



Department of Social and Family Affairs

Welfare Queries Top The List As Almost 680,000 Citizens Seek Advice Through Network Of Information Services

Minister Brennan Pays Tribute To Work Of Volunteers As He Launches Tipperary Citizens Information Service

The Minister for Social Affairs, Séamus Brennan, today released statistics showing that the nationwide network of Citizens Information Services and Centres dealt with almost 680,000 queries last year – 40% more than in 2002.

Minister Brennan, speaking during an official visit to Co. Tipperary, said that according to the latest research, social welfare queries accounted for almost one third of all queries, followed by employment, health services and health payments.

The statistics show:

- In 2004 a total of 676,846 queries were received by the Citizens Information Service through its network of 98 centres and 143 outreach services **(see county breakdown attached)**.
- Queries received by the Citizens Information Phone Service - LoCall 1890 777 121 - increased by 75% last year to 73,000.
- The OASIS website, which provides information on the social and civil rights of all citizens in Ireland, was accessed 1.8million times - an increase of 80%.
- Independent analysis shows that of the 676,846 queries received by the Citizens Information Services network, Social Welfare issues accounted for 30%, Employment 13%, Health Services 9% and Health Board Payments 7%. The balance was made up from Family Matters, Law & Justice, Housing, Tax, Education, Consumer Issues and Debt.



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Minister Brennan said: "These latest statistics clearly demonstrate the extent of the public's need for information on entitlements and rights. The Citizens Information Centres and outreach services provide a valuable and easily accessible network of information points that reach into every corner of the country. The provision of information on the scale provided helps break down barriers, eases anxieties, opens up opportunities and often clears the way for citizens, particularly those who are most vulnerable in society, to improve their situations. When you consider that over 970,000 payments are made by my Department each week that in total benefit more than 1.5 million men, women and children, it is understandable why queries on welfare rights and entitlements should make up almost one third of overall information and advice queries."

Minister Brennan officially launched the County Tipperary Citizens Information Service (CIS) in Thurles and also formally opened the renovated premises of Thurles Citizens Information Centre (CIC). Both are part of the national network of citizens' information services supported by Comhairle, the statutory body operating under the aegis of the Department of Social Affairs, with responsibility for the provision of information, advice and advocacy services. This year the Department is providing funding to Comhairle of €21million - €3 million more than in 2004 - nearly €9 million of which is earmarked for Citizens Information Services.

The Minister paid a special tribute to the solid foundations that have been laid by the volunteers, and other staff, in the various Citizens Information Centres throughout Ireland. He said these volunteers remain at the heart of the service and continue to give freely of their time and energies in order to ensure that the people can access information on their rights and entitlements and can be assured of helpful advice as they seek to work their way through often complex situations.

County Tipperary Citizens Information Service was formed after a series of meetings in 1999/2000 with representatives of Tipperary's five Citizens Information Centres and members of various statutory and voluntary organisations. The number of queries it receives from the public continues to grow rapidly, with the CIS responding to 24,598 queries last year, an increase of 36% on the previous year. The service is provided in fully accessible CIC centres in Thurles, Clonmel, Tipperary, Roscrea and Nenagh, with outreach services provided on a weekly basis in Carrick on Suir, Cahir and Cashel. The CIS has been allocated funding of €299,000 this year, €61,000 more than in 2004.

Press Release ENDS



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NOTE FOR INFORMATION:

County Analysis of Queries Received by Citizens Information Services in 2004:

County	Queries
Carlow	11,670
Cavan	6,312
Clare	24,821
Cork	40,833
Donegal	47,626
Dublin	217,151
Galway	25,031
Kerry	15,272
Kildare	22,829
Kilkenny	9,737
Laois	20,794
Leitrim	8,384
Limerick	30,708
Longford	8,099
Louth	15,081
Mayo	19,613
Meath	15,722
Monaghan	18,486
Offaly	12,808
Roscommon	9,767
Sligo	9,647
Tipperary	24,598
Waterford	16,703
Westmeath	18,172
Wexford	18,181
Wicklow	8,801
Total	676,846

Comhairle

Comhairle is the statutory body, operating under the aegis of the Department of Social and Family Affairs, with responsibility for the provision of independent information, advice and advocacy relating to social and civil services, for all citizens throughout the country. The nationwide network of Citizens Information Centres and the Citizens Information Phone Service, supported by Comhairle, are an essential force in the provision of these services.



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Comhairle provides a range of information resources including the Citizens Information Database, the Oasis (On-line Access to Services, Information and Support) website – oasis.gov.ie, the Resource Database for the Voluntary and Community Sector and a range of publications.

Its website is comhairle.ie

Citizens Information Phone Service - LoCall number: 1890 777 121

The Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS) provides a full range of information on rights and entitlements and on state and other social services. The service is available from Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 9.00pm.