 3.8% recorded in Q 1 of 2001. Increases in the numbers in full-time employment accounted for almost 90% of the annual change.

→ Live Register

The average Live Register (LR) for 2004 was 166,013. This compares to 172,414 in 2003.

The LR for the beginning of January 2004 was 172,396, and by the end of December 2004 it had decreased (by 13,508) to 158,816. During 2004, the LR reached its lowest at the beginning of December when it fell to 151,012, and it reached its highest at the beginning of August when it rose to 177,674.

The developments during 2004 in pursuit of this Goal are set out under the relevant objectives, as follows:

→ OBJECTIVE 1

To actively support customers in their efforts to access the labour market.

→ Employment Support Services

The range of Employment Support Services administered by the Department continue to be reviewed to ensure their relevance to current labour market and economic conditions.

The Back to Work Allowance and Back to Education Allowance were further amended in 2003 to ensure their continued focus on the more vulnerable groups in society. Following further review the qualifying period for Back to Work Enterprise Allowance was reduced from 5 years to 3 years for persons on Unemployment Benefit/Assistance, this took effect from March 2004.

By December 2004 there were 11,566 participants in the Back to Work Allowance scheme, 6,855 on the self-employed strand and 4,711 on the employee strand. There were 7,505 participants in the Back to Education Allowance scheme in the 2004/2005 academic year.

→ Back To Education Allowance (BTEA)

With effect from September 2004 the qualifying period for the Back to Education Allowance, Third Level Option, was increased from 6 months to 15 months. The qualifying period for the Second Level Option was not changed to ensure that this strand of the scheme retains its focus on the more disadvantaged groups in society who do not have a second level education qualification and who are at risk of becoming dependent on social welfare payments on a long-term basis. In recognition of the difficulties being experienced by some customers in accessing third level education at 15 months Budget 2005 resulted in a change in this qualifying criteria to 12 months which will take effect from September 2005.

→ OBJECTIVE 2

To assist in the implementation of the Employment Action Plan (EAP).

There were 67,174 referrals to FÁS under the EAP, involving 57,234 individuals.

Under the terms of the EAP, anyone aged between 18 and 55 years who is approaching six months' duration on the Live Register, is systematically referred to FÁS to avail of interventions such as guidance and training. Of these people, 39,163 (68%) were interviewed by FÁS by end-2004.

Everyone aged between 18 and 55 years who is on the Live Register for over six months duration is also systematically referred to FÁS for guidance and training under this process. The referrals figure above also includes 19,005 such referrals (16,477 individuals). This intensification process was rolled out across all regions of the Department during the second half of 2003 and continued during 2004. Of the 16,477 individuals concerned, 12,023 were interviewed by FÁS by end- 2004.

The Department's Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with FÁS, which provides a framework for co-operation between Social Welfare Services and FÁS, was updated and formally launched in April 2004. This memorandum commits both organisations to working more closely together to increase the effectiveness of services to unemployed and other socially excluded groups.

The Department also continues to work on the feasibility of introducing profiling of unemployed customers.

→ OBJECTIVE 3

To facilitate and improve access to education, training and labour market programmes for people with disabilities.

The Disability Consultative Forum, which is a consultative group established by the Department including groups representing the interests of

people with disabilities, continued its work in 2004 on:

- employment support interventions;
- Disabilities Bill / Sectoral Plans;
- Transfer of Spending Money Allowances for people in long-stay care;
- Expenditure Review of Disability/Income Supports; and
- Carers Allowance Customer Survey.

There is ongoing consultation with FÁS and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment including consultation in relation to participation and progression rates to employment and training for people with disabilities.

→ OBJECTIVES 4 & 5

To facilitate and encourage lone parents to access employment.

To facilitate and support older people to remain in or access employment and participate in the provision of local services.

Those who have been out of the labour market, particularly lone parents and people with disabilities, availed of pre-employment and personal development training through the Special Projects fund which was set up to help long-term unemployed people access the labour market and is accessed locally by Regional staff. Some €2.68 million was provided through this fund in 2004 for training and supports for those who are most distant from the labour market.

Groups needing special help of this type also include the very long-term unemployed, travellers and people with literacy difficulties as well as older people.

The budget for Special Projects for 2005 is €2.45 million (increased from the 2003 budget of €2.15 million).

→ Examples of Special Projects

Carlow Moving-On project for Young Mothers

This programme has entered its eighth year running this year. The aim of the project is 'to enhance the life long prospects of 20 young mothers aged between 16 and 25 years of age in the County Carlow area by enabling them to achieve inclusion in education, training, enterprise opportunities, the local labour market and their own communities'. The programme objectives are:

- To provide opportunities to enable personal and social development to occur;
- To value the skills and experiences that young mothers have and to build on this life experience learning;
- To enhance generic work skills;
- To facilitate preparation for work;
- Flexibility, group and individual support; safe learning environment, and non-formal approach; and
- To offer national certification that enables participants to access further education or employment.

The fact that childcare is available on site has made the programme very effective. A mentoring and intervention /referral system was built into the programme for participants. The programme has received funding from DSFA for the past few years (received €60,000 in 2004). The 2002/2003 evaluation shows the following progression levels of participants:

- 6 participants moved on to PLC & FETAC Level 2 Childcare courses;
- 3 participants progressed to studying social studies (St Patrick's College Carlow and Carlow Institute of Further Education);
- 3 participants went on to study Business Studies and Information Technology FETAC Level 2 at Carlow Institute of Further Education;
- 2 participants went into employment;
- 1 went into a hairdressing apprenticeship;
- 1 participant went on to a FAS training course;
- 2 participants re-located to another area; and
- 2 took time out due to pregnancy.

In-Roads Programme for Lone Parents

This programme was delivered in 2004 through Obair, Newmarket-on-Fergus, (Mid-West region), to 16 lone parents in the Newmarket-on-Fergus/Shannon areas for 2 mornings each week for 10 weeks.

The programme was essentially a career counselling and personal development programme aimed at enhancing the employability of these people who are distant from the labour market. Its main objectives were:

- Personal development for participants; and
- To give participants the skills, attitude and knowledge to make informed choices in relation to work related options open to them.

The following outcomes were listed for the programme:

- To have developed an awareness on the part of participants of the changing nature of the world of work;
- To have identified participants' strengths and limitations in relation to employment;
- To have had an examination of the effects of unemployment on the individual and on society in general;
- To have explored how parenting alone effects participants' career choices and plans;
- To have explored participants' skills, interests, needs and values in relation to returning to work;
- To have explored a range of options open to participants e.g. education, training, self-employment;
- To have developed a positive attitude to adult learning options;
- To have information gathered in relation to their preferred career option and to have developed an individual plan with realistic and achievable goals; and
- To have developed increased self-awareness, inter-personal, communication and problem solving skills on the part of participants.

The Department funded this programme at a cost of €17,500.

Social and Family Supports Service (SFSS)

The Jobs Facilitation network was evaluated in the 2001 – 2002 period by NEXUS Consultants. Following the completion of the evaluation, a process of consultation was undertaken with Regional staff engaged in the employment supports area of the business.

It is now broadly accepted that people of working age are viewed as a similar customer group, with needs and characteristics in common, whether they are unemployed, lone parents or people with disabilities. This is due to changes in society and in the nature of work, and consequently there are now more opportunities for participation for the groups concerned and there is less distinction between those groups than was the case in the past.

Arising from the NEXUS review and the consultations, it was decided to merge the Family Services Project (FSP) and Job Facilitator (JF) services under the title *Social and Family Support Service (SFSS)*. The merger took place in March 2004 and Jobs Facilitators were renamed Facilitators.

The Department's Facilitators will continue to focus on the training, development and other needs of customers and their families on a case management basis during 2005.

→ OBJECTIVE 6

To promote greater self reliance through active measures which lead to education, training, rehabilitation and work experience.

Second Chance Education Grants

Grants totalling €371,636 were paid from this fund during 2004 in respect of 5 second-chance education initiatives. This Grants scheme is designed to assist programmes, projects and initiatives, which provide second-chance education opportunities to long-term unemployed people and other disadvantaged groups. The overall objective is to encourage those groups to return to education and training as a means of improving their educational qualifications with a view to returning to the labour force.

CHAPTER 05

GOAL 3: FAMILIES

GOAL 3: FAMILIES

Supporting families in caring for children and other dependent family members, ensuring specific supports for disadvantaged families, families in conflict, one-parent families and families on low incomes and working with other agencies to identify and develop responses to key family issues.

The developments during 2004 in pursuit of this Goal are set out under the relevant objectives, as follows:

→ OBJECTIVE 1

To contribute to the development and implementation of appropriate policies and actions to promote family welfare generally.

→ Strengthening Families

An integrated strategic approach for supporting families is being prepared. This will discuss the role of families and the impact on families and family life of the demographic, social and economic changes taking place in society and what changes might be necessary in current policies and programmes in response to that.

An Interdepartmental Committee (IDC) was established in July 2004 to oversee the development of this approach. The Departments represented on the IDC are also identifying the policy areas for which they have responsibility as well as reviewing the implementation of the recommendations of the Commission on the Family which come within their remit.

A call for submissions was issued in July 2004 to interested organisations to inform the process. Some 25 submissions were subsequently received from non-governmental organisations setting out their perspective on the issues and challenges to be faced. A draft synthesis report has been prepared on the content of the submissions and the issues raised will be taken into account by the IDC.

The IDC also commissioned a background paper which outlines the key demographic, economic, social and other relevant changes taking place which are impacting on families and family life,

the likely future trends in relation to family change and the challenges these pose for current policies and programmes.

Appropriate proposals arising from the current examination will be brought forward in 2005.

→ Longitudinal Study

Preparations are being made by the Department and the Department of Health and Children, through the National Children's Office, for a National Longitudinal Study on children. The study will be the most significant of its kind to be undertaken in the Republic of Ireland, particularly in terms of the cost, scope and length of study period. It is anticipated that 10,000 children from birth and 8,000 children aged nine will be recruited to participate in the study. The aim of the study is to examine the factors which contribute to, or undermine, the well being of children in contemporary Irish families, and, through this, contribute to the setting of effective and responsive policies relating to children and to the design of services for children and their families. The study was put out to public tender and it is hoped to commence the study in 2005.

A Steering Group has been established, chaired by the Director of the National Children's Office, and including senior officials from the Department of Social and Family Affairs, policy makers, people with expertise in research and statistics as well as child health, to oversee the project.

→ Families Research Programme

The Families Research Programme was launched in 1999 to provide grant aid to support research projects which have the ability to inform the future development of aspects of public policy which relate to families and family services. Under the Programme, 14 projects were selected for funding covering such areas of family life as

marriage, marital breakdown, the impact of counselling services on relationships, children and parental separation, fathers, grandparents and family friendly work practices.

All of the projects funded under the Programme have now been published. Four projects were published in 2004 viz.:

- Distressed Relationships: Does Counselling Help, published February 2004;
- Young Men on the Margins, published in April 2004;
- From Child to Adult, published in September 2004; and
- Strengthening Families Through Fathers, published in November 2004.

→ OBJECTIVE 2

To ensure that the social welfare system responds effectively to the needs of different family situations.

→ Family Services Project (FSP)

The Family Services Project (FSP) continues to provide a high quality information service on the range of supports available, through the Social and Family Supports Service, to families from State agencies and from the community and voluntary sector with the emphasis on services available locally.

The FSP spend for 2004 was €1.6 million. Projects funded include, parenting skills, personal development and guidance and counselling for those most distant from the labour market, most disadvantaged or those whose needs are complex.

2005 will see a more structured approach to reporting on outcomes for both the Family Services and Special Projects.

→ One-Parent Family Payment (OPFP)

The One Parent Family payment is the income support scheme for separated, unmarried and widowed people, and also for prisoners spouses who are bringing up a child or children without

the support of a partner. It was introduced in 1997 when it replaced a number of schemes for different categories of lone parent. At the end of December 2004, there were 80,103 people receiving this payment. On average, some 330 new claims are received each week, equivalent to about 17,000 per year.

Following the Department's review of the scheme in 2000, it was decided to localise the administration of the scheme. This was with a view of improving customer service by bringing lone parents into closer contact with the various support services available in local offices, reducing claim processing times through closer linkage with the local investigative officer network as well as providing more direct local contact for lone parents with the Department's employment support services.

By the end of the year, 19 of the Department's Local Offices and their associated Branch Offices were processing OPFP claims locally. The OPFP claims processed locally accounted for approximately 45% of the total weekly intake of OPFP claims nationwide.

→ OBJECTIVE 3

To put in place programmes and supportive measures to help families in conflict and to address the effects of separation and divorce on families.

→ 10th Anniversary of the International Year of the Family

2004 was the 10th Anniversary of the United Nations International Year of the Family. Under Sustaining Progress the Department of Social and Family Affairs was responsible for preparing a national programme focussing specifically on the development of family policy and supports to mark the anniversary year. A Steering Committee, chaired by the Department was established to co-ordinate a governmental programme of activities for each region. This committee included a range of government departments and agencies involved with families.

→ Special Awards Scheme

€1million was provided by the Government to facilitate the celebration of this Anniversary. This included a once off special awards scheme for voluntary and community organisations to facilitate the development of a national programme to celebrate the anniversary year. Some 950 applications for funding were received and approximately 800 groups were approved for awards under the scheme. The majority of awards went to small local community-based groups; a number of national groups were also awarded funding.

→ OBJECTIVE 4

To work with other Departments and agencies in delivering support to families.

→ Family Support Agency

The Family Support Agency was established in May 2003 under the Family Support Agency Act, 2001. The Agency brings together the main programmes and pro-family services developed since 1997. It provides a comprehensive and coherent response for families in need of these support services and for families generally. The Agency's functions are to:

- Provide a Family Mediation Service throughout the country for couples who have decided to separate, helping them to reach agreement on issues such as the family home, financial arrangements and ongoing parenting arrangements so that children retain close bonds with both parents where possible;
- Support, promote and develop the provision of marriage and relationship counselling services, child counselling services and bereavement support for families and provide grant aid, with the approval of the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, to voluntary organisations providing these services in the community. Funding of €7.5 million was approved in 2004 for over 520 voluntary and community groups nationwide;

- Support, promote and develop the Family and Community Services Resource Centre Programme, the aim of which is essentially to help combat disadvantage by improving the function of the family unit; and
- Commission research into matters such as marriage and family formation, trends in marital breakdown, the effectiveness of relationships counselling and other family counselling supports.

The Family Support Agency launched its first Strategic Plan on 11th May 2004.

→ OBJECTIVE 5

To ensure insofar as possible that people meet their obligations to support their family.

