

Quarterly Social Policy Report July – September 2006

Introduction

This report is based on social policy records submitted by Citizen Information Services to Comhairle in the period July to September 2006. It takes into account returns received up to and including October 6th 2006, which was the cut off date for receipt of records for this quarter. During this period Comhairle received a total of 482 social policy returns mainly from 46 CICs and the Citizens Information Phone Service. This represents an increase of 37% on the previous quarter. The social policy records received from these various sources enable Comhairle to identify and document social policy issues arising from the interaction between information providers and service users. The policy feedback mechanisms pursued by Comhairle include the publication of research, reports and submissions based on feedback from CISs and other sources. Where possible Comhairle will target and follow up with the relevant government department or agency.

The pursuit of evidence based feedback is important in that it helps to inform the policy process by giving the citizen a voice and putting their experience at the heart of policy development, implementation and evaluation.

Analysis of Social Policy Returns

The table below provides an overview of the social policy returns received categorised by problem category. The combined social welfare returns (general, insurance, assistance and supplementary welfare) amount to 40% of the overall returns and represent the largest problem category. Employment accounts for 22% of the social policy returns received in this quarter. The next largest category is health, at 9%, with housing attaining 6% of the total. This pattern of social policy returns is largely consistent with the query returns recorded in 2005, which show that the top three query categories were Social Welfare (34%), Employment (16%) and Health Services (8%)¹. See Appendix 1 for details of the number of social policy records returned by individual CIS.

The issues identified in this report are set out here under three broad headings as follows:

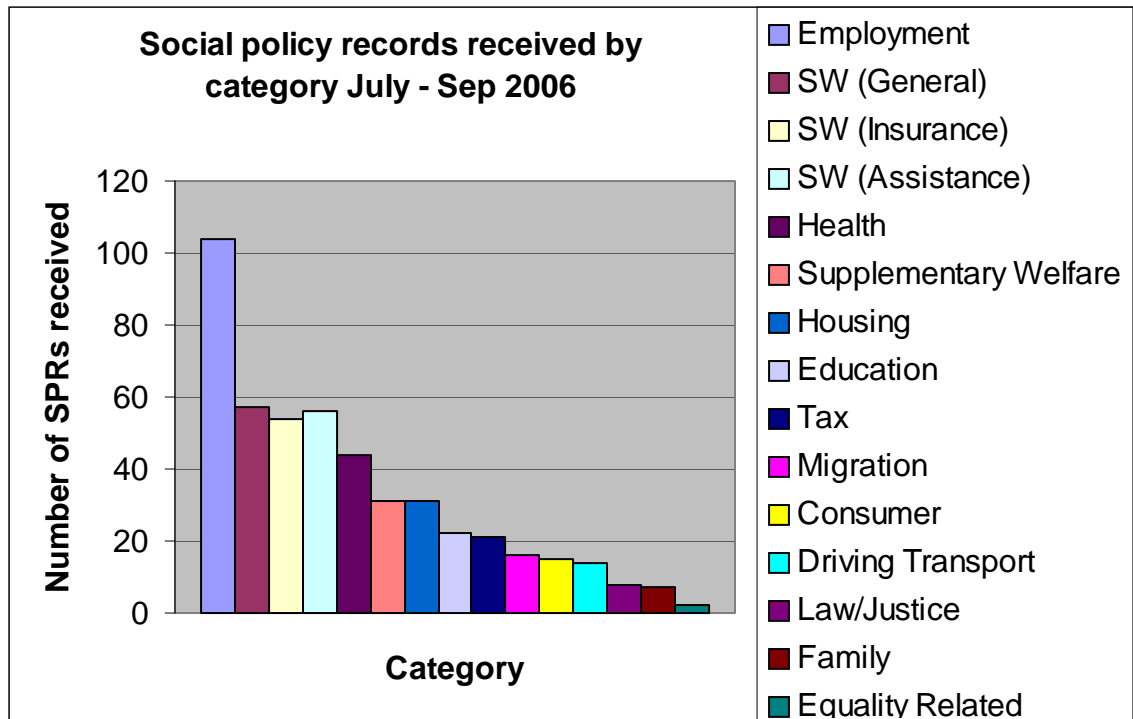
1. Availability of services / supports;
2. Administration / communication problems in accessing services
3. Information deficits.

