

Strategy Statement 2001-2004

People, Policies, Services

Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs



Our MISSION is to promote social well-being through income and other supports which enable people to participate in society in a positive way

1. FOREWORD FROM THE MINISTER

I welcome the publication of this Strategy Statement which I have agreed with the Secretary-General of my Department.

We have, as a society, experienced significant change over the last number of years. Unprecedented economic growth has led to higher levels of employment and increased prosperity. However, not all of our citizens have been in a position to avail of the benefits which this upturn in our economy has brought. Tackling disadvantage and promoting social inclusion are key priorities for this Government and my Department has been given a key role to play in this area through its central co-ordinating role in relation to the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS). In consultation with other departments and agencies we will strengthen this process.



I am convinced that, through a concerted effort, we can deal with disadvantage and ensure that all citizens are in a position to participate fully in society.

My Department has developed an excellent reputation for providing a high quality service to customers and I am determined that we maintain very high standards in this area. I would like to compliment the staff of my Department for their continued commitment and dedication to improving how we provide our schemes and services.

We will continue to focus on developing and delivering supports and services that meet the expectations and needs of the wide variety of customers served by my Department.

This Strategy Statement outlines an ambitious programme but I am confident that the objectives that have been set can be achieved.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which reads "Dermot Ahern". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D'.

Dermot Ahern TD

Minister for Social, Community and Family Affairs

November 2001

2. FOREWORD FROM THE SECRETARY GENERAL

I am pleased to introduce this Strategy Statement which has now been agreed with the Minister in accordance with the provisions of the Public Service Management Act, 1997.

This Strategy Statement is a framework document where we set out our Mission, our High Level Goals and the strategies and actions we will pursue to fulfill our remit over the period 2001 to 2004. We outline the environment in which we operate and the key policy and operational areas in which we are involved. In separate chapters we deal with our policy development process, our income maintenance programmes and our service delivery strategies. In addition, we set out our objectives in the key area of Human Resource Management.



Over the years we have, I believe, demonstrated that we are a progressive and responsive organisation. The recent independent customer survey which was carried out shows that overall satisfaction levels with the service we provide remain high. However, we recognise that improvements are required in a number of areas and we give an outline of our customer service programme in this Strategy Statement. The issues are covered in more detail in our Customer Action Plan 2001-2004 published earlier this year.

Dealing with the cross cutting issues where there is overlap of responsibility between different departments and agencies is a key area and we outline our approach to and involvement with these organisations in this Strategy Statement.

This Statement has been developed following a lengthy process of consultation including the involvement of our Partnership process. Each major area of policy and activity was examined and staff at all levels were invited to contribute. We have an ongoing programme of consultation with our customers and voluntary and community representative groups as well as with other departments and agencies and their views and the feedback received has also been taken into account.

Our aim is to continue to improve the services we provide. Our staff have shown that they are committed to this task and we can look forward with confidence to meeting the challenges ahead and achieving the goals we have set in this Strategy Statement.

Finally, I would like to express my appreciation to everyone involved for their contribution to the preparation of this Strategy Statement.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eddie Sullivan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Eddie Sullivan

Secretary-General,

November 2001

3. INTRODUCTION

The Business of the Department

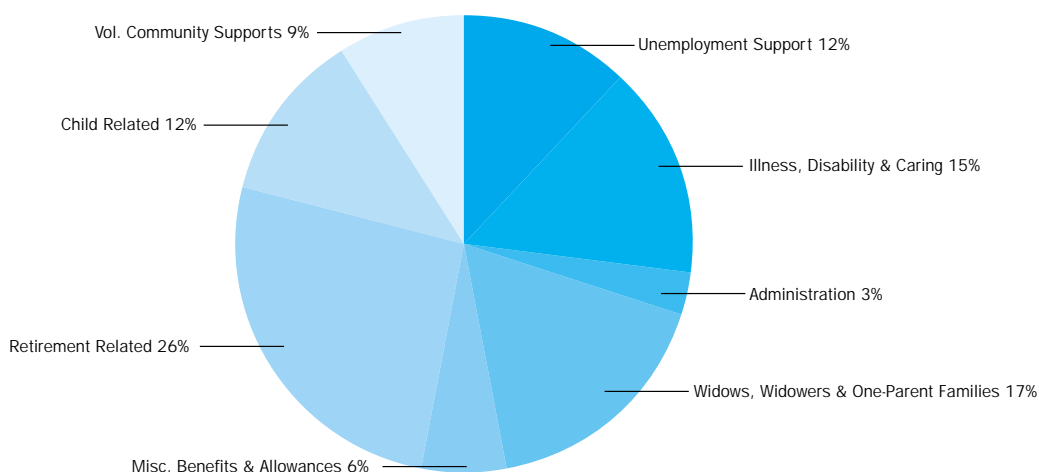
Our Mission is “to promote social well-being through income and other supports which enable people to participate in society in a positive way”.

The basic function of the Department is two-fold;

- to formulate appropriate social protection policies
- to administer and manage the delivery of statutory and non-statutory social, community and family schemes and services.

Our work impacts on the lives of every person in the State and we are responsible for the delivery of a wide range of social insurance and social assistance schemes, including pensions, benefits, allowances and other supports. Services are provided to many categories of people (unemployed, older people, those who are ill or have disabilities, carers) and to families and communities in general. Payments are made to approximately 875,000 people each week and, on an annual basis, 1.7 million claims are processed. The gross estimated expenditure figure for 2001 is £6.1 billion (€7.75 billion). In 2000, almost 332,000 claims were reviewed in relation to continuing entitlement to payment. The total savings from our control activities amounted to £214 million (€272 million) in 2000.

Estimated Breakdown of Expenditure by Programme 2001



The Structure of the Department

The Department is structured on Aireacht/Executive lines and has a total of over 4,500 staff.

The **Aireacht** is composed of two distinct divisions – Corporate Services and Planning. Corporate Services comprises Personnel (including Staff Development Unit and the Employee Assistance Service), Finance Branch, Facilities Management (including Business Information Protection and Health and Safety) and the Internal Audit Unit. Planning Division is responsible for the formulation of social protection and other social support policies to meet the changing needs of Irish society and for the provision of support and advice to the Minister and the Government.

Social Welfare Services (SWS) is the executive arm of the Department and is responsible for the day-to-day administration and management of social welfare schemes and services through a network of local, regional and decentralised offices. Our HQ Offices are located in Dublin, Sligo, Letterkenny, Longford, Waterford and Dundalk (2002).

Regional Structure

Our local delivery of services is structured on a 10-region basis with regional offices in Waterford, Cork, Limerick, Galway, Longford, Sligo, Dundalk and three in the Dublin area.

There is a network of 58 Social Welfare Local Offices (SWLOs) and 69 Branch Offices (SWBOs). In addition to the staff who administer the Unemployment and Farm Assist schemes, information and other services from the Local Offices there are also locally based Social Welfare Inspectors and Jobs Facilitators. Inspectors investigate entitlement to schemes and services by interviewing customers in the Local Offices or in their homes and ensure compliance with the PRSI system by visiting employer premises. They also carry out fraud investigation work. Jobs Facilitators are locally based staff who assist people return to work, training or education by advising them of options, including this Department's Back to Work and Back to Education Schemes.

Voluntary and Community activation, Family Support initiatives and promoting social inclusion are important and expanding elements of the remit of the Regions.

Social Welfare Appeals Office

Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO) is an independent Office responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Statutory Agencies

There are three statutory agencies under the aegis of the Department; The Combat Poverty Agency, The Pensions Board and Comhairle. A new agency (The Family Support Agency) will be in operation in 2002.

Social Welfare Tribunal

The Social Welfare Tribunal is an independent body, which adjudicates in cases where a claim for an unemployment payment has been disallowed under the Trade Dispute provisions in the Social Welfare Acts and where the claimant, or their union on their behalf, argues that the employer refused or failed to follow the normal negotiating machinery available for settling disputes.

Office of the Commissioners of Charitable Donations and Bequests

The Department took over the responsibility for the Office of the Commissioners of Charitable Donations and Bequests in July 2001.

4. DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGY

This Strategy Statement was developed in accordance with the guidelines for Strategy Statements issued by the Department of the Taoiseach and following a wide-ranging consultative process within the Department. A series of working groups was set up to examine the different elements of our business and to develop appropriate objectives, strategies, outputs and performance indicators. Opportunities were given for management and staff at all levels to input to the process.

Our Partnership process provided opportunities for staff to contribute to the discussions, including taking part in various working groups. The Partnership Steering Committee and Partnership groups have discussed a number of the major “building blocks” of this Statement including the Human Resources (HR) Strategy, the Customer Action Plan and the Internal Customer Service Plan.

We are involved in a wide range of activities which also involve other departments and State agencies at central, regional and local level and these activities are reflected in the objectives and strategies which have been set. Furthermore, the Statement has been informed by the views and feedback arising from the variety of consultation processes with customers and representative groups, in which we engage. The Statement also takes account of feedback from the range of voluntary and community organisations with which we are involved.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This Strategy has been framed within the context of the changing environment in which we operate. In this regard, we undertook an environmental analysis that was informed by a report prepared by a firm of consultants on our behalf. This analysis involved examining the political, economic, social and technological contexts in which the Department operates. It identified the organisation's strengths and weaknesses and the opportunities and threats we need to address. In carrying out this analysis we have identified issues facing the organisation currently and new issues which may arise during the period 2001-2004 and beyond.

In this Strategy Statement we focus on two broad questions:

- What the Department will do i.e. what business is appropriate to us
- How we will do it in an efficient and effective way.

The environment within which we operate has changed greatly. The role of the social security and social welfare system has evolved from a purely income maintenance role to one which seeks to address the underlying causes of poverty and social need.

In recent years social insurance coverage has gradually extended, the number of people covered by schemes has increased, as has the range of schemes for which we are responsible. The number of unemployed customers has fallen dramatically while the numbers of lone parents, people with disabilities and carers have increased significantly. Our widening agenda is also reflected in the addition of extra responsibilities in the areas of community development, support for voluntary organisations and volunteering, family policy and family services and the broader social inclusion agenda.

5.2 DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC FACTORS

Demographic and economic changes are a major element of the environment in which we operate. For the period of this Strategy Statement the main points to note are:

- Population growth will continue
- Inward migration is likely to be significant
- The numbers of persons in two of the Department's key customer groups – children and the elderly – will not increase appreciably
- Economic growth will be much lower than in recent years
- The labour market environment will be considerably less buoyant than in recent years
- There is likely to be more "churning" in the labour market, with a somewhat higher level of short-term unemployment than in the past
- Higher employment rates in recent times have increased potential claimant levels in the population, e.g. there may be increased levels of Disability and Treatment Benefit claims
- Given the continued trend of increases in births outside marriage, the number of one parent households is likely to rise significantly
- Population increase is being accompanied by a rapid increase in household formation due to the age structure and the rate of marital breakdown. This is creating unprecedented demand for housing. Taken together with the rate of house price inflation, this suggests significant increases in demands for social housing and other housing supports
- The growth in female participation in the work force and the growing numbers of one parent families will keep on the agenda the issue of reconciling work and family life and the role of family life generally.

5.3 THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

Government commitments and priorities as expressed in major statements of policy such as the Programme for Government, the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF) and the National Development Plan (NDP), form a key element of the environment within which we must formulate our Strategy. The issues addressed in these Programmes which are of critical importance for us include:

- Combating poverty and social exclusion
- Local and community development
- Services for people with disabilities and carers
- Equality/diversity issues arising from equality legislation
- Childcare
- Employee/Family friendly policies
- Client centered delivery of services
- Promotion of the Information Society
- Renewal of local government including the establishment of City/County Development Boards
- Recognition of citizenship responsibilities.