→ Maintenance Recovery

All one-parent family payments claimants are required to make ongoing efforts to seek maintenance from their spouse or, in the case of unmarried applicants from the other parent of their child. Failure to make efforts to seek maintenance can result in a claim being refused. Work by the Department in recent years has led to an increase in the level of maintenance being paid by liable relatives and also to an increase in savings on scheme expenditure. Savings were achieved of €14.2 million and €16.1 million in 2003 and 2004 respectively. Court actions taken against liable relatives who failed to contribute to social welfare payments made to their spouse and /or children have been successful. Normally, maintenance is obtained by way of negotiation or by court order. Separated couples are increasingly using the Family Mediation Service. Since 2001, one-parent family payment claimants are allowed to retain 50% of any maintenance received without a reduction in their social welfare entitlements as a further incentive to seek support themselves.

The issue of maintenance support and recovery is being kept under review.

CHAPTER 06

GOAL 4: POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

GOAL 4: POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Provide relevant and effective supports to those affected by poverty and social exclusion and co-ordinate the development and implementation of the Government's strategy in this area, in co-operation with other statutory and voluntary agencies.

The developments during 2004 in pursuit of this Goal are set out under the relevant objectives, as follows:

→ OBJECTIVE 1

To take a leading role in driving forward the implementation of the revised National Anti-Poverty Strategy in co-operation with the other agencies and organisations involved.

→ National Anti-Poverty Strategy and National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion

The National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAP/inclusion) incorporates the strategic approach to tackling poverty set out in the earlier National Anti-Poverty Strategy and also reflects the social inclusion commitments contained in the current National Partnership agreement, Sustaining Progress.

The current Plan was submitted to the European Union in July 2003 and covers the period up to 2005. It sets out the commitments made by Ireland to meet the Lisbon pledge 'to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty' by 2010. Copies are available on the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) website – www.socialinclusion.ie in the publications section, or directly from the Office for Social Inclusion, Department of Social and Family Affairs, Áras Mhic Dhiarmada, Store Street, Dublin 1, Tel: +353-1-7043851.

The causes of poverty are many. Working to eradicate it requires action across a range of different policy areas. The NAP/inclusion contains actions in relation to employment, social welfare, education, health, housing, equality and also focuses on groups who have been identified as being most vulnerable to social exclusion. The strategic approach reflected in the plan means that these actions are being co-ordinated in a

'joined up' way, with a view to achieving more effective outcomes.

The Department, through the Office for Social Inclusion, also has lead responsibility for progressing the Ending Child Poverty Special Initiative – one of eight special initiatives contained in Sustaining Progress.

→ Office for Social Inclusion (OSI)

The Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) was set up in late 2002, taking over from the NAPS Unit, and has overall responsibility for developing, co-ordinating and driving the Irish National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAP/inclusion).



SCREENSHOT OF OSI WEBSITE

The main functions of OSI are as follows:

- Co-ordinating the strategic process for tackling poverty across relevant Government Departments and agencies. Poverty and social exclusion are multi-faceted problems requiring a multi-dimensional and co-ordinated strategic response;

- Monitoring and evaluating progress against agreed targets. Working with individual Departments, OSI monitors implementation of the NAP/inclusion and evaluates progress to determine whether desired outcomes are being achieved;
- Developing key support functions to underpin the process, including a Data Strategy, amended Poverty Proofing Guidelines and research on the nature and causes of poverty;
- Communicating and consulting with key stakeholders and interested parties about the current Plan and the development of future National Action Plans;
- Promoting regional and local implementation of the NAP/inclusion. Working with the Combat Poverty Agency and the Departments of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Health and Children and other Departments with local structures. The aim is to develop a more effective focus on the regional and local implementation of the NAP/inclusion and to ensure that local variations on the nature, extent and causes of poverty are taken into account in both policy design and implementation;
- Increasing the social inclusion focus of the National Development Plan (NDP). In conjunction with the CPA, OSI is responsible for monitoring and reporting on the embedding of the Social Inclusion Horizontal Principle within those measures that were prioritised for social inclusion following the Mid-Term Evaluation of the NDP; and
- Managing the international dimension. Ensuring that we learn from experience of other countries in tackling this common challenge and from the policy and research findings of international organisations.

In addition to Irish Presidency activity (full details in the Highlights chapter), and the ongoing management of the functions outlined above, areas of particular priority for OSI during 2004 included the monitoring and evaluation of progress towards achieving the NAP/inclusion targets, culminating in the publication of OSI's first Annual Report in December, the development

of a Communications Strategy for the Office and the co-ordination and progression of actions under the Sustaining Progress Ending Child Poverty Initiative.

→ Institutional Structures

During 2004 OSI continued to develop and support the enhanced set of institutional structures which underpin the NAP/inclusion. In addition to the Office for Social Inclusion, these include:

- The Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, which is chaired by the Taoiseach and includes all relevant Ministers and Ministers of State with responsibility for areas relevant to the NAP/inclusion;
- The interdepartmental Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion, co-ordinated by the Department of the Taoiseach which met monthly during 2004 to brief and advise the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion;
- The Management Group of Assistant Secretaries, drawn from relevant Departments, which is tasked with overseeing the work of OSI which met five times during 2004;
- Social Inclusion Officers/Units, established in key Government Departments to co-ordinate their Department's contribution to the process in liaison with OSI;
- The Social Inclusion Consultative Group, involving the social partners and anti-poverty experts, met twice during 2004 to provide advice on implementation and development of the NAP/inclusion;
- The National Economic and Social Forum, which has responsibility for convening the Social Inclusion Forum (SIF). The SIF gives people experiencing poverty, individual members and representatives of the community and voluntary and other sectors an opportunity to contribute to the NAPS process. The SIF met for the second time in January 2005; and
- National Development Plan (NDP)/Community Support Framework (CSF) Monitoring Committees. OSI has

responsibility for supporting the social inclusion horizontal principle within the NDP/CSF. To assist the progression of this process and generally increase the social inclusion focus of the NDP, OSI participates on all NDP Monitoring Committees and works with the Combat Poverty Agency in providing technical assistance.

→ OBJECTIVE 2

To develop a greater understanding of the causes of poverty and exclusion and the strategies to address it.

→ Data Strategy

The current NAP/inclusion refers to the need for timely, accurate and relevant statistical data, to the work required to implement the commonly agreed EU social indicators in Ireland and to the need to develop national indicators to assist monitoring and evaluation of policies.

In 2004 OSI brought forward proposals regarding the development of appropriate indicators to measure consistent poverty. The Cabinet Committee directed that OSI should continue work on revising the existing indicators to take account of changes in living standards since the indicators were first selected.

Other important inputs to the development of the Data Strategy in 2004 included work on common indicators undertaken at EU level by the Social Protection Committee (SPC) Indicators Sub-Group and activity at national level under the umbrella of the Steering Group on Social and Equality Statistics (under the aegis of the National Statistics Board).

In 2005 OSI will prioritise the revision of poverty measures, including indicators of consistent poverty, as part of the overall development of the data strategy. The work will cover all measures, with the aim of identifying specific vulnerable groups to inform future policy and enable the setting of targets, particularly in the context of the next NAP/inclusion which will cover the

period from 2006-2009. A further aspect of the work to be progressed in 2005 will be the identification of remaining data gaps which hinder the assessment of progress towards meeting many of the NAP/inclusion targets, and prescribing measures to fill these gaps. It will be important to ensure that issues and needs arising as part of the development of the data strategy will inform the research agenda which is agreed by OSI and other agencies including the Economic and Social Research Institute and the Combat Poverty Agency.

→ OBJECTIVE 3

In line with agreed EU guidelines, to co-ordinate the preparation and submission of Ireland's National Action Plans against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAP/incl) and support other EU initiatives in this area.

→ OSI First Annual Report

The preparation by European Union Member States of national action plans against poverty and social exclusion is part of an EU wide drive to meet the objective set by the European Council at Lisbon in 2000 to 'make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and social exclusion by 2010'. The preparation and evaluation of the national action plans facilitates the exchange of good practice and provides a basis for exchanges with the EU Commission and Member States in devising the best way to meet common objectives in the area of social inclusion.

OSI's first annual report, which was launched in December 2004, details the progress made on implementation of the NAP/inclusion since August 2003 (copies of the report are available on the OSI website – www.socialinclusion.ie (in the publications section) or directly from the Office for Social Inclusion, Department of Social and Family Affairs, Áras Mhic Dhiarmada, Store Street, Dublin 1, Tel: +353-1-7043851

The OSI annual report was prepared following close collaboration with policy owners in relevant Government Departments. A wide range of activities and strategies are set out in the report,

indicating the range and breadth of programmes aimed at tackling social exclusion. The next step in the process will be the preparation by OSI of a report to the EU on implementation and evaluation of the current NAP/inclusion for submission in June 2005.

→ Transnational Level

Open Method of Co-Ordination

The Office for Social Inclusion is represented on the Social Protection Committee Indicators' Sub Group (ISG) in relation to the formulation and definition of agreed common indicators for monitoring poverty and social exclusion. OSI is also actively involved in the European Union Community Action Programme to Combat Social Exclusion 2002-2006. The programme, which is part of the open method of co-ordination, aims at supporting co-operation between Member States on combating poverty and social exclusion.

→ British-Irish Council

OSI is engaged in a programme of work as part of the social inclusion strand of the British-Irish Council (BIC). A Social Inclusion Ministerial meeting was held in Cardiff in July 2004, which was attended by the Minister and an official from OSI. This meeting reviewed the Council's first work programme under this strand, which dealt with financial inclusion, and agreed that the second work programme would be on access to employment for disabled people and how education and training could assist in this regard. During 2004 representatives from OSI also attended BIC meetings for social inclusion officials from member administrations.

→ OBJECTIVE 4

In the context of the development of policies for and the delivery of social welfare and related services, ensure that the particular interests of groups affected by or vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion are addressed and protected.

→ OSI Communication Strategy

The development of an effective communications strategy was identified as a key priority for the Office. Work was completed on the communications strategy during the latter half of 2004, with the following desired outcomes being agreed:

- A clear understanding of the role of OSI within the public sector and by key stakeholders;
- Increased awareness and knowledge about the NAP/inclusion and its requirements in the public sector and non-governmental organisations; and
- Increased awareness of the NAP/inclusion among people experiencing poverty generally.

A number of key messages were defined for communication including the role of OSI in developing, co-ordinating and driving the NAP/inclusion; the Government's commitment with EU partners to make a decisive impact on poverty by 2010; clear information about the NAP/inclusion process, its key objectives, timescales and the responsibilities of individual Government Departments in its implementation and key achievements of the process to date; the importance of consultation with key stakeholders in implementation of the NAP/inclusion and improved awareness of where the NAP/inclusion fits with other national and local processes. Activities and actions were agreed for the first year of the communications strategy and the following were achieved during December 2004:

- the development of an OSI website - www.socialinclusion.ie;
- the publication and launch of the first OSI Annual Report; and
- the publication of the first of a series of information leaflets on OSI and poverty issues in general.

More details about the Communication Strategy are available on the OSI website – www.socialinclusion.ie or directly from the Office for Social Inclusion, Department of Social and Family Affairs, Áras Mhic Dhiarmada, Store Street, Dublin 1, Tel: +353-1-7043851.

→ Social Inclusion Forum

During the latter months of 2004, OSI staff worked closely with the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF), the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) and the Combat Poverty Agency in preparing for the annual Social Inclusion Forum which took place in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham in January 2005. This Forum, which was co-funded by OSI and NESF, provided an opportunity for people who are not directly represented in the social partnership process to be consulted and to put forward their views and experiences on key policies and implementation issues relating to the NAP/inclusion.

→ Equality/Diversity

Population in Ireland will grow in the coming years mainly through continued immigration. The trend in immigration will change the profile of customers of some schemes. For social policy and service delivery planning, this poses challenges for taking account of new inter-cultural differences in dealing with an increasingly diverse customer base.

The Government's National Action Plan against Racism (NPAR) provides strategic direction to combat racism and provides a framework based on 5 objectives:

- protection;
- inclusion;
- provision;
- recognition; and
- participation.

Progressing the Department's focus in driving forward implementation of the social inclusion agenda has been reported above. Equally, our staff supports, training and awareness raising initiatives are, and will continue to be, grounded in the overall objective of serving all our customers in an equitable and non-discriminatory manner.

To that end, the Department continues to be represented on the various Quality Customer Service (QCS) Groups established under the SMI QCS Initiative, including the sub-group on

equality/diversity. Training on diversity awareness continued for staff in the Department during 2004 with the assistance of our external partners in UCC, the Irish Wheelchair Association and Pavee Point. By end 2004, some 500 staff had participated in this course and it is planned to extend the training in 2005.

Quality Interpretation Services

During 2004, 12 of the Department's Local Offices and the Dublin HQ Public Office have had access to a dedicated telephonic arrangement, operating on a three-way connection between the customer, staff member and a 'call-centre' based contractor who is a qualified interpreter. Access to the interpretation service was also arranged for smaller offices as the need arose. The facility will continue to be the subject of ongoing quality review to ensure that it addresses the needs of customers and staff alike.

→ OBJECTIVE 5

To support through a nationwide service, families and individuals identified as having problems with debt and money lending.

→ Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS)

MABS had an extremely busy 2004 with progress made in a number of areas foremost amongst which was the compilation of a Modernisation Action Plan for the service provided for in 'Sustaining Progress' and the setting up of MABS National Development Limited (NDL) to support the 52 MABS companies and their staff.

At European level the Unit hosted a peer review of MABS in Cork in mid November 2004.

→ National Advisory Committee (NAC)

A reconstituted National Advisory Committee (NAC), chaired by the Department, met with the Minister in January 2004 to set out its vision for the future of the service. 5 meetings of the NAC took place in 2004 with 3 sub groups being set up to examine access to financial services,

interdepartmental issues impacting on MABS customers and community education.

→ MABS National Development Limited (NDL)

MABS NDL was established in March 2004 to further develop the MABS Service in Ireland. MABS NDL mission is, through a partnership process, to support management and staff of MABS in the development of a quality consistent service, operating to established standards, to ensure that families on low income have access to an independent, free and confidential Money Advice and Budgeting Service so that they can cope with debt and take control of their own finances. The MABS NDL team consists of five employees who specialise in Casework/Technical Support (3), Social Policy/Communications (1) and Community Education (1).

→ MABS Peer Review

In National Action Plans against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAPs/incl 2003-2005), all Member States were asked to identify four examples of best practice and one of the four advanced by Ireland on this occasion was the Money Advice and Budgeting Service. The aim of the peer review is to assess the effectiveness of key policies or institutions and encourage the dissemination of good practice input across Member States. It serves as a useful tool to Member States to help them in focusing their policies in order to meet the objectives agreed at the Nice Summit and revised at the Copenhagen European Council.

The Review took place on 18 and 19 November and was attended by representatives from seven member states. An EU Commission report on the review will be available in January 2005.

→ OBJECTIVE 6

To support, where appropriate, initiatives at local level which encourage self-help and empowerment.

