



Minister Mary Coughlan welcomes further computerisation of Social Welfare records

Checking your social welfare entitlements will be faster and easier as a new computerised records systems goes live.

The new system pioneered by Social and Family Affairs Minister, Mary Coughlan, will provide citizen's social insurance records dating back over twenty years at the touch of a button.

The project which is vital for better and faster customer services is one of a number of special projects detailed in the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Mary Coughlan's annual departmental report published today.

"Over 4.3million images, which had been stored on paper and microfilm, are being scanned into the new super-computer system and will shortly be available at the touch of a button. This will ensure that customer records are quickly and easily accessible, leading to my own goal of providing a better and more customer friendly service coupled to administrative savings," said Minister Mary Coughlan today.

The 2002 annual report, in both Irish and English, details the Department's expenditure of over €9.5billion – an increase of 21% on expenditure in the previous year – in addition to details of the services offered, the range of people with whom the Department deals and the evolving role of the Department.

In 2002 -

- More than 925,000 people received a weekly social welfare payment
- Over 500,000 families received child benefit during the year
- More than 1.4million people were recipients of Free Schemes including electricity, travel and phone rental.

"I welcome the publication of the 2002 Annual Report of the Department, which demonstrates our ability and our record of delivery of policies which are making real changes in the lives of those dependent on social welfare," Minister Coughlan said.

The Department undertook a number of major projects during 2002, among them a project to computerise pre-1979 insurance records using the latest technology. Over 4.3 million microfilm images of records have been captured and are in the process of being transferred to the Department's central computer database.

Under the Families Research Programme, five projects were completed and launched during 2002, with another four projects scheduled for completion in 2003.

The Family Support Agency was launched in 2002 to further the family role of the Department's responsibilities. Minister Coughlan said: "I look forward to the role it will



play in providing assistance and information through a national professional network of family support organisations and services.”

The first Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance Fund was completed during 2002. The main purpose of the review is to consider the adequacy of the current rates of contribution to the Fund, both now and in the future, taking account of forecast demographic and other developments.

2002 was a particularly significant year for the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS). In February, the revised NAPS was launched and the implementation of this revised plan is supported by a new set of institutional structures. Key to this is the Office of Social Inclusion which, during 2002, took over the responsibilities of the NAPS Unit in the Department of Social and Family Affairs.

The Money Advice and Budgeting Services, now operates nationwide after opening two more offices bringing the total to 52 offices nationally. This service was used by more than 11,000 new customers in 2002.

One of the most important developments in the Health and Safety area in 2002 was the introduction of a No Smoking policy in all buildings in the Department of Social and Family Affairs.

Ag ullmhú don Bhile na dTeangacha Oifigiúla (Comhionannas) leanagh le traenáil I nGaeilge I mbliana 2002. Cuireadh ranndrár fé leith d’ábhar Ghaeilge ar fáil a thugann rochtain do chuile dhuine san Roinn agus a chuireann eolas nuashonraithe ar fáil.

ENDS August 3rd 2003