5.4 EU AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Irish social policy developments will, increasingly, be influenced by processes within the European Union, the UN, the Council of Europe and the OECD. The most significant influence will arise from EU initiatives. There is strong recognition of the need for greater balance between the economic, employment and social dimensions if the EU is to be seen by its citizens as credible and relevant.

The issues which we need to address, in this context include:

- Implementation of plans to progress social integration and address persistent poverty
- Benchmarking of policies against EU trends
- The programme for the Irish Presidency of the EU in the first half of 2004.

5.5 THE MODERNISATION PROGRAMME

Both the Government and the public expect a flexible and responsive Civil Service which provides a high quality service efficiently and effectively in an open and transparent way. The Civil Service Modernisation Programme has identified a number of priorities which are key to achieving this. These include the Performance Management and Development System, improvements in external and internal Customer Service, a range of Human Resources initiatives, the deepening of the Partnership process and developments in e-Government, Financial Management, Programme Evaluation and Regulatory Reform. We are fully committed to this ambitious and extensive programme of change.

5.6. AN EVOLVING SERVICE

There is a demand at public, political and agency level for a more integrated approach to the delivery of public services and for a more proactive approach to addressing customer needs. In responding, in a more comprehensive way, to the needs of a wide range of customers we have developed close working relationships with other departments and agencies. At the same time, in order to meet our objectives, we need to identify clearly our remit in the areas of social, community and family affairs and how that remit complements and enhances the roles of organisations operating in similar areas.

Complex customer needs arise because many people who seek income support have requirements which must be supplied by other state services. As unemployment has declined, many of those who remain out of employment require specific tailored interventions to assist them. This also applies to some lone parents and people with disabilities. For some young people, a range of personal and family circumstances is preventing their entry to the labour market. Early intervention with this group may obviate the need for more serious intervention later on.

There has been considerable policy and institutional change, in recent years, in the area of services for people with disabilities with the aim of improving their quality of life. Disability will continue to be a major issue from both a policy development and service delivery perspective. The area of care provision will also require policy development and service improvements because of the ageing of the population, changes in family structures and the enhanced awareness in society of the role of the carer.

We also have the central role in relation to State support for the Voluntary and Community sector. The White Paper on Supporting Voluntary Activity sets out a framework for the future development of our role in this area and its implementation is one of our key responsibilities.

5.7 THE NEEDS OF FAMILIES

We have had, in recent years, a central role in the development of policies for family support. The achievement of effective working relationships with the other departments and agencies who have responsibilities in this area, so as to achieve positive outcomes for the recipients of services will be one of our major challenges during the period of this Strategy.

We have a key function in the elimination of social exclusion and its associated problems in so far as families are concerned. We have a central role in giving effect to Government policy to sustain families and promote family well-being, as expressed in Government and Partnership programmes.

A number of major policy documents, including the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, the Report of the Commission on the Family, the National Children's Strategy and the Review of the One Parent Family Payment have identified issues that must be addressed and which require a significant input from other departments and agencies. Among the issues to be addressed are;

- Child poverty and the risk of social exclusion
- Marital breakdown and the growth in lone parenthood
- Balancing work and family life
- Co-ordination of policy and administrative responses to family welfare issues
- The need for high quality research to underpin developments.

5.8 THE TECHNOLOGY CONTEXT

We are heavily dependent on technology in carrying out our business and many areas of the organisation could not function without the availability of robust Information and Communications Technology (ICT) systems.

There are three aspects of the technology environment, which have particular relevance;

- The trend in recent years towards the development and 'de facto' standardisation of internet technologies creates an imperative for us to adopt these technologies and position ourselves to avail of the benefits and opportunities which this trend has opened up

- There is a need at national and EU level to push ahead with the development of the Information Society. Our priorities in this area are to progress on-line delivery of services and the integration of services generally. We are in a unique position in view of our central information databases and can therefore fill two roles in this area – that of ‘customer data repository’ and that of ‘service supplier’
- Bearing in mind our remit in relation to social exclusion, community development etc, we have a role in addressing the ‘digital divide’ and extending the benefits of technology to people and groups who would otherwise be unable to avail of them.

In our e-Government Strategy, which was published in January 2001, we have set out our plans for the development of electronic services and participation in cross-departmental programmes such as Reach and GRO. These initiatives offer opportunities to enhance the quality of service to the customer, reduce costs and improve our business processes.

The developments in technology have implications for the management and organisation of our business. The integration of business and technological planning processes and the need for a core level of proficiency in new technologies for all staff will be a key issue as the pace of technological change, and our reliance on technology, continues to increase.

5.9. HUMAN RESOURCES ENVIRONMENT

This Department operates within the wider, unified Civil Service environment. Critical functions such as recruitment, pay and conditions of service are determined centrally. Increasingly, the external, social and economic environment within which the Civil Service operates affects the way we carry out our functions.

The buoyant economy and the competitive labour market of recent years have made it more difficult to recruit and retain people with the appropriate skills. We must, therefore, develop a progressive and positive human resource environment so that we can promote the Department as the employer of choice for serving staff and potential recruits.

This Department employs approximately 4,500 staff and is one of the largest employers in the Civil Service. Staff turnover is significant. For example, in 2000, a total of 342 employees (7.6% of the workforce) left the organisation, including 166 (3.7%) who moved to other departments either on lateral transfer or on promotion.

Another significant feature is the age profile of our staff, more than 40% of whom are 40 years of age or over. Currently, 6% of all our employees are aged under 25 years and 2% are aged under 20 years. This age profile has implications for a number of key HR areas including our future training and development programmes, promotion policy and manpower planning.

We are giving effect to policies on Employee and Family Friendly Working Arrangements in response to growing demands for greater flexibility in terms of work patterns. At the end of 2000 approximately 630 employees were job-sharing, 270 availed of career breaks and 2,700 were on flexible working hours. In addition, almost 200 employees availed of Term-Time leave during summer 2001.

We recognise the demands and responsibilities placed on us by recent equality legislation and Government decisions on new strategies for the promotion of equality of opportunity for all employees. We also acknowledge our obligation to ensure that the working environment for staff is safe, comfortable and meets the requirements of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act.

Our capacity to respond to these challenges depends significantly on the willingness and ability of staff and management to work together towards implementing change in ways which meet both their development needs and the achievement of the Department's objectives. Here, the Partnership process within the Department plays a key role. There are a number of committees and working groups established under Partnership and a participative model of working, which has brought about significant improvement in the level of participation and consultation, has been developed.

Our Modernisation Action Programme, validated through extensive consultation conducted through the Partnership process, provides for the development of strategies and policies, which will position us to meet the challenges on the Human Resources front. Human Resources Strategy, currently being finalised through the Partnership process, will provide the basis for HR developments over the period of this Strategy Statement.

The Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) represents both a significant challenge and an opportunity. We must implement and maintain the system and address the training and development needs that arise.

We also must position ourselves to respond to policies, currently being developed centrally, to devolve greater responsibility in the area of Human Resources to line departments.

5.10 CONCLUSION

By carrying out the environmental analysis we have attempted to define the critical issues we will face in the period 2001 to 2004. The Strategy Statement is, however, set in the context of the long-term aims of this Department. We do recognise that some environmental factors are not easily defined even in the short to medium term. For example, it is clear that economic growth will be at a much lower rate than recent years and that some key sectors are currently experiencing difficulties related to global market forces. This could have an impact on employment trends and, consequently, on the resources we need to devote to delivering unemployment payments and related services. We are conscious, therefore, that as an organisation we need to be flexible and be in position to respond to changes as they arise. This flexibility must apply to our organisational structures and ICT capability. Also, critically, our HR policies need to create a positive working environment for staff and accommodate change.

6. HIGH LEVEL GOALS

In the fulfilment of our Mission, we are involved in a very wide and varied range of activities and services. In the context of preparing this Statement we have summarised our purpose in the form of a small number of High Level Goals which encapsulate the essential functions on which we are focused.

1. PEOPLE

To develop the capacity of the organisation and a culture of pride, innovation and performance, with a high level of involvement and participation by staff at all levels and where capabilities are fostered and encouraged.

2. POLICIES

To develop the highest standard of policies and advice to Ministers and Government for the promotion of effective social protection, family and community supports.

3. SERVICES

To deliver income supports and other services, to the highest standards, in co-operation with other relevant agencies.

7. OUR VALUES

In delivering on our responsibilities we are guided by a set of underlying Values which need to be reflected in all our activities. We articulate these Values as follows:



1. We value integrity, openness, honesty, fairness and mutual respect in our dealings with our customers, our stakeholders and each other.
2. We value and respect the views of our customers and our shared responsibility in delivering and maintaining a quality service. We respect the information that they entrust to us.
3. We value our partnership with other agencies and organisations which are involved in the promotion of social solidarity and a cohesive society.
4. We value the resources entrusted to us by the Government and seek to achieve effectiveness, economy and efficiency in their use.
5. We value the commitment, initiative and contribution of the people who work in the Department and a Partnership-based approach to our work.
6. We value the welfare of the people who work in our organisation.
7. We value the co-operation and goodwill of staff unions and associations.

Strategy Statement 2001-2004

People, Policies, Services

Policy Development

8. POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Goal

To develop the highest standard of policies and advice to Ministers and Government for the promotion of effective social protection, family and community supports.

8.1. INTRODUCTION

The development of policy in the areas of social protection, social inclusion and family and community supports is a key responsibility for us. Our objective is to ensure that the policy development process is managed in such a way that the highest quality advice is provided to the Minister and Government in the areas for which we have responsibility.

Consultation, both within and outside the Department, is an important element of our Policy Development Programme and our aim is to ensure that, in developing proposals for policy change, we respect and are responsive to the needs and concerns of individuals, families and communities who will be affected by those policies.

The main vehicles for the development of policy at present are as follows:

- Government Programmes and Social Partnership agreements
- The Annual Budget process where increases in payment rates and other improvements in social welfare schemes are determined
- The Annual Social Welfare Bill and other legislative initiatives
- Action Plans under the National Anti-Poverty Strategy
- The Programme Evaluation process which involves the systematic review of departmental programmes and the development of proposals for change
- The Family Research Programme operated by the Family Affairs Unit
- The Department's programme of commissioned research

- Reports and submissions from the statutory bodies which report to the Department in an advisory capacity
- Ongoing policy analysis within the Department
- EU and other relevant developments and research at international level
- The views of internal and external stakeholders as communicated to the Department through consultation with customers, submissions of representative interested groups etc.

The Annual Budget process provides the social partners, representative groups, members of the Oireachtas as well as departmental officials, with the main opportunity, on an annual basis, to put forward proposals for improvements in social welfare services.

Objective

To ensure that well prepared options are available in good time to enable the best possible consideration to be given to them.

In developing proposals for policy change and in carrying out other reviews and research it will be our aim to ensure that:

1. The purpose of the review is clearly identified.
2. Stakeholders are consulted.
3. All necessary information is included.

As far as the content of research is concerned we will ensure that:

1. The issues are identified.
2. The analysis of the issues is accurate, logical, comprehensive and contains a range of useful and relevant options.

3. The analysis is undertaken within a relevant, responsive and challenging framework.
4. Options for change are identified and costed in a succinct, simple and clear way.
5. The proposals made are:
 - politically aware
 - outcome focused
 - practicable and capable of implementation
 - durable, (given medium to long-term requirements)
 - poverty proofed.

The process will be adequately resourced and managed in an efficient and effective way. Relevant stakeholders and agencies will be involved in a timely and appropriate fashion.

8.2 LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

In general, our income support schemes have a statutory basis contained in the Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act, 1993, as amended. The preparation and application of the legislation is a key function of the Department and the main vehicle for giving effect to policy change.

Objective

To ensure that a firm legislative basis exists for social protection schemes and that the legislation is in a format accessible both to those whose task it is to apply it and our customers.