The Department staff are appropriately engaged at local, area and national level with, for example, involvement in the County and City Development Boards, RAPID and CLÁR programmes, Area Partnerships and community groups funded through ADM Ltd, supports for local initiatives (i.e. County Adult Guidance Service Committees, County Homeless Fora, ICTU Centres for the Unemployed, Social Economy Working Groups, Regional Drug Task Forces, County Council Co-ordinating Services Groups for Travellers, Regional Violence against Women Committees, Area Childhood Development Initiatives), Money Advice and Budgeting Service, Citizen Information Centres and County Childcare Committees.

CHAPTER 07

GOAL 5: E-GOVERNMENT AGENDA

GOAL 5: E-GOVERNMENT AGENDA

Promoting the use and development of integrated services in line with the development of the e-Government Agenda.

The greater use of new technology and progress on the delivery of the e-Government agenda are key to the improved delivery of social welfare services.

In October 2003, a major e-Government initiative entitled '**eEnabling Life Event Data**' was launched by the Ministers for Social and Family Affairs and Health and Children, and the Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach. This initiative incorporated four key and inter-related modernisation projects:

- Modernisation of the Civil Registration Service;
- REACH Inter Agency Messaging Service;
- Personal Public Service Number – Public Service Identity; and
- This Department's Service Delivery Modernisation Programme.

The fundamental objectives underpinning the four projects are:

- the introduction of a modern civil registration service;
- the sharing of life event data electronically between agencies;
- automated allocation, by the Department, of a Personal Public Service (PPS) Number to a child on receipt of electronic notification of birth;
- automated processing of Child Benefit claims following the allocation of the PPS Number;
- delivery of integrated and e-enabled services for citizens; and
- re-engineering of back office and legacy systems.

Over the course of 2004, the Department continued to develop its new generation of IT systems – these are radically changing how the

Department connects to its customers and partner Departments, Agencies and Offices in offering more customer-centred services. Organisational structures and work processes continue to be redesigned to take advantage of the flexibilities offered by these new IT systems. Developments during 2004 in pursuit of this Goal are set out under the relevant objectives, as follows:

→ OBJECTIVE 1

To deliver identity services to support the provision of public services.

→ Personal Public Service (PPS) Number

The Department's Client Identity Services continued to provide data matching services for Departments/Agencies, who use the PPS Number, in advance of the implementation of PSI Services. This ongoing support will, in time, facilitate the deployment of PSI services throughout these organisations. During the year data matching exercises were carried out with Dept of Education, Dept of Agriculture, the Passport Office, Health Service Executive and Local Authorities.

→ Public Service Identity

The Public Service Identity (PSI) project commenced in June 2004. The project is being developed and implemented in parallel with the Public Services Broker being developed by Reach. Once implemented PSI Services will, using the PPS Number as the unique customer identifier, provide support for secure customer registration on the PSB. PSI Services will also provide Departments/Agencies with online access to validate customers PPS Numbers or to find PPS Numbers for customers. In the future PSI services will allow for updates such as

change of address. It is expected that PSI Services will be available via the Reach Broker during the second quarter of 2005.

→ Data Protection

The Code of Practice for the use of the PPS Number was kept under review. Work has also commenced on creating a system access database. Progress was made on the compilation and publication of the Register of Users of the PPS Number with one hundred and fifty four replies published on the Departments website. The compilation of the Register is ongoing.

→ SAFE

Client Identity Services in DSFA, working with the Department of Finance, established an interdepartmental Steering Group to develop a standards based framework for a Public Service Card, using the PPS Number as an identifier. The programme has been named SAFE - Standard Authentication Framework Environment. This is in line with the focus on the provision of a standard means of authentication for access to public services.

The reason that the term 'framework' is being used is to emphasise that a single public service card is not envisaged at this stage but rather a structure within which individual initiatives can continue and converge where there is a benefit to doing so (e.g. convenience for users, efficiencies for issuers). The output from the SAFE Steering Group will be a standard which will take the form of a document that sets out the business principles, rules and other requirements for all cards and tokens issued by public service agencies.

It is expected that SAFE will facilitate convergence over time of existing cards under a single branded scheme, reducing the need for customers to carry multiple cards.

→ OBJECTIVE 2

To support the provision of, and internet-based access to, information about public services.

→ Department's Website

The website has maintained the WC3 Web Accessibility Initiative AAA Standard making its content fully accessible to disabled customers – the blind and partially sighted in particular. The site also complies with XHTML 1.0 Standard, which means that, with web-based translation tools, its content can also be seen in a variety of other languages including French, German and Italian.

All translated leaflets and application forms are now also available in Irish on the website. In addition, an email subscription facility is available for employers to receive instant notification of PRSI changes.

→ OBJECTIVE 3

To implement the Civil Registration Modernisation Programme – 'GRO Project'.

The General Register Office (GRO) is responsible for the administration of the Civil Registration Service in Ireland and operates under the aegis of the Department of Health and Children (DoH&C). The day-to-day service is delivered by the Health Service Executive (HSE) (formerly Health Boards) on an agency basis for the GRO.

A joint programme of work between the Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA) and the DoH&C for the modernisation of the civil registration service has been ongoing for a number of years. The objectives of the Civil Registration Modernisation programme are to ultimately provide for a seamless integration of Government services, eliminating the need for paper certificates and leading to efficient, timely and more convenient e-Enabled services for citizens.

The main developments during the year 2004 were as follows:

- The Civil Registration Act was enacted in February 2004;
- The roll-out of a new computer system to all HSE registration offices was completed in 2004;
- The integration of birth registration and Child Benefit (CB) claim processing was progressively extended as registration offices went live and now facilitates the automated processing of CB claims for all births registered electronically. What this means in practice is that the electronic registration of the birth of a child sets in motion the allocation of a PPS No for the child and triggers the automated claim process for Child Benefit for the first born child in a family and the automated payment of Child Benefit for subsequent children;
- Child Benefit claims in respect of 31,750 children were automatically processed in 2004, on foot of the registration of a birth on the civil registration system;
- Average processing time from birth registration to payment of Child Benefit has been reduced from up to 10 weeks to a few days, resulting in improved customer service and reduced paper volumes and associated handling costs;
- Electronic interfaces have been implemented to allow for the electronic transfer of birth data from some maternity hospitals to the civil registration computer system thereby taking paper out of the system and introducing greater efficiencies
- *Integrating and eEnabling of Live Event* was one of three projects chosen to represent Ireland in the EU-wide conference on Quality in the Public Service (3QC) which took place in the Netherlands in September 2004. The project was also one of 20 included in the National Showcase of Public Service Excellence in July 2004 and has been internationally recognised – including eEurope awards for eGovernment; and

- The Death Event Publication Services (DEPS) became available on 15 March 2004. This facility assists with the publication of death registration data, with validated PPS numbers, to public sector agencies for the administration and control of schemes and services. It is now being used by a variety of agencies. In addition, death registration is now being provided on a weekly basis via REACH to the National Cancer Registry of Ireland for research purposes.

→ OBJECTIVE 4

To develop its internal systems so that they will support electronic delivery of service to its clients.

The DSFA Integrated Services Connector (DISC) was deployed to support the completed integration with the General Register Office (GRO) for births and deaths. This system will provide the Department's messaging infrastructure for connection with the Public Services Broker (PSB) to be operated by the Reach agency.

Work continued on the multi-year programme of development of the Department's 'new generation' of systems, based on the Business Object Model, that underpin Service Delivery Modernisation. The systems are being designed to 'streamline' interaction with the Department's customers and to support process change.

→ REACH

The Reach agency largely concentrated on the building of the Public Service Broker (PSB) during 2004. As a first stage, the reachservices.ie facility was rebuilt and this was put into operation during 2004. The bulk of development effort, however, went into the PSB itself with a view to live operation in 2005.

It also continued to operate the Inter-Agency Messaging System to provide communication services between the GRO, DSFA and CSO on births, deaths and marriages.

CHAPTER 08

GOAL 6: THE DEPARTMENT AND ITS STAFF

GOAL 6: THE DEPARTMENT AND ITS STAFF

Developing an effective, adaptable and capable organisation and a culture of pride, innovation and performance with a high level of involvement and participation by people at all levels and a climate which fosters personal and career development.

The developments during 2004 in pursuit of this Goal are set out under the relevant objectives, as follows:

→ OBJECTIVE 1

To promote and develop a strong customer service culture throughout the Department and the agencies under its aegis and to deliver continuous improvement in quality customer service by placing the customer at the centre of the process.

→ Developing Service Delivery

The Department is committed to delivering a quality customer service to all our customers and also to ensuring the continuous improvement in the standard of service we provide. The Department's Statement of Strategy and Customer Action Plan provide a specific focus on customer service development. The latest Customer Action Plan 2004-2007 was published in May 2004.

→ Customer Charter

May 2004 also saw the launch of the Department's first Customer Charter "Our Service for You". This marked an important development in quality customer service for both the customer and the Department.

The Charter is an easy-to-read booklet which sets out the Department's commitments to delivering a high quality service to our customers. Before preparing the Charter, a consultation process took place to obtain the views of customers and staff. Arising from this process, four main areas of service delivery were identified and the Charter commitments focus mainly on these:

- Access to Our Services;
- Provision of Information;
- Your Claim; and
- Comments & Complaints.

An update on how the Department has met the standards, set down in the Charter, is set out in Appendix 5 of this Report. Quality customer service initiatives, arising from our Charter commitments, are being progressed across the Department on an ongoing basis.

→ Customer Consultation

2004 saw the continued support and facilitation of work on customer panels and surveys.

Touchscreen Surveys

The Department continued to use touchscreen technology to obtain customer feedback. The equipment is available in all 10 regions. The technology is a fast and efficient method of surveying customers. Surveys based on the 12 quality customer service principles were carried out during 2004.

Comment and Complaint System

The Department is operating a formal Comment and Complaint System since 2002. This system provides customers the opportunity to express their views about our service delivery. It also ensures that there is consistency in how comments and complaints are dealt with across the organisation.

The Customer Charter published this year places further emphasis on our commitment to respond quickly to customer complaints. Comment and Complaint Leaflets are available in our Public Offices. Customers can make a comment or complaint either by completing a Comment and Complaint form, by phone or through the Department's website: www.welfare.ie

Training in complaint handling has been provided to frontline staff across the Department. A computerised Comment and Complaint Recording System is in place, which facilitates the provision of data about the issues that concern customers. This feedback in turn helps to inform ongoing customer service policy.

Customer Panels

The Department continued its practice of providing avenues for consultation through Customer Panel activity in 2004. Four panels were convened throughout the year:

- Two panels for unemployed customers ran in the Southern Region;
- A multi-scheme panel was operated in the Dublin North Region, which involved participation by a representative from the Health Service Executive; and
- A Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) Panel was conducted in the Dublin South Region.

The panels sought to elicit information from customers in relation to perceptions of service delivery, preferences for channels to interact with the Department and attitudes as regards transacting claim business through Social Welfare Local Offices (SWLOs).

Customer Surveys

Survey activity in the Department, in 2004, involved conducting Touchscreen Surveys of customers visiting Local Offices, across the 10 regions. A Consultant's Report providing an independent review of the Department's customer consultation methods was carried out in 2003. An action plan was prepared in 2004 to progress the key recommendations identified in the review.

→ OBJECTIVE 2

To develop the capacity for high quality support to the political process, the maintenance of a high standard of policy development and support for continuous improvement of our business and for innovation.

→ Policy-Making Process

The Government instituted an Expenditure Review process to provide a systematic analysis of what is actually being achieved by expenditure on each programme, and to provide a basis on which more informed decisions can be made on priorities within and between expenditure programmes. The process involves engagement with customers and with other Departments and Agencies with an interest in the delivery of the particular programme under review.

Expenditure reviews have been carried out in 18 areas of the Department to date. In 2004, the review on Back to School Clothing and Footwear Scheme and the Review of the Supplementary Welfare Allowance Scheme - Phase 1 were completed.

Many of the recommendations, put forward in the reviews carried out to date, have been implemented. Remaining recommendations are reviewed on an annual basis and will be considered for implementation as priorities and resources allow.

→ Regulatory Reform

Following an OECD report on Ireland's regulatory framework, the Government published a white paper '*Regulating Better*', in January 2004, which sets out core principles of good regulation including rigorous assessment in terms of their impacts on business and ensuring that existing regulations are streamlined and revised through a process of systematic review and by repealing, restating and consolidating them as appropriate. Preparing and applying legislation is a key function of this Department and the main vehicle for giving effect to policy changes. The Department embarked on a programme of

Regulation consolidation and we will continue to ensure that our future legislative programme fully accords with the objective of a firm legislative basis existing for social protection schemes and that the legislation is easily accessible to those who apply it and our customers.

→ Review of Business Processes

The Department's Service Delivery Modernisation Programme aims to transform delivery of services to customers and to respond ever more effectively to changes in business and customer needs, and to e-Government initiatives. Realisation of the programme depends heavily on applying new technologies. A new generation of IT systems has been developed and is being refined and extended on an on-going basis. New organisational structures and work processes are being redesigned to facilitate a service that is more customer centred, integrated, proactive, efficient, controlled and easier to access. See also the progress reported on this programme under Objective 4 of this Chapter on page 57.

→ OBJECTIVE 3

To provide secure, reliable and robust ICT systems in support of current policy, service delivery and administrative objectives and to develop new ICT capabilities in line with the Department's strategic direction.

→ Operations:

The IS Division successfully operated and maintained its older production systems while migrating systems to a newer, though less robust, industry standard platform (Intel processors, Windows operating system, etc.). Considerable work remains to be done in the next few years to develop the management capability and the necessary resilience for this platform.

The infrastructure review, commenced in late 2003, was completed. The resultant plans will satisfy the Department's decentralisation needs, insofar as these are known. VoIP technology was piloted and the entire private PBX network

migrated to VoIP which meant that DSFA were the first public service organisation running VoIP across the data VPN. Migration from leased line to the Government VPN also commenced.

Considerable work was done on enhancing the manageability of the desktop devices to provide greater security, allow remote configuration etc. This work is scheduled to complete in 2005.

In addition to this work, the continuous requirements to support staff and accommodation changes throughout the country were met. The help desk dealt with over 27,000 calls for fault reports and requests. There were some 283 additional pieces of equipment installed, 1,091 equipment moves and 2,083 changes in 2004. This includes the deployment of assistive technology to visually and hearing impaired staff.

→ Applications:

On the strategic applications front, the difficult feat of implementing the various budgetary provisions in a short timescale was successfully achieved again.

The Integrated Short Term Schemes (ISTS) system was enhanced, in particular to support the deployment of One Parent Family Payment processing to local offices. Development of a further ISTS release to encompass Revenue taxation requirements was commenced. Similarly, a number of enhancements were made to the long term schemes systems and to the Central Records system. Administrative systems were also progressed, in particular a lot of effort was put into the Oracle Financials system.

