



**PRESS RELEASE**

**31/08/08**

**Hanafin moves to reassure public after C&AG confirms missing laptop contained personal details for SW customers**

The Minister for Social and Family Affairs Mary Hanafin T.D., today (*11th August 2008*) sought to reassure social welfare customers whose personal information was contained on a stolen laptop belonging to the Comptroller and Auditor General, which went missing in April 2007.

The Department of Social and Family Affairs is to write to all of the customers whose personal details were contained on a laptop. The vast majority of customers affected were in receipt of various social welfare schemes during a period of time in 2005.

The Department is also setting up a dedicated helpline for members of the public to ring if they are one of the people affected or if they have any concerns.

**Freephone helpline: 1800 690 590 (9am – 6pm) or email [helpline@welfare.ie](mailto:helpline@welfare.ie).**

Advertisements will appear in national and regional newspapers this week to outline which particular schemes are affected and further information is available on the Departments website [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie)

The C&AG was conducting an audit of payments records relating to 2005 and the information provided, other than names and addresses, was provided in an encoded format. However, the C&AG has confirmed that this information was



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converted into a readable record on their laptop and that details of up to a maximum of 380,000 records were on the laptop at the time it went missing.

Given the fact that 16 months has passed since the theft of the laptop, officials in the Department of Social and Family Affairs believe there is no evidence that customer information has been mis-used or compromised in any way. The Department has been in contact with the Bank of Ireland, its bank, and it has seen nothing to indicate any connection between fraud activity and missing DSFA records.

The Department was only informed of the details of the information on the stolen laptop just over a week ago and has been working with both the C&AG and Data Protection Commissioner in relation to the breach of information. An Garda Síochána and payment agencies have been contacted.

Since being informed of the loss of data the Department has been working to identify details of the 380,000 customers and the information that had been included on their records. The Department has ascertained that about a quarter of these customers had payments made through their bank accounts.

Speaking about the breach of security, Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Mary Hanafin expressed her great concern at the loss of the information but said that everything was being done to ensure that customers affected would be contacted.

**“I am extremely concerned that this theft of information could cause anxiety to our customers, particularly our pensioners. I am also very concerned that this volume of information was put on a laptop.**

**The information that was provided to an Auditor of the C&AG office in 2007 was provided by us in standard coded format and, with the**  
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**exception of names and addresses, was not something that would be easily interpreted by the outside public. I am also very concerned that we were not made aware by the C&AG of the nature and extent of the loss at the time the theft was reported to the Gardaí in 2007. I view the loss of information and time very seriously.**

**In the first instance, we will immediately be contacting those customers whose bank details would have been included in the records and over the next two weeks will follow this up with letters to all the other people affected. We will be offering them advice and reassurance about the safety of their information.**

**We will also be asking them to be check their own records, particularly their bank records, to ensure that there has been no suspicious activity. If they notice anything suspicious they should contact their financial institution and the Department.**

**I have also asked officials to draft codes of practice or protocols in relation to data sharing with all the bodies which are entrusted with such sensitive information.”**

If a customer was not in receipt of a welfare payment in the particular month in 2005, their information was not on the laptop and they need not take any further action. For those who were being paid during this period, the Department will be writing to each of them individually in the coming weeks with advice.

### **Details of number of records on C&AG missing laptop**



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<u>Scheme</u>	<u>Records</u>	<u>Pay month</u>
State Pensions (Old Age/Retirement)	295,000	April 05
One Parent Family Payment	63,000	January 05
Widows' Non-Contributory Pension	15,000	April 05
Orphans' Contributory Pension	800	April 05

A small number of records of bereavement grants (80) Carers Allowance/Benefit (13) and Invalidity Pensions (17) were included in the files.

In addition some 5,000 unemployment and employment supports were also included. These records relate to payment files of customers in **only** the following local offices - Kilbarrack (February 2004), Newbridge (September 2004) and Cobh (October 2004)

**ENDS**