Our aims in relation to the development of legislation are to:

- Consult with all stakeholders so as to ensure that the views of relevant interests and affected parties are identified and taken into account in the preparation of legislation

- Progress the consolidation process in line with the Civil Service Regulatory Reform Programme
- Press ahead with our current legislative programme which includes, in addition to the annual Social Welfare Bill, the following:

A Pensions Bill to provide for a legislative framework for the development of Personal Retirement Saving Accounts (PRSAs), a Pensions Ombudsman and for additional provisions for the regulation of occupational pension schemes to enhance members' benefits and protection

A Civil Registration Bill to provide a new legal framework for the registration of life events in the State

A Family Support Agency Bill to establish a new body to be known as the Family Support Agency

A Money Advice and Budgeting Service Bill to place the present service on a statutory footing

A Charities Bill to provide comprehensive legislation on charities and charities fundraising

A Public Services Broker Bill to provide for the establishment and operation of the Public Services Broker and to consolidate existing legislation governing the Personal Public Service Number, the Public Service Card and the sharing of customer data between Government agencies

A Social Welfare (Consolidation) Bill to consolidate all of the enactments relating to social welfare services from 1993 to 2001 inclusive.

8.3 EU/INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION

There is a significant EU/International dimension to the development of policies in the areas of social inclusion and social protection.

Objective

To ensure that we discharge the responsibilities we have for meeting Ireland's international obligations, reflecting national concerns in the field of social protection and social exclusion as well as contributing to international research. This will involve, inter alia the following

Actions

- Co-ordinating this Department's contribution to North-South co-operation, particularly in the fields of the protection of the social security rights of migrant workers, and exchanging views and experiences in relation to policy and administrative developments
- Developing bilateral relations with other countries aimed at protecting social security rights and developing best practice on policy and administrative developments
- Ensuring, through representation at international fora on social exclusion and protection, that national concerns and views are reflected and that outcomes are fed back into policy development at national level
- Monitoring the implementation of EU and other international instruments
- Preparing a relevant and effective programme in the social field for Ireland's EU Presidency in the first half of 2004.

9. KEY POLICIES – SOCIAL INCLUSION AND SOLIDARITY

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Through our income support services and other programmes we play an important role in the area of promoting and developing social inclusion and solidarity. We have a co-ordinating role in advancing the social inclusion agenda across Government services, notably through implementing the National Anti-Poverty Strategy.

The social insurance system is built on the principle of solidarity between contributors to the system and those who need to avail of the social insurance schemes. Social assistance schemes and programmes to assist people in need are founded on the principle of solidarity between taxpayers and people who need assistance.

Through the Family Policy and Family Services agenda we seek to enhance the lives of individuals, families and communities for the benefit of society as a whole. Our involvement with the voluntary and community sectors and with the business community in delivering and funding programmes for people in situations of need is another aspect of our role in the area of social inclusion.

9.2 SOCIAL INSURANCE

Objectives

To promote the provision of social protection through the social insurance system and to enhance the capability of the system to meet its aims in the medium to long term, through the development of appropriate financial, operational and supervisory structures for the Social Insurance Fund.

To help employers, as major stakeholders in the social insurance system, fulfill their obligations in respect of the operation of the Pay Related Social Insurance (PRSI) system.

Actions

- Undertake an Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance Fund. In the light of the outcome of the review, develop proposals, in conjunction with other relevant Government Departments and, where appropriate, agencies and the social partners in relation to the financial, operational and supervisory structures of the Fund
- Develop proposals, in the context of changing social and work patterns, to adapt the social insurance system to address issues such as:
 - The needs of groups not currently covered by the system
 - The necessity for the introduction of benefits for new contingencies and those not at present covered by the scope of the system
 - The response of the system to the increasing trend towards combining work and family responsibilities
- Review the current legislative framework applicable to the social insurance classification of employees and self-employed in the light of emerging employment arrangements and relevant social welfare appeals and judicial findings
- Ensure a proactive, responsive and integrated approach relating to issues surrounding the determination, including the statutory decision mechanism, of the insurability status of contributors
- Ensure that the administrative burden on employers is minimised while protecting the welfare of all contributors
- Provide a proactive and comprehensive information service on a national and local basis to employers in relation to the operation of PRSI
- Develop and enhance the use of new technologies for our interaction with employers.

9.3 NATIONAL ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY (NAPS)

The overall aim of the National Anti Poverty Strategy (NAPS) is to reduce the numbers of those who are consistently poor. The goals of the Strategy are framed around five key themes of unemployment, income adequacy, educational disadvantage, urban disadvantage and rural poverty. This Department, which has a central co-ordinating role in relation to NAPS, aims to strengthen the process through consultation with other departments and agencies. The NAPS is being reviewed, and its scope broadened to encompass the themes of health and housing. A revised Strategy is due for publication by the end of 2001.

Objectives

To provide advice to the Minister in relation to poverty, social exclusion and inequality issues. To contribute to the overall development of policy aimed at tackling social exclusion, poverty and inequality. To create greater awareness of NAPS.

Our aim is to strengthen the NAPS process through consultation with other departments and agencies as well as internally.

Actions

- Contribute to the setting of explicit social objectives and appropriate performance indicators
 - Develop and improve data collection at national level and commission research aimed at informing the policy response to the poverty issue
 - Implement the findings of the review of Poverty Proofing by the NESC and roll out poverty proofing to local authorities
 - Promote the involvement of people experiencing poverty disadvantage in policy decisions that affect them
- Work closely with the EU, in relation to National Action Plans against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAPsinc) and in the development of appropriate performance indicators. The first National Action Plan was published in June 2001
 - Monitor the implementation of actions arising from the completion of the NAPS Review
 - Continue the process of extending the NAPS initiative to local government.

9.4 FAMILY AFFAIRS AND SERVICES

We have a key role to play in the elimination of social exclusion and its associated problems, in so far as families are concerned and the development and implementation of appropriate policies to sustain families and promote family well being.

Policy on family related issues is co-ordinated in our Family Affairs Unit. Support for families is provided through our wide range of income maintenance programmes and other services.

We are addressing issues identified by the Commission on the Family, the National Children's Strategy, the Review of the One-Parent Family Payment and the National Anti-Poverty Strategy by adopting a wide range of complementary strategies in pursuance of our actions in relation to the family and these include:

- Establishing a new agency – The Family Support Agency, which will;
 - provide a family mediation service
 - support, promote and develop the provision of marriage and relationship counselling services
 - support, promote and develop the Family and Community Services Resource Centre programme
 - undertake research on family issues
 - provide information about relationships education, parenting issues and family responsibilities

- Utilising Child Benefit as a key instrument in addressing child poverty and promoting family welfare
- Contributing to the implementation of appropriate and integral social protection policies, programmes and actions in favour of all families, in particular those experiencing disadvantage, in order to:
 - Support family cohesion and enable families to be preserved in the face of difficult situations
 - Alleviate life crises which can lead to situations of social exclusion and family breakdown
- Further developing the Families Research Programme and other relevant research initiatives
- Contributing to the further development and progression of the National Children's Strategy through participation in cross-departmental and agency co-operation
- Providing up to date and accurate information on the income support services, and developing in consultation with service providers, an awareness programme about family counselling services and support
- Implementing the successful aspects of the Family Services Pilot Project to enable the provision of proactive family supports through our local office network and continuing the development of a case management approach to dealing with customers
- Meeting commitments in this area set out in the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF) and the National Development Plan (NDP)
- Evaluating income supports and services as to their effectiveness in dealing with family issues.

9.5 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT PROGRAMME

The Community Development Support Programme concentrates on a wide range of supports for local self-help groups, community development, welfare rights and information work. The provision of funding to enable community groups to pilot initiatives identified as meeting new and emerging community needs is also a feature of the programme.

Objective

To assist disadvantaged communities to participate in mainstream local development, training and education, enterprise and employment opportunities, as well as influencing policy and working for change at regional and national level.

Actions

- Support, through our grants system, a wide range of community self help initiatives aimed at tackling social exclusion and facilitating participation in the labour market, training or further education
- Encourage the active participation of people in their communities and the development of community leadership skills
- Evaluate the programme through the Programme Evaluation process.

9.6 MONEY ADVICE AND BUDGETING SERVICE (MABS)

Objective

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

Actions

- Develop and implement legislation to place the service on a statutory basis
- Work closely with the National Advisory Committee on matters relating to policy and advice for the Minister
- Develop further the organisational structure of MABS following a review of the service
- Support the provision of training through Comhairle for money advisors and management committees of MABS projects
- Support the development of best practice and the funding of information guides on money management and debt counselling

- Work closely with statutory agencies, commercial bodies, voluntary and community groups and the Credit Union Movement.

9.7 RELATIONSHIP WITH COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR AND CHARITABLE ORGANISATIONS

Objective

To place the State's relationship with the community and voluntary sector on a new footing by establishing a cohesive framework of support for the community and voluntary sector across Government Departments and agencies.

Actions

- Develop policy in relation to community and voluntary activities supported by the Department
- Help develop the capacity of the community and voluntary sector to participate in decision-making
- Support the establishment and the work of the Implementation and Advisory Group for the White Paper on Supporting Voluntary Activity, jointly representing the statutory and community/voluntary sectors
- Ensure an appropriate framework is in place to encourage volunteering in Ireland and, in line with this, support and contribute to the work of the National Committee on Volunteering
- Formulate an appropriate regulatory framework for charities
- Implement legislation in relation to the disbursement of dormant account funds through the setting-up of the Dormant Accounts Fund Disbursement Board.

9.8 OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONERS OF CHARITABLE DONATIONS AND BEQUESTS

The Commissioners of Charitable Donations and Bequests are an independent statutory body whose main functions derive from the Charities Act 1961 and 1973.

The Department has recently taken over the responsibility for the Office of the Commissioners of Charitable Donations and Bequests.

Actions

- Develop an effective working relationship with this Office.

9.9 CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR)

Corporate Social Responsibility can be described as a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders, on a voluntary basis.

Objective

To ensure that there is an appropriate administrative framework to encourage Corporate Social Responsibility.

Actions

- Co-ordinate and publish the Irish input to the EU Green Paper on Corporate Social Responsibility
- Publish a departmental report on Corporate Social Responsibility
- Support the work of the Foundation for Investing in Communities
- Provide input to the Informal Government Network on Corporate Social Responsibility.

10. SERVICE DELIVERY AND CUSTOMER SERVICE DEVELOPMENT

Goal

To deliver income supports and other services, to the highest standards, in co-operation with other relevant agencies.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

Our aim is to have a customer-centred organisation delivering a service of the highest quality that takes account of best practice and the standards of leading customer service organisations. We will develop our organisation so that we can build services to meet the needs of individual customers. We will achieve this by reorganising and integrating services and changing our processes, organisational structures and support systems.

10.2 BACKGROUND

This programme of change is being driven by a number of factors, specifically:

- Customer expectations for a modern efficient service delivery which compares with the best available
- The Public Service Modernisation Programme
- The Government's Action Plan for the Information Society and, in particular, the commitment to generalised electronic access to public services in the future through a variety of platforms
- Value for money in the use of resources through improved efficiency and integration of services
- Better management accountability and an improved working environment for staff who provide the service to customers.

Objectives

To deliver continuous improvement in quality customer service by placing the customer at the centre of the process. To increase efficiency and effectiveness. To ensure effective control of fraud and abuse. To ensure business continuity.

In developing the strategy to achieve these objectives, the following underlying principles have been adopted:

- Personalised Service
- Choice
- Minimising Customer Effort
- Openness
- A Professional Approach
- Stewardship.

Personalised Service – We will make every effort to ensure that customers are made aware of their full entitlements. We will be proactive in our dealings with our customers and will respond to their individual needs.

Maximise Customer Choice – We will provide customers with expanded options for service that are broad in terms of the time, place, mode of access, payment method and language.