The main strategic development focus continues to be the 'new generation' of systems, based on the Business Object Model, that underpin the Service Delivery Modernisation programme. Work commenced on a further stage of this programme for phased delivery in 2005.

→ OBJECTIVE 4

To refine and progress the Service Delivery Model (SDM) as part of the Modernisation Action Programme.

To develop organisational structures and work processes to support implementation, and benefits realisation, of the Service Delivery Model.

SDM is a long-term programme of change and is being implemented in a number of phases spanning several years. Phase 1 has been successfully implemented for Child Benefit.

Phase 2 of the Service Delivery Modernisation (SDM) project was initiated in 2003 for Retirement/Old Age Contributory Pensions, related Household Benefits/Free Travel and the Bereavement Grant. The aim of SDM Phase 2 is to provide a quality, reliable, caring and integrated service to pensioners, assisting them in establishing their rights and anticipating their needs where possible by:

- Proactive initiation by the Department of Retirement/Old Age Contributory pension claims and related allowances for people;
- Additional access channel – phone, post, in person at an office of the Department and via the Public Service Broker;
- Customer contact centre for pensioners for the taking of claims, provision of information and maintenance of claims; and
- Integrated processing of pension claims and related allowances, relieving pensioners of the need to complete multiple claim forms, minimising customer effort.

Very good progress was made during 2004 in implementing this phase.

The technology element of the project commenced in May 2004, following the on-schedule selection of a tenderer. It was a condition of the tendering process that the National Disability Authority guidelines on IT accessibility were adhered to and the system designed to meet all possible eventualities.

In parallel with the development and implementation of the new IT system, a team-based programme of organisational change was put in place to re-design work processes, organisational structures and roles. As with SDM Phase 1 (for Child Benefit – see above and our 2003 Annual Report), the aim of this component of the project will be to gain from the efficiencies on offer from the new IT system and multi-skill staff to handle all aspects of the work, thereby providing a fully integrated service to pensioners.

Further phases of the SDM programme will be rolled out in the coming years.

→ OBJECTIVE 5

To increase the Department's capacity to manage the security of its information in line with best practice and legal obligations.

Business Information Security Unit, which was set up during 2003, continues to promote information security to ensure that the Department's business information is used in a secure environment by security conscious staff. The unit advises business owners and support areas of their responsibility to protect the confidentiality, integrity and availability of business information from a wide range of threats. This helps to minimise the risk of damage to business information and to ensure compliance with relevant legislation and best practice.

→ OBJECTIVE 6

To ensure the structure of the Department is optimal to achieve the tasks which must be undertaken.

→ Decentralisation

As part of the major decentralisation programme for the Civil Service announced in December 2003, it is proposed that the Headquarters of the Department, together with two of the Department's agencies (The Combat Poverty Agency and Comhairle), comprising some 1,300 posts will move from Dublin to various provincial

locations. In preparation for the challenge that the decentralisation programme poses for the Department and its staff, a formal project management structure was established to manage the planning and implementation of the programme.

Implementation Plan

A detailed Implementation Plan was developed for the programme and submitted to the Decentralisation Implementation Group in June 2004.

Communication Strategy

A Communication Strategy for the programme was developed. This strategy established the framework for communication to be adopted for the implementation of the decentralisation programme. All documents relating to decentralisation are filed in a shared decentralisation drawer, accessible to all staff, on the Department's messaging system. In addition, two newsletters were issued to all staff during 2004, to keep staff up to date on the programme.

Training Strategy

A training strategy was prepared in consultation with the Department's Staff Development Unit (SDU). This strategy sets out the scope and responsibility of the training and development for the programme.

Partnership Sub-Committee

A Decentralisation Partnership Sub-Committee was established to provide a forum for liaising with staff. This group also has a Quality Assurance role regarding documents developed as part of the communication and training strategies.

Central Application Facility (CAF) Results

The number of first preference applications to the Central Application Facility, for each location were issued to Departments following the priority application date in September.

November 2004 - Report

The Decentralisation Implementation Group report published on 24 November recommended locations to be included in the 1st Phase of moves.

The locations recommended for this Department were Sligo and Drogheda while Carrick-on-Shannon was identified as a potential early mover.

→ OBJECTIVE 7

To ensure the optimal relationship between the Department and the agencies with which it does business.

→ Pensions Board

The Department works closely with the Pensions Board on the development of policy in relation to occupational pensions and PRSAs generally. The Department is represented on the Pensions Board itself and the various committees, which underpin and support the work of the Board. The Pensions Board is financed mainly through annual fees paid to it by the pension schemes and PRSA providers which it regulates.

→ Comhairle

The Department has a very close working relationship with Comhairle and has a representative on the Board of Comhairle. In 2004 Comhairle continued its development of the national network of Citizens Information Centres with 46 full-time centres, 52 part-time centres and 143 outreach locations. Over 600,000 queries were dealt with by the various centres in 2004. This represents an increase in 20% on the previous year. The Budget allocation for Comhairle for 2004 was €17.286 million.

→ Combat Poverty Agency

A collaborative relationship exists between the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) in the Department and the Combat Poverty Agency (CPA). Regular planning meetings take place between OSI and CPA management and the Department is represented on the CPA Board. The Department provided funding of almost €4 million to the CPA in 2004.

→ Family Support Agency

The relationship between the Family Affairs Unit and the Family Support Agency is one of continuous and effective co-operation and communication. Regular meetings take place between the two and the Department is represented on the Board of the Agency. The overall allocation for the Family Support Agency for 2004 was €20.185 million.

→ Pensions Ombudsman

The Pensions Ombudsman has the power to investigate and determine complaints made by or on behalf of beneficiaries of occupational pension schemes or Personal Retirement Savings Accounts (PRSAs) who allege that they have suffered financial loss as a result of maladministration by those charged with managing these arrangements. He may also investigate any dispute of fact or law brought to his attention that arises from the actions of those administering occupational pension schemes or PRSAs. The Pensions Ombudsman is independent and is able to give such directions as he considers necessary or expedient to resolve a dispute.

The Office of the Pensions Ombudsman opened for business in September 2003 but did not become fully operational until 2004 when the recruitment of investigative staff was completed. The claimload of the Office increased steadily throughout 2004 and while the Pensions Ombudsman can make a legally binding determination in relation to complaints received, efforts are also made to resolve issues brought to his attention through mediation.

→ OBJECTIVE 8

To develop the role of the manager as the key facilitator in implementing change and improvement. To ensure management processes which foster open and participative management, effective communications, clear setting of tasks and priorities, timely and logical decision making and which encourage decision making and ownership of problems at the appropriate level of management.

→ AP/PO Management Development Programme

The roll-out of the AP/PO Management Development Programme concluded in 2004 with a total 190 APs and 57 POs (including Medical Assessors) completing the programme. The course centred around four main themes: Personal Effectiveness, Leadership, Teamwork and Driving Change.

A customised version of the programme was also delivered to the Social Welfare Appeals Officers and Medical Assessors. During the course of the programme, issues that arose of general organisational application were reported to the Management Advisory Committee (MAC) and are being followed up.

→ OBJECTIVE 9

To implement our Human Resources Strategy 2003-2005 in the context of delivering on the commitments outlined in this Strategy Statement.

→ Human Resources

The Department employs more than 4,700 staff and, as such, is one of the largest employers in the Civil Service.

Basic pay costs amounted to €161.77 million while the cost of overtime was €3.546 million. During 2004, the turnover of staff in the Department was significantly less in comparison with previous years. In accordance with the Government decision on Public Service numbers the Department operated against a background of restrictions on staff numbers and critical examination and prioritisation of the filling of vacancies both at the local and corporate levels.

During the year, 188 employees joined the Department, of whom 96 were new recruits to the Civil Service. 69 of the Department's staff were promoted either internally or through interdepartmental competition. 263 employees left the Department during 2004, including 51 who transferred to other Government Departments on promotion and 107 who moved

on lateral transfer. 37 staff retired during the year and 44 staff resigned their positions.

→ Human Resources Strategy 2003-2005

The purpose of the Department's HR Strategy is to bring together our various HR policies, integrate them within the overall organisational strategy and place Human Resources at the centre of the Department's decision-making.

The implementation of the Strategy is being monitored via the Management Committee and the Department's Partnership process. An update on progress to the end of 2004 will be communicated to staff in early 2005.

→ Career Opportunities

In addition to Civil Service-wide competitions, 7 competitions for internal promotions were held. In line with commitments in the Sustaining Progress National Agreement the holding of additional and enhanced internal competitive interview competitions was agreed. Some of these competitions were held or commenced in 2004.

The reviewing of competitive interview promotion processes continued in 2004 and included statistical analysis of competition results and feedback from candidates and interview board members.

A number of schemes, which provided opportunities for career advancement, and, in some cases, opportunities for study abroad, were also dealt with.

→ Family Friendly Measures

Staff continued to avail of family friendly measures in 2004. At the end of 2004 the following was the position regarding the take-up of the various worksharing options:

| Pattern | Number of officers availing of option |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 4 day week | 231 |
| 3 weeks on/1 week off | 25 |
| 3 day week | 103 |
| 9am-3pm attendance | 26 |
| Half attendance | 597 |
| Total | 982 |

→ Term Time

In 2004 there were 386 applications for Term Time, with 41 applications subsequently withdrawn and 27 applications refused. Of the 318 approved applications, 299 (94%) were female and 307 (97%) were for the purpose of child-minding. 238 temporary Clerical Officers were recruited to cover Term Time absences and 169 staff members received Higher Duty Allowances for the period.

→ Staff with Disabilities

In line with the Civil Service Gender and Diversity Policies and its own published commitments the Department is developing a range of initiatives aimed at increasing staff awareness of equality issues as they apply across the broad HR agenda. The HR Strategy 2003-2005 included a commitment to progress initiatives aimed at addressing issues affecting staff with disabilities and, specifically, to strengthen the role of the Department's Disability Liaison Officer (DLO). The DLO is based within Personnel and has responsibility to promote the interests of staff with disabilities and co-ordinate the achievement of the Department's objective of ensuring a working environment that meets the particular needs of these employees. Key elements of the role are:

- liaison and co-operation with external and internal service providers to ensure specific needs are met;
- raising awareness of disability issues in the Department; and
- research regarding best practice in this area.

A Disability Issues Monitoring Committee was established in 2004 to oversee recommendations made by the Partnership Disability Issues Group. The Committee, which includes staff members with disabilities, carries out regular assessments and monitors progress of recommendations made and meets with relevant support areas to discuss the implementation of these.

Disability Awareness Guidelines were produced and circulated to all members of staff in 2004. These guidelines were developed in consultation with members of staff with disabilities and particularly emphasise communication with people with disabilities. In relation to Assistive Technology, a review of the outstanding needs of staff with visual and hearing impairments was carried out, equipment purchased and delivered to relevant staff, with training programmes provided.

→ POSITIVE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

→ Civil Service Code of Standards & Behaviour

The Civil Service Code of Standards & Behaviour was published in September 2004. The Code forms part of all civil servants' terms and conditions of service. It underpins the existing rules in many areas and introduces new rules governing gifts, hospitality and the acceptance of appointments outside the civil service. A copy of the Code was issued to every member of staff.

→ Anti-Bullying, Harassment & Sexual Harassment Policy

An officer was assigned on a full-time basis in 2004 to investigate bullying and harassment complaints and to deliver awareness raising sessions on the policy to managers and staff.

→ Employee Assistance Service

The Employee Assistance Service has an important role in HR management. It enables the Department to respond appropriately to situations that may involve employees with personal difficulties and, more broadly, provides an employee support service. The usage of the service increased in 2004 and this can be accounted for by the appointment of an additional Employee Assistance Officer in 2003 and the proactive promotion of the Service, particularly in the Local Offices.

→ Human Resource Management System

The current computerised Human Resource Management System was implemented in the Department in 2000 following a joint project with Revenue and CMOD (Department of Finance) to identify and procure/develop a suitable HRM system for the Civil Service. As part of the development of common systems in Personnel areas in the Civil Service an upgraded version of the system became available in 2002 and is being adopted as the Civil Service standard. In line with this development the Department's system was upgraded, with the new system successfully going live in February 2004.

The upgrade of the system:

- Allows the Department to adopt the Civil Service standard system;
- Enables Personnel section to operate more effectively and to improve current standards of service and administrative efficiency;
- Will support the future devolution of certain Human Resource Management functions to line management;
- Assists Personnel in meeting the HR commitments of the Public Service Modernisation Programme, the HR Strategy 2003-2005 and the Internal Customer Service Plan; and
- Enables Personnel, as the custodians of an information source, to support the development of other Department initiatives, e.g. Management Information Framework (MIF).

→ Excellence Through People (ETP)

Excellence Through People is Ireland's National Standard for Human Resource Development and is administered by FÁS. The Department's Staff Development Unit (SDU) underwent an assessment for ETP and received the award in November 2004. The principal objectives of the award are to encourage the development of employees to full potential so as to maximise their contribution to the specific needs of the organisation and to show recognition for organisations that have achieved this aim. The award must be reapplied for annually.



Sexton Cahill, Chairman of ETP Approvals Board, Michéal Martin, Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Paula Lyons, former Staff Development Unit DSFA and Rody Molloy, Director General of FÁS.

→ Performance Management and Development System (PMDS)

PMDS gives the civil service the framework that defines how we can advance towards improved performance, greater job satisfaction and better service. The rollout of PMDS in the Department continued in 2004. During 2004, twenty trainers located throughout the country delivered training in the three phases of PMDS. The sub-group of the PMDS Project Board set up to examine the implementation and monitoring of the process in the Department continued its work.

Under the terms of General Council Report 1398, the process of Upward Feedback must be integrated into PMDS. As required by the report, a Staff Attitudinal/Climate Survey was carried out in February 2004 and a report on the findings was produced in the last quarter.

Following this, the PMDS trainers delivered

training/briefing sessions, to all staff (4,700 approx) of the Department, on the process of Upward Feedback and its Code of Practice.

→ Training & Development Services Supplied

Staff Development Unit (SDU) provides a range of training and development services for staff of the Department, and details of these are available to all staff. In addition to details of formal training courses available, this includes material available through the Learning Centre for self-managed learning (i.e. CD Roms, books and videos). To assist people in completing their PMDS Personal Development and Training Plan, both formal courses and self-managed learning options outlined in the Directory are linked to the relevant PMDS Competencies. SDU offer a broad range of courses under the headings of Induction, Customer Service Interpersonal Skills, Management Development and PC Training. In addition, specialised training is provided for particular roles within the organisation (e.g. Service Officers, Local Office Managers and Social Welfare Inspectors) and for particular business needs. The unit also actively promotes and supports staff in the provision of on-the-job training and coaching. Two issues of the Department's training magazine – 'Training Matters' – were published during 2004, updating staff on training plans and initiatives around the Department.

