



Hanafin hopes agreement on local decisions can be implemented to help speed up Jobseekers claims

Minister for Social and Family Affairs Mary Hanafin T.D., today (18th September 2009) said that every effort is being made to reduce the waiting times for customers seeking Jobseekers payments. The Minister acknowledged that there are a small number of offices around the country which have unacceptably lengthy delays, but that measures are being put in place to address this. The national average processing times are currently 4 weeks for Jobseekers Benefit and just over 7 weeks for Jobseekers Allowance, which is a means tested payment.

Minister Hanafin said **“I know that processing times in some areas are unduly long but I want to assure the public that everything is being done to reduce them. Means testing claims is a detailed and complex process. Waiting times for some offices, such as Edenderry Branch Office with 22 weeks for Jobseekers Allowance, is unacceptable. However, an additional Inspector has been allocated to deal with means testing claims from this office and hundreds of outstanding claims are also being sent to one of the newly established new Local Office Support Units in an effort to get the claims processed.”**

Minister Hanafin said that three industrial relations issues had been ongoing, and in recent weeks that two were successfully dealt with and there was one issue which she hoped could be resolved as quickly as possible.

The Minister said that an outstanding issue with the CPSU (*Civil and Public Service Union*) affecting the processing of claims taken in Branch Offices around the country, is due to be considered by Arbitration shortly. **“An agreement with**



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Branch Office Managers that they would decide certain categories of straightforward jobseeker's claims, rather than delaying the process by having to send them to Social Welfare Local Offices for decision was agreed as far back as March 2008, as part of the Department's Modernisation Action Plan. The initiative was similarly agreed with the CPSU. The Union subsequently refused to implement the initiative. They claimed that this would be outsourcing of the civil servants' work, as Branch Offices are not staffed by civil servants, rather they are run by branch managers operating them under a contract for service.

It would be in the interests of all of our customers and of staff that this issue be resolved as quickly as possible” said the Minister.

Since May 2008, some 350 extra staff have been assigned to local Social Welfare offices, new Local Office Support Units and the Departments Inspectorate.

Of these, some 190 have been assigned since January 2009 as follows:

16 Social Welfare Inspectors were assigned in March 2009 to various locations around the country to undertake means testing and other work associated with processing claims for the jobseekers allowance.

68 posts have also been assigned to date for Local Office Central Support Units in 6 locations.

Some 110 posts have been assigned to Local Offices around the country, some of which have been filled by temporary staff, pending the assignment of permanent staff. In addition arrangements are also in train to allocate a further 24 Inspector posts.



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The Minister went on to say **“the Department is continuing to monitor staffing levels and to assign staff as required. In addition, processes and procedures surrounding the taking of claims and claims decisions are being reviewed constantly and where efficiencies can be achieved new, streamlined procedures are being introduced.”**

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