Minimise Customer Effort – The fullest possible service will be provided at the first point of contact and core data will be captured only once.

Openness – We will foster a structured approach to meaningful consultation with, and participation by, the customer in relation to the development, delivery and review of services.

Professional Approach – We will ensure successful implementation of a customer-centred approach by introducing new ways of working by empowered, motivated and trained staff using appropriate technology.

Stewardship – We will balance our commitment to customer service with our stewardship of public monies through effective and efficient management of our services and a comprehensive Control Strategy.

10.3 SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL

We have a wide range of customers with differing needs, depending on their own circumstances and the type of service being accessed. An extensive examination and preparatory process has been carried out on the question as to how best we can deliver our services in the future. This has crystallised into a programme of change known as the Service Delivery Model (SDM). At one level, this new model represents the unifying vision, across all areas of the organisation, of putting the customer at the centre of our service. At another, it refers to the broad range of individual projects related to information systems, business processes and organisational issues that will support its achievement.

MAIN FEATURES OF THE SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL

1. It will facilitate a more proactive approach with an emphasis on completing the full transaction, as far as possible, at the first point of contact with customers.
2. Differentiated responses will be offered, ranging from personalised case management for those customers with complex needs to automated transactions for those availing of services based on fixed rules and entitlements.
3. Access to services will be primarily via the phone and, in person, via the Local Office network.
4. The Internet is also becoming a primary delivery channel, initially for information services but increasingly for personalised transactions.

Note: The first phase of the implementation of the Model will be for the Child Benefit system in early 2002.

Realisation of the Service Delivery Model is being underpinned by significant investment in new technical architecture utilising web and component technologies. This will provide us with the organisational agility to adapt to changing business requirements. It will encompass the development of a new generation of systems that will facilitate a more customer centred service and will strongly support our e-Government Strategy.

Organisational Changes and Timescale

Our organisational structures and work processes will be changed to support the implementation of the Service Delivery Model and our involvement in e-Government initiatives. This work will progress over a number of years and will build upon best practice and lessons learned from the initial implementation. Ultimately, the model will be extended to all schemes over an estimated timescale of 10 years. We will adopt a participative approach to the shaping and development of the new structures, and training and support will be agreed and provided.

10.4 REGIONAL SERVICE

Our aim is to continue and further develop a flexible and individual service to customers and communities through our regional network. The key features of our strategy in this regard will be:

- Further localisation of services to local offices commencing with the One-Parent Family Payment Scheme from 2002
- Further development of the "case management" approach to meeting customer needs in line with the development of other elements of the Service Delivery Model
- Development of our information services
- Enhanced co-operation between regional staff and with local statutory, voluntary and community groups.

10.5 QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE



We are committed to implementing the Principles of Quality Customer Service endorsed by the Government. We have set out how we intend to achieve this in our Customer Action Plan 2001-2004. The main focus of the Plan is continuous improvement in the quality of the delivery of our services.

Three Key Commitments

- We recognise that a key requirement of our customer service programme is the delivery of accurate payments and services to customers with courtesy, sensitivity and the minimum delay
- We are committed to fostering a climate of mutual respect between staff and customer
- We will maintain effective systems to control fraud and abuse.

The Elements of our Customer Service Programme

Our commitments to a quality customer service can be summarised under the following headings:

Consultation

- Further develop the consultative process so that customers can express opinions, give feedback and become involved with the setting of challenging service standards

Information

- Maintain a proactive approach to the provision of, and ease of access to, quality information and advice

Employers

- Help employers, as major stakeholders in the social insurance system, to fulfil their obligations in respect of the operation of PRSI

Equality/Diversity

- Ensure that the service we provide is equitable, non-discriminatory and takes account of increasing cultural diversity. A key focus in this regard is staff training and awareness raising

Choice

- Promote choice, where feasible, in all aspects of service delivery

Payment Methods

- Ensure that the most modern and the widest possible range of payment methods is available and provide access, where possible, to new payment services and facilities so that customers can choose the option that best suits their personal preferences

Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

- Ensure that the potential offered by Information and Communications Technology is availed of fully

Accommodation and Access

- Modernise the standard of accommodation in our offices through our building programme, with particular emphasis on privacy and access for people with disabilities. The Department supports the National Heritage Plan

Appeals/Redress

- Maintain a formalised, accessible and transparent system of appeal/review for customers who are dissatisfied with decisions on entitlements

Comments and Complaints

- Establish a well-publicised and accessible system for dealing with comments and complaints about the quality of service provided

Official Languages Equality

- Provide quality services through Irish and/or bilingually and inform customers of their right to be dealt with through one or other of the official languages

Co-ordination and Integration

- Foster a more co-ordinated and integrated approach to the delivery of services

Customer Focused

- Further promote and develop a strong customer service culture throughout the Department

Training and Development

- Support and encourage staff to fulfill customer service objectives by developing appropriate skills and attitudes

Staff Consultation

- Promote internal consultation at all levels in the Department so that the opinions of, and feedback from, staff are taken into account in improving customer service

Monitoring of Quality

- Identify, through the development and monitoring of customer service quality standards, those areas where improvement is warranted.

10.6 INFORMATION SERVICE

The provision of comprehensive and accurate information in a clear and easily accessible manner to customers, employers, staff and external partners is essential to the effective delivery of social welfare services.

Objective

To ensure that all our customers are made aware of their entitlements under a broad range of social insurance, social assistance and other supports and are kept informed of changes and improvements as they occur.

Actions

In order to achieve our objectives in this area we will;

- Be proactive in delivering a comprehensive and up-to-date information service to all customers, other departments and agencies, and the voluntary and community sector
- Ensure that our staff are informed, trained and supported in order to carry out their duties to a high standard
- Promote our information services through the national and the local media
- Encourage our broad range of customers to avail of the service through our network of Local Offices
- Participate in consultative fora and customer panels designed to further improve the quality of information leaflets, claim forms and communications generally
- Develop our links with other information providers and with community and voluntary groups
- Provide grants under the Scheme for the Development and Promotion of Information and Welfare Rights
- Maximise the use of new and emerging technologies in information provision including the use of the Department's website and other appropriate means, e.g. Comhairle's OASIS project
- Facilitate the expansion, on a phased basis, of our LoCall phone service to all scheme areas

- Publish a comprehensive Information Services Strategy which will articulate the development of information provision and dissemination for the coming years.

10.7 APPEALS/REDRESS

Objective

To ensure that any persons who are dissatisfied with the decisions made on their social welfare entitlements are provided with the means to have such decisions reviewed.

Actions

- We will develop our systems to ensure that any decision will be reviewed in the light of any further information brought to our notice. All customers who receive an adverse decision are advised of their right to have their claim reviewed.
- Where decisions are of a formal nature made by Deciding Officers, we have in place a formal appeals procedure whereby any decision can be reviewed by an Appeals Officer of the Social Welfare Appeals Office. That Office acts as an agency of the Department operating in an independent manner. Where appropriate, customers are advised of their right to appeal to that Office.
- It is proposed to have a management consultancy study carried out of the role, functions and organisation of the Social Welfare Appeals Office. That study will examine all the processes involved in dealing with claims to the appeal stage, with a view to identifying procedural improvements.

10.8 THE EURO

We are engaged in an extensive project to ensure that there is a smooth transition to the Euro with all necessary measures in place in time for the changeover on 1 January 2002. We are currently implementing a concerted and targeted information campaign to ensure that customers are fully aware of the implications, for them, of the changeover to the Euro.

10.9 TAX/CALENDAR YEAR

Under a Government decision the tax year will be aligned with the calendar year from 1 January 2002 onwards. Social welfare increases provided for in Budget 2002 (to be announced in December 2001) will take effect from the beginning of January 2002. We will ensure that the transition to the new arrangements and the payment of the social welfare increases will be conducted in a streamlined manner.

10.10 E-GOVERNMENT

We recognise the immense potential that now exists to use new technologies to help integrate public services. The Information Society Action Plan envisages us playing a key role in the development of public service interfaces for sharing of information and access to integrated services. We are committed to fulfilling this role and to attaining the e-Europe benchmarking standards for electronic delivery of public services.

In our e-Government Strategy which was published in January 2001 we have set out our plans for the development of electronic services and participation in cross-departmental programmes such as Reach and GRO.

10.11 REACH

Reach is a cross-departmental agency established by the Government to develop a strategy for the integration of public services and which reports to the Minister for Social, Community and Family Affairs. We have taken a lead role in the establishment of the agency and are closely involved in the development of its work.

The roles of the Personal Public Service (PPS) number and the Public Service Card are critical to this initiative. We are currently engaged in a major project to rationalise

the current system to facilitate developments. The PPS number is the individual's unique identifier and is issued by this Department. As part of the development of integrated services, public service organisations have begun to use the PPS number and we will continue to facilitate this.

Our Central Records System will be an essential foundation for establishing and recording identities and for the collection, storage, maintenance and provision of data necessary for the delivery of services.

We will develop, in conjunction with Reach, a strategy for data in the context of the development of the Public Services Broker. We will also participate with Reach in projects and initiatives for the further development of the Broker, the Public Service Card and access to integrated public services.

10.12 GRO

We, in co-operation with the Department of Health and Children, are involved in a major project for the modernisation of the Civil Registration Service – an essential underpinning of the development of integrated public service delivery.

10.13 OTHER E-GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

In addition to supporting Reach, GRO, the development of our central Records System and the promotion of the PPS number, our priorities in the area of e-Government also include;

- Developing the Service Delivery Model
- Facilitating increased take-up of electronic payments
- Development of our website (www.welfare.ie) including the provision of an on-line application facility and improvements to further facilitate access by persons with disabilities and an on-line comment facility as part of our customer consultation programme.

10.14 SECURITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY OF DATA

We hold important customer information in both manual and electronic forms and are obliged under law to maintain the confidentiality of this data. We have cultivated, and will continue to develop a high awareness amongst staff of the importance of data protection and confidentiality.

As part of this process we have developed and implemented effective Business Information Protection policies, to protect the security and confidentiality of all data.

We are putting in place a security framework to integrate existing procedures, guidelines and all data protection standards operational in the organisation.

10.15 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION (FOI)

We have in place procedures for dealing efficiently with requests under the Freedom of Information Act.

10.16 INTEGRATED SERVICES

Objective

To develop procedures and practices to ensure a more focused and better co-ordinated delivery of services by statutory authorities with an emphasis on addressing the specific needs of all customers.

Our locally based staff have developed effective working relationships with other public service organisations and community groups. They are involved in initiatives on a wide range of issues relevant to our mission to promote social, community and family well-being. This involves participation in locally based task forces and working groups e.g. RAPID, CLÁR, City/County Development Boards, Family Services Project, Drugs Task Forces. In Chapter 14 our links with other departments and agencies are outlined.

We are committed to the provision of support and resources for our staff engaged in service integration and community liaison initiatives.

10.17 CONTROL PROGRAMME

We have a broad-ranging and comprehensive control strategy, which aims to keep fraud and abuse to a minimum. Our emphasis therefore is to minimise risks of fraud and eliminate incorrect payments. This involves checks at point of claiming, reviews of means, verification that the conditions for entitlement continue to be met, medical reviews, inspection of employers for compliance, arrangements for debt recovery and prosecution of offenders.

An effective control programme sits alongside the provision of the highest quality service to our customers and the emphasis will be to highlight the mutual inclusiveness of both aspirations. The development of information technology has played a major role in the evolution of our control policy. The use of a common identifier, standard methods of capturing and validating data and adherence to principles of data integrity are all aimed to ensure that data is up to date, accurate and readily accessible.