¹ Comhairle *Citizen Information Services Survey Report* (2005) prepared by Vision 21

NB The social policy returns analysed in this quarterly report refer to the period July to September 2006 and so do not take into account budgetary changes

Category	No.	%
Employment	104	22%
SW (General)	57	12%
SW (Assistance)	56	11%
SW (Insurance)	54	11%
Health	44	9%
Supplementary Welfare	31	6%
Housing	31	6%
Education	22	5%
Tax	21	4%
Migration	16	3%
Consumer	15	3%
Driving Transport	14	3%
Law/Justice	8	2%
Family	7	1%
Equality Related	2	1%
Total	482	100%

Table 1: Social Policy Returns by category July – Sep 2006



1. Availability of Services / Supports

The withdrawal of income supports and services for people making the transition from welfare to work is a recurring theme in the social policy records completed by CICs. The withdrawal of support at this stage can contribute to welfare recipients making a rational decision to remain on welfare rather than risk a reduction in income support. Such decisions centre primarily on the potential for the rent supplement to be substantially reduced or withdrawn and the childcare and other expenses associated with a return to work. People undertaking part time work experience particular problems with claiming pro-rata benefits reflecting a lack of flexibility in the system to cater for the rise in atypical employment and training / retraining opportunities. Benefit coverage gaps are also recorded in relation to frontier workers and people with disabilities / long term illnesses. Some of the service problems identified are as follows.

Income Supports

National Fuel Scheme

The payment period - 29 weeks from September to mid April - under the National Fuel Scheme is regarded as being too short and the rate of payment insufficient to meet current fuel costs (refer payment increase in Budget 2007). Also, there is no mechanism for consideration of special circumstances, such as people with chronic illnesses who have a requirement for constant heat to receive an additional payment.

Atypical employment and the welfare system

The requirement to be available for full time work and genuinely seeking work in order to qualify for Jobseeker's Benefit and Jobseeker's Allowance creates a difficulty for parents who leave full time employment in order to care for children and find when they sign on that they must state availability for full time work. There is a need for greater flexibility in relation to employment / social welfare supports to ensure that particular groups do not become excluded from the labour market.

Home Care Support Package

The Home Care Support Package initiative administered by the Health Service Executive requires the family/carer to register as an employer, pay employer's PRSI and handle all the responsibilities associated with being an employer e.g. health and safety issues. This impacts negatively on the uptake of the Home Care Package with a consequent recourse to residential care.

Training schemes and retention of benefits

FAS training schemes are not exempted under the qualifying criteria for tapered retention of the rent supplement acting as a disincentive to train and up skill. The FAS accommodation allowance of €69 per week is generally not regarded as sufficient to make up for the loss of rent supplement.

EU / EEA workers and habitual residence

In January 2006 the Minister for Social and Family Affairs announced that 'any EU/EEA worker who suffers loss of income because he has lost employment through no fault of his own, or becomes unable to work through illness, is entitled to claim supplementary welfare allowance'. However CIS evidence suggests that Community Welfare Officers continue to apply the habitual residence condition and refuse SWA to EU/EEA workers even where the loss of employment is due to illness.

Eligibility for Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance

As a supplement to low income families the income limits for eligibility for the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance are generally regarded as being set too low, particularly in relation to one parent families. Also the earnings assessment is different for one parent families than for couples. However, assessment for the medical card is the same for families in either situation. This highlights an inconsistency in the way that income thresholds are applied across the system.

Family Income Supplement payment reviews

There is a level of inflexibility in how the FIS is administered that can result in recipients losing out on mid year payment increases where their financial circumstances change. The Department have ruled out introducing a review mechanism on the basis that it would require legislative change and would most likely impact negatively on clients given that wage movement are more likely to rise rather than fall – meaning lower payments for FIS recipients. However, the option of allowing an upward review of the payment without also requiring downward reviews may need to be considered.

