



Hanafin launches Customer Charter & revamped website

Responding to customer needs while delivering expanded services - Hanafin

Almost a quarter of a million people are visiting the Department of Social and Family Affairs new website every month, which was formally launched today by Minister Mary Hanafin T.D. This figure is almost twice as many hits on the site compared with previous years. **“Responding to increasing numbers of customers needs and improving productivity through technology is our key priority”** said Minister Hanafin.

The Minister said that **“delivering a quality customer service to all our citizens, who access services from the cradle to the grave, is the daily challenge for the staff at the Department. Setting out our commitments to each and every customer with the launch of the Customer Charter and Customer Action Plan is a sign of how seriously we take the responsibility of delivering a quality service.”**

The new Customer Charter sets out the standards of service that people can expect in their dealings with the Department. It will be displayed in all of the Departments offices and on the website. The Customer Action plan sets out the Department’s aims and actions for the next three years and is a key part of the Government’s objective of attaining greater efficiency in delivering



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public services in an affordable way and using modern technology to best effect.

Minister Hanafin was speaking to customer representative groups who regularly participate in consultation and discussion forums to help develop customer services, such as the new website and charter. **“There is no doubt that the increasing Live Register numbers is having an impact on the services we are providing to people. Many customers are visiting Social Welfare offices and accessing the website for the first time in their working lives to seek information on their entitlements. While some areas of the country are seeing delays in processing the huge numbers of claims for Jobseekers payments, we are looking all the time at improving our processes in local and branch offices. We will continue to seek to make improvements in order to reduce waiting times for deciding on claims.”**

The Minister said that using new technologies and providing ease of access to information for customers at a time that suits them is at the core of the decision to modernise the website www.welfare.ie. **“The new website is easy to use and provides the most up to date information for all users, including employers, Citizens Information Services and advocate groups. It was also recently awarded the 2009 Irish eGovernment award for Most Accessible Government website. Having all this information at your fingertips also**



cuts down on the delays associated with getting information booklets printed and updated, which will ultimately cut down on costs.”

Tackling fraud at every stage of claim processing is also an important element of customer service, said Minister Hanafin.

“While every effort is being made to process claims as quickly as possible, it is essential that a quality customer service is accompanied by an effective control programme which ensures that the appropriate checks are made at the point of claim so as to prevent and minimise the risk of fraud.”

Minister Hanafin said that over the past few months an additional 246 staff have been assigned to local offices and the Inspectorate. Four central decisions units have been established in Sligo, Townsend Street, Finglas and Carrick-on-Shannon, to specifically decide claims for Jobseekers Benefits and Allowances from offices around the country experiencing backlogs in claims. A further three similar units are planned for Wexford, Roscommon and Tallaght in the coming months.

Minister Hanafin said that despite the major increase in claim loads for local offices throughout the country, there has been a significant increase in productivity. **“The number of claims processed in local offices in the first three months of this year was over 155,000 compared with 86,000 in the same**



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period last year. This represents an increase of over 80%.”

The total number of claims processed in local offices in 2008 was around 509,000, compared with just under 360,000 in 2007.

Minister Hanafin concluded by saying that she has visited a number of Social Welfare local offices throughout the country, and has seen for herself the enormous efforts that staff making to deliver services to customers. **“Staff throughout the country are consistently stepping up to deliver services locally, and as I have said in the past, staff are working ‘flat out’ to meet the many demands being made of them at this particularly busy time. Having the Customer Charter and Customer Action Plan in place will mean our customers can see for themselves how these vital services can be delivered.”**

ENDS

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Examples of some of the new procedures and processes being delivered by the Department of Social and Family Affairs include:

- State Contributory pensioners can complete and submit a claim online, and also apply for the Household Benefits package online;
- Requests for a copy of social insurance record available online;
- Jobseekers can download and complete a form at home and bring it to their local office, thus reducing queuing times.
- Statements of benefit paid can be requested online and via SMS text message
- SMS Text messaging for forms request. (full list of SMS services available at <http://www.welfare.ie/EN/ContactUs/Pages/smstextservices.aspx>)
- Streamlined process for people who had a claim in previous two years
- More straight-forward procedures for providing evidence of identity and address when making claims
- Streamlined procedures for people moving to Jobseekers Allowance when their Jobseekers Benefit expires
- Appointment system for taking claims in some 14 local offices, which will be extended to more offices in the coming months.