We recognise the adverse impact that abuse of the social welfare system can have in the area of fair competition in the labour market and the importance for our customers and society generally of maintaining an effective control regime. Accordingly, the key features of our strategy will be to;

- Continually review our systems and processes to minimise opportunities for fraud and incorrect payments
- Review the effectiveness of existing deterrents
- Maximise the use of information technology in fraud and error detection and data analysis
- Conduct an ongoing control awareness campaign for both the public and staff

- Place a particular emphasis on identity fraud and the development and implementation of effective methods to detect and combat this method of abuse
- Enhance the ongoing development of co-operation, to the optimum degree, on a national and local basis with other State agencies, the Health Boards, and Local Authorities
- Conduct research into best practice in other jurisdictions and comparable organisations and apply, as appropriate
- Co-operate with other jurisdictions, having regard to relevant legislation
- Liaise with outside organisations including Employer Groups and Trade Unions
- Provide enhanced training and other supports to staff involved in control work
- Enhance mechanisms for feedback from frontline staff on the effectiveness of the control programme.

11. INCOME MAINTENANCE PROGRAMMES

In this Chapter we set out the strategies we intend to pursue in respect of our main income maintenance programmes over the next three years. While the programmes are designed to meet a wide and complex variety of needs and circumstances we have adopted a number of key underlying objectives and actions for these programmes.

Objective

To provide income support programmes which:

- Are efficient, effective, transparent and easily understood
- Recognise the needs of diverse family units
- Support equality between men and women
- Do not create “poverty traps” or “unemployment traps”
- Where appropriate, encourage participation in the labour market, training or further education
- Are compatible with the services provided by other State agencies in these areas.

Actions

- Continue with our series of Programme Evaluations
- Further develop customer service as set out in our Customer Action Plan 2001-2004
- Roll out the new Service Delivery Model
- Implement information and awareness campaigns
- Assess the findings of the PPF Working Group on Benchmarking and Indexing Payments and provide appropriate advice and proposals.

11.1 OLD AGE/RETIREMENT PENSIONS

There is considerable focus on the pension system in Ireland at present as we consider how best to provide retirement income for citizens into the future. The social welfare pensions system will continue to provide the basic level of provision.

The expansion of social insurance coverage over the years along with changes in the qualifying conditions has led to an increase in the proportion of persons in receipt of contributory pensions as against the means tested non-contributory scheme.

Proposals emerging from recent reports on the pensions system include;

- Increasing the rate of social welfare pensions
- Introduction of Personal Retirement Savings Accounts (PRSAs) as a supplementary pension cover
- Fundamental changes in the qualifying conditions for receipt of pensions.

The Government has made specific commitments in relation to pensions. These include increasing all payments to those over 66 years of age to £100 (€127) per week by 2002; increasing the Qualified Adult Allowance to the maximum Old Age (Non Contributory) Pension and paying it directly to the qualified adult.

Pension arrangements must be adequate and sustainable in the years to come and, in this context, demographic projections are relevant and provide a backdrop for developments in the pension and long-term care areas.

Actions

- Publish and enact a Pensions (Amendment) Bill 2001, which will provide, inter alia, the legislative framework for PRSAs, a Pensions Ombudsman and enhance the position of members of occupational pension schemes through the introduction of improved arrangements and new structures
- Survey private pensions coverage to establish a benchmark against which the position of PRSAs can be monitored
- Complete Phase 2 of the Pensions Review, which will establish the appropriate link between pension contributions and pension entitlement

- Review the position of women who leave the paid workforce for family reasons and review the Homemakers Scheme
- Develop further our partnership with the Pensions Board
- Consider any proposals that emerge from the PPF Working Group on Administrative Individualisation.

11.2 WIDOWS, WIDOWERS AND ONE-PARENT FAMILIES

There have been considerable changes in family structures and formation in recent years. The number of persons receiving One-Parent Family Payment (OFP) has grown considerably to approximately 78,000 at present (July 2001). Lone parents receiving OFP are a very diverse group ranging from relatively small numbers of teenage parents with very young children to separated/widowed people with larger/older families. The needs of the different groups within the population of OFP recipients requires varying responses.

Evidence is emerging that long-term welfare dependency has become a reality for many of those receiving this payment and they also have a high risk of poverty. While the labour force participation of lone parents has risen significantly, the indications are that much of this relates to part-time or low paid employment. The low level of general education which many recipients of the OFP have attained is seen as a constraint on their ability to secure a standard of employment which would ease their poverty risk and make them independent of the social welfare system. The lack of affordable childcare is often a factor limiting their ability to take up employment/training.

We are taking action in response to a number of recent reports in this area, including the Report of the Working Group on the Treatment of Married, Cohabiting and One-Parent Households under the Tax and Social Welfare Codes (1999), the Review of the One-Parent Family Payment (2000) and the Report of the NESF Project Team on Lone Parents (forthcoming).

Actions

- Localise the administration of the OFP scheme and develop the case management/customer activation approach so as to encourage and support participation in employment, training and education
- Monitor the ongoing effectiveness of the income disregards
- Apply effective control measures and the Liable Relative Maintenance provisions.

11.3 FAMILY AND CHILD INCOME SUPPORT

We operate a range of schemes which are designed to provide income support and strengthen the family's ability to meet its needs. In developing our strategy for these schemes for the next three years we are taking a number of issues and developments into account;

- The need to effectively address the issue of child poverty
- The expected continued increase in births, falling family sizes and changing family structures
- The objectives set out in the National Children's Strategy
- The commitments in this area contained in the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF)
- Developments in the provision of childcare.

Actions

- Deliver on the commitments contained in the PPF in relation to increasing the Child Benefit payment rates
- Participate in the Working Group examining the payment of Family Income Supplement through the income tax system and progress any recommendations arising.

11.4 ILLNESS/DISABILITY AND CARING

Our income support schemes in this area cover a diverse range of customers who have widely different needs. In developing our strategies for these schemes for the next three years we are taking a number of issues and developments into account.

- The increase in number of recipients, dependants and overall expenditure in recent years partly relates to the increase in the labour force and social insurance coverage. Additionally, improvements made to the means test and other eligibility conditions have also resulted in an increase in the number of recipients who are now receiving social assistance related payments
- The requirements arising from recent and pending legislation in the area of equal status and the establishment of a Human Rights Commissioner
- The need to develop supports for people with disabilities to enter or return to the labour force
- The needs of older people, particularly those living alone, and the requirement to provide community care and to support family carers.

Actions

- Participate in inter-departmental Working Groups arising from the PPF and otherwise, which are examining issues in the area of disability, carers and older people
- Develop, in consultation with FAS, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the Department of Health and Children supports for persons with disabilities to enable them to enter or return to the workforce
- Finalise the report on the future financing of long-term care. This will examine the strategic issues involved and assess alternative financing/funding approaches.

11.5 EMPLOYMENT AND UNEMPLOYMENT

Our role in this area is to provide income support to people who are out of work and to facilitate them in accessing employment, training and educational opportunities. Our functions in the area of employment are complementary to other actions by other departments and agencies.

In developing our strategies for these services we have taken into account the special needs of those who have remained on the Live Register and who have not been able to avail of the increase in job opportunities. In a very significant number of cases the people involved are lacking education, skills and qualifications and often have social problems.

Actions

- Work closely with FAS and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment to progress the Government's overall objectives as set out in the Employment Action Plan
- Work closely with other State agencies and relevant local organisations that are dealing with the issues of employment, training, adult literacy and disability. In this regard, we will work towards streamlining the services at local level
- We will seek to remove disincentives in the system that may exist for some people to return to the labour market, education or training. Particular attention will be paid to the position of secondary benefits
- Develop our case management/customer activation approach in dealing with the long term unemployed, lone parents and people with disabilities
- Monitor our programmes on an ongoing basis to ensure that they meet the changing needs of both our customers and the labour market.

11.6 TREATMENT BENEFITS

These benefits (dental, optical and audiological) are available to insured persons who satisfy certain contribution conditions and also to the qualified adults of such contributors. Arising mainly from the increase in the insured population in recent years there has been a significant increase in the number of persons eligible for and availing of these schemes.

Actions

- Review the qualifying conditions in consultation with relevant interested parties with a view to removing anomalies
- Work with the Department of Health and Children to ensure that the schemes remain compatible with the services of this type which are provided by the Health Boards
- Ensure that the services provided are up to date taking account of advances in medical appliance technology.

11.7 FREE SCHEMES

The Department operates the following Free Schemes

- Free Travel
- Free Electricity/Gas Allowance
- Free TV Licence
- Free Telephone Rental.

The Key Trends

- Estimated expenditure on the Free Schemes in 2001 is £140million (€178 million), while total expenditure on these schemes has increased by 35% since 1997
- Recipients of all Free Schemes have continued to increase, due to the extension of the schemes and the increase in the number of older people

- These extensions include automatic entitlement to the schemes to those aged over 75, (since 2000) to those over 70 (in 2001) and the extension of the schemes to those in receipt of Carer's Allowance.
- De-regulation of the markets for telecommunications and electricity supply has significant implications for the operation of the relevant Free Schemes.

A review of the Free Schemes was undertaken and published by the Policy Institute of Trinity College, Dublin in April 2000. This review examined the underlying rationale for the schemes and their performance, using efficiency criteria and customer views, and assessed their overall contribution to combating poverty and social exclusion. The Review provides a basis for decisions on future policy developments in this area.

Objectives

While each scheme within the Free Schemes has individual and separate objectives they all share a common set of objectives in the area of social inclusion. These are defined as:

- Provide assistance to those living alone by targeting them with specific benefits providing both income and social inclusion gains
- Support older people and people with disabilities in their wish to remain in the community as opposed to institutional care
- Support Government policy which seeks to acknowledge the value of older people in society.

Actions

- Explore further options for improving the efficiency of service delivery
- Develop the administrative and support systems to cater for competition in the telecommunications and electricity markets and to accommodate choice of service providers

- Explore ways of improving effective management by:
 - Examining ways of improving the system for reimbursing the suppliers of the Free Travel scheme
 - Improving management information systems to provide more detailed information for audit purposes and to provide detail on take-up, usage and scheme effectiveness.
 - Participate in the inter-departmental Working Group, chaired by the Department of the Environment and Local Government, to develop a template that will enable all City/County Development Boards to carry out audits of existing transport services and to establish criteria for reasonable needs.

11.8 FUEL ALLOWANCES

Fuel Allowances are paid to eligible people as an increase in their primary weekly payment between October and the following April each year. Almost 300,000 households benefit at a cost of about £52m. (€66million) per annum.

Objective

The purpose of Fuel Allowances is to assist householders who are on long-term social welfare or health board payments and who are unable to provide fully for their own home heating needs. A higher rate of payment is made in designated smokeless fuel areas. The overall objective of the scheme is to ensure that eligible households have sufficient funds to meet their home heating costs, taking into account their primary weekly payment as well as the fuel allowance.

Compensation for fuel price inflation is provided through increases in primary weekly payment rates, which are payable for 52 weeks of the year, rather than through increases in the fuel allowance payment rates, which are payable for only part of the year.

Actions

- Monitor fuel price movements to ensure that increases in primary weekly payments together with fuel allowances fully compensate eligible households for fuel price inflation
- Ensure that the home heating income needs of people on low incomes are considered in the formulation of policy on global warming, future extensions in designated smokeless zones and other relevant developments.

11.9 SUPPLEMENTARY WELFARE ALLOWANCE

The Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) scheme provides a "safety net" for people who are at risk of severe poverty due to lack of resources. SWA is intended to be a short-term, flexible response to immediate or newly emerging need. Where long-term, recurring or wide scale need is being met within the SWA system, and as this becomes apparent, specifically designed measures, within the social welfare system or elsewhere through mainstream provision (for example, the housing system) are introduced to meet these needs.

We are undertaking a fundamental review of the scheme and of the approach to supporting households in need as part of our series of Programme Evaluations. This is a wide-ranging review and we have, at this stage, developed a number of strategies aimed at meeting our objectives in this area.