Gaps in Coverage / Anomalies / Inconsistencies

Rehabilitative work and appeal mechanisms

People on invalidity and disability pensions may be allowed to engage in rehabilitative work (max 20 hours per week) subject to receiving written permission from the Department of Social and Family Affairs. However, if an application to do rehabilitative work is refused there is no appeal mechanism to enable claimants challenge a decision.

Frontier workers and benefit eligibility

Frontier workers are finding themselves unable to claim specific benefits either here in the Republic of Ireland or in Northern Ireland owing to eligibility criteria applying in both jurisdictions. A case in relation to Carers Benefit illustrates how a woman could not claim this payment in the Republic of Ireland because she did not have the relevant PRSI contributions and could not claim a UK carer's benefit because the person for whom she was claiming did not reside in the UK.

Free travel pass

There is no free travel pass for children in receipt of a Domiciliary Care Allowance. Parents and guardians are entitled to a companion free travel pass but children only become eligible when they go on to a disability allowance from age 16. Where a disabled child is required to travel to hospital appointments on a regular basis the absence of a free travel pass can cause considerable hardship for families on low income.

CE Part-time Integration Option

The Part-time Integration Option allows you to work under the Community Employment scheme for a maximum of **one** year. This may be extended depending on individual need. The duration of the scheme causes problems for individuals who have been unable to secure suitable alternative employment and for organisations in the community and voluntary sector who become reliant upon CE workers trained for the provision of certain services

Habitual residence and returning Irish immigrants

The habitual residence condition continues to present problems for Irish citizens returning home after working abroad to find that they are not entitled to claim benefits in their country of origin. A particular difficulty arises for people who do not intend to remain in Ireland but return to care for an elderly or chronically ill relative and find they are not eligible for the carer's allowance.

Refuse charges

In rural areas refuse services have been largely contracted out to private operators and many local authorities do not operate a waiver scheme for low-income households. As refuse charges continue to increase this can create a heavy financial burden for low income households. Also, tax relief on refuse charges is of no benefit to people on low income.

Bereavement Grant

The Bereavement Grant is available only to people in receipt of an insurance-based social welfare payment (entitlement extended to next of kin of deceased recipients of Disability Allowance aged 16 –22 in Budget 2007). People who receive a means tested payment can apply for a Supplementary Welfare

Exceptional Needs Payment to assist with funeral expenses but this payment tends to be significantly lower than the Bereavement Grant.

Inconsistent means testing

Problems of inconsistent and multiple means testing continue to be reported by CICs. Complex and incoherent means testing across a range of income supports can be intrusive for the client and it is not cost effective.

Housing / Homelessness

Homelessness preventative strategies

The need to build homelessness preventative strategies into mainstream services is highlighted in casework from CICs. Homelessness is not exclusively a housing issue involving as it does health and other elements of social support. Movement towards a preventative model highlights the need for more appropriate accommodation including supports where necessary. CICs have reported cases of people being discharged from hospital into homelessness. A discharge plan should be put in place involving liaison between service providers such as the HSE, local authority and community-based services.

Rent supplement and accommodation appropriate to family circumstances

People with children who leave the family home after separation are experiencing difficulty finding suitable private rented accommodation within the rent supplement levels set by the HSE. They need to be able to rent accommodation appropriate to their family circumstances i.e. be able to accommodate children staying on weekends / holidays. However they are deemed single by the HSE and so must find accommodation that falls within the rent levels set for a single person as opposed to a single parent.

Employment Rights Issues

The need for greater protection and more effective enforcement mechanisms are recurring themes in the area of employment rights reports from CICs. The area of employment rights is the subject of a recent Comhairle Social Policy Report, ***Employment Rights from information to redress*** which is available on request from Comhairle and can be downloaded from www.comhairle.ie One of the main problems for workers seeking to assert their employment rights is the fear of dismissal if they seek redress. The main problem areas reported by CICs include failure to pay the minimum wage, holiday entitlements, confusion as to the rights of part time employees, abuses of the work permit system, illegal deductions from wages and difficulties accessing documentation such as terms and conditions of employment. The partnership agreement ***Towards 2016*** contains a number of commitments in the area of employment rights and compliance. These include the establishment of a new statutory Office of the Director for Employment Rights Compliance and to progressively increase the number of Labour Inspectors to 90 by end of 2007.

