



2016 -
2019

Department of Social Protection

Statement of Strategy



An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí
Department of Social Protection

Foreword by Minister

I welcome the publication of the new Statement of Strategy for the Department of Social Protection. This Strategy will implement the priorities as set out in the Programme for a Partnership Government.

The top priority for the next few years is to remain prudent in our approach to the economy and public spending and ensure that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past, providing for modest and sustainable increases in incomes and improving public services and infrastructure. We want to ensure that everyone benefits from the recovery, with no one left behind.

We made progress on all of these priorities in Budget 2017 with a €5 increase across the board in maximum weekly benefits for people of working age, and for retired people aged 66 or over, alongside additional targeted measures for the self-employed, lone parents, young jobseekers and rural communities.

My goal is to ensure that people are rewarded for working, by reforming the PRSI system and reinforcing the contributory principle. Budget 2017 has already started this process by restoring some dental and optical benefits to employees.

I am also implementing a New Deal for the self-employed, who will have new benefits extended to them, including treatment

benefit such as free eye and dental tests for the first time, and access to the safety-net of State income supports if they have a serious illness or injury that prevents them from working without having to go through a means test.

Current levels of pension provision are inadequate for many people especially in the private sector. I intend to work with relevant parties to develop new proposals to improve the adequacy of retirement provision. Such proposals will be designed to supplement the State's own pension provision, not replace it.

The Department is also developing a new working family payment to reduce child poverty and make work pay, ensuring that no family is better off on welfare than in work.

Since my appointment as Minister for Social Protection I have been consistently impressed by the calibre of staff. I look forward to continued close co-operation in implementing the priorities set out in the Programme for a Partnership Government.



Leo Varadkar T.D.

Minister for Social Protection

Introduction by the Secretary General

The Department of Social Protection's tenth Statement of Strategy sets out the mission, high-level objectives and key strategies which we will pursue in delivering the policies and priorities as set down by the Minister for Social Protection and the Government, in particular the commitments in the Programme for a Partnership Government. It also details our complex operating environment, which presents both challenges and opportunities, and the significant enablers which will be leveraged to help achieve our goals.

The objectives and high-level strategies in the Statement of Strategy are aligned to Business and Risk Management Plans across the Department and each staff member's role in the attainment of those objectives is clearly defined within the Performance Management & Development System.

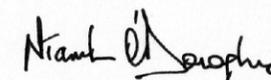
Much has been achieved in recent years in difficult circumstances. We will build on those achievements and continue to report on progress in the Department's annual report.

In preparing this Statement of Strategy, submissions were invited and received from civil society including community and voluntary bodies, other Departments and

Offices, staff and the public. Thank you for your considerable contributions which were all fully considered, and informed the development of this Statement of Strategy.

As a Department we strive to provide excellent customer service whilst making the best use of the resources available to us. The Department delivers a vast range of services from various locations throughout the country, but as a single organisation, we have a true sense of purpose to put our clients at the centre of all of our activities.

Achieving our ambitious work programme could not happen without the dedication and motivation of the Department's staff. My sincere thanks to all of the Department's staff for their invaluable support and co-operation in our continued efforts to deliver and improve our services.



Niamh O'Donoghue

Secretary General

Our Mission, Strategic Objectives and Values

The Department's Mission is:

To promote active participation and inclusion in society through the provision of income supports, employment services and other services.



The Department's overall objective for 2016 to 2019 is:

To continue putting our clients at the centre of all our operations, providing an efficient and effective service and to continue developing our staff, structures and processes.

01 Put the Client at the Centre of Services and Policies 

02 Drive Cost, Efficiency and Effectiveness 

03 Develop Staff Structures and Processes 

We Value

- PUBLIC SERVICE
- CUSTOMER FOCUS
- TOTAL PROFESSIONALISM
- ENGAGED STAFF
- INNOVATION

We are dedicated to serving the people of Ireland in an efficient and impartial manner.

We are totally committed to the positive difference we can make to our customers' lives and Irish society.

We are proud of our professionalism and commitment to quality in everything we do.

We believe that our effectiveness as an organisation is dependent on a highly skilled and engaged workforce.

We believe that having the attitude and environment to adapt and innovate is core to our future success.



Strategic Objectives

01

Put the Client at the Centre of Services and Policies

HIGH LEVEL STRATEGIES

- Deliver client focused commitments in the Programme for a Partnership Government and broader Government policy, e.g. Action Plans for Jobs, Housing and Rural Development.
- Contribute to Government social protection policy formulation through economic analysis and evaluation which will be supported by the Department's participation in the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service and implementation of the Service's Medium Term Strategy 2016 to 2019, as appropriate.
- Ensure speedy access to accurate decisions, payments and reviews for all schemes and services, which are clearly communicated to the client.
- Focus on maximising employability by providing income support, targeted activation and training referral, development and employment services.
- Work with other Departments/Offices, contracted service providers, employers and stakeholders in providing client centred services.
- Attain better outcomes in tackling poverty for children and families, people of working age, including jobseekers, people with disabilities, carers, and older people, through providing appropriate income supports.
- Ensure that the Department's services and information resources are accessible to people with disabilities.
- Identify client service requirements and establish client satisfaction levels through regular surveys and through the provision of feedback mechanisms.

KEY OUTCOMES

- Quality client centred services.
- Improvement in employability and engagement with employers.
- Reduction in welfare dependency.
- Reduced poverty rates.
- People with disabilities are able to access all of the Department's services and information services.
- Strong awareness and understanding of client needs.

HIGH LEVEL INDICATORS

- Level of progress in the implementation of the commitments in the Programme for a Partnership Government.
- Adherence to processing standards and achievement of processing targets.
- Quality of decisions and the communication of same.
- Information written in plain language, available in versions appropriate for people with disabilities (e.g. large type, high contrast, braille); website incorporates features to make it accessible to people with disabilities.
- The level of, and trends in, client service satisfaction measures.
- The level of progress achieved in meeting the targets in the Pathways To Work Strategy.
- Level of progress in the implementation of the DSP commitments in the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for people with disabilities.
- Reduction in consistent poverty rates and improvement in other social inclusion indicators.

02

Drive Cost, Efficiency and Effectiveness

HIGH LEVEL STRATEGIES

- Continue to improve cost-effectiveness in line with commitments in the Programme for a Partnership Government and other key Public Services strategies.
- Work with other Departments/Offices, contracted service providers, employers and stakeholders to address cross-cutting issues for the benefit of all stakeholders.
- Continuously improve control and compliance across all schemes to reduce fraud and error and implement Key Actions of Compliance & Anti-Fraud Strategy 2014-2018.
- Continue to improve corporate governance and financial management and reporting systems.
- Continue to exchange information with other Public Sector bodies and third party agencies to improve efficiencies.
- Exploit opportunities to digitally provide services and information.
- Implement and evaluate reforms to underpin the long-term sustainability of our income support and activation service.

KEY OUTCOMES

- Achieving value for money.
- Improved processes and procedures.
- Increased self-service through digital provision.
- Reduction of fraud and error.
- Timely recovery of debts.
- Enhanced corporate governance.
- Greater inter-agency co-operation.
- Strong evidence base for policy development.

HIGH LEVEL INDICATORS

- Level of progress in the implementation of the commitments in the Programme for a Partnership Government, including cross-cutting issues and adherence to the Government's fiscal targets.
- Level of control activity against targets.
- The number of Public Services Cards issued and the degree to which usage is expanded. The number of external public service providers utilising the SAFE/PSC/MyGovID infrastructure.

03

Develop Staff, Structures and Processes

HIGH LEVEL STRATEGIES

- Implement the commitments of the Public Service Reform Programme and the Civil Service Renewal Plan.
- Embed organisational culture and values throughout the Department's activities and initiatives and encourage and promote innovation.
- Deliver seamless services to clients by streamlining processes and procedures.
- Foster an environment and provide supports that will encourage staff motivation, flexibility and up-skilling.
- Provide high quality, accredited training and education for staff, tailored to role requirements and provide appropriate technological and organisational supports.
- Work with other Departments on the implementation of shared commitments in the Programme for a Partnership Government.

KEY OUTCOMES

- An organisation that can deliver seamless services to clients in a pro-active, efficient and effective manner.
- Strengthened performance management.
- High levels of staff motivation and engagement.
- Staff receive awareness training to provide service to clients with particular needs.
- Structured, accredited training and education curriculum provided to staff.

HIGH LEVEL INDICATORS

- Level of progress in the implementation of the commitments in the Programme for a Partnership Government in relation to the development of operational capabilities.
- Level of progress in the achievement of the Public Service Reform Programme.
- Contribution made to the achievement of actions in the Civil Service Renewal Plan.
- Level of staff engagement.
- Delivery of HR Strategy commitments.
- Implementation of structural, technological and organisational changes.
- Number of staff completing accredited programmes.

Key challenges and opportunities in our Operating Environment

ECONOMIC CONTEXT

While Ireland's recovery is now firmly established, national and international developments will potentially present challenges for economic activity in the coming years. DSP expenditure represents 38% of all gross current Government expenditure and, therefore, plays a key role in reducing poverty, disadvantage and inequality. The development of the social protection system will have regard to the overarching Government objective of sustainable public finances within the fiscal rules set out in the Stability and Growth Pact.

EUROPEAN UNION AND INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

The Department leads Ireland's contribution to the EU Open Method of Coordination on Social Protection and Social Inclusion and will continue to actively participate in the relevant EU Committees and networks. The Department also co-ordinates Ireland's contribution to the Europe 2020 poverty target through the National Reform Programme and the European Semester. The Department will play an important role in the development of Ireland's response to the decision by the UK to leave the European Union.

WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER DEPARTMENTS, PUBLIC SECTOR BODIES AND CONTRACTED SERVICE PROVIDERS

Continuing to foster the good working relationships the Department has with other Government Departments, public sector bodies and contracted service providers will be critical to: achieving the Government's objectives; implementing the Compliance and Anti-Fraud Strategy 2014 – 2018 in order to protect the integrity of the system and ensuring that we continue to target our scarce resources at those who most need them; delivering new services for other State organisations in the context of the wider roles of DSP.

CLIENT AND STAKEHOLDER INTERESTS

Consultation with clients and stakeholders via customer focus groups, surveys, the pre-budget forum, other fora and meetings with civil society organisations provides valuable feedback and perspectives to the Department which are key to helping us deliver services and supports which best meet client needs within the resources available.

NATIONAL SOCIAL TARGET FOR POVERTY REDUCTION

Social transfers have played a vital role in alleviating poverty and will continue to do so. However, there are real challenges in meeting the national social targets for poverty reduction, particularly child poverty. Supporting people into work and preparing them for work through education will be a key focus because of the importance of work as a route out of poverty.

DEMOGRAPHIC AND OTHER PRESSURES

There are financial implications of ensuring an adequate and sustainable welfare and wider pension system (State, occupational & private) in the years ahead, particularly having regard to the challenges caused by demographic pressures. This includes the maintenance and development of the social insurance system, based on paid PRSI contributions, with an appropriate level of entitlements based on these contributions. Emerging, and sometimes urgent, social needs can challenge the Department to provide an appropriate and flexible response to meet the needs of clients in a timely manner.

BEYOND INCOME SUPPORT

There will be greater integration of income supports with activation, closer engagement with employers and robust evaluation of outcomes, to support clients on the route back to employment and self-sufficiency. Pathways to Work 2016-2020 envisages extending this approach beyond the registered unemployed to include additional groups such as people with disabilities and qualified adults of recipients of working-age payments.

PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM

The Government's Public Service Reform Programme and the Civil Service Renewal Plan provide ongoing opportunities and challenges for the Department.

IRISH HUMAN RIGHTS AND EQUALITY COMMISSION ACT

The Department is required to have regard to its public sector duty in all its activities as provided for by Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act, 2014.

TECHNOLOGY

Greater numbers of people are expecting and demanding digital provision of services and information. Technological innovations provide opportunities to deliver these in an authenticated way so services can be personalised and tailored to individual circumstances with due regard for cost, benefits, security and privacy.

ONE DSP CHANGING TOGETHER

The continuing implementation of a wide-ranging programme of organisational development will deepen integration, support staff and build organisational and staff capability to successfully manage change and to provide excellent services to our clients.

Achieving our Strategic Objectives will be supported by these Enablers

PEOPLE AND STRUCTURES

- Successful communication and embedding of organisational culture and values.
- Management of team and individual performance.
- Alignment of Departmental structures and staff deployment with strategy.
- Greater use of strategic workforce planning.
- Greater supports to strengthen knowledge, capabilities, leadership and skills throughout the organisation.
- Effective internal and external engagement, communications and networks.
- Availing of opportunities presented through Public Service Reform and Renewal.

TECHNOLOGY AND PROCESSES

- Deployment of modern technologies in an innovative way to maximise efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources.
- Availability of cross-Governmental programmes, such as shared services, data sharing and eGovernment.
- Ongoing analysis and improvement of key business processes.
- Increased use of the online authentication solution www.MyGovID.ie and the online platform www.mywelfare.ie to provide services and information digitally and securely.

GOVERNANCE

- Corporate Governance Framework.
- Integrated risk management, strategic planning and business planning system and process.
- Data privacy and security policies, standards and guidelines.
- Internal Controls.
- Oversight by Internal Audit Unit and the Audit Committee.
- Ongoing review of legislative code.

Commitments in the 'Programme for a Partnership Government' where the Department of Social Protection has a lead role

To protect low-income families in private rented accommodation and avoid further market rental inflation we will expand access to the Tenancy Sustainment Protocol throughout the country. This scheme, operating in conjunction with Threshold in the Dublin and Cork City areas, has assisted almost 6,000 rent supplement households to date. (First 100 Days Action)

We will also increase Rent Supplement and Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) limits by up to 15% taking account of geographic variations in market rents, and extend the roll out by local authorities of the HAP, including the capacity to make discretionary enhanced payments.

We will seek to introduce a PRSI scheme for the self-employed and provide a supportive tax regime for entrepreneurs and the self-employed.

Developing a new Integrated Framework for Social Inclusion, to tackle inequality and poverty.

Specifically, we will work with the Oireachtas to introduce a new 'Working Family Payment', targeted at low-income families. Every parent working at least 15 hours per week will be guaranteed that every extra hour they work will result in more take-home pay. We will also make available further training and skills development opportunities for those in low income jobs. By increasing income disregards for lone parents through the Working Family Payment scheme we can progressively support low and middle income lone parents in work. The new Government will develop our work activation, social protection and further education services to ensure a seamless service for jobseekers.

In addition to implementing the 'Pathways to Work' 5 Year Strategy which aims to help 50,000 Long-Term Unemployed people into jobs, we will publish a dedicated 'Pathways to Work for Jobless Households' to support jobless households into employment.

We will actively encourage payments at Post Offices.

The rollout and extension of the Personal Microcredit Scheme, which is providing simple microloans to members and helping to combat the use of moneylenders.

We will invest in new services and caseworkers to support jobseekers through the network of local Intreo Centres. We will support a regional approach to Intreo Centres where job vacancies are brought to the attention of qualified jobseekers in neighbouring counties. We will review work activation and social welfare schemes to ensure that schemes do not contain anomalies that may impact unfairly on people in rural areas, including farmers.

We will also extend the Dental Treatment Benefit under the Social Insurance Fund to reimburse the cost of some routine dental treatments.

Support the Departments of Health and Social Protection in working together to pursue a "Fit for Work Programme" to support more people to get back to work if they have an illness or disability.

Working with Intreo, we will seek to introduce flexibility and support in the social welfare system for people with severe and enduring mental health difficulties to transition into employment by ensuring a seamless return of their entitlements should a particular employment opportunity prove unsuitable.

We will consolidate all means testing under a single national body ensuring a single application process for services or entitlements across all Government agencies.

We support an increase in the Disability Benefit and Allowance, Carer's Benefit and Allowance, and Blind Person's Pension.

We will support and expand supported employment opportunities and work with stakeholders to make supported employment more attractive to both prospective employers and employees.

We will highlight incentives for employers to employ a person with a disability and roll out a national awareness campaign.