Actions

- Work with the Department of the Environment and Local Government to implement the Government decision that housing needs currently addressed through long-term Rent Supplement payments will in future be met by the Local Authorities, through a combination of social housing provision and private sector rental assistance

- Ensure that claims made for payments administered by this Department are decided with minimum delay and that recourse to SWA by people awaiting decisions on social welfare claims will be minimised
- Examine the feasibility of paying basic SWA in our Local Offices, for example, where final decisions on entitlement to primary payments are awaited
- Examine the feasibility of paying Rent and Mortgage Supplements, retained as secondary benefits by participants on designated employment support programmes, in our Local Offices
- Review the Back to Work Clothing and Footwear scheme including the current administrative arrangements for the scheme
- Develop, through our regional structure, closer links with Community Welfare Officers with the aim of improving the overall welfare service to households which are suffering from disadvantage. We will take a proactive approach in identifying the overall needs of these households and in liaising with other agencies.

12. HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATIONAL ISSUES

Goal

To develop the capacity of the organisation and a culture of pride, innovation and performance, with a high level of involvement and participation by staff at all levels and where capabilities are fostered and encouraged.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

We are working together to become an organisation where there is a culture of pride, innovation, inclusion and excellent performance. Our Human Resource Management policies are designed to deliver on this vision. Underlying our HR Strategy (currently in development) are the principles of Partnership, openness, support and development. In addition to implementing progressive HR strategies we will develop our management capability and organise our structures in order to support the strategic direction of the organisation.

An analysis of the Human Resources environment in which we are operating and the challenges facing the organisation in this complex area is included in chapter 5.

Objectives

We have four main objectives in the Human Resource Management area. These are:

1. Ensure that Human Resource Management supports the achievement of our strategic and business objectives.
2. Provide a positive working environment where there is equality of opportunity for all employees in the areas of personal and career development and advancement.
3. Re-orientate the Human Resource Management function to support the devolution of responsibility for the day-to-day management of human resources issues to line management.
4. Strengthen and extend the Partnership process across the organisation.

Actions

Our major actions towards achieving these objectives are:

- Ensure that Human Resource issues are considered as an essential part of all aspects of our work
- Support and encourage excellent standards of performance at all levels throughout the organisation and develop positive approaches aimed at addressing under performance
- Implement effective and progressive policies in the areas of manpower planning, recruitment, placement, mobility and promotion
- Implement the Performance Management and Development System and identify the organisational skills and competencies emerging from this system
- Develop and implement a new Training and Development Strategy based on the achievement of the organisation's business objectives, the personal development of employees and the systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of training and development programmes
- Continue the extension of the Partnership process, foster the widest possible involvement of staff and conduct ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the process
- Develop a progressive and innovative managerial culture and good management practice throughout the organisation through the provision of training/development opportunities
- Provide support and advice on industrial and employee relations matters and on the implementation of central agreements
- Restructure the work of Personnel Branch to support newly delegated HR functions and provide supports to assist line managers assume responsibility for day-to-day management of these functions
- Promote policies, which will contribute towards a positive working environment and enforce the Civil Service policy on harassment, sexual harassment and bullying

- Ensure that flexible working arrangements are provided to the maximum extent possible, having regard for the business needs of the organisation
- Respond effectively to the new policies on gender equality and equality of opportunities in line with central agreements and, in particular, seek to increase the female representation rate from 27% to 30% at Assistant Principal level and 26% to 30% at Principal Officer level
- Implement Internal Customer Service initiatives and meet the communication needs of employees in relation to HR issues
- Promote good industrial and employee relations throughout the organisation.

12.2 PARTNERSHIP

Objective

The objective of the Partnership approach in the Civil Service is to ensure that, through consultation and the participation and co-operation of all concerned, there is common ownership by management, unions and staff of the development and implementation of action programmes for change and a participative approach to resolving issues.



We are facing into a significant change programme and we recognise that if we are to achieve our goals there must be common ownership of the programme by management, unions and staff. Comprehensive Partnership structures have been developed in the Department. In addition to a central Steering Committee and five main regional committees there are local committees in the Dublin and decentralised HQ Offices and our Local Offices. The localisation of Partnership will continue with the aim of embedding the process in all areas of the organisation.

12.3 INTERNAL CUSTOMER SERVICE

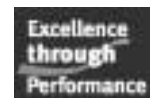
The Internal Customer has been designated as one of the Government endorsed Principles of Quality Customer Service. We are developing an enhanced internal customer service in its broadest sense through consultation with staff throughout the organisation including both those who deal with internal customers and those who deal with external customers.



In recognition of the importance of this issue we have produced a separate Action Plan, based on the Principle of Internal Customer Service and covering the same implementation period as our Customer Action Plan 2001-2004.

Among the issues being addressed in the Plan are improved departmental communications (particularly regarding internally provided services and how to access them), agreements between internal customer and supplier areas in respect of the standard of the service provided, new and improved computer systems and training and awareness raising initiatives emphasising the importance of internal customer service.

12.4 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT & DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM (PMDS)



The Performance Management and Development System, which is currently being rolled out to our staff aims to strike a balance between the needs of the organisation and the development needs of individuals. The introduction and implementation of the system is of itself a major task because of our size and additional resources have been allocated to deal with the initial training needs.

It represents a major programme of change for us but we recognise that effective management of performance is

necessary if we are to continue to improve as a public service organisation. Meeting the individual development needs of our staff is an essential element of PMDS and, in this regard, we are reviewing our Training and Development policies.

Our strategy is to implement PMDS at all levels of the organisation by the end of 2004 and to embed the system. We will evaluate the impact of the system on an ongoing basis.

12.5 DEVELOPING MANAGEMENT CAPABILITY

We will develop the role of the manager as the key facilitator in implementing the change process. This will be achieved through clarity in assignment of roles, appropriate delegation of responsibilities, development of HRM and financial management and improved communication systems. We will also continue to develop the necessary supports for managers through training and development and the provision of information and advice.

12.6 MANAGEMENT PROCESSES

Objective

To have management processes which will foster open and participative management, effective communications, clear setting of tasks and priorities, timely and logical decision making and encourage decision making and ownership of problems at the appropriate level of management.

Actions

- Ensure that management processes are in place to allow key decisions to be made in a timely, informed and accepted manner and enable us to achieve our goals.
- Ensure that effective communication flows exist to support the achievement of our strategic objectives.

- Foster a spirit of empowerment, participation, accountability and a culture of Partnership to ensure that decisions are made at the appropriate level.

12.7 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Objective

To operate Financial Management systems of the highest quality.

Actions

- Identify the financial resources necessary to meet programme and administrative needs
- Support the management system by providing appropriate internal financial reporting and by ensuring accountability and control of delegated responsibility
- Facilitate structured resource allocation procedures for both capital and non-capital expenditure
- Be flexible so as to meet the demands of future financial management. Particular attention will be given to the financial data analysis and reporting needs of strategic management processes and appropriate skills will be developed
- Evaluate Financial Management Systems against performance criteria designed to measure flexibility, effectiveness and the value of information provided to users.

12.8 VALUE FOR MONEY

Value for Money will be achieved through systems and structures, which will;

- Ensure value for money is recognised as an integral part of management practice
- Identify areas within our various schemes and administrative functions in which value for money reviews may be applied
- Develop and carry out a programme of ongoing value for money reviews

- Provide training in value for money principles and review processes
- Liaise with the Office of Comptroller and Auditor General and other bodies to ensure that approaches to value for money are in line with current best practices.
- Develop performance indicators and targets against which value for money management and control will be evaluated.

12.9 MANAGEMENT INFORMATION FRAMEWORK

In line with developments across the Civil Service we are developing a Management Information Framework to provide an integrated approach to managing financial and management information. The framework will facilitate the full costing of programmes and will incorporate indicators and other information relating to the achievement of our objectives. It will relate expenditure not only to the costs of delivering a service but to the outputs of that service which will include the value for money obtained from the service or programme in question.

12.10 RESOURCES ALLOCATION

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

The distribution of resources, which encompasses staff, information and communications technology, training and infrastructure facilities, will be managed on a priority basis in accordance with the status of objective concerned.

Our ability to deliver these objectives through the appropriate distribution of resources will be examined on an ongoing basis over the duration of this Strategy Statement.

Actions

- All business objectives as outlined in this Strategy Statement and related Business Plans will be prioritised and resources will be allocated in accordance with these priorities
- Resource implications will be systematically considered as part of the evaluation process for new initiatives and other service improvements
- The resource requirements for critical business areas will be reassessed on a regular basis to ensure they are adequate to realise stated objectives.

12.11 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

In Chapter 10, we set out our vision of a customer centred organisation, (i.e. the implementation of our Service Delivery Model). We recognise that to achieve this we will need to change our organisational structure as well as our support services and processes.

Action

- We will carry out a review which will have the objective of considering the structural changes necessary to successfully deliver schemes and services to a diverse and extensive customer base and ensure the most efficient and effective use of resources.

Strategy Statement 2001-2004

People, Policies, Services

Agencies and
Cross-Departmental Activities

13. AGENCIES

Three statutory agencies operate under the aegis of the Department;

- The Combat Poverty Agency which has responsibilities in the areas of advice to the Minister, research, action programmes and public information in relation to poverty
- The Pensions Board, which regulates occupational pension schemes and has an information role in this regard. It also has an advisory role in relation to pension development generally
- Comhairle – an organisation established in 2000 – which combined the functions of the National Social Service Board (NSSB) with certain functions of the National Rehabilitation Board (NRB). The functions of Comhairle are designed to ensure that services for people with disabilities will become an integral part of mainstream information, advice and advocacy services for all by building on the expertise and resources of both the NSSB and the NRB at local, regional and national levels.

In addition the Family Mediation Service comes under the aegis of the Family Affairs Unit of the Department. The Family Mediation Service is a free, professional confidential service which enables couples, who have decided to separate, reach agreement on all issues related to their separation. It assists couples in addressing the issues on which they need to make decisions including, post-separation living arrangements; finances and parenting arrangements to enable children to have an ongoing relationship with each parent. A trained mediator helps couples reach agreement on these issues. Once agreement is reached the couple can take the agreement prepared at mediation to their respective solicitors to have it formalised into a legal document.

A new agency, The Family Support Agency is being established. The new Agency will bring together the main programmes designed to help prevent marital breakdown, to support ongoing parenting relationships for children and to promote local family support introduced by the Government in recent years.

We have a very close working relationship with our Agencies. Their crucial role in contributing to the achievement of our objectives is fully recognised.

The Agencies all operate within a strategic plan or process. Our objective is to liaise effectively with, and support them, in the formulation and implementation of their strategies.

14. CROSS-DEPARTMENTAL ACTIVITIES

Our role embraces a wide range of social and economic issues affecting individuals, families, communities and society in general. These issues can be complex, multi-dimensional and inter-related. Effective cross-departmental policy and service delivery responses, at national and local levels, play a key role in identifying and addressing these.

The degree of involvement that is appropriate for us varies from issue to issue. In some cases the issue is of central importance to our remit and it is appropriate that we take the lead in co-ordinating the response to those issues. In relation to other issues, our response may be one of liaison or partnership with other relevant stakeholders, while in other cases our role may involve acting as an advocate of change.

14.1 NATIONAL ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY

The ten-year National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS), which recognises the multi-dimensional nature of poverty and social exclusion was launched in April 1997. A NAPS Unit, based in this Department was established to co-ordinate implementation of the Strategy across Government Departments and Agencies. Structures are now in place to ensure that the issue of social inclusion is central to policy formulation and implementation. As provided for under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness, a review of the NAPS is being undertaken and a revised Strategy is due for publication by the end of 2001.