2. Administrative / Communication Problems in Accessing Services

Delays in processing Respite Care Grant applications

Respite care grant applications are being delayed for up to 3 months in some instances. Delays can lead to people losing out on placement opportunities for respite care creating further hardship for carers.

Language interpretation services

The absence of a dedicated language interpretation service that is freely accessible to employees and clients of government departments and agencies is creating a barrier to communication with foreign nationals who sometimes need urgent assistance in accessing health and welfare services.

Delays in housing needs assessment

CICs report problems of long delays with local authorities conducting an assessment of housing need. A local authority decision in relation to housing need can determine an individual's eligibility for the rent supplement and so delays will hamper their ability to access accommodation in the private rented sector.

3. Information Deficits

Lack of awareness of BTWA

Non-national parents of Irish born children granted residency in Ireland are informed that they are expected to be off social welfare within a 2 year period. Many who take up work immediately are unaware of the impact that this will have on their rent allowance and UA payments and are not being informed of their right to apply for the Back to Work Allowance by social welfare offices.

Recovery of Medical Expenses

CICs report that clients are not aware of their right to claim tax relief on certain medical expenses where they cannot recover the expenses from any other source.

Redundancy entitlement

Employees in continuous insurable employment for 2 years or more who experience a lay off or short-time are often unaware that they may have an entitlement to a statutory redundancy payment.

Carer's Allowance

People who are caring for more than one person are not being made aware that they may be entitled to an additional 50% of the maximum rate of Carer's Allowance each week.

One Parent Family Tax Credit

People entitled to the one parent family tax credit, which entitles you to a tax credit of €1630 in addition to your normal personal tax credit are not always made aware of this entitlement. Entitlement to the one parent family tax credit also entitles you to an increase in the standard rate tax band which means you can earn up to €36,000 per annum before you have to pay tax at the top rate of 42%.

Credited Contributions

People who leave the workforce are not always informed of the importance of keeping their social insurance record active. They may be entitled to credited contributions but must check with the Department of Social and Family Affairs to establish if this is the case. The qualifying criteria for many social welfare payments require that you have a number of paid and/or credited contributions.

Occupational Injury Benefit

Many employees who experience an accident at work or contract a disease owing to the type of work they do are not always aware that they can claim Injury Benefit. You must apply for Injury Benefit *within 21 days* of becoming ill, otherwise you may lose the benefit.

Emergency Taxation

Many migrant workers taking up employment here are unaware of the need to apply for a certificate of tax credits – Form 12A. This should be done as soon as a job offer is accepted to ensure that the employer deducts the correct amount from pay at the outset. Employers do not always inform employees of the need to make this application for a certificate of tax credits.

