



NEWS RELEASE

9 APRIL 2008

CULLEN - APPEALS OFFICE ANNUAL REPORT PUBLISHED

Martin Cullen TD, Minister for Social and Family Affairs has welcomed the most recent annual report published by the Social Welfare Appeals Office today (9 April 2008) which confirms that just 14,070 appeals were registered to the Office – out of payments made to a possible 1 million weekly social welfare customers - involving almost 50 different schemes in 2007. Minister Cullen made his remarks at the launch of the Social Welfare Appeals Office Annual Report. The Report contains statistical data on the work of the Social Welfare Appeals Office during last year. The Appeals office operates as an independent entity outside of the remit of the Department.

Minister Cullen TD said: "The Department's income and support services impact on the lives of almost every person in the state. Given the fact that over 50 separate welfare schemes and services are administered by the Department and that the administration of these schemes involves the processing of 1.9 million applications in any one year, I welcome the 2007 Annual Report of the Appeals Office which shows that just 14,070 of the Department's customers choose to make an appeal last year on a decision made in relation to a payment."

The Minister added: "The decision staff in the Department are committed to meeting the needs of a diverse customer base and while every effort is made by the Department to deliver entitlements to people it is understandable that not everyone will agree with the decisions made on their claims." The Minister added: "Access to an independent review mechanism for those who are dissatisfied with a decision given on their social welfare entitlements is a fundamental feature of our social security system and is vital. I welcome the commitment of the Social Welfare Appeals Office in providing that important service to the social welfare customers who seek it."

The 2007 figures show appeal outcomes by category: (for example)

INVALIDITY PENSION

In 2007, **8,116 applications** for Invalidity Pension were received. In relation to the 506 appeals processed in 2007, **281 were allowed** by the Appeals Office.



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OCCUPATIONAL INJURIES

In 2007, **18,931 applications** were received for Occupational Injuries payments, (which includes Injury Benefit, Disablement Pension and Death Benefits). In relation to the 456 appeals processed in 2007, **184 were allowed** by the Appeals Office.

ONE PARENT FAMILY PAYMENT

In 2007, **17,876 applications** were received for One Parent Family Payment. In relation to the 866 appeals processed in 2007, **111 were allowed** by the Appeals Office.

ILLNESS BENEFIT

In 2007, **305,912 applications** were received for Illness Benefit. In relation to the **2,556** appeals processed in 2007, **475 were allowed** by the Appeals Office.

DISABILITY ALLOWANCE

In 2007, **19,989 applications** were received for Disability Allowance. In relation to the **2,754** appeals processed in 2007, **536 were allowed** by the Appeals Office.

The Appeals Office operates independently of the Department of Social and Family Affairs. It deals with appeals on decisions made in regard to entitlement to benefits under the Social Welfare Acts and questions regarding the insurability of employment. It also provides an appeals service to the Health Service Executive relating to Supplementary Welfare Allowance.

Copies of the Social Welfare Appeals Office Annual Report 2007 can be accessed on the website <http://www.socialwelfareappeals.ie>

ENDS (See Editor's Note overleaf)

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Notes for Editors:

The Social Welfare Appeals Office is based in D'Olier House, D'Olier Street, Dublin 2 and has a staff of 60 headed by a Chief Appeals Officer.

The annual report for 2007 provides a detailed statistical analysis of the Office's performance in processing appeals during that year, including trends in:

- appeals received - 14,070 appeals were received in 2007 compared with 13,800 in 2006, a 2% increase.
- appeals disposed of - 13,845 comprising 1,688 appeals which were withdrawn, 3,419 which were given the benefit of a revised decision by the Deciding Officers in the Department of Social and Family Affairs and 8,738 which were decided by Appeals Officers.
- reviews by Deciding Officers - Part of the appeals procedure involves a review by the Deciding Officer, who made the original decision, prior to the appeal going before an Appeals Officer. Frequently, new evidence becomes available in the course of an appeal and a revised decision is possible. There were 3,419 such revisions in 2007.
- appeal outcomes - 12% of appeals were withdrawn and 25% were revised by Deciding Officers. 47% of appeals had a favourable outcome compared to 46% in 2006.
- appeal processing times - it took an average of 22 weeks to dispose of an appeal (up from 21 in 2006). However, many cases take longer due to legal matters, medical considerations, additional investigations etc. If the 25% most protracted appeals are disregarded, the average falls to 14 weeks. [Note: The appeals system is judicial in nature and due process must be followed. There is very limited scope for fast-tracking cases.]
- oral hearings - 63% of appeals determined by Appeals Officers were dealt with by way of an oral hearing compared to 65% in 2006.

The Report details meetings and consultations held during 2007 with Appeals Officers and with the Decisions Advisory Office of the Department. This dialogue has proved to be an effective means of ensuring consistency in Appeals Officers' decisions and also of



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resolving difficulties and anomalies in the interpretation of legislation or policy.

The Report also provides a number of case histories which serve to give an understanding and an insight into the appeals process. A larger number of case histories are published on the Appeals Office website available at www.socialwelfareappeals.ie. Details of court proceedings and judgements during 2007 are also published in the report.

ENDS