14.2 RAPID

Following the successful piloting of the Integrated Services Process (ISP) during 1999 and 2000, the Government launched the "RAPID" Programme (Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development). RAPID is targeted at 25 areas suffering high concentrations of deprivation. In selecting areas,

issues such as unemployment levels, income, family and social structure, educational disadvantage and high levels of rented local authority housing were taken into account. The Department will be appropriately engaged, at the local level, on each of the individual RAPID projects.

14.3 CEANTAR LAGA ÁRD-RIACHTANAIS-CLÁR

This targeted investment programme for disadvantaged rural areas is being progressed by the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Areas which have experienced significant population losses and have high dependency rates are being considered for participation. This Department is committed to contributing fully to this programme.

14.4 CITY AND COUNTY DEVELOPMENT BOARDS

During 2000 City and County Development Boards were established in each county and county borough. They are representative of local government, local development bodies, the state agencies, and social partners. They are drawing up, and will, subsequently, oversee the implementation of a county/city strategy for economic, social and cultural development. This Department, in view of our remit and extensive local and regional network, has a key contribution to make in these structures.

14.5 INTEGRATED DELIVERY OF PUBLIC SERVICES

We support the development of integrated citizen-centred public services being co-ordinated by the Reach cross-departmental agency. This involves addressing the legislative and regulatory revisions necessary to support the data aspects of the initiative. Our commitment also involves co-operating with other departments and agencies in a variety of projects and initiatives to progress the integration of public services.

14.6 CIVIL REGISTRATION SERVICE

We, in co-operation with the Department of Health and Children, are working towards the development and implementation of a modern civil registration service, which includes the development of a modern body of legislation, the re-organisation of the civil registration service and the development of an online computer registration system. This is a key building block in the integration of public services and eGovernment with the objective of providing more convenient access to information and services.

14.7 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRES

We support local self-help and community development initiatives through a range of grant schemes and long-term funding programmes aimed at helping people develop the confidence and the capacity to participate as partners alongside statutory agencies and others in local development initiatives. We will continue to work closely with other agencies and departments to devise strategies and actions to support community development and to achieve greater integration, co-operation and consistency in addressing the needs of disadvantaged communities.

14.8 THE VOLUNTARY & COMMUNITY SECTOR

Implementing the recommendations within the "White Paper on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector" is a key element in the further development of this sector and is being pursued in conjunction with other relevant agencies. We work closely with the voluntary sector and relevant agencies to devise strategies and actions for supporting and developing volunteering across a broad spectrum of activity.

14.9 MONEY ADVICE & BUDGETING SERVICES

In co-operation with others, we will further develop our supports to customers in the management of their finances and in avoiding or eliminating over-indebtedness, in particular through the Money Advice and Budgeting Services which are available at a number of locations nationwide.

14.10 EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Supporting customers, including those on the live register, lone parents and people with disabilities, in their efforts to access employment, or become self-employed, is a key task for us. This requires co-operation in relation to identifying and addressing, in an integrated, progressive and systematic way, the often multiple and complex issues facing those seeking employment. We will encourage the maximum take-up by customers of education, training and work opportunities. In particular, we will work with FAS and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment to progress the Government's objectives as set out in the Employment Action Plan. We are working with the Department of Education and Science on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the white paper on Adult Education in relation to the provision of educational opportunities for our customers and are participating in the Task Force on Lifelong Learning which was set up under the PPF.

14.11 PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

We support the co-ordination of Government strategy for people with disabilities through participation in the inter-departmental committee being chaired by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. Other inter-agency initiatives include a feasibility study for a cost of disability payment and a specialist support group for disability issues.

14.12 CARERS

We will examine proposals to address personal long-term care funding and will co-operate with the Department of Health and Children and the Voluntary Sector to meet the wider needs of carers.

14.13 HOUSING

We are working with the Department of Environment and Local Government on the implementation of a new private sector rent assistance scheme, to be operated by the Local Authorities, which will replace current long-term Rent Supplement payments.

14.14 HOMELESSNESS

We will facilitate the necessary policy and business changes recommended by the Cross-Departmental Team on Homelessness as part of our support of the Team's Action Plans

14.15 CHILD EDUCATION SUPPORTS

Education is a central factor in personal and social development that facilitates people in leading a full life. It also influences a person's capacity to become financially self-sufficient. Children from low-income households can face particular difficulties in participating in education because of their lack of resources and this can reinforce disadvantage. In recognition of this, we operate a Child Education Support Programme to assist in providing school meals and in supporting low-income families with back to school clothing and footwear costs so that their children can participate in the education system to the maximum extent possible. We are working with the Department of Education and Science, the Department of Health and Children, the Local Authorities and the Health Boards, to review these schemes as part of our series of Programme Evaluations.

14.16 GUARANTEED MINIMUM INCOME

We are co-operating with the Health Boards and the Department of Health and Children to enhance the effectiveness of the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme and to rationalise administrative arrangements.

14.17 ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

We will continue to work with the Health Boards to provide supports and advice to asylum seekers, refugees and other non-nationals granted the right to remain in the State. Through our Community Development Programme, we will continue to support groups working with asylum seekers and refugees. We are also committed to working with the Reception and Integration Agency in providing services to asylum seekers and refugees.

14.18 ANTI-RACISM AND INTER-CULTURALISM

We participate in the Government's High-level Group on Anti-Racism. We will work with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, its relevant agencies and other groups to promote anti-racism and awareness of increasing cultural diversity. We will ensure through staff training and awareness raising that our services are provided in a manner that all of our customers find accessible, acceptable and culturally appropriate.

14.19 COMBATING DRUG ABUSE

The Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion oversees and supports, in particular through significant funding, a very wide range of initiatives in combating the drugs problem. We are represented on the National Drugs Strategy Team (NDST) whose remit is to ensure effective co-ordination between the departments and agencies involved in responding to this issue.

14.20 VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

We are represented on the National Steering Committee on Violence Against Women, which is under the aegis of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. The importance of community and family based strategies as an essential part of achieving a multi-dimensional response to women who are victims of violence is recognised.

14.21 ACCESS TO TRANSPORT

Lack of accessible rural transport can adversely affect many of our customers and, in particular, those who rely on the Free Travel Scheme. We will continue to pursue this issue in co-operation with other relevant agencies.

Strategy Statement 2001-2004

People, Policies, Services

Measuring and Evaluating
our Performance

15. MEASURING AND EVALUATING OUR PERFORMANCE

15.1 MONITORING OF BUSINESS PRIORITIES

We set out detailed targets and milestones for each business area in our annual Business Plans and these are monitored in the monthly Aireacht and SWS Reports. Indicators to be included in future Business Plans will be drawn up in line with this Strategy Statement and they will be focused on our High Level Goals and Objectives.

15.2 SERVICE STANDARDS

We have developed a series of Service Standards. These are monitored on a monthly basis and include Claim Processing, Customer Satisfaction and Control. The purpose of setting the standards is to achieve continuous improvement of service to our customers. These standards will be developed further over the lifetime of this Strategy Statement in the context of the Management Information Framework and other initiatives.

15.3 QUALITY MEASUREMENT – CUSTOMER CONSULTATION

As part of our programme of consultation with our customers we carry out surveys, provide comment cards in Local Offices and operate customer panels. In this way, we get feedback on the quality and efficiency of the service we provide. In addition, from time to time, we arrange for an independent survey of customers. The most recent survey carried out on our behalf by MRBI confirms that overall satisfaction levels with the service remain high. We will develop standards and measures of the quality of service delivery and report on these on an ongoing basis.

15.4 COMMITMENTS UNDER THE PROGRAMME FOR PROSPERITY AND FAIRNESS (PPF)

As part of the ongoing Civil Service Modernisation Programme we have submitted Performance Indicators to the Civil Service Quality Assurance Group, as required under the PPF. These Performance Indicators are reflected in this Strategy Statement.

15.5 HIGH LEVEL GOALS

In relation to the High Level Goals set out in chapter 6 we will apply the following performance indicators

Policies

- Meeting commitments consistent with the National Anti-Poverty Strategy
- Completion of the programme of legislation
- Completion of the series of Programme Evaluations
- Meeting commitments in Government Programme set out in the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness
- The development of the Research Programme
- Completion of the annual Budgetary and Estimates cycle.

Services

- Customer satisfaction measured through surveys (using the results in the 2001 National Customer Survey as a benchmark)
- Implementation of the Service Delivery Model
- Meeting the targets set out in our e-Government Strategy
- Meeting the Control targets.

People

- Measurement of staff satisfaction, innovation and participation measured through surveys and other methods.
- Extension and Evaluation of Partnership
- Implementation of the Performance Management and Development System
- Implementation of Worksharing arrangements
- Implementation of the Management Information Framework.

Strategy Statement 2001-2004

People, Policies, Services

Appendices

APPENDIX 1:

ORGANISATIONAL TARGETS FOR 2001

Activity		Standards	
NEW CLAIMS		CLEARANCE TIME (1)	VOLUME CONTEXT (3)
Old Age Contributory Pension		55% in 6 weeks	14,000
Retirement Pension		80% in 5 weeks	14,000
Widow/ers Contributory Pension		80% in 5 weeks	8,500
Old Age Non-Contributory Pension		65% in 8 weeks	11,500
Blind Person's Pension		65% in 8 weeks	220
Widow(er) Non-Contributory Pension		75% in 8 weeks	1,300
One-Parent Family Payment (Widow)		75% in 8 weeks	600
One-Parent Family Payment (Unmarried)		55% in 8 weeks	13,560
One-Parent Family Payment (Separated Spouse)		65% in 13 weeks	6,440
Carers Allowance		80% in 8 weeks	6,000
Free Electricity/Gas Allowance		70% in 7 weeks	39,000
Free Telephone Allowance		70% in 7 weeks	49,000
Free Travel – new pass		90% in 4 weeks	16,000
Free Travel – replacement pass		90% in 2 weeks	10,000
Unemployment Benefit		85% in 2 weeks	120,000
Unemployment Assistance		70% in 2 weeks	120,000
Disability Benefit		90% in 1 week	200,000
Occupational Injury Benefit		80% in 4 weeks	18,000
Treatment Benefit (2)		90% in 2 weeks	684,000
Child Benefit		90% in 1 week	168,000
Maternity Benefit (before commencement of Benefit period)		80% -	28,000
Family Income Supplement		70% in 3 weeks	18,000
Invalidity Pension		70% in 9 weeks	7,500
Disability Allowance		70% in 9 weeks	12,000
Telephone Service		90% of calls to be answered within 10 seconds	
Replies to Public Representatives		80% within 3 working weeks	
Issue of Contribution Records to members of public		60% in 5 days	
Customer Satisfaction		90% overall satisfaction with service delivery	
ARREARS			
PSO	80% within 3 weeks of claim being put in payment		54,000
Longford	80% within 3 weeks of claim being put in payment		24,000

(1) Clearance time: Elapsed time from date of receipt of claim to date of decision.

(2) This relates to all optical claims and 40% of dental claims where pre-treatment claims are submitted.

