



## Note on Public Service Performance Report 2016

### PBO Note 2 of 2017

#### Introduction

This note has been prepared to brief Members of the Oireachtas and the Committee on Budgetary Oversight, in particular. Its aim is to provide an overview of the Parliamentary Budget Office's (PBO) evaluation of the *Public Service Performance Report 2016* and how future iterations can be developed to support Members in their oversight and scrutiny role.

#### Background

The *Public Service Performance Report 2016* was published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on 28th April 2016. It is the first iteration of what is planned to be an annual publication setting out and measuring how the Government has performed in the previous year.

The *Public Service Performance Report 2016* presents (by Vote or group) the gross amount spent at programme level in 2016 along with a set of high level metrics per programme. These metrics are presented in a 'dashboard' format. The publication of the performance report follows on from changes to the presentation of the *Revised Estimates for Public Services 2017* which increased the focus on numerical performance indicators.

The Government, when releasing the performance report, stated that, "the report, which is the first of its kind, aims to strengthen the focus on what is being delivered with public funds and create an opportunity for meaningful dialogue between Ministers and Oireachtas Committees on government performance".

In addition, the performance report (p.4) stated that, "the format of the report will be subject to review in advance of its next iteration. Feedback will be sought from the Oireachtas and other stakeholders that could assist in the evolution and refinement of this report so that it can best fulfil its purpose in future years".

Subsequent to its publication, the Government has indicated that a pilot project with respect to gendering budgeting will be initiated in the *Revised Estimates for Public Services 2018*. As outlined in PBO Note 1 of 2017 on Gendering Budgeting, this pilot will (for a number of programmes) introduce high level gender objectives and indicators. The pilot indicators will be published in December 2017 in the *Revised Estimates for Public Services 2018* and progress will be published in the *Public Service Performance Report 2017* (anticipated publication date: April 2018).

#### PBO's evaluation of the Public Service Performance Report 2016

The PBO has considered the *Public Service Performance Report 2016* with two objectives in mind:

- How the document can be used by individual Members and Committees of the Houses of the Oireachtas; and
- How the document can be improved in future iterations.

The publication of the *Public Service Performance Report 2016* is a welcome development. The change in the budget calendar in 2013 has meant that the annual *Revised Estimates for Public Services* are now published prior to the end of the year and thus cannot include information on the achievement of output targets in that year.

The performance report presents information in an easy to view, accessible style. Importantly it reinforces the use of quantitative performance metrics. The use of the 'dashboard' format is of particular value. The performance report can be used by Members and Committees to get a 'bird's eye' overview of the range of services provided as a result of Government expenditure and to assist them in scrutinising Government performance.



The PBO also welcomes the commitment (made in Budget 2018) to pilot gender budgeting objectives and indicators in the *Revised Estimates for Public Services 2018* and include information on these targets in the next iteration of the *Public Services Performance Report*.

Some possible improvements in the information provided have been identified by the PBO. These, if implemented, would make it easier to utilise and navigate the performance report. These are:

- Adding information from other years – there is limited time series data with the financial information and none with the output information presented. This may be expected as it is the first report of its kind. It would, however, be useful for future iterations to include time series information for comparison purposes. The same metrics should be used in future reports where possible to ensure consistency over time. In addition, if a metric is changed or omitted this should be indicated, if possible (perhaps in an appendix).
- Adding information on the original targets for 2016 and 2017 – the original output targets for the metrics are not presented in the report. This means additional work is needed to match the outturn to the target to illustrate performance. Without the original target the document reports on activity (what was done) rather than performance (what was done compared to what was expected to be done). In addition, presenting the 2017 target alongside the 2016 target and outturn would provide a perspective on whether the 2017 target is realistic given the 2016 outturn.
- Matching financial information to outputs at a more appropriate level – the performance report presents the financial information at programme level. It is not clear how much of this (financial) input goes towards achieving the individual outputs presented. The Revised Estimates are presented at sub-programme level and it may be more appropriate to have more granular information in the report.
- Consistently aligning the metrics presented in the performance report with the metrics presented in the *Revised Estimates for Public Services* – there is some inconsistency between the metrics reported and those listed in the Revised Estimates volume.

- Aligning the metrics chosen with strategic plans and annual reports – it is unclear how the performance metrics reported on are linked to the strategic plan of the Department or their annual reports.
- Improving the quality of output metrics – the quality of many of the output metrics could be improved especially if they are to be used in a performance accountability context. For example, metrics on customer satisfaction and quality of service could be added. The pilot project on the introduction of gender budgeting metrics, if successful, could be a model used by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to gradually improve the quality of performance metrics over time.

The PBO does not suggest that the additional information above be included to the detriment of the accessible style of the document. However, to ensure ease of use, the additional information could be grouped by Vote (perhaps directly after the information already presented in the report).

**Disclaimer:** *This document has been prepared by the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) for use by the Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas to aid them in their parliamentary duties. It is not intended to be either comprehensive or definitive. The PBO may remove, vary or amend any information contained therein at any time without prