Department of Social and Family Affairs

Simple Access To Public Services From The State On The Cards
Mary Coughlan Minister For Social And Family Affairs

Access to public services provided by Government and other bodies will be streamlined and made easier under a new initiative to cut red tape.

A top level expert group is being established to report to Government within six months under the eGovernment initiative to introduce a standardised framework for a Public Service Card (PSC).   The aim is to develop a standard for Public Service Cards that acts as a key for access to services, identifying and authenticating individuals as appropriate and where required.

A PSC Framework standard will facilitate convergence over time of existing cards under a single branded scheme, reducing the need for public service customers to carry multiple cards. Currently some 4.9 million types of public service cards are already in use.

"The introduction of a Public Services Card framework using the Personal Public Service (PPS) number will improve the modernisation of public service delivery, lead to a greater integration of services, reduce bureaucracy and make access to public services easier and more efficient, " said Mary Coughlan Minister for Social and Family Affairs.

"This initiative will cut the often annoying red tape and bureaucracy that people have to go through to access public services which they are entitled to or need to access. The expert group will draw up a blueprint for simple access to public services, "added Minister Coughlan.

The use of cards for access to a range of public services has been increasing in recent years with the eGovernment agenda for the modernisation of public services.

Public service cards are already in use in a number of Government Departments. These include:

- The Social Services Card for social welfare purposes (2.3 million issued since 1992).
- The Drugs Payment Refund scheme card (1.3 million cards).
- Medical card (767,000 cards)

- Garda age card (100,000 cards).
- Social Welfare Free Travel pass (580,000 cards).

An EU health card for access to health services throughout the EU will be in widespread use shortly and there are plans to introduce a Transport card as part of an integrated ticketing service in the Dublin area initially. Other public services which could be accessed could include such simple things as library services, and other public services could emerge in the future.

The security and integrity of Public Service Cards is an important issue and the development of a Public Service Card standard could significantly facilitate secure authentication of identity, such as to avail of social welfare payments as well as electronic payment delivery.

Opportunities will also be created to increase value for money through economies of scale and through the use of shared services for card management, for example the issue, replacement and renewal of cards.

The task of the expert group is to draw up the card standards framework and to recommend to the Government an approach to the development of the public service card for the future. The overall intention is to bring about a situation where people do not need to hold multiple cards for dealing with public services and to ensure that the tax payer is getting best value for money. The expert group will comprise of officials from the key Government Departments with cards schemes. It will be chaired jointly by the Department of Finance and the Department of Social and Family Affairs which has responsibility under legislation for the development of the Public Service Card and the Personal Public Services Number (PPS Number). The PPS Number is the individual's unique identifier in dealing with public services.

A copy of the terms of reference for the Steering Group is attached.   ENDS June 29th 2004

Steering Group to develop a Public Service Card framework

Draft Terms of Reference

1.   Develop a standards-based Public Service Card framework with the Personal Public Service number as a unique identifier.

2.   Identify the issues to be addressed to ensure that plans for migration towards card-enabled delivery of public services (where required) are developed in a coherent, inclusive, customer-centric and VFM fashion, and make

recommendations on a preferred approach to future developments.

3. Establish the compelling requirements for the approach recommended, having regard to emerging policies on governance of public service delivery and taking account of work already done in relation to card initiatives across the public sector.

4. Identify the costs and benefits involved, and the options in relation to VFM for the investment involved.

5. Examine the potential for interoperability or collaborative working with the private sector, where appropriate to enable wider use of a Public Service Card where the customer chooses to so use it (e.g. financial services and private health insurance).

6. Consider the issues in relation to public education and awareness about card-enabled access to public services, in the light of the Government's modernisation programme for improved public services, the ePayments strategy and the goals of a fully inclusive Information Society.

7. In carrying out its work the group will address;

    - the need for the Framework to provide the operational basis for policy decisions in relation to wider card usage, for example, possible use of a public service card as a national identity card;
    - recommendations emerging from the central Group on identity management in the light of Government policy objectives for an attractive access card for public services underpinned by a secure identity management framework
    - the potential for the Public Service Card to be used by the cardholder as a proof of age card and wider use by the cardholder as a secure token of identity generally.

8. The Group will also have regard to:

    - the need for a common policy approach to issues at a pan-European level (including proposals for common EU cards and reciprocation of public identity between Member States) and developments nationally and internationally in relation to security
    - privacy requirements and Data Protection legislation
    - the emergence of new technologies in the use of cards and other tokens for establishing and authenticating identity.

9. The Group will report and make recommendations on its findings to Government. Progress will be reported via the Assistant Secretary Implementation Group, the E-Strategy Group of Secretaries General and the Cabinet Committee on the Information Society.