Appendix 1

CIC	SPRs received
Meath CIS (Navan CIC)	59
Co Carlow CIS (Carlow CIC)	51
Independent (Citizens Information Phone Service)	38
Co Longford CIS (Longford CIC)	47
Co Roscommon CIS (Roscommon CIC)	31
Co Mayo CIS (Castlebar CIC)	25
Cork Centre City & South County CIS (Cork (City Centre) CIC)	25
Co Galway CIS (Galway CIC)	19
Co Mayo CIS (Ballina CIC)	12
Co Wexford CIS (Wexford CIC)	12
Kilkenny CIC (Kilkenny CIC)	11
Co Westmeath CIS (Athlone CIC)	10
West Cork CIS (Bantry CIC)	10
Co Louth CIS (Dundalk CIC)	9
Tallaght CIS (Tallaght CIC)	9
Co Waterford CIS (Waterford CIC)	8
Clondalkin CIS (Clondalkin CIC)	7
Co Roscommon CIS (Boyle CIC)	7
Blanchardstown CIS (Blanchardstown CIC)	6
Co Donegal CIS (Donegal Town IIU)	6
Co Donegal CIS (Dungloe IIU)	6
Northside CIS (Northside CIC)	6
Co Leitrim CIS (Drumshanbo CIC)	5
Co Wicklow CIN (Bray CIC)	5
Co Donegal CIS (Letterkenny IIU)	4
Co Leitrim CIS (Carrick-on-Shannon CIC)	7
Co Tipperary CIS (Thurles CIC)	4
Co Westmeath CIS (Mullingar CIC)	4
Comhairle (Hume House)	4
Crumlin CIS (Crumlin CIC)	4
Co Donegal CIS (Milford IIU)	3
Co Louth CIS (Drogheda CIC)	3
Co Monaghan CIC (Monaghan CIC)	3
Co Donegal CIS (Carndonagh IIU)	2
Co Donegal CIS (Information Line)	2
Co Galway CIS (Rosmuc CIC)	2
Co Offaly CIS (Tullamore CIC)	2
City Centre (Dublin) CIS (City Centre (Dublin) CIC)	1

Co Clare CIS (Ennis CIC)	1
Co Galway CIS (Gort CIC)	1
Co Galway CIS (Loughrea CIC)	1
Co Galway CIS (Portumna CIC)	3
Co Galway CIS (Tuam CIC)	1
Co Tipperary CIS (Tipperary CIC)	1
Co Waterford CIS (Dungarvan CIC)	1
Comhairle Waterford	1
Cork City (North) CIS (Hollyhill CIC)	1
Kerry CIS (Tralee CIC)	1
South Kildare CIS (Newbridge CIC)	1

Total **482**

**Table 2: Number of social policy records returned to Comhairle by
Citizen Information Service July – Sep 2006**

Appendix 2

Sample Cases

Availability of Services / Supports Cases

22/09/2006 Co. Longford CIS (Longford CIC)

Our client is receiving a social welfare pension and a small pension from the Co. Council. Client has severe chronic arthritis and other medical conditions that affect his blood circulation. It is necessary for him to have adequate and constant heat in his home. However, a small Co. Council pension makes him ineligible for the National Fuel Allowance. On checking this with DSFA we were advised that there was no facility in the National Fuel Allowance guidelines to look at special circumstances, and that even if the client produced medical evidence of his need for extra heating in support of his application, it would not be considered as there was no provision for doing so. Client is appealing the matter on this basis.

15/09/2006 Co. Roscommon CIS (Roscommon CIC)

In an economy where there is reportedly full employment, there is a lack of employment supports for people prepared to only work part-time. This CIC has encountered a number of clients, particularly new mothers, who choose to leave their jobs to care for their children. They are penalised for voluntarily leaving employment by Social Welfare but, generally, they have no problem with that. However, problems do arise because, when signing on, these clients must state that they are available for full-time work. In many cases, they are really only interested in part-time work. A number of clients, particularly those entitled to Jobseeker's Benefit have queried why they cannot seek part-time work and thereby qualify for a half rate Jobseeker's Benefit payment.

02/08/2006 Comhairle Waterford

The conditions attaching to the Home Care Support Package discourages families from taking up the scheme. The HSE Public Health nurse phoned to highlight problems with the Home Care Support Package offered by the HSE. The requirement to become an employer prevents people from taking up the offer even though they desperately want to stay at home and be cared for at home. The Home Care Support Package being offered to families to care for elderly relatives at home requires the family / carer to register as an employer, pay employer's PRSI and incur all the ensuing responsibilities of an employer. Of 10 clients who meet eligibility for the scheme only 1 can take it up because

the family is "well off" and can afford to take on the responsibility of employer. The PHN gave the example of a 76 year old woman with dementia being cared for by her 80 year old sister. Her sister cannot take on the responsibility of being an employer, pay PRSI/PAYE, register with Revenue, meet Health & Safety standards etc. These conditions force families to rely on nursing homes when the object of the Home Care Support Package is to support carers to care in the home.

