



Department of Social and Family Affairs

Value For Money In Public Services - Mary Coughlan Minister For Social And Family Affairs

Mary Coughlan, TD, Minister for Social and Family Affairs today urged value for money in public services as she opened the second national conference of Comhairle, the statutory body with responsibility for the provision of information, advice and advocacy services.

"Today we are facing straitened economic times. There are more and increasing demands on the public purse - and priorities must be set. Expectations from individuals, for organisations and services are higher than ever before - and there must be a realisation in the public demesne that growth of expectation must slow in line with the growth in public expenditure.

"It is incumbent on us to also ensure that for every Euro of public money spent that we deliver one Euro's value to the public in return" said Minister Coughlan.

"The establishment and continued development of Comhairle is part of this Government's commitment to mainstreaming the delivery of public services. I have underwritten my commitment to Comhairle by overseeing an ever expanding budget. Over the past few years, funding for Comhairle has risen substantially from nearly 13m in 2001 to more than 17m this year.

"I would urge you to diligently assess how you spend your Budget and to ensure that the service you provide is not replicating information services already in place. I would urge you to put in place an audit of service, and question the value for money you provide to the public," Minister Coughlan said at the Limerick conference today.

Addressing the work of the conference Minister Coughlan said: "The theme you have chosen for your conference 'Information - Gateway to Inclusion' is a very fitting one. This government is committed to building an inclusive society. As a public representative I see on a weekly basis how people's rights and entitlements are affected by the quality of information available to them."

"Over the past eighteen months I have visited a number of your centres and I must say how impressed I was on these visits at the dedication and professionalism of all the people I met - whether paid staff or volunteers - every one of you working together as a team to bring a quality service to our citizens. I note that queries to Citizen Information Centres have increased to 476,000 or by 23% on the previous year's figure - a significant increase by any standard.

"One of the things that never fails to amaze me is the number of volunteers working throughout the CIC network. This is something that as an organisation I would urge you to strive to hold on to and to treasure, their experience and expertise should be harnessed and valued," said Minister Coughlan.

ENDS

October 17th 2003

Note for Editor

Comhairle is the statutory body with responsibility for the provision of information, advice and advocacy services and was established in 2000. It combines the functions of the former National Social Service Board and certain functions of the National Rehabilitation Board. It was established in the context of the Government's policy of mainstreaming services for people with disabilities. The policy is designed to ensure



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that services for people with disabilities are provided by agencies that deliver services to the whole community.

It supports the development and work of the national network of Citizens Information Centres and in particular, the establishment of full-time key centres. It currently supports 39 key centres, 47 other centres and 117 outreach centres.

The main functions of Comhairle are:

- To support the provision of independent information, advice and advocacy services.
- To assist and support individuals, in particular those with disabilities, in identifying and understanding their needs and options and in accessing their entitlements to social services.
- To promote greater accessibility, co-ordination and public awareness of social services and of information, advice and advocacy services provided in relation to such services.
- To support, promote and develop the provision of information on the effectiveness of current social policy and services and to highlight issues of concern to users of those services.
- To promote and support the development of voluntary bodies providing social services including, where appropriate, the provision of financial and other resources such as integrated information, training and development services.