



## **Department of Social and Family Affairs**

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### **Customer Service Commitments Reinforced – Minister Mary Coughlan TD**

Mary Coughlan TD, Minister for Social and Family Affairs, today launched her Department's Customer Charter and Customer Action Plan 2004 – 2007. These two documents combined represents a blueprint for continued development of services provided to customers over the next three years.

"My Department is one of the biggest service providers in the country," Minister Coughlan said. "We make payments to over 938,000 people every week and we process 1.7million claim transactions annually."

The Department's Customer Action Plan 2004 – 2007 sets out what the Department proposes to do over the next three years to develop our services in line with quality customer service principles. The Customer Charter will be a public statement about the Department's standards and services which will endeavour to translate quality customer service developments into meaningful improvements for customers and will also require that progress in meeting the standards is evaluated and reported upon.

Speaking about the 70 customer panel meetings held by the Department of Social and Family Affairs around the country, Minister Coughlan said: "At the core of any effective Customer Charter initiative is a customer comment and complaint system. This type of feedback is essential to enable us to focus on a continuing improvement in our service and a number of areas where improvements are needed have been identified as a result of that system."

Recent developments include a commitment that communications with visually impaired customers will use the method that suits them best. Improvements centre around telephone and email facilities with, for example, applications for Blind Person's Pension and Free Schemes now accepted over the phone. Technology is currently being put in place to enable communication using Braille.

Another recent development has been the funding of the services of a 'Plain English' expert from the National Adult Literacy Agency in order to review all our information products and application forms to ensure they meet relevant standards.

In addition, in line with eGovernment strategy, the Department's website at [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie) is fully compliant with "Triple A" accessibility for people with disabilities.

The Customer Charter will be displayed in poster form in all Social Welfare Local Offices and will also be available in leaflet format for customers to take away with them.

ENDS May 19<sup>th</sup> 2004