→ PMDS Personal Development and Training Plans

PMDS Personal Development and Training Plans are the primary mechanism of submitting training requests to SDU. During 2004, SDU received 460 Year 1 Personal Development and Training Plans and by the end of 2004 had received a total of 4,878 forms since the commencement of PMDS. Also received were 839 annual review forms, 421 Year 2 plans and 524 Year 3 plans.

→ Training Provided

During 2004, 2,564 staff attended a total of 362 SDU training courses involving 3,044.5 mandays. Courses delivered included Induction, Management Development, Interpersonal Skills, Writing Skills, Computer and PC Training. In addition, specialised training was provided for particular roles within the organisation (e.g. Services Officers and Inspectors) and for particular business needs. For example, for Inspectors, two training programmes were developed and delivered to enable these staff perform new work practices efficiently and effectively. 9 briefing sessions on the application of PRSI to certain benefits-in-kind were delivered to 330 field staff, with a further 23 information sessions on the PRSAs attended by over 370 participants.

→ Training Strategy

The draft Training and Development Strategy was amended during 2004 to reflect the need for a substantial investment in training and development to support the Government's Programme for Decentralisation. The strategy has been developed in the context of the Framework for Civil Service Training and Development (2004 - 2008) by the Centre for Management Organisation and Development (CMOD). This framework maps out a strategy for the development of training over 5 years within which each Government Department will develop its own strategy and priorities.

The Department's training strategy will define the scope and responsibility for training and development and a framework within which training plans can be developed and will outline the environment and influences affecting the training function in the future. The strategy has been developed in consultation with the Partnership Committees.

→ Learning Centre

During 2004, SDU continued to cater for self-managed learning needs through its Learning Centre facility. A total of 600 requests were

received for material such as CD ROMs, books and videos on topics relating to Group and Interpersonal Effectiveness, Managing for Results, Thinking Style and Problem Solving Personal Effectiveness as well as Life Skills Material. A great deal of interest was also shown in the IT material available. The Learning Centre has an internal website (intranet) for all HQ staff which contains 75 course titles.

→ Refund of Fees

For the academic year 2003/2004 there are 243 staff members availing of the Refund of Fees scheme. This includes 7 people pursuing Masters Degrees (in Public Management, Public Administration, Social Policy, Business Studies, European Law, Internet Systems, Strategic Management) and 151 pursuing courses in core study areas which include Business Studies and Public Administration. This also includes funding for short courses of 16 weeks duration or less e.g. ECDL, which is being pursued by 51 people.

→ Irish Language Training Programme

Four specialised Irish language-training programmes were completed in 2004. These programmes were delivered to a number of Inspectors, Facilitators, and Social Welfare Local Office staff from the Western, Southern and Eastern regions. Staff from the Pension Services Office in Sligo and the Public Office in Oisín House, Dublin also received specialised training.

The main objective of the training is to equip front-line staff to deliver a quality customer service through Irish. A further programme of training will be provided during 2005 to support the implementation of the Official Languages Act 2003.

→ Partnership

A key value and guiding principle of the Department is the recognition that effective delivery of our services and management of our

work requires a partnership approach between management, unions and staff.

The Department's Partnership Steering Committee is supported by 5 regional partnerships and 36 local or special interest committees. The Steering Committee met on 8 occasions in 2004.

Promoting Partnership in the Department

The review of partnership and how it operates in the Department, which began in 2003, was finalised during 2004. An Action Plan was developed over a number of areas and is now being implemented.

Over the course of 2004, partnership also actively contributed to and participated in initiatives such as:

- The Department's Modernisation Action Plan and progress reports (details of which have been outlined in Chapter 2);
- Attendance Management Policy;
- Staff Climate and Attitudinal Survey under PMDS;
- Review of the HR Strategy;
- Preparations for the new Internal Customer Service Plan which will be finalised in 2005; and
- the Fiúntas awards (see below).

→ FIÚNTAS - Employee Recognition Scheme

The Fiúntas Scheme is an exceptional performance award scheme whose purpose is to increase staff motivation, to recognise exceptional performance and to encourage fresh input and foster a climate of change. In 2004 a total of 94 awards were made to 46 individuals and 48 teams across a wide number of areas of the Department. The total expenditure was just over €177,000. Awards are publicised in the Social Affairs magazine.



John Hynes S-G, Fidelma Cotter – Employee of the Year award winner, December 2004 and Mick Breathnach.

→ Input Suggestion Scheme

In 2004, a total of 125 suggestions were received under this scheme and, of these, 54 were deemed to be valid with 4 receiving awards and 38 still under consideration at the end of the year.

In 2004, 51 suggestions, which had been submitted between 2001 and 2004, were implemented. Of these, 22 suggestions resulted in confirmed savings of €331,314.

The annual INPUT Awards ceremony was held in December 2004. The event was a way of acknowledging the successful suggestions submitted under the scheme during 2003 and 2004. Some 25 award winners collected Input Award Certificates at the ceremony.

The Idea of the Year award and a bonus cheque of €500 went to a team of officers from the Pension Services Office who submitted a design for a user friendly ready reckoner to enable customers calculate their entitlements under the Retirement and Old Age Contributory Pension Schemes.



John Hynes, Secretary-General with PSO staff who received the INPUT Idea of the Year award 2004

→ OBJECTIVE 10

Resources will be allocated for the effective and efficient implementation of our objectives as outlined in this Strategy Statement.

→ Project Management

A Projects Governance Process is in place to ensure that a corporate view is taken of competing requirements and that resourcing decisions are soundly based. The Projects Governance Committee meets on a monthly basis to monitor progress with projects and to review, where necessary, resourcing requirements including allocations for consultancy under the Department's Administrative Budget. A

Project Management Framework is being developed to promote best practice in project management throughout the Department.

The Department established a Risk Management Unit to co-ordinate implementation of its risk management programme. During 2004, this Unit piloted the programme in 4 specific areas with a view to commencing the roll out across the Department during 2005.

→ Staffing Reviews

The 3rd round of staff assessments for Local Offices (LO) was completed and a report was submitted.

Staffing resource impact analysis was carried out on 16 Local Offices, which took on the registration and deciding of new One Parent Family claims in 2004.

Staffing reviews were also carried out in a number of other business areas.

A staffing assessment was carried out to assess the impact of the Habitual Residence Condition that was introduced in May 2004.

→ Training, Development and Education Resources

The organisation of the training resources within the Department reflects the significant staffing numbers (some 4,700) and the wide geographical

spread of offices.

SDU, based in Dublin, is the central training unit with a staff of sixteen but works with, and supports, the staff of the training units in decentralised headquarter buildings and a network of 58 Local Office Trainers based throughout the country. A separate Training Unit provides specialist Information Systems training (ISDDU) for the staff of the IS Division and liaises with SDU as required. Training in the rollout of PMDS has been managed separately under a PMDS Project Manager.

The annual training budget allocation for 2004 was €0.96 million, of which €210,000 was delegated to Principal Officers for use in accessing external training courses in areas which the Department does not have the expertise or resources to provide. The training budget also covers funding for special training projects and the Fees Refund Scheme.

→ OBJECTIVE 11

To operate Financial Management systems of the highest quality.

→ Management Information Framework (MIF)

Improving financial management systems has been identified as a priority for the civil service change and modernisation programme under the Strategic Management Initiative. A key element of this reform process is the Management Information Framework (MIF). The Department places the highest priority on the effective management of the resources for which it is responsible and on having good financial management and control systems in place. The MIF project in the Department aims, therefore, at facilitating better decision-making about allocation of resources, better management of resources once allocated and a greater transparency in and accountability for the use of resources.

In 2004, good progress was made on the implementation plan for the MIF. The main

priority has been the development of new-style management reports. These provide a range of information from which performance can be assessed. The development of these one-page management reports continued during the year and management report templates were developed for all of the main scheme areas of the Department. The process of automating the completion of the one-page reports for the regions was started.

On the costing system, an evaluation of the options available was undertaken. A costing model, which caters for the specific needs of the Department, was developed and approved by the MAC.

Work continued on refining the Management Information data to improve its quality and consistency. This exercise will enhance the Department's ability to develop more detailed indicators so as to more accurately reflect the complex nature of the work.

Work also continued on the implementation of the MIF training and awareness strategy, including customisation of the centrally developed MIF training programme. Progress on developing the MAC level balanced scorecard will continue into 2005.

In 2002, the Department agreed to participate in the Resource Allocation and Business Planning pilot project which sought to develop a model for linking business planning and financial management and facilitate effective monitoring of performance against outputs/outcomes. The pilot was associated with the ongoing development of performance indicators and other aspects of the MIF project. During 2004, the Department participated in the Steering Group and inter-Departmental Working Group which developed the project under the overall supervision of the Financial Management Subgroup of Secretaries General. A draft report linking the Department's estimates with outputs identified by reference to the Statement of Strategy was submitted to the Steering Group. The project continued into 2005.

→ Change Management Fund

The Change Management Fund managed by the Department of Finance, supports Departments/ Offices in their efforts to implement, in an effective and co-ordinated manner, the strategic change agenda under the SMI programme of modernisation. In 2004, the Department received some €51,000 from the Fund for a number of projects, including:

- Elements of the Performance Management and Development System training programme;
- The 'What Now' Information Booklet for ex-offenders;
- Co-hosting of the North/South Benefits Information Seminar;
- Diversity awareness training for staff; and
- Quality Accreditation under the Quality Customer Service programme.

→ Performance under Prompt Payment Legislation

The Department complied with the provisions of Prompt Payment legislation in 2004. In the relatively small number of cases where the statutory time limit for payment was exceeded, the relevant amount of interest was included in the total payment. In 2004, there were 29 late payments, the value of which amounted to 0.09% of total payments. Prompt payment interest amounted to €789.42.

→ Providing of EFT method of payment to Suppliers of goods and services to the Department

In 2004, the Department commenced paying suppliers of goods and services by electronic funds transfer (EFT). This facility was extended to travel and subsistence payments for staff on 1 November 2004. Up to 31 December 2004, a total of 1,171 EFT payments issued to 514 suppliers/staff to a value of €12.8million.

→ OBJECTIVE 12

To ensure Value for Money in all of the activities of the Department.

→ Business Controls, Internal Audit & Audit Committee

As a vital element of the corporate governance processes within the Department, the robustness of its business control infrastructures was subjected to continuous review, audit and enhancement during the year. All significant control and governance issues and recommendations brought to attention by internal and external audit were responded to in writing by management and enhancements actioned as appropriate.

The recommendations in the (Mullarkey) Report of the Working Group on the Accountability of Secretaries General and Accounting Officers, which issued in January 2003, were actioned by the Department in line with the timetables therein.

The DSFA Audit Committee, which operates under a written charter and whose membership of six includes three external members (including the Chairperson), is an integral part of the Department's corporate governance processes. The Audit Committee met on four occasions during 2004 and provided advice and guidance to the Department in relation to business control, internal audit, risk management and other governance issues.

During 2004, the Internal Audit Unit – which is an independent, objective, assurance and consulting activity – provided audit reports, reviews, questionnaires and other audit activities in respect of many aspects of the Department's business environment including social welfare schemes, head office areas, computer areas and Social Welfare Local Offices.

The Internal Audit Unit provides advice and assurance to Management on matters relating (inter alia) to the Department's systems of business control, to quality of performance and to business risk.



L to R : Eoin O Broin, Director of Regions, DSFA, Brian Duffy, Head of Internal Audit, DSFA, Pat Banahan, General Manager Internal Audit, VHI, Eddie Rice, Decisions Advisory Officer, DSFA, Sylva Langford, Assistant Secretary, Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform and outgoing Chairperson of DSFA Audit Committee 2004 and Michael Flynn, Director of Internal Audit, Department of Agriculture and Food and incoming Chairperson of DSFA Audit Committee 2005.

→ Facilities Management

In 2004, the Department introduced a new Waste Management system with the emphasis on reducing the amount of waste going to landfill and increasing the amount to be recycled. Piloted in the Dublin HQ buildings, progress on this programme will be reviewed in 2005.



APPENDICES

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Status Report on Organisational Targets for 2004

| Clearance Time Target | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Activity | Standard Clearance Time(1) | Status Performance |
| New Claims | | |
| Old Age Contributory Pension | 55% in 6 weeks | 44% Achieved |
| Retirement Pension | 80% in 5 weeks | 49% Achieved |
| Widow(er)'s Contributory Pension | 80% in 5 weeks | 82% Achieved |
| Old Age (Non-Contributory) Pension | 65% in 8 weeks | 63% Achieved |
| Widow(er)'s (Non-Contributory) Pension & One Parent Family Payment (Widow) | 75% in 8 weeks | 84% Achieved |
| One-Parent Family – (Unmarried Parent) | 55% in 8 weeks | 14% Achieved |
| One-Parent Family – (Separated Spouse) | 65% in 13 weeks | 24% Achieved |
| Free Schemes | 70% in 7 weeks | 72% Achieved |
| Bereavement (PSO) | 80% in 3 weeks | 61% Achieved |
| Bereavement (Longford) | 80% in 3 weeks | 67% Achieved |
| Invalidity Pension | 70% in 9 weeks | 69% Achieved |
| Family Income Supplement | 70% in 3 weeks | 44% Achieved |
| Disability Allowance | 70% in 13 weeks | 71% Achieved |
| Carers | 70% in 13 weeks | 50% Achieved |
| Unemployment Benefit – All Claims | 85% in 2 weeks | 68% Achieved |
| Unemployment Assistance – All Claims | 70% in 2 weeks | 56% Achieved |
| Disability Benefit | 90% in 1 week | 57% Achieved |
| Occupational Injury Benefit – Interim Disability Benefit | 85% in 1 week | 70% Achieved |
| Maternity (before commencement of benefit) | 80% | 78% Achieved |
| Treatment Benefit | 90% in 2 weeks | 72% Achieved |
| Child Benefit | 90% in 1 week | 76% Achieved |
| Arrears | | |
| PSO (Sligo) | 80% in 3 weeks | 87% Achieved |
| Longford SWS | 80% in 3 weeks | 76% Achieved |

1 Clearance time: elapsed time from date of receipt of claim to date of decision.

APPENDIX 2: SUMMARY OF DSFA BUDGET PACKAGE 2005

| | COST | |
|---|---------------|-----------------|
| | 2005 €m | Full Year €m |
| 1 Delivering Income Support | 678.82 | 678.82 |
| 2 Support to Work | 17.73 | 19.36 |
| 3 Fighting Child and Family Poverty | 118.99 | 155.24 |
| 4 Supporting Persons with Disabilities and their Carers | 18.61 | 20.58 |
| Total | 834.15 | 874.00 |
| DETAILS OF DSFA BUDGET PACKAGE 2005 | | |
| Proposal | | |
| 1. Delivering Income Support | | |
| Personal Rates of Payment | | |
| €12 increase in the personal rate of payment for all pensioners aged 66 or over (65 in the case of Retirement and Invalidation Pension); special €14 increase in the personal rate of all lower payments. Proportionate increases for all persons in receipt of reduced rates. [January 2005] | | |
| QAA Rates of Payment | | |
| €9.30 per week increase for OACP, Retirement Pension and Invalidation Pension QAAs aged 66 and over; €10 per week increase for Invalidation Pension QAA aged under 66; €8 per week increase for OACP and Retirement Pension QAAs aged under 66; €7.90 per week increase for OAP QAAs aged under 66 and a €9.30 per week increase for all other QAAs. Proportionate increases for all persons in receipt of reduced rates. [January 2005] | | |
| Maternity Benefit | | |
| Increase the minimum rate of Maternity Benefit by €14 per week, from €151.60 to €165.60. [January 2005] | | |
| Maternity & Adoptive Benefit | | |
| Increase the rate of Maternity Benefit from 70% to 75% of reckonable weekly earnings. [January 2005] | | |
| | 678.82 | 678.82 |