Working with Intreo, we will support people with disabilities, and allow them to transition into employment, while ensuring a seamless return of their entitlements should a particular employment opportunity prove unsuitable. We will also address concerns surrounding the loss of secondary benefits, so that people are always better off in work.

We also support an increase in Carer's Allowance and Carer's Benefit as well as improved access to counselling supports for carers.

We will consolidate all means testing under a single national body so that people/parents will only apply once for services or entitlements across all Government agencies. This new Agency will address the matter of access to services based on county boundaries, and implement a new approach following review and consultation.

We will increase the State Pension and the Living Alone Allowance above the rate of inflation.

We will include a provision for pension increases.

We will fully protect the Free Travel pass for all pensioners.

Introduce a new Working Family Payment that promotes work over welfare by supplementing, on a graduated basis, the income of a household, while at the same time incentivising more hours and full-time work.

Commitments in the 'Programme for a Partnership Government' where the Department of Social Protection has a lead role

Publish an Action Plan for Jobless Households, containing targets aimed at supporting those in jobless households into employment and reducing child poverty.

In recognition of the vital role of schemes such as the Rural Social Scheme, Community Employment Schemes, BTEA and Farm Assist in rural communities and in activating the unemployed, we will ask the Minister for Social Protection to make suitable recommendations to strengthen provision in this area.

Review of the Farm Assist Scheme, recognising the challenges facing farmers on low incomes.

Review the Fish Assist Scheme in recognition of the irregular earning patterns of fishermen, in an effort to respond to difficult financial circumstances.

Rather than sustain a system that encourages welfare dependency, the new Partnership Government will develop a system that fosters independence through retraining and employment. The new Government will also provide the resources to invest in services that protect the weakest and most vulnerable in our society from poverty and exclusion.

Roll out a new Working Family Payment that supports low income families.

Launch an integrated plan across Government to help jobless households back into employment – the most effective way to reduce child poverty.

We will also carry out an immediate review of the financial supports available to the unemployed or those returning to the education system to ensure the greatest possible uptake of continuing education by eliminating current barriers.

Commitments in the 'Programme for a Partnership Government' where the Department of Social Protection has a contributory role

Specifically, the new Government will:

- Target 200,000 extra jobs by 2020, including 135,000 outside of Dublin
- Reduce the unemployment rate to 6%
- Facilitate the return of at least 70,000 emigrants
- Prioritise balanced regional development, which will allow us to aim for an unemployment rate in each county that is within one percent of the State average by 2020.

Working with the Oireachtas we will cut Employers' PRSI for low-income workers to mitigate the cost of minimum wage increases, in order to protect jobs.

The new Government will act swiftly on the recommendations of the Post Office Business Development Group by supporting the introduction and rollout, by An Post, of an "ePayment Account" in 2016, to enhance post office activity in financial services and increase footfall.

We will extend the entitlement to a medical card for all children in receipt of the Domiciliary Care Allowance in Budget 2017.

We will also propose legislation on the regulation of surrogacy and assisted human reproduction services.

We will, therefore, implement the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities, ensuring its actions are compatible with mainstream activation policies and that it addresses concerns surrounding the loss of secondary benefits, so that work always pays more than welfare.

We will increase paid parental leave in the first year of birth (currently maternity leave is 26 weeks, plus 2 weeks paternity leave to be introduced from September). Research shows children benefit most from parental care in the first year. All parents, without exception, need support at some stage.

We will develop targeted supports to reduce childcare costs, broaden parental choice and increase supports for stay at home parents.

We will reform the monitoring of child benefit payments by amalgamating the two existing school attendance monitoring systems, currently run by the Department of Education and Tusla, to address poor attendance within some families.

School retention rates are increasing but more can be done to ensure a transition to work or further education for young school leavers. Additional supports to groups working with Early School Leavers will be examined.

We will introduce a pilot employment support scheme in 2016, providing 30-40 participants with skills and training identifiable with the Defence Forces.

We will also commission an independent examination to identify the supports and barriers to accessing higher education for lone parents, and examine measures to increase participation. The recommendations of this report are to be published in advance of Budget 2017.