07/07/2006 Co. Galway CIS (Tuam CIC)

A citizen of the Czech Republic, working in Ireland since May 05, lost his job as a result of illness. Claimed Supplementary Welfare Allowance but CWO refused on grounds that he was not 'habitually resident' in Ireland. CIC brought Feb 2006 Dail announcement by Seamus Brennan to the attention of the CWO ('any EU worker who suffers loss of income because he has lost employment through no fault of his own, or becomes unable to work through illness, is entitled to claim supplementary welfare allowance). CIC lodged an appeal on client's behalf 22nd June 2006. A letter dated 27th July granted the appeal and 'decided to continue payment for a further 2 month period.' However, the client has been to the local CWO 3 times since (1/8, 9/8 & 10/8) and has been informed that payment will not be made until week commencing 14/8.

17/07/2006 Co. Mayo CIS (Castlebar CIC)

The earnings assessment for the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance is different for one parent families than for couples. However, assessment for the medical card is the same for families in either situation. This highlights an inconsistency in the way that income thresholds are applied across the system. A CIC client who is a single parent with two children in secondary school gets OPFP and works 3 days a week. She qualifies for FIS but not for the Back to School Clothing & Footwear Allowance Scheme.

01/07/2006 Co. Clare CIS (Ennis CIC)

This query concerns a young man separated from his partner. His child is living with him. He is in receipt of a FIS payment. He had been working in the evening in the hotel industry but this became increasingly difficult and he transferred to day work. Because he now works days his income has decreased. Consequently he has been finding it difficult to manage. Unfortunately he was told that his file would not be reopened until the end of the year. This was confirmed when Ennis CIC spoke to the Department. If a FIS recipient's income increases they are allowed to keep their payment until the end of year, but no allowance is made if the reverse occurs. This payment is intended to assist people with low income, which, in this case it is failing to do. If it is possible to reopen files in relation to other SW payments why can this not be done with the

FIS payments? A FIS payment should be reviewed within a reasonable time frame if income decreases

01/07/2006 Co Donegal CIS (Letterkenny IIU)

People on payments such as disability and invalidity benefit can apply to do rehabilitative work part time under the exemption rule. However, when people are refused this there is no mechanism for appealing this decision. Most social welfare decisions have an appeal mechanism and there should be one also for the exemption rule.

01/07/2006 Citizens Information Phone Service

The caller was a lady (in full time insurable employment) now in her 40s who had worked all her life. Her mother had suffered a stroke, so she wanted to take leave from employment and claim carer's benefit. The woman in question lived in the Republic of Ireland, but worked in the North. She was informed that she would not be able to claim carer's benefit because she would not have the relevant PRSI contributions and advised to contact the Dept of Social Security in the UK, However, she had already been in touch with them and they informed her that she could not claim carer's benefit because the person that she was claiming for would not be resident in the UK.

01/07/2006 Co. Galway CIS (Rosmuc CIC)

This SPR relates to a disabled child living on the Aran Islands and in receipt of the Domiciliary Care Allowance. Her mother looks after the child on a full time basis and she has a free travel pass but the child does not. She could not understand why children under 16 years on a disability payment could not get a free pass. She said her daughter will get a pass once she is over 16 and on Disability Allowance, but her point was that the child needed it just as badly now as her daughter needs to travel to hospital a lot and they have to manage on a very low income.

12/07/2006 Co. Longford CIS (Longford CIC)

Client on a CE Scheme placement is restricted to working one year. This condition is not imposed on the Rural Social Scheme introduced in more recent years. The CE Scheme rules should be adjusted to allow people remain on the placement until they at least find suitable alternative employment given the extra benefit to the community from their work.

