



NEWS RELEASE

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3/4 million customers can now opt for easy bill pay – Hanafin

Over 750,000 people who are paid their weekly social welfare payment through the post office can now avail of a service that gives easy-pay options for household bills.

Minister for Social and Family Affairs Mary Hanafin T.D., today (*Thursday, 12th November 2009*) said **“this free, easy to use household budgeting service, aimed at social welfare customers collecting their payment with their Social Services Card through An Post, is a useful option for people looking to manage their money.”**

Under the scheme customers can commit a fixed amount of their weekly social welfare payment towards any number of utility bills, including ESB, Bord Gáis, Eircom and Local Authority rents or mortgages. This service was previously available for Jobseekers and Lone Parents who were getting paid through their social services card. However with the recent move of all State Pensioners, Carers and Widows onto the electronic system, many more people can now use it.

Minister Hanafin said the Department intends to extend the facility to a range of other telecoms and utility providers and to introduce additional services over time. **“Knowing that regular payments are going towards the electricity, heating or rent can relieve a lot of pressure on families and individuals as they seek to manage their money. An Post operates a network of over 1,200 post offices throughout the country, so this service is very accessible for all social welfare customers”**, said Minister Hanafin.

Currently only some 20,000 customers are availing of the Household Budgeting facility, but now up to 750,000 customers can avail of it. Minister Hanafin said **“An Post is to promote it in its offices, while MABS and CIS are also planning to highlight the budgeting service to customers.”**

How much can a customer pay?

The total payments cannot exceed 25% of the basic weekly Social Welfare payment a customer receives and minimum payments must conform to the following guidelines for each agency:



Department of Social and Family Affairs

- E.S.B - minimum of €3.50 per week
- Bord Gáis - minimum payment per week of between €4.00 and €9.00 depending on bill type
- Eircom - minimum payment of €3.50 per week.
- Local Authorities – must equal the weekly rent / tenant purchase / mortgage.

Each Household Budget deduction is shown on the customers' receipt when they collect their weekly payment.

Promotion

An Post is to promote the Household Budgeting service in all of its post offices. Full details will be made available on www.anpost.ie and will be on the Department of Social and Family Affairs website www.welfare.ie. The Citizens Information Service and Money Advice and Budgeting Service will also inform people of the additional options in post offices.

ENDS

Notes for Editors

Currently some 91% of social welfare customers receive their payment electronically direct to their post office or into an account in a financial institution. In October 2009, some 757,280 customers were being paid by EIT (Electronic Information Transfer) using their Social Services Card at post offices. Over 550,000 further customers are getting payment by way of EFT (Electronic Fund Transfer) directly into their bank or financial institution.