



**Review Of €700m A Year Welfare Allowance “Safety Net”  
Scheme Recommends More Streamlined Delivery Of Vital  
Income Supports**

***Minister Brennan Says Government Committed To Reforms  
That Shape System To Best Meet Needs & Pressures Of 21<sup>ST</sup>  
Century Ireland***

The Minister for Social Affairs, Seamus Brennan T.D., today launched the findings of a major review of the Supplementary Welfare Allowance Scheme (SWA) carried out under the Government’s Expenditure Review Initiative.

The Supplementary Welfare Allowance, introduced almost 30 years ago, has become an integral part of the overall welfare system with a clear “safety net” role in terms of providing front line payments and supports to help alleviate poverty and social exclusion.

Over 110,000 people receive a supplementary welfare payment each week under a number of headings, including Rent and Mortgage Interest Supplements, heat, travel, urgent needs and basic weekly payments. The report includes a detailed breakdown of the payments under each heading. Last year the total cost of the support scheme was more than €700 million. It is delivered by some 700 Community Welfare Officers, working within the Community Welfare Service of the Health Service Executive, from over 1000 locations countrywide.

Minister Brennan said; “The SWA system is a vital support lifeline every week for tens of thousands of people who find themselves in difficult circumstances, as the breakdown in this report of payments so graphically shows. However, it is over 30 years since the whole system was reformed and in that time Ireland as a country has changed dramatically. Our population is growing steadily; immigration has replaced emigration and a whole range of new social issues, pressures and needs have emerged. Recently, the Government took the first step in bringing about reforms by



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deciding to transfer the functions of Community Welfare Officers from the Health Services Executive to my Department. This report, which I welcome, now lays out the roadmap for the reforming of the operation of the system to ensure that it delivers a co-ordinated, targeted and flexible service best shaped to meet the needs of Ireland in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. With some EUR700 million of taxpayer's money being invested each it is also crucially important that the scheme delivers the best possible value for money.

While maintaining its valuable role as a welfare safety net for those who may otherwise face hardship or destitution, it is important that the system for the future is focused on providing the supports and activation measures that will bring people towards a better place in life and offer fresh hopes and new beginnings. Just as we are now moving towards more enlightened social policies on Lone Parents, the reforming the SWA will be another significant step in modernising our welfare supports system to better reflect the needs of modern Ireland."

The 320-page report concludes that the SWA scheme has met its objective of guaranteeing that every person in the State has a minimum level of income sufficient to meet their basic day to day needs. However, the report also points out that the scheme has gone beyond its original "safety net" role and now plays a more extensive role than was originally intended. In its detailed assessment of the scheme, the report makes a number of recommendations for change in the context of the implementation of a more streamlined delivery of income support through the Social Welfare system, supported by active case management for those coming within the system, to deliver immediate, flexible solutions to individuals' needs.

The Report's recommendations include:

### ***Basic SWA Payments***

That social assistance payments, including basic Supplementary Welfare Allowance, should be integrated into a unified system of income support to be delivered at Social Welfare Local Offices. This would be complemented by a range of activation supports to encourage and facilitate individuals towards greater self-sufficiency.



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### ***Rent & Mortgage Interest Supplement***

The report also notes the growth in recent years in the area of rent supplementation. In the period 2001 to 2005 the numbers in receipt of rent supplement grew from 42,700 to 60,000. The report supports the Rental Accommodation Scheme introduced by the Government in July 2004 as the way forward in dealing with the housing needs of those who are in receipt of rent supplement for 18 months or more. It recommends that these arrangements be enhanced by the early referral to local authorities of tenants with apparent long-term housing needs for a full housing needs assessment. This approach will allow the rent supplement scheme revert to its original role as that of a short-term income support payment.

### ***Exceptional Needs Payments***

The report recommends that these payments be rationalised and delivered in the context of the proposed reformed system to deliver immediate flexible solutions to individuals' needs. These solutions would be tailored to meet the individual needs of the person and, where required, this solution would be a multi-agency response. The report concluded that the Community Welfare Service, wherever located, was best placed to deliver this service. The vital factor was that this element of the scheme would be administered by caseworkers who would interact with the various agencies that deal with the individual's basis needs.

### ***Core Functions Programme***

Minister Brennan said earlier this year the Government decided to implement the recommendations of the Core Functions of the Health Service Report which provided for the transfer of functions, mainly from the Health Service Executive (HSE) to my Department. The main element of this decision was that income support and maintenance schemes including the SWA scheme, together with the associated resources, would be transferred. The transfer of functions presents fundamental reform and developmental opportunities for a fully integrated and enhanced income support system, including a restructuring and integration of income and wider support services within one entity.

Minister Brennan said: "I am also aware that a change of this magnitude can create concerns for those who are currently carrying out the service from within the HSE.



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For example, I know that staff will be anxious to ensure that their terms and conditions of employment are safeguarded in the transfer. I wish to assure the staff concerned that this will be the case. The Community Welfare Service plays a vital role within the overall social welfare system and I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the excellent work of the 59 Superintendent CWO's and the 700 CWO's who administer the SWA scheme. The existing service provides a responsive and flexible approach to meeting needs. Flexibility and responsiveness are attributes for which there will be an obvious and continuing need into the future. I will ensure that those aspects of the current system are preserved and built upon as part of the transfer process".

The Minister added; "I consider the transfer of functions as a unique opportunity to enhance the role of the community welfare officer in the supporting the needs of those most disadvantaged in society. The recommendations in the report of the review of the SWA scheme complement that objective and the report itself offers a working template to support the implementation of the transfer of function from the HSE to my Department. I am confident that the transfer programme, which will be taking place over the coming months, will be embraced successfully and will offer an improved delivery of service to our customers".

**ENDS**