



Minister Hanafin opens new Social Welfare Local Office in Athlone

Support and advice on social welfare schemes and services centrally available at new office - Hanafin

The Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Mary Hanafin T.D. today (15th September 2009) officially opened the new Social Welfare Local Office in Athlone, Co. Westmeath.

Speaking with staff and guests at the opening, Minister Hanafin said **“this new office, located in Grace Park Road, takes the place of offices in Barrack and Pearse Streets, which served the people of Athlone and surrounding areas for almost 70 years.”**

The new office is an accessible and user-friendly facility which accommodates 48 staff and serves an area with a population of 19,500 people. Staff in the office process claims from Birr and Ballinasloe Branch offices as well as from the immediate area. It provides modern facilities which offer customers comfortable surroundings and privacy in which to carry out their business.

For the first time, all social welfare services are housed in the one building in the centre of the town. Minister Hanafin said **“the staff of Athlone Social Welfare Local Office deal with claims for Jobseeker’s Benefit, Jobseeker’s Allowance and One Parent Family Payment. Members of the public can get first hand information and advice on the full range of social welfare schemes and services and people are welcome to hand in or post their Illness Benefit certificates to Athlone Social Welfare Local Office where they will be dealt with on the day. Having all of the services available in one office ensures that there is a focal point for people from the Athlone area who are seeking advice on their entitlements and the services available to them.”**

In addition to general service delivery, information staff and social welfare inspectors, Minister Hanafin also pointed out that Athlone Social Welfare Local Office also provides the services of a Facilitator. **“The Facilitator helps people who are unemployed to develop their own individual plan for getting back to work and to avail of appropriate education or training opportunities. In doing so, he works closely with staff from other agencies - such as FÁS, Athlone IT, the VECs, Shannon Banks Training and Education Centre as well as with local Partnership companies, County Development Boards and employers”**, the Minister explained.



Department of Social and Family Affairs

Minister Hanafin thanked the officials from the Office of Public Works and the developers for their efforts to create this modern facility for the people of Athlone and surrounding areas.

Athlone Social Welfare Local Office is open to the public from 9.30am - 4pm and can be contacted at 0906 449600. It is one of some 60 Social Welfare Local Offices providing services to the public throughout the country.

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