

Public Service Agreement 2010-2014 (Croke Park Agreement) Action Plan

Department/Office/Agency: Office of the Ombudsman

1. Summary of Main Progress Achieved in the Six Month Period April 2011 to September 2011

1. New work flow model in the Office of the Ombudsman has significantly improved complaint handling output over the period (+15% year-on-year) while just over 60 per cent of complaints are resolved within 12 weeks (up from 50 per cent over previous years). This required radical re-organisation of the Office's infrastructure, management structures and processes. The process, from review to implementation, took five months.
2. The Office of the Ombudsman cross-organisational initiative "Health Complaints", launched in September, will significantly enhance, and make more productive, customer interactions with the health and social services.
3. The Office of the Ombudsman has put in place an Investigations Unit to identify and make recommendations with regard to systemic issues of maladministration; such investigations often raise issues relating to administrative overlap and inefficiencies.
4. Following a review of the services currently provided in these areas, the Offices of the Ombudsman, Information Commissioner and the Standards in Public Office Commission have identified significant improvements to be made in its social media and web platforms that will deliver internal efficiencies and provide a much improved service to their respective customers and stakeholders.
5. A new comprehensive Corporate Procurement Policy has been introduced for the Offices of the Ombudsman, Information Commissioner and the Standards in Public Office Commission: in addition to updating the procurement guidelines it contains specific measures for identifying value for money efficiencies.

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2. Detailed Progress Update for the 6-months – April to September 2011

1. Better human resource management: Actions under this heading include reductions in numbers, redeployment, reconfiguration of service delivery, revisions in attendance arrangements, better attendance and absence management, etc.			
Terms of the Public Service Agreement 2010 – 2014	Action	Target Date as per Current Action Plan	Current Position
1.1 Paragraphs 4.1 and 4.4	Office of the Ombudsman Following a recent comprehensive external review of the organisational structure, significant reconfiguration of both the processes and structure of Office has been identified as required to deliver enhanced service to customers and to meet the current surge demand (+30% on 2009) in the face of declining staff resources (2014 ECF will be 16% less than that envisaged in 2009 AEV).	Q2 2011	Reconfiguration of structures and processes complete and operational. Early signs are encouraging; projected case closure total at +15 per cent on 2010 and complaints handling times have been shortened – over 60 per cent resolved within 12 weeks as opposed to 50 per cent in 2010.
1.2 Paragraph s 4.1, 4.3 and 4.4	Information Commissioner (OIC) Following a recent external review, staffing levels and certain work practices have been adjusted within the OIC to ensure best fit with demand and to deliver improved flexibility to quickly match resources with demand patterns across the organisation as a whole.	Q2 2011	In place. However, operational priority given to Office of the Ombudsman reconfiguration – case management changes implemented with full implementation identified as priority for Q4 2011.
1.3 Paragraph 4.4	Offices of the Ombudsman and Information Commissioner More dynamic and focused team-working across the Office will allow enhanced participation by all staff in value adding activities, process and output quality improvement.	Q2 2011	In place.

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1.4 Paragraphs 4.1, 4.3, 4.4 and 4.15	Office of the Ombudsman Amalgamation of Commission for Public Service Appointments with the Office of the Ombudsman in line with the “McCarthy” Report	Effective from 4 Oct. 2010	Amalgamation in place. Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (PER) to arrange legislative amendment to formalise process
1.5 Paragraph 4.11	Organisation-wide A fundamental review of the operation of PMDS within the organisation is underway with a particular focus on equity in terms of recognising good performance and tackling under-performance.	Effective from 1 Jan. 2011	Full-scale review of PMDS operation underway centrally. Office will implement fully the terms of the amended Scheme.
1.6 Paragraph 4.13	Organisation-wide Within the Office, merit-based competitive promotion has been the norm for many years.	Ongoing for some time	In place
1.7 Paragraph 4.5	Organisation-wide Increase staff collaboration and engagement through increased consultative processes (e.g. Innovation Forum established).	In place	In place
1.7 Paragraph 4.10	Organisation-wide Fully implement civil service policy on sick leave to maintain absenteeism levels below norm	In place	In place
1.8 Paragraph 4.11	Organisation-wide Efficient and effective delivery of training and talent management (e.g. mentoring and coaching for succession planning purposes), together with specific evaluation of training and development programmes.	In place	In place

2. Better Business Processes: *Actions under this heading would include efficiency measures and improvements to the processes by which your Department/Body delivers its services to the public, including changes to the technology used, better data management, including around identity, and so on.*

Terms of the Public Service Agreement 2010 - 2014	Action	Target Date as per Current Action Plan	Current Position
2.1 Paragraphs 4.4 and 4.11	Ombudsman Ombudsman complaint process has been reviewed and areas for increased efficiency have been identified. When re-structured the process will create a smoother and faster flow through the office. As with all continuous improvement-based models this process will continue to evolve in terms of efficiency gains over the coming years.	Q2 2011 to Q3 2012	New structures and processes in place (see 1.1 above). These structures and processes removed inefficiencies and introduced more clearly defined flow model to complaint handling. Operation is constantly under review and refined as necessary.
2.1 Paragraphs 4.4 and 4.11	Information Commissioner Following review, further efficiencies have been identified in case processing, management and case allocation	Q2 2011 to Q3 2012	Case management and allocation changes in place with full implementation to be achieved by Q4 2011.
2.1 Paragraphs 4.4 and 4.13	Offices of the Ombudsman and Information Commissioner Invalid demand (phone and mail) impact on the process will be reduced significantly through new technology and web-based innovations.		Between 1/4/10 and 30/9/10 some 3050 invalid telephone calls were received. Post introduction of new system some 2200 calls that would have required staff intervention have now been filtered out of the system, and, instead, have been transferred directly to the relevant public/private body. This improves customer service and assists in driving resource efficiencies.