25/07/2006 Co. Roscommon CIS (Roscommon CIC)

The client is a returning Roscommon native who spent the last 10 years in the USA. He holds an Irish passport. His wife, who also spent ten years in the USA,

holds joint UK and USA citizenship. Their children hold US passports. On his return to Ireland, while looking for work, he was dismayed to discover that he could not qualify for Unemployment Assistance due to the introduction of the Habitual Residence Condition in 2004. He had been totally unaware of the introduction of this condition despite doing some research prior to returning home. The HRC rules are affecting a significant number of returning Irish citizens. The client compared his position with that of asylum seekers who are at least provided with accommodation by the State and Programme Refugees who have all the rights of habitually resident Irish citizens as soon as they arrive in the State. The HRC rules should be applied to take account of the circumstances of returning Irish citizens and their main 'centre of interest'.

25/07/2006 Citizens Information Phone Service

Fees in respect of bin charges from private companies in areas not covered by Local Authority waste management are reported as excessive, unreasonable and inflexible and the senior citizens affected have no alternative for waste collection in their area. Waiver schemes should be available to low income households.

01/09/2006 Tallaght CIS (Tallaght CIC)

Children of deceased parents don't qualify for a bereavement grant in circumstances where the parent was in receipt of a means tested payment (Note entitlement extended to next of kin of deceased recipients of Disability Allowance aged 16-22 in Budget 2007). I had a client come in, whose mother had passed away. Her mother was a single parent and had no contributions and therefore she was ineligible for the grant. The funeral costs placed a considerable financial burden on her daughter.

25/09/2006 Co. Mayo CIS (Castlebar CIC)

The means test for SWA is different to the means test for Jobseeker's Benefit / Assistance. We had a recent case where a man was claiming UB and was claiming for his wife as a qualified adult who was receiving a FAS training allowance. His Jobseeker's Benefit exhausted and he completed a claim for Disability Allowance application. He went to his CWO to claim SWA while waiting for his DA to be processed. However the means test for SWA took his spouses training allowance fully into account. It was not disregarded as it had been for U.B and D.A purposes. To operate two separate means tests is an unnecessary complication of the system and an inefficient use of resources.

14/07/2006 Co. Donegal CIS (Donegal Town IIU)

The Housing Section of the County Council received a call from the Psychiatric Unit of Letterkenny General Hospital to advise that they were discharging a man from their care and sending him down to the Council in a taxi, as the man was

homeless. The Council officer informed the Unit that they would be able to offer bed and breakfast accommodation to the man for 3 nights (over the weekend) and assist him with a deposit. However, he made it clear that he would not be able to source appropriate accommodation for the man. The Unit stated that they were sending him anyway because, as far as they were concerned, he was well enough to leave their care. The Housing officer approached us with a request to help him source some accommodation. We were extremely shocked and concerned that the Psychiatric Unit would act in this way and we suggested that a complaint be made to them. Although we were able to assist with sourcing accommodation for the man we felt that he would require further support and assistance given the lack of available rental property in the area. This type of query comes up on a more regular basis and we feel that there is a huge gap in provision in this area. There seems to be no Social Worker available to assist with this type of case unless there are children involved and, even then, their role is limited. We believe that the whole area of homelessness in South Donegal needs to be considered properly and a definite policy drawn up to deal with the issue so that everyone is clear what action can be taken to help someone in this situation.

01/08/2006 Co. Donegal CIS (Milford CIC)

A man came to the centre in a very distressed state having been refused Rent Allowance by a Community Welfare Officer. He was a separated father who had found suitable accommodation and obtained a loan of €600 for a deposit from a family member. He had moved into the flat and owed 2 weeks rent to the landlord as well as the deposit to his sister. His rent was €145 per week and the Community Welfare Officer refused to give him any help towards it. According to their regulations he was being treated as a single man and needed to find a flat/house for €85 per week and no more. The cheapest accommodation available to him in his locality was €145. The man had 3 children who came to stay with him at the weekend and therefore felt that he should have been treated as a single parent for the purposes of Rent Supplement. The man was unable to provide proof of the children staying at weekends. Had he produced evidence he would have been allowed to find accommodation for €170 per week. The Community Welfare Officer refused point blank to pay him any rent supplement and he was already behind in his rent by 2 weeks and in debt to the sum of €600 that he had obtained for the deposit. A lot of separated fathers find themselves in the same predicament.

