



**NEW WELFARE OFFICES OPEN IN SLIGO & LEITRIM TO ACCOMMODATE
OVER 250 STAFF AS PART OF DECENTRALISATION PLAN**

***SEAMUS BRENNAN – OPENING OF NEW OFFICES REFLECTS STEADY
PROGRESS BEING MADE IN DELIVERING ON DECENTRALISATION
COMMITMENTS***

Minister for Social Affairs, Seamus Brennan, TD, said today that the immediate relocation of at least 250 staff to new Social Welfare Offices in Sligo and Carrick-on-Shannon was a very clear statement of the solid progress the Government is making in delivering on its decentralisation programme.

Minister Brennan was speaking when officially opening the new €10 million extension to the Social Welfare Services Office in Sligo town that will accommodate up to 100 decentralised staff, as well as 60 existing staff who are relocating from other accommodation in the town.

Minister Brennan also visited the newly completed offices of the Department of Social and Family Affairs in Carrick-on-Shannon which will be ready for occupation by almost 130 decentralised staff in early April. Mr. Tom Parlon T.D., Minister of State at the Department of Finance, also attended the ceremonies.

Minister Brennan said: "Today is a landmark day for Sligo, Carrick-on-Shannon and for the decentralisation programme overall.

"These are just two of six locations to which the Department of Social and Family Affairs is committed under the programme of decentralisation. The decentralising



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of some 250 staff immediately to Sligo and Carrick-on-Shannon, rising by a further 100 in the near future, is a clear indication of the determined and solid progress being made in the delivering of the decentralisation programme.

“We are also making steady progress with the other locations to which my Department is committed under the programme. Discussions are advancing on a site identified in Drogheda: a contractor is expected on site by this June for offices in Buncrana; the purchase of a site in Donegal town is at an advanced stage, and plans for the new office in Carrickmacross has been approved by the Office of Public Works. So the solid evidence on the ground is that decentralisation is happening, as towns like Sligo and Carrick-on-Shannon, can now clearly see on the ground and as many others will witness in the near future.

“It should also be remembered when assessing decentralisation that in my Department of Social and Family Affairs up to 70% of the entire staff of over 4,500 are either in decentralised offices (25%) or in regional or local offices (44%), with just over 30% based in central offices in Dublin.”

The number of staff in the Sligo Social Welfare Services Office has almost doubled since mid-1989, when the office first opened for business following on from the initial Government decision to decentralise civil service sections and jobs. Some 320 staff moved to Sligo at that time and there are now some 600 staff in the Department’s largest headquarters building outside of Dublin.

The new extension has added significantly to the Department’s capacity to deliver more services from the Sligo office with the Information Service, Payments



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Delivery Section, Internal Audit and part of the Staff Development Unit all working out of Sligo. Last year, in excess of EUR6 billion was disbursed through schemes administered by the office and as would be expected with such a large customer base, staff deal with a huge volume of telephone calls and enquiries – last year amounting to over 1 million incoming telephone calls alone.

Minister Brennan said that over the years the Sligo office has made a very valuable contribution to the implementation and delivery of new policy initiatives focused on the Department's customers. In addition, the recent transfer of operations to Sligo was completed with the minimum of disruption to the Department's customers.

Social Welfare schemes administered by the Social Welfare Services Office in Sligo include State Pension payments for about 330,000 recipients, One Parent Family Payments for 84,000 recipients, Widow/Widowers payments to 114,000 recipients, Free Travel for 640,000 recipients and about 960,000 recipients under the Household Benefits Scheme.

Minister Brennan also welcomed the forthcoming occupation of the Department's office in Carrick-on-Shannon by some 130 staff – the office is due to open on April 17th next. He stressed that the Department of Social and Family Affairs is committed to fulfilling its obligation under the Decentralisation Programme to relocate a total of 225 posts to Carrick-on-Shannon.

The areas of the Department that will be relocating to Carrick-on-Shannon will be the Decision Advisory Office, Freedom of Information Unit, Client Identity



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Services, Labour Market Unit, Overpayment & Debt Management Unit, Employment Support Services, Control Division & Central Prosecutions and the Maintenance Recovery Unit.

Press Release Ends