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2.2 Paragraph 4.4	Organisation Generally New organisational processes and structures to be introduced (e.g. business processes, work practice agility and responsiveness etc.) with IT required to provide optimal assistance in delivery of quality customer service and organisational and administrative efficiency.	In place	Reconfiguration of organisation and premises is complete. Staff re-assigned as required and all necessary amendments to IT system architecture in place and operational.
2.3 Paragraph 4.13 and 4.14	Organisation-wide Identify how new media can assist customers access the Office and how the current websites should look and operate based on customer and organisational needs is currently underway. The process includes consultation with website users and other customers	Review and begin roll out of recommendations during 2011	Review completed; RFT for websites redesign issued and appropriate use of new media identified. Roll out to begin in Q2 2012.
2.4 Paragraph 4.15	Organisation-wide The management of risk within the Office will be updated to ensure that the Risk Register and its proposed action plans are linked directly to strategy and unit Business Plans.	January 2011	In place
2.5 Paragraph 4.4	Organisation-wide The Office will develop further its Business Planning Process to ensure uniformity of approach in terms of improved measurable outputs/outcomes and better clarity around individual staff responsibility in that context.	January 2011	In place

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2.6 Paragraphs 4.14.and 4.15	Organisation-wide The Office will identify and utilise improved financial metrics to monitor and improve the overall efficiency of organisation	March 2011 onwards	New comprehensive Corporate Procurement Policy has been introduced: it contains specific measures for identifying value for money efficiencies. In addition, unit cost measurements have been identified.
2.7 Paragraphs 4.14 and 4.16	Organisation-wide Achieve a significant overall reduction in supplier prices by end-2012	Ongoing since Q4 2010	See 2.6 (above).The Policy commits the Office to reviewing high value contracts at year-end and annual evaluation of procurement to ensure Policy compliance.

3. Delivering for the Citizen: *Actions under this heading would include efficiency measures and improvements to the processes by which your Department/Body delivers its services to the public, including changes to the technology used, better data management, including around identity, and so on.*

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3.1	Ombudsman		
Paragraph 4.4	Redesign of the complaints process to focus on quicker throughput and decision-making. We envisage that the customer will experience significantly faster process time than is currently the case. Details to be provided in further progress reports.	Q2-Q4 2011	See 1.1. above
3.2	Ombudsman and Information Commissioner		
Paragraph 4.4	Dedicated enquiry team trained and in-place to address enquiries efficiently and effectively at the first point of contact with a view to improving customer responsiveness.	Q2 2011	In place – assisting complainants at first point of contact and progressing or resolving some 35 per cent of complaints within 5 working days.
3.3	Ombudsman		
Paragraph 4.4	The Office of the Ombudsman is leading a cross-cutting project group with regulatory agencies, advocacy groups and complaint handling bodies in the health sector to put in place agreed mechanisms to facilitate for potential customers easier interaction with the various constituent bodies and raise awareness of how best to pursue a complaint or raise a matter of concern about health and social services	Q3 2010	The <i>Healthcomplaints</i> initiative led by the Office of the Ombudsman, in conjunction with 16 health and social care regulators, service providers and service user representative groups, was launched on 19 September. The resource tools developed as part of the initiative (to assist members of the public know how to complain about health and social care services) have been distributed to relevant bodies nationally and the website <i>www.healthcomplaints.ie</i> is now live.
3.4	Organisation-wide		
Paragraph 4.4	Identify improved strategic quality service delivery and output standards.	Q3 2011 onwards	High level Quality Assurance Group established that regularly reviews and makes recommendations with regard to case process,

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			output, and outcome. In addition, significant progress has been made with regard to identifying improved customer service delivery via web and new media platforms (see 2.3 above).
3.5 Paragraph 4.4	Office of the Ombudsman and information Commissioner Continue and improve the customer feedback process via various media and maintain and increase the level of customer satisfaction		Regular evaluation of all external Office engagements including our targeted outreach programme of regional and citizen information centre visits, to improve targeted effectiveness and impact now ongoing. Customer surveys further refined to focus more clearly levels of satisfaction with the quality of service and outcomes.
3.6 Paragraph 4.4.	Organisation-wide As part of its Strategic Plan the constituent Offices have identified a number of initiatives that are designed to bring about systemic improvements across the public service or are directly related to enhancing customer care. These include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • collating examples/evidence of poor public service delivery and unfair practices for further possible investigation, • developing a strategy to liaise with and support new public bodies due to come under the remit of the Ombudsman's Office in 2011, • identifying and undertaking systemic investigations/commentaries on examples of maladministration, 	Initiated Q4 2010	A dedicated Investigations Unit was established on 1 March, 2011. To date it is progressing some 10 investigations in relation to specific or systemic maladministration. It is envisaged that the output from the Unit will be increased significantly from 2012 onwards.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> identifying and targeting public bodies performing particularly poorly to address maladministration 		