APPENDIX 2: SUMMARY OF DSFA BUDGET PACKAGE 2005 (continued)

| Proposal | COST | |
|---|--------------|-----------------|
| | 2005 €m | Full Year €m |
| 2. Support to Work | | |
| Family Income Supplement (FIS) Increase all FIS earnings thresholds by €39 per week. [January 2005] | | |
| Back to Education Allowance Increase the Cost of Education Allowance by €146, from €254 to €400 per annum and reduce the qualifying period by three months, from 15 to 12 months. [September 2005] | | |
| Qualified Adult Allowances (QAAs) Increase the upper ceiling for entitlement to tapered QAA payments by €10, from €210 to €220 per week. [January 2005] | | |
| One Parent Family Payment Introduce a transitional half-rate payment (of six months duration) of One Parent Family Payment where recipients' income exceeds €293 per week. [January 2005] | | |
| | 17.73 | 19.36 |
| Proposal | | |
| 3. Fighting Child and Family Poverty | | |
| Child Benefit Increase the Child Benefit Lower Rate by €10.00 and the Higher Rate by €12.00 per month. New monthly rates are €141.60 and €177.30 per month, respectively. [April 2005] | | |
| Child Dependant Allowance Increase the income threshold for entitlement to half-rate CDA with UB, DB, IB and H&S Benefit by €50, from €300 to €350 per week. [January 2005] | | |
| Creche Supplement Provide funding for: - (1) the continued support in 2005 of existing recipients, - (2) the support of new cases referred by Health Sector Personal Social Services Professionals and - (3) the support of community creches (subject to discussions with the Ministers for Health and Children and Justice, Equality and Law Reform). [2005] | | |

APPENDIX 2: SUMMARY OF DSFA BUDGET PACKAGE 2005 (continued)

| | COST | |
|---|------------|-----------------|
| | 2005 €m | Full Year €m |
| <p>Diet Supplement Introduce improvements in the Diet Supplement scheme in the context of the report on the cost of dietary requirements carried out by the Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute. [2005]</p> | | |
| <p>Rent Supplement - Additional criteria for Rent Supplement eligibility - Allow Rent Supplement to remain in payment unless a third offer of local authority accommodation has been refused (replacing the eligibility requirement that a person cannot refuse more than two reasonable offers of local authority accommodation). [January 2005]</p> | | |
| <p>Rent and Mortgage Interest Supplement - Increase the income disregard for entitlement to Rent and Mortgage Interest Supplement by €10, from €50 to €60 per week. [January 2005]</p> | | |
| <p>Unemployment Assistance Abolish the assessment of Benefit and Privilege for UA recipients aged 26. [April 2005]</p> | | |
| <p>Family Resource Centre Funding for the expansion of the Family and Resource Centre Programme [2005]</p> | | |
| <p>Marriage/Family Counselling Increase in Grants for Marriage/ Family Counselling [2005]</p> | | |
| <p>Family Mediation Service Funding for the upgrade of premises and computer systems for the Family Mediation Service [2005]</p> | | |
| <p>Information & Families Research Programme Funding for the launch and promotion of the second phase of the Families Research Programme. [2005]</p> | | |
| <p>Family Support Agency Additional funding for the development of the Family Support Agency's information and dissemination role. [2005]</p> | | |
| <p>MABS Additional funding for the Money Advice & Budgeting Service [2005]</p> | | |

APPENDIX 2: SUMMARY OF DSFA BUDGET PACKAGE 2005 (continued)

| | COST | |
|---|------------|-----------------|
| | 2005 €m | Full Year €m |
| Special Funding for MABS Special funding for development of additional MABS services [2005] | | |
| Comhairle Additional funding for Comhairle. [2005] | | |
| Comhairle Special funding for the development of Comhairle's communications strategy. [2005] | | |
| Combat Poverty Agency Additional funding for Practice to Policy Programme operated by the Combat Poverty Agency. [2005] | | |
| Assessment of Capital Increase the amount of capital disregarded for the means test purposes for all schemes (except SWA) from €12,694.38 to €20,000, an increase of €7,302.62. [June 2005] | | |
| | 118.99 | 155.24 |
| Proposal 4. Supporting Persons with Disabilities and their Carers. | | |
| Respite Care Grant Extend entitlement to the Respite Care Grant to persons providing full time care and attention (excluding those working over 10 hours per week and those on unemployment payments) [June 2005] | | |
| Extend entitlement to Respite Care Grant in respect of each care recipient (currently payable in respect of 2 care recipients only) [June 2005] | | |
| Increase the rate of Respite Care Grant by €165, from €835 to €1,000 for each care recipient. [June 2005] | | |
| Carer's Allowance Increase the income disregard from €250 (single)/€500 (couple) per week to €270 (single)/€540 (couple) per week; increases of €20 and €40 per week, respectively. [April 2005] | | |

APPENDIX 2: SUMMARY OF DSFA BUDGET PACKAGE 2005 (continued)

| | COST | |
|--|---------------|-----------------|
| | 2005 €m | Full Year €m |
| Carer's Benefit | | |
| Increase the earnings limit for Carer's Benefit recipients who work outside the home by €120 per week, from €150 to €270 per week. [April 2005] | | |
| Abolish the condition that a recipient of Carer's Benefit must have been in employment in the three months immediately prior to commencement of full-time caring. [April 2005] | | |
| Disability Allowance | | |
| Extend entitlement to a transitional Disability Allowance weekly rate of €35 to all persons resident in institutional/residential settings. [June 2005] | | |
| Injury Benefit | | |
| Extend entitlement to full rate Injury Benefit where a person is also in receipt of Disablement Benefit, thereby aligning the Injury Benefit provisions with those of Disability Benefit. [April 2005] | | |
| Disability Benefit | | |
| Extend entitlement to full-rate DB to claimants transferring from Long-Term Unemployment Assistance who have a total of 260 contributions paid. [May 2005] | | |
| Disability Benefit | | |
| Allow a choice of using either of the two previous Relevant Tax Years to satisfy contribution conditions for receipt of Disability Benefit immediately following payment of Occupational Injury Benefit. [April 2005] | | |
| Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities | | |
| Special funding for Comhairle to begin preparatory work towards the setting up of a personal advocacy service for persons with disabilities. [2005] | | |
| Free Fuel | | |
| Extend entitlement to the Smokeless Fuel Allowance to those in receipt of Occupational Injury Benefit for 13 weeks or more. [October 2005] | | |
| | 18.61 | 20.58 |
| TOTAL: | 834.15 | 874.00 |

Appendix 3: Expenditure on Social Welfare by Payment Type, 2003 and 2004

| Type of Payment | 2003 €000 | 2004 Provisional €000 | Change % |
|---|------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|
| Old Age (Contributory) Pension | 946,902 | 1,050,348 | 10.9% |
| Retirement Pension | 898,981 | 983,706 | 9.4% |
| Old Age (Non-Contributory) Pension | 565,006 | 599,988 | 6.2% |
| Pre-Retirement Allowance | 89,077 | 94,726 | 6.3% |
| Total Old Age | 2,499,966 | 2,728,768 | 9.2% |
| Widow/er's (Contributory) Pension | 826,135 | 906,450 | 9.7% |
| Widow/er's (Non-Contributory) Pension | 116,834 | 122,300 | 4.7% |
| Deserted Wife's Benefit | 89,234 | 89,749 | 0.6% |
| Deserted Wife's Allowance | 10,605 | 10,967 | 3.4% |
| Prisoner's Wife's Allowance | 13 | 15 | 15.4% |
| One Parent Family Payment | 660,586 | 694,835 | 5.2% |
| Widowed Parent Grant (Contributory) | 2,867 | 3,068 | 7.0% |
| Widowed Parent Grant (Non-Contributory) | 290 | 323 | 11.4% |
| Total Widows, Widowers and One Parent Families | 1,706,564 | 1,827,707 | 7.1% |
| Maternity Benefit | 107,336 | 121,572 | 13.3% |
| Health and Safety Benefit | 213 | 144 | -32.4% |
| Adoptive Benefit | 532 | 609 | 14.5% |
| Orphan's (Contributory) Allowance | 8,895 | 9,659 | 8.6% |
| Orphan's (Non-Contributory) Pension | 5,805 | 6,223 | 7.2% |
| Child Benefit | 1,666,530 | 1,765,117 | 5.9% |
| Total Child Related Payments | 1,789,311 | 1,903,324 | 6.4% |
| Disability Benefit | 433,455 | 478,996 | 10.5% |
| Invalidity Pension | 440,263 | 487,376 | 10.7% |
| Injury Benefit | 11,883 | 13,599 | 14.4% |
| Disablement Benefit | 60,810 | 62,599 | 2.9% |
| Death Benefit | 5,813 | 6,185 | 6.4% |
| Disability Allowance | 463,608 | 544,489 | 17.4% |
| Medical Care | 251 | 275 | 9.6% |
| Carer's Allowance | 183,273 | 210,277 | 14.7% |
| Carer's Benefit | 6,943 | 7,698 | 10.9% |
| Blind Person's Pension | 14,816 | 15,868 | 7.1% |
| Total Illness, Disability and Caring | 1,621,115 | 1,827,362 | 12.7% |

Appendix 3: Expenditure on Social Welfare by Payment Type, 2003 and 2004

| Type of Payment | 2003 €000 | 2004 Provisional €000 | Change % |
|--|-------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|
| Unemployment Benefit | 477,129 | 455,544 | -4.5% |
| Unemployment Assistance | 565,952 | 613,817 | 8.5% |
| Total Unemployment Supports | 1,043,081 | 1,069,361 | 2.5% |
| Family Income Supplement | 45,360 | 55,812 | 23.0% |
| Employment Support Services (1) | 139,407 | 115,956 | -16.8% |
| Farm Assist | 62,806 | 66,343 | 5.6% |
| Total Employment Supports | 247,573 | 238,111 | -3.8% |
| Supplementary Welfare Allowance | 587,813 | 601,582 | 2.3% |
| Total Supplementary Welfare Allowance | 587,813 | 601,582 | 2.3% |
| Treatment Benefits (1) | 63,348 | 70,455 | 11.2% |
| Rent Allowance | 675 | 754 | 11.7% |
| Free Schemes (1) | 340,514 | 364,272 | 7.0% |
| Miscellaneous (1) | 68,489 | 76,767 | 12.1% |
| Equal Treatment - Insurance payments | 5 | 1 | -80.0% |
| Equal Treatment- Assistance payments | 0 | - | - |
| Redundancy and Insolvency (2) | 97,636 | 147,722 | 51.3% |
| Total Miscellaneous Payments and Grants | 570,667 | 659,971 | 15.6% |
| Administration - Insurance Schemes | 184,042 | 191,313 | 4.0% |
| Administration - Assistance Schemes | 242,987 | 243,566 | 0.2% |
| Total Administration | 427,029 | 434,879 | 1.8% |
| Grand Total | 10,493,119 | 11,291,065 | 7.6% |

(1) See Additional Expenditure Details in Table A4.

(2) These schemes are administered by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

APPENDIX 4: LEGISLATION ENACTED IN 2004

A number of primary and secondary legislative initiatives were introduced in 2004 as follows:

- 1) Civil Registration Act 2004 (Number 3 of 2004)
- 2) Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2004 (Number 9 of 2004)
- 3) Social Welfare Act 2004 (Number 41 of 2004)

The following Regulations listed below were signed into legislation by the Minister for Social and Family Affairs during the course of 2004:

S.I. No. 8 of 2004 SOCIAL WELFARE (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) ACT, 2002 (SECTION 16) (COMMENCEMENT) ORDER, 2004

This Order provides for the commencement of the following items of the Schedule to the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2002 in so far as it relates to the Districts of Limerick, Nenagh, East Clare and Limerick West: Item 3 of Part 4, Items 1, 2, 5, 6, 8 and 9 of Part 5 and Item 2 of Part 6. These items provide for amendments to the Registration of Births and Deaths (Ireland) Acts and the Marriages (Ireland) Acts.

The commencement of these provisions is necessary to enable the electronic registration of births and deaths in the Civil Registration Office in Limerick from 19 January 2004 and in Nenagh, East Clare and Limerick West from 26 January, 2004 and to allow for the capture of additional information at the time of registration.

S.I. No. 9 of 2004 SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED PAYMENTS PROVISIONS) (AMENDMENT) (NO.1) (QUALIFIED CHILD INCREASE) REGULATIONS, 2004

The Social Welfare Act, 2003 provided that, with effect from 19 January 2004, any increase for a qualified child applicable to Unemployment Benefit, Disability Benefit, Injury Benefit and Health and Safety Benefit will be payable only where the weekly income of the spouse or

partner of the claimant does not exceed a prescribed amount. These Regulations provide that the prescribed amount shall be EUR 300 per week.

S.I. No. 17 of 2004 SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED PAYMENTS PROVISIONS) (AMENDMENT) (OVERLAPPING PAYMENTS) REGULATIONS, 2004

These Regulations provide for the removal of the entitlement to half-rate Disability Benefit, Injury Benefit, Unemployment Benefit, Unemployability Supplement, Maternity Benefit, Adoptive Benefit and Health and Safety Benefit where the recipient is in receipt of Widow/ers Pensions or One-Parent Family Payment (OPFP), as announced in Budget 2004.

The Regulations provide that where a person is in receipt of a reduced rate widow/er's pension or OPFP and has an entitlement to Disability Benefit, Injury Benefit, Unemployment Benefit, Unemployability Supplement, Maternity Benefit, Adoptive Benefit or Health and Safety Benefit at a higher rate of payment, he or she may continue to receive the Widow/er's pension or OPFP and receive a "top-up" by way of the benefit payment.

The amount of the top-up payment will be the difference between the maximum rate of benefit to which the person is entitled, and the reduced rate of Widow/er's pension or OPFP he or she receives.

The Regulations also contain a saver which provides that a person who is in receipt of half-rate benefit and a Widow/er's pension or OPFP prior to the commencement of these Regulations, will continue to receive such overlapping payments for the duration of his or her claim.