Administrative / Communication Problems in Accessing Services Cases

05/07/2006 Co. Galway CIS (Galway CIC)

People are experiencing unacceptable delays in having their Respite Care Grant applications processed. A client who completed the application form in April has

still not received the grant. People rely on the grant arriving on time so that they can secure placements and make the necessary arrangements for respite care.

29/09/2006 Co. Roscommon CIS (Roscommon CIC)

The CIC was approached by a trainee psychiatric social worker who was aware of our Foreign Nationals Support Service, providing interpretation through Portuguese. She explained that she had a client who was recently discharged from hospital and needed some follow-up work fairly quickly. The social worker was unable to communicate with the Brazilian client even on a very simple level because of the language barrier. The CIC agreed to the request, as long as the Brazilian client had no objection. The meeting then took place and included a CIC information provider, with the consent of both the client and the social worker. The meeting lasted 90 minutes. Afterwards, the social worker explained that she was unable to source interpretation within the HSE system, hence her request. As a result, 90 minutes of limited FNSS time - the service operates with one interpreter for just three hours a week - was taken up with a case, which, primarily, should have been the responsibility of the HSE. Obviously, the client's interests were our primary concern, hence our agreement to facilitate the meeting but, as was explained to the social worker, it would not be possible for this to occur on a regular basis.

26/07/2006 (Citizens Information Phone Service)

A female lone parent, living at home, made application for rent supplement to a CWO. Cork City Council was requested in Jan 2006 to conduct an assessment of housing need. Despite contacting the Council on a number of occasions since, the caller claimed it would be the end of July (7 months) before she was assessed.

Information Deficits Cases

26/07/2006 City Centre (Dublin) CIS (City Centre (Dublin) CIC)

The case involves a person who was granted residency in Ireland as a result of having an Irish born child. In the letter granting residency she was told that she would be expected to come off SW within two years, so she took a job working 20 hours per week (5 mornings). She did not realise the implications of the work for her UA payment or her Rent Allowance and was not informed by Coolock SW office that she should apply for the BTWA. The result was that they stopped all her UA and is now looking to have two weeks overpayment refunded. Because she made the effort to find work, she is now in a situation where she owes €700 to SW and is on a reduced income.

04/07/2006 Co. Carlow CIS (Carlow CIC)

A client was not aware she could claim back medical expenses. Gave her Med 1 form and explained that she could claim for last 4 years

19/07/2006 Co. Longford CIS (Longford CIC)

Employee working in the same company for 3 yrs had hours reduced substantially to less than half time. Employee was unaware that this was a redundancy situation and that she might have some entitlements in this regard.

12/07/2006 Co. Longford CIS (Longford CIC)

Client seeking Carer's Allowance was unaware until visiting the CIC that she could claim Carer's Allowance for two persons. This may give her an entitlement to 50% of the maximum rate of Carer's Allowance each week.

05/07/2006 Co. Longford CIS (Longford CIC)

A lone parent client was only receiving a Single Persons Tax Credit and was unaware that a special tax credit was available for lone parents, and that all she had to do was complete a form to claim this.

19/07/2006 Co. Longford CIS (Longford CIC)

People are not always advised to apply for credited contributions and many do not know that they are available or how important they are to maintaining their social insurance record.

01/08/2006 Co. Meath CIS (Navan CIC)

Client suffered an injury at work. However, although he was entitled to claim Occupational Injury Benefit the client was not aware that this payment existed and therefore did not claim. He came to CIC too late but Social Welfare agreed to at least look at his claim. However, claim should be made within 21 days of accident. Client is most likely going to lose out because of lack of knowledge. There should be a procedure, (either at Work, GP Office) to highlight the requirement for a medical certificate and claim form to be completed and forwarded to the relevant Social Welfare section within 21 days of the accident.

01/07/2006 Co. Carlow CIS (Carlow CIC)

Employer stopped emergency tax from wages of non-national but did not explain the tax system to him. The CIC advised him of the need to apply for a certificate of tax credits and of his right to have emergency tax refunded. The CIC gave the client a Form P12 to complete.