(3) Volume context: Annual Claim Volume

2001 CONTROL TARGETS (TOTAL £218M)

SCHEMES	SAVINGS £M	REVIEWS
Unemployment	100.0	110,000
Illness	40.0	150,200
Pensions	50.0	31,300
Child Benefit	4.5	140,000
PRETA/FIS/Farm Assist	0.5	16,500
SWA	9.0	-
Carers	2.0	1,000
Total	206.0	449,000
PAYE/PRSI	12.00	10,000
Overall Total:	218.00	459,000
Employer Inspections:		10,000 – all categories
General Inspections		8,000
SIU/JIU		2,000

SOCIAL WELFARE SCHEMES & SERVICES

The number of Recipients in December 2000* and Annual Payments* for the various Social Welfare Schemes and Services are:

*Statistics Report December 2000

1. Retired and Elderly:

Payments of £1.3 billion (€1.65 billion) to over 268,000 customers

Payments of £161 million (€204 million) to over 1.25 million Free Scheme recipients

Including the following schemes:

Retirement Pension: payments to 78,000 customers (£468 million/€594 million)

Old Age (Contributory) Pension: payments to 86,000 customers (£454 million/€576 million)

Old Age (Non-Contributory) Pension: payments to 90,000 customers (£359million/€456million)

Pre-Retirement Allowance: payments of to 13,000 customers (£62 million/€79 million)

Free Schemes (free travel, electricity, telephone etc.) payments to over 1.25 million customers (£161 million/€204 million)

2. Widows, Widowers and One-Parent Families: Payments of £996 million (€1.26 billion) to over 220,000 customers

Including the following schemes:

Widow/er's (Contributory) Pension: payments to 100,000 customers (£470 million/€596million)

One-Parent Family payments to 74,000 customers (£378 million/€480 million)

Widow/er's (Non-Contributory) Pension: payments to 17,000 customers (£76 million/€96 million)

Deserted Wife's Benefit: payments to 12,000 customers (£66 million/€84 million)

Deserted Wife's Allowance: payments to 1,000 customers (£6 million/€8 million)

3. Child-Related Payments: Payments of £554 million (€703 million) to over 510,000 families in receipt of Child Benefit and a further 9,000 customers receiving other benefits.

Including the following schemes:

Child Benefit: payments to 510,800 families (£502 million/€637 million)

Maternity Benefit: payments to 6,000 customers (£46 million/€58 million)

Orphan's (Contributory) Allowance: payments to 1,000 customers (£5million/€6 million)

Orphan's (Non-Contributory) Allowance: payments to 740 customers (£1million/€1.3 million)

Adoptive Benefit: payments to 10 customers (£146,000/€188,000)

Health and Safety Benefit: payments to 30 customers (£135,000/€171,400)

4. Illness, Disability and Caring: Payments of £826 million (€1.05 billion) to over 168,000 customers

Including the following schemes:

Incapacity Pension: payments to 48,000 customers (£245 million/€311 million)

Disability Benefit: payments to 47,000 customers (£221 million/€281 million)

Injury Benefit: payments to 1,300 customers (£8 million/€10 million)

Disablement Benefit: payments to 11,000 customers (£40 million/€51million)

Death Benefit: payments to 665 customers (£3 million/€4 million)

Disability Allowance: payments to 54,000 customers (£220 million/€279 million)

Carer's Allowance: payments to 16,000 customers (£78 million/€99 million)

Blind Person's Pension: payments to 2,200 customers (£10 million/€12 million)

Carer's Benefit: payments to 50 customers (£28,000/€35,550)

Note: Free Schemes apply to some customers in this category. All Free Scheme information consolidated in Section 1

5. Unemployment and Employment Support Services: Payments of £802 million (€1.02 billion) to over 180,000 customers

Including the following schemes:

Unemployment Assistance: payments to 69,000 customers (£369 million/€468 million)

Unemployment Benefit: payments to 46,000 customers (£209 million/€265 million)

Back to Work Allowance to 34,000 customers

Area-Based Enterprise Allowance to 4,500 customers

Back to Education Allowance to 4,000 customers

Part-Time Job Incentive Scheme to 450 customers

payments of £161 million/€204 million

Farm Assist: payments to 8,000 customers (£32 million/€40 million)

Family Income Supplement to 13,000 customers (£31million/€39 million)

6. Supplementary Welfare Allowance: Payments of £232 million (€294 million) to over 25,000 customers

7. Miscellaneous Benefits, Allowances & Services: Treatment Benefit payments of £46 million (€58 million) to over 183,000 customers and payments of over £51 million (€65 million) in relation to other allowances and services

Including the following schemes:

Treatment Benefits (optical, dental and hearing aids): payments to 183,000 customers (£46 million/€58 million)

Rent Allowance: payments to 470 customers (£599,000/€760,450)

School Meals: payments of £1.14million (€1.45million)

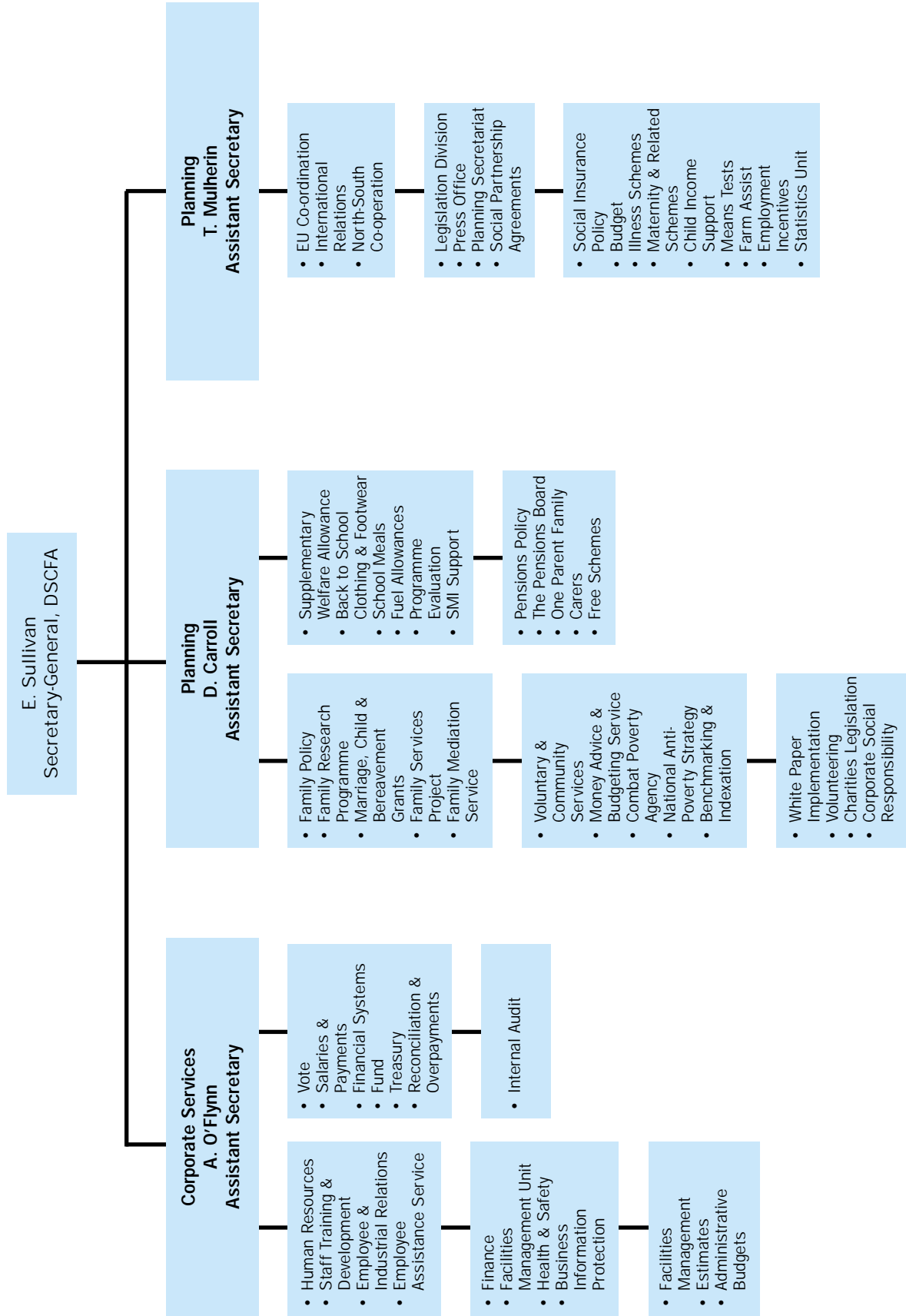
Grants to Voluntary and Community Organisations of £26 million (€33 million)

Family Mediation Service at a cost of £4 million (€5 million)

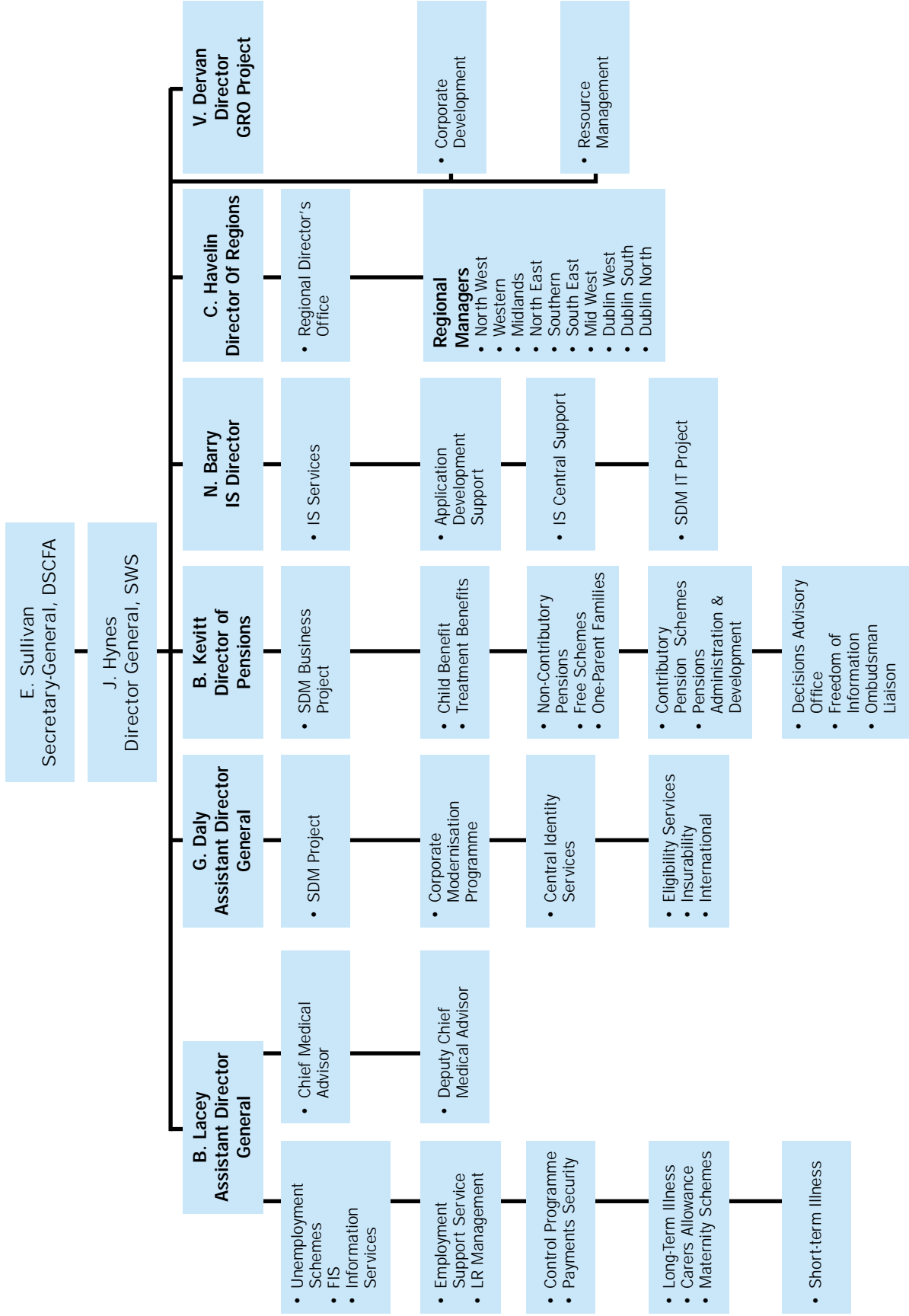
Community Development Programme: payments of £2 million (€2.5million)

Redundancy and Insolvency (administered by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment): payments to customers of £18 million (€22.9 million)

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE – AIREACHT



ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE – SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICES



Further copies of this document may be obtained from:

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