S.I. No. 49 of 2004 OCCUPATIONAL PENSION SCHEMES (REVALUATION) REGULATIONS, 2004

Section 33 of the Pensions Act, 1990 (as amended by section 21 of the Pensions (Amendment) Act, 2002) provides that the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, after consultation with the Minister for Finance, shall, in respect of each revaluation year, make Regulations specifying the percentage

which shall determine the amount by which preserved benefit is to be increased in that year. This Regulation provides for a revaluation percentage of 3.5% for 2003.

S.I. No. 75 of 2004 SOCIAL WELFARE (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) ACT, 2002 (SECTION 16) (No. 1) (COMMENCEMENT) ORDER, 2004

This Order provides for the commencement of the following items of the Schedule to the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2002 in so far as it relates to the Districts of Kilmallock, Thurles and Roscrea: Item 3 of Part 4, Items 1, 2, 5, 6, 8 and 9 of Part 5 and Item 2 of Part 6. These items provide for amendments to the Registration of Births and Deaths (Ireland) Acts and the Marriages (Ireland) Acts.

The commencement of these provisions is necessary to enable the electronic registration of births and deaths in the Civil Registration Office in Kilmallock from 9 February 2004, in Thurles from 11 February 2004 and in Roscrea from 13 February 2004 and to allow for the capture of additional information at the time of registration.

S.I. No. 77 of 2004 SOCIAL WELFARE (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) ACT, 2002 (SECTION 16) (No. 2) (COMMENCEMENT) ORDER, 2004

This Order provides for the commencement of the following items of the Schedule to the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2002 in so far as it relates to the Districts of Kilrush and Ennistymon: Item 3 of Part 4, Items 1, 2, 5, 6, 8 and 9 of Part 5 and Item 2 of Part 6. These items provide for amendments to the Registration of Births and Deaths (Ireland) Acts and the Marriages (Ireland) Acts.

The commencement of these provisions is necessary to enable the electronic registration of births and deaths in the Civil Registration Office in Kilrush from 23 February 2004 and in Ennistymon from 25 February 2004, and to allow for the capture of additional information at the time of registration.

S.I. No. 97 of 2004 SOCIAL WELFARE (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) ACT, 2002 (SECTION

16) (No. 3) (COMMENCEMENT) ORDER, 2004

This Order provides for the commencement of the following items of the Schedule to the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2002 in so far as it relates to the Districts of Letterkenny, Leitrim and Stranorlar: Item 3 of Part 4, Items 1, 2, 5, 6, 8 and 9 of Part 5 and Item 2 of Part 6. These items provide for amendments to the Registration of Births and Deaths (Ireland) Acts and the Marriages (Ireland) Acts.

The commencement of these provisions is necessary to enable the electronic registration of births and deaths in the Civil Registration Offices in Letterkenny, Leitrim and Stranorlar from 16 March 2004 and to allow for the capture of additional information at the time of registration.

S.I. No. 125 of 2004 SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED PAYMENTS PROVISIONS) (AMENDMENT) (No. 2) REGULATIONS, 2004

These Regulations provide for increases in the income disregarded for the purposes of Carer's Allowance. In the case of a single person, the increase is EUR 40, bringing the total amount of the disregard to EUR 250 per week. In the case of a married person, the disregard is increased by EUR 80, giving a new total of EUR 500 per week. These changes take effect from 1 April, 2004.

The Regulations also provide for an improvement in the assessment of benefit and privilege for Unemployment Assistance and Pre-Retirement Allowance. In the case of persons aged 27 years and over who are living in the parental home, the assessment of benefit and privilege will be abolished with effect from 7 April, 2004.

S.I. No. 141 of 2004 SOCIAL WELFARE (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) ACT, 2004 (SECTIONS 22 & 23 (COMMENCEMENT) ORDER, 2004)

This Order provides for the commencement of Sections 22 and 23 of the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2004.

Section 22 provides for the substitution of the existing Part VII of the Pensions Act 1990. Part VII

currently provides for equal treatment of men and women in Occupational Benefit Schemes. This new Part will further provide, inter alia, for the implementation of Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29th June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin (Race Directive) and 2000/78/EC of 27th November 2000, establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation (Framework Employment Directive) as they apply to Occupational Pensions.

These Directives relate to discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation, religion, age, race and disability. It is also proposed to extend Part VII to include the grounds of marital and family status and the Traveller Community Ground.

Section 23 provides for some miscellaneous amendments to other sections of the Pensions Act which are mainly technical in nature and some of which are consequential on the equal treatment provisions.

S.I. No. 145 of 2004 SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED PAYMENTS PROVISIONS) (AMENDMENT) (No. 3) (OVERLAPPING PAYMENTS) REGULATIONS, 2004

These Regulations provide for the restoration of the entitlement to half-rate Disability Benefit, Injury Benefit, Unemployment Benefit, Unemployability Supplement, Maternity Benefit, Adoptive Benefit or Health and Safety Benefit which was payable to recipients of Widow/ers Pension and One-parent Family Payment prior to 19 January 2004.

S.I. No. 158 of 2004 SOCIAL WELFARE (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) ACT, 2002 (SECTION 16) (No. 4) (COMMENCEMENT) ORDER, 2004

This Order provides for the commencement of the following items of the Schedule to the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2002 in so far as it relates to the Districts of Kenmare, Castletownbere and Dingle: Item 3 of Part 4, Items 1, 2, 5, 6, 8 and 9 of Part 5 and Item 2 of Part 6. These items provide for amendments to the

Registration of Births and Deaths (Ireland) Acts and the Marriages (Ireland) Acts.

The commencement of these provisions is necessary to enable the electronic registration of births and deaths in the Civil Registration Offices in Kenmare and Castletownbere from 13 April 2004 and in Dingle from 20 April 2004 and to allow for the capture of additional information at the time of registration.

S.I. No. 159 of 2004 SOCIAL WELFARE (TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS) (ALIGNMENT OF INCOME TAX YEAR WITH CALENDAR YEAR) REGULATIONS, 2004

These Regulations provide for the continuation of the transitional arrangements necessary to preserve entitlement to social insurance-based benefits, consequent on the alignment of the income tax and calendar years with effect from 1 January, 2001.

Article 3(1) provides that in the Benefit year 2004 (i.e. the period 5 January 2004 to 2 January 2005), for the purposes of qualifying for Disability Benefit and Unemployment Benefit, the appropriate Governing Contribution Year will be the contribution year commencing on 1 January 2002 and ending 31 December, 2002.

Maternity and Adoptive Benefit payment rates are determined on the basis of a woman's reckonable earnings in the last complete income tax year before the beginning of the Benefit Year in which the claim is made. Article 3(2) provides that in the 2004 Benefit Year, the Income Tax Year 1 January 2002 to 31 December, 2002 will be applicable.

Article 3(3) provides that, for the purposes of determining entitlement to Health and Safety Benefit in the Benefit Year 2004, the appropriate Governing Contribution Year will be 1 January 2002 to 31 December, 2002.

Article 3(4) provides that, for the purposes of determining entitlement to Treatment Benefit in the Benefit Year 2004, the appropriate Relevant Contribution Year will be January 2002 to December, 2002.

S.I. No. 184 of 2004 SOCIAL WELFARE (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) ACT, 2004 (SECTION 17) (COMMENCEMENT) ORDER, 2004

This Order provides for the commencement of Section 17 of the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2004 with effect from 1 May 2004. Section 17 provides for the introduction of Habitual Residence as a condition for qualification to certain social welfare payments.

This condition will require a person who makes an application for social assistance, on or after 1 May 2004, to be habitually resident in the State or the rest of the Common Travel Area (Great Britain, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man) for a substantial continuous period. If he or she has been present in the State for less than the 2 year period it shall be presumed that he or she is not habitually resident, and the onus will be on him or her to prove otherwise.

The habitual residence condition will apply to the following social assistance payments:

- Unemployment Assistance
- Old Age (Non-Contributory) and Blind Pensions
- Widow(er)'s and Orphan's (Non-Contributory) Pensions
- One-Parent Family Payment
- Carer's Allowance
- Disability Allowance
- Supplementary Welfare Allowance (other than once off exceptional and urgent needs payments)

It will also apply to persons claiming Child Benefit.

S.I. No. 194 of 2004 SOCIAL WELFARE (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) ACT, 2002 (SECTION 16) (No. 5) (COMMENCEMENT) ORDER, 2004

This Order provides for the commencement of the following items of the Schedule to the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2002 in so far as it relates to the Districts of Monaghan and Drogheda: Item 3 of Part 4, Items 1, 2, 5, 6, 8 and 9 of Part 5 and Item 2 of Part 6. These items provide for amendments to the Registration of Births and

Deaths (Ireland) Acts and the Marriages (Ireland) Acts.

The commencement of these provisions is necessary to enable the electronic registration of births and deaths in the Civil Registration Offices in Monaghan from 27 April 2004 and in Drogheda from the 28 April 2004 and to allow for the capture of additional information at the time of registration.

S.I. No. 233 of 2004 OCCUPATIONAL PENSION SCHEMES (ANNUAL REPORTS) REGULATIONS, 2004

Section 55(5) of the Pensions Act provides that, where an annual report prepared in respect of a defined benefit scheme does not contain a statement in relation to the funding of that scheme in accordance with Section 55(3) or (4), or contains a statement but the actuary does not state that the scheme satisfies the funding standard, the trustees must notify the Pensions Board to that effect within such time limit as may be prescribed.

The annual report is required to be made available to members not later than nine months after the end of the scheme year to which it relates or such later date as may be approved by the Board. This regulation sets a time limit of not later than four weeks after this date for trustees to provide such notification to the Board.

S.I. No. 250 of 2004 SOCIAL WELFARE (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) ACT, 2002 (SECTION 16) (No. 6) (COMMENCEMENT) ORDER, 2004

This Order provides for the commencement of the following items of the Schedule to the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2002 in so far as it relates to the Districts of Navan and Galway: Item 3 of Part 4, Items 1, 2, 5, 6, 8 and 9 of Part 5 and Item 2 of Part 6. These items provide for amendments to the Registration of Births and Deaths (Ireland) Acts and the Marriages (Ireland) Acts.

The commencement of these provisions is necessary to enable the electronic registration of births and deaths in the Civil Registration Offices

in Navan and Galway from 12 May 2004 and to allow for the capture of additional information at the time of registration.

S.I. No. 375 of 2004 SOCIAL WELFARE (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) ACT, 2002 (SECTION 16) (No. 7) (COMMENCEMENT) ORDER, 2004

This Order provides for the commencement of the following items of the Schedule to the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2002 in so far as it relates to the Districts of Mayo and Roscommon: Item 3 of Part 4, Items 1, 2, 5, 6, 8 and 9 of Part 5 and Item 2 of Part 6. These items provide for amendments to the Registration of Births and Deaths (Ireland) Acts and the Marriages (Ireland) Acts.

The commencement of these provisions is necessary to enable the electronic registration of births and deaths in the Civil Registration Offices in Mayo from 2 June 2004 and in Roscommon from 3 June 2004 and to allow for the capture of additional information at the time of registration.

S.I. No. 406 of 2004 SOCIAL WELFARE (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) ACT, 2004 (SECTIONS 13 & 16) (COMMENCEMENT) ORDER, 2004

This Order provides for the commencement of Sections 13 and 16 of the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2004.

Sections 13 and 16 provide for technical amendments to the definitions of PRSI, contained in the Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act 1993, consequential on the Budget 2003 measure to charge PRSI and levies on certain benefits-in-kind. The amendments provide for the deletion of the definition of 'emoluments' and a minor adjustment to the definition of 'reckonable earnings'. These amendments will come into effect from 1 January 2004.

S.I. No. 428 of 2004 SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED CONTRIBUTIONS AND INSURABILITY) (AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS, 2004

These Regulations amend the Social Welfare (Consolidated Contributions and Insurability)

Regulations, 1996, to provide for an exemption from PRSI on the return on certain foreign funds and life policies. These Regulations are required in order to harmonise, for PRSI purposes, treatment of similar domestic funds and policies.

S.I. No. 429 of 2004 SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED CONTRIBUTIONS AND INSURABILITY) (AMENDMENT) (No. 1) REGULATIONS, 2004

These Regulations amend the Social Welfare (Consolidated Contributions and Insurability) Regulations, 1996, to prescribe, for the purposes of Sections 10(12) and 18(4) of the Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act, 1993, Section 985B of the Taxes Consolidation Act, 1997. This part of the Tax Code will be used to govern the payment of PRSI in relation to benefits-in-kind which are minor and irregular in nature.

S.I. No. 450 of 2004 SOCIAL WELFARE (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) ACT, 2002 (SECTION 16) (No. 8) (COMMENCEMENT) ORDER, 2004

This Order provides for the commencement of the following items of the Schedule to the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2002 in so far as it relates to the Districts of Dublin, Dublin South City, Naas and Wicklow: Item 3 of Part 4, Items 1, 2, 5, 6, 8 and 9 of Part 5 and Item 2 of Part 6. These items provide for amendments to the Registration of Births and Deaths (Ireland) Acts and the Marriages (Ireland) Acts.

The commencement of these provisions is necessary to enable the electronic registration of births and deaths in the Civil Registration Offices in Dublin from 3 August 2004, in Dublin South City 4 from 5 August 2004, in Naas from 9 August 2004, and in Wicklow from 11 August and to allow for the capture of additional information at the time of registration.

S.I. No. 657 of 2004 SOCIAL WELFARE (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) ACT, 2002 (SECTION 16) (No. 9) (COMMENCEMENT) ORDER, 2004

This Order provides for the commencement of the following items of the Schedule to the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2002 in so

far as it relates to the District of Waterford: Item 3 of Part 4, Items 1, 2, 5, 6, 8 and 9 of Part 5 and Item 2 of Part 6. These items provide for amendments to the Registration of Births and Deaths (Ireland) Acts and the Marriages (Ireland) Acts.

The commencement of these provisions is necessary to enable the electronic registration of births and deaths in the Civil Registration Office in Waterford from 11 October 2004 and to allow for the capture of additional information at the time of registration.

S.I. No. 658 of 2004 SOCIAL WELFARE (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) ACT, 2004 (SECTION 8) (COMMENCEMENT) ORDER, 2004

This Order provides for the commencement of Section 8 of the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2004.

The Maternity Protection (Amendment) Act 2004 provides for a range of improvements in the maternity leave arrangements arising from the recommendations of the Working Group on the Review and Improvement of the Maternity Protection Legislation. Section 8 of the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2004 provides for a number of amendments to the Maternity Benefit scheme consequent on the amendments to maternity leave. These amendments provide for:

- (a) a reduction from 4 weeks to 2 weeks in the minimum period of Maternity Benefit which must be taken before the expected date of birth, and consequential amendments, and
- (b) the power to make Regulations to allow for the splitting of the period of Maternity Benefit in situations where the infant is hospitalised.

S.I. No. 660 of 2004 SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED PAYMENTS PROVISIONS) (AMENDMENT) (NO.4) (MATERNITY BENEFIT) REGULATIONS 2004

The Maternity Protection (Amendment) Act 2004 amended the provisions governing maternity leave, by reducing the minimum period of leave which must be availed of prior to the expected

date of birth from 4 weeks to 2 weeks, and providing that the continuous period of maternity leave may be postponed where the child is hospitalised.

These Regulations reflect these amendments, with effect from 18 October, 2004, for the purposes of the Maternity Benefit scheme, by providing as follows:

- The minimum payment period prior to the expected date of birth will be 2 weeks; and
- Where Maternity Benefit has been in payment for a minimum period of 14 weeks, payment may be postponed in the event of the hospitalisation of the child.
- The Regulations further provide that an application to postpone payment must be made in writing; that the maximum duration of the postponement of benefit will be six months, and that payment will resume within seven days following written notification of the discharge of the child from hospital. Payment will then continue until completion of the period of entitlement to benefit.

S.I. No. 689 of 2004 SOCIAL WELFARE (TEMPORARY PROVISIONS) REGULATIONS, 2004

These Regulations provide for the payment of a Christmas Bonus to long-term social welfare recipients, equivalent to 100% of their normal weekly payments, subject to a minimum payment of EUR 30. The bonus payment applies to recipients of –

- Disablement Pension,
- Death Benefit by way of pension,
- Old Age (Contributory and Non-Contributory) Pension,
- Retirement Pension,
- Invalidity Pension,
- Widow's and Widower's (Non-Contributory) Pension,
- Widow's and Widower's (Contributory) Pension,
- Orphan's (Contributory and Non-Contributory) Pension,
- Pre-Retirement Allowance,

- Blind Pension,
- Carer's Allowance,
- One-Parent Family Payment,
- relevant payments under section 18(1) of the Social Welfare Act, 1996 (formerly Deserted Wife's Benefit and Allowance and Prisoner's Wife's Allowance),
- Unemployment Assistance at the long-term rate,
- Disability Allowance; and
- Farm Assist.

S.I. No. 735 of 2004 SOCIAL WELFARE (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) ACT 2002 (SECTION 16) (No.10) (COMMENCEMENT) ORDER 2004

This Order provides for the commencement of the following items of the Schedule to the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2002 in so far as it relates to the District of Wexford: Item 3 of Part 4, Items 1, 2, 5, 6, 8 and 9 of Part 5 and Item 2 of Part 6. These items provide for amendments to the Registration of Births and Deaths (Ireland) Acts and the Marriages (Ireland) Acts.

The commencement of these provisions is necessary to enable the electronic registration of births and deaths in the Civil Registration Office in Wexford from 29 November 2004 and to allow for the capture of additional information at the time of registration.

S.I. No. 756 of 2004 SOCIAL WELFARE (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) ACT, 2004 (SECTION 9) (COMMENCEMENT) ORDER, 2004

This Order provides for the commencement of Section 9 of the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2004.

The Adoptive Leave Act 1995 (Extension of Periods of Leave) Order 2004 provides for an increase in the period of adoptive leave, permitted under the Adoptive Leave Act 1995, from 14 to 16 weeks. Section 9 of the Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 2004 provides for the consequential increase in the number of weeks for which adoptive benefit is payable, from 14 to 16 weeks. This amendment takes effect from 19 November 2004.

S.I. No. 802 of 2004 SOCIAL WELFARE (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) ACT 2002 (SECTION 16) (No.11) (COMMENCEMENT) ORDER 2004

This Order provides for the commencement of the following items of the Schedule to the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2002 in so far as it relates to the Districts of Portlaoise, Mullingar, Dundalk and Cavan: Item 3 of Part 4, Items 1, 2, 5, 6, 8 and 9 of Part 5 and Item 2 of Part 6. These items provide for amendments to the Registration of Births and Deaths (Ireland) Acts and the Marriages (Ireland) Acts.

The commencement of these provisions is necessary to enable the electronic registration of births and deaths in the Civil Registration Office in the District of Portlaoise from 13 December 2004, in the District of Mullingar from 14 December 2004, in the District of Dundalk from 17 December 2004, and in the District of Cavan from 20 December 2004. It will also allow for the capture of additional information at the time of registration.

S.I. No. 845 of 2004 SOCIAL WELFARE (OCCUPATIONAL INJURIES) (AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS 2004

The Social Welfare Act 2004 provides for increases in the maximum rates of benefits payable under the Occupational Injuries Benefits scheme arising from Budget 2005. These Regulations provide for increases in the reduced rates of the following Occupational Injuries benefits:

- in respect of Disablement Gratuities appropriate to degrees of disablement assessed at 19% or less with effect from 3 January 2005,
- in respect of Disablement Pension payable in lieu of such Gratuities, with effect from 7 January 2005, and
- in respect of Injury Benefit payable to persons under the age of sixteen with effect from 3 January 2005.

S.I. No. 846 of 2004 SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED PAYMENTS PROVISIONS) (AMENDMENT) (NO. 6) (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) REGULATIONS 2004

These Regulations provide for the circumstances in which the recipient may receive, for a further 6 months, a transitional One-Parent Family Payment payable at half rate where the recipient's income exceeds the weekly threshold of EUR 293. These Regulations come into operation on 6 January, 2004.

S.I. No. 847 of 2004 SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED PAYMENTS PROVISIONS) (AMENDMENT) (No. 7) (QUALIFIED CHILD INCREASE) REGULATIONS 2004

The Social Welfare Act 2003 provided that, with effect from 19 January 2004, any increase for a qualified child applicable to Unemployment Benefit, Disability Benefit, Injury Benefit and Health and Safety Benefit would be payable where the weekly income of the spouse or partner of the claimant does not exceed a prescribed amount.

These Regulations provide that the amount prescribed shall be EUR 350 per week.

S.I. No. 848 of 2004 SOCIAL WELFARE (TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS) (ALIGNMENT OF INCOME TAX YEAR WITH CALENDAR YEAR) (NO. 1) REGULATIONS 2004

These Regulations provide for the continuation of the transitional arrangements necessary to preserve entitlement to social insurance based benefits, consequent on the alignment of the income tax and calendar years with effect from 1 January, 2001.

Article 3(1) provides that in the Benefit year 2005 (i.e. the period 3 January 2005 to 1 January 2006), for the purposes of qualifying for Disability Benefit and Unemployment Benefit, the appropriate Governing Contribution Year will be the contribution year commencing on 1 January 2003 and ending 31 December, 2003.

Maternity and Adoptive Benefit payment rates are determined on the basis of a woman's reckonable earnings in the second last complete income tax year before the beginning of the Benefit Year in which the claim is made. **Article 3(2)** provides that in the 2005 Benefit Year, the Income Tax Year 1 January 2003 to 31 December, 2003 will be applicable.

Article 3(3) provides that, for the purposes of determining entitlement to Health and Safety Benefit in the Benefit Year 2005, the appropriate Governing Contribution Year will be 1 January 2003 to 31 December, 2003. **Article 3(4)** provides that, for the purposes of determining entitlement to Treatment Benefit in the Benefit Year 2005, the appropriate Relevant Contribution Year will be January 2003 to December, 2003.

S.I. No. 849 of 2004 SOCIAL WELFARE (RENT ALLOWANCE) (AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS 2004

These Regulations provide for increases in the amount of means disregarded for people affected by the decontrol of rents and the minimum rent for the purposes of the Rent Allowance scheme with effect from 1st January 2005.

S.I. No. 850 of 2004 SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED PAYMENTS PROVISIONS) (AMENDMENT) (No. 5) (INCREASE IN RATES) REGULATIONS 2004

The Social Welfare Act 2004 provides for increases in the maximum rates of social insurance payments arising from Budget 2005. These Regulations provide for increases in the reduced rates of Disability Benefit, Unemployment Benefit, Health and Safety Benefit, Old Age (Contributory) Pension, Retirement Pension, Widow's and Widower's (Contributory) Pension, Deserted Wife's Benefit, and also provides for increases in the rates of tapered increases in respect of Qualified Adults. All of these increases are effective from the first week in January 2005.

The Regulations also provide for increases in the minimum weekly rate of Maternity Benefit and Adoptive Benefit with effect from January 2005.

Appendix 5 Performance against Customer Charter Standards (May - Dec 2004)

Access to our Services

- *Making our offices accessible for all including people with disabilities (80% of our offices are accessible, for people with disabilities at present).*
85% of our offices now have basic disabled access. A Disabled Access Group has also made recommendations to improve these access levels and a plan is underway to improve standards on existing and new building projects
- *Extending our opening hours in many of our Local Offices (check the opening hours displayed at your own Local Office).*
At the end of 2004 a total of 33 local offices were providing a service throughout lunch-hour
- *Respecting your privacy needs if calling to our offices.*
This service is being provided, where facilities permit, to those who require it
- *Improving our services for visually impaired customers (LoCall 1890 500 000 ext 8442 or 8459 for this service).*
A data bank of all Blind Pensions Claimants has been set up in the Pensions Services Office, identifying preferred type of communication (Braille, Audio cassette, email or Large Print). Communications are issued to customers through that medium. Blind Persons Pension claims are now taken by phone with follow up contact to finalise cases. Ongoing reviews will be undertaken to identify improved service needs for the visually impaired across other services in the Department

- *Improving our telephone answering service by aiming towards a target of answering all telephone calls within 30 seconds.*
A new telephone monitoring system was installed in July 2004. The call answering service across the main scheme areas for the second half of the year shows an average call answer within 9.6 seconds. A telephone monitoring project is also underway to further improve our performance in this area
- *Phoning you back if you ask us to.*
This service is provided by all scheme areas

Provision of Information

- *Providing you with full, clear and correct information on our schemes and services when required. You can request claim forms and information leaflets by telephoning LoCall 1890 20 23 25 or you can download them from our website at www.welfare.ie.*
A three day target is aimed at for all requests to the LoCall leaflet line
- *Ensuring our forms and leaflets are simple and easy to understand.*
Forty-six scheme related booklets and 27 primary application forms have been "Plain Englished" by the end of 2004
- *Providing help with filling in forms at your local Social Welfare Office or your local Citizen's Information Centre (contact LoCall 1890 777 121).*
This service is provided as required on an ongoing basis
- *Supporting employers in the operation of the PRSI contribution system.*
A pro-active approach is maintained with Special Collection Employers who deal with the Department. PRSI updates and changes are issued by annual mailshot

Your Claim

- *Letting you know how soon you may expect a decision on your claim.*
Scheme areas notify customers if there will be a likely delay in processing a claim
- *Advising you how to get financial or other help in the meantime, if necessary.*
This is standard practice across all scheme areas
- *Letting you know the different payment options available.*
This is routine procedure across all scheme areas
- *Informing you of the reasons for the decision on your claim.*
This is standard practice across all scheme areas
- *Informing you of your right to appeal that decision and how to make an appeal.*
This is standard practice across scheme areas where such a right exists
- *Letting you know that you also have access to the Ombudsman's Office.*
This is normal practice where occasion demands – where a customer wishes to pursue an issue falling outside the remit of Deciding Officers and Appeals Officers

Comments and Complaints

- *Promoting and developing our existing Comment and Complaint System (in operation since May 2002).*
A Poster and leaflets are available in all our offices promoting the Comment and Complaint System. Customers can also access our website for this facility
- *Answering any complaint within 15 working days.*
This standard is being met across all scheme areas

- *Guaranteeing that your complaint will not affect how we treat you in the future.*

Training is provided to staff to ensure this standard is met

e-Government Services

- *Using modern technology to significantly improve the service we give.*
The modernisation of the General Register Office (GRO) has led to improved services in the Child Benefit and General Benefits areas.

There is increased use of email services for contact with customers and for distributing information to employers.
- *Providing an improved range of services through our website.*
All suitable primary booklets and application forms available for download from our website at end 2004
- *Continuing to support REACH (an agency set up by the Government to develop electronic ways of linking people and the public service).*
Following extensive consultation, three services were identified during 2004 for inclusion in the launch of the Public Service Broker (PSB): (1) Notification of Unemployment; (2) Request for Change to a Direct Payment Method; (3) Request for Replacement of Social Services Card

Treating You Fairly

- *Serving all our customers in an equal, fair and courteous manner.*
Customer service training is provided to staff to ensure this standard is maintained
- *Applying the law consistently and fairly in relation to your entitlements and obligations.*
This is standard practice across all scheme areas

Security and Confidentiality

- *Keeping your personal information safe*
This is treated as a priority standard across all areas of the Department
- *Using that information only for social welfare purposes and as permitted by law*
This is treated as a priority standard across all areas of the Department

Service Through Irish

- *Providing quality services through Irish and English if required*
It is our policy to provide this service as required. Irish Language training is provided for staff to conduct business through the medium of Irish. At the end of 2004, 41 booklets and 24 claim forms in Irish were available for download from our website

Appendix 6: Ministers in Charge of the Department since 1947

| | From | To |
|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| James Ryan | 22 January 1947 | 18 February 1948 |
| William Norton | 18 February 1948 | 14 June 1951 |
| James Ryan | 14 June 1951 | 2 June 1954 |
| Brendan Corish | 2 June 1954 | 20 March 1957 |
| Patrick Smyth | 20 March 1957 | 27 November 1957 |
| Sean McEntee | 27 November 1957 | 24 June 1959 |
| Sean McEntee | 24 June 1959 | 12 October 1961 |
| Kevin Boland | 12 October 1961 | 21 April 1965 |
| Kevin Boland | 21 April 1965 | 16 November 1966 |
| Joseph Brennan | 16 November 1966 | 2 July 1969 |
| Kevin Boland | 2 July 1969 | 6 May 1970 |
| Joseph Brennan | 6 May 1970 | 14 March 1973 |
| Brendan Corish | 14 March 1973 | 5 July 1977 |
| Charles J Haughey | 5 July 1977 | 12 December 1979 |
| Michael Woods | 12 December 1979 | 30 June 1981 |
| Eileen Desmond | 30 June 1981 | 9 March 1982 |
| Michael Woods | 9 March 1982 | 14 December 1982 |
| Barry Desmond | 14 December 1982 | 14 February 1986 |
| Gemma Hussey | 14 February 1986 | 10 March 1987 |
| Michael Woods | 10 March 1987 | 18 July 1989 |
| Michael Woods | 18 July 1989 | 13 November 1991 |
| Brendan Daly | 13 November 1991 | 11 February 1992 |
| Charlie McCreevy | 11 February 1992 | 12 January 1993 |
| Michael Woods | 12 January 1993 | 15 December 1994 |
| Proinsias De Rossa | 15 December 1994 | 26 June 1997 |
| Dermot Ahern | 26 June 1997 | 17 June 2002 |
| Mary Coughlan | 17 June 2002 | 29 September 2004 |
| Seamus Brennan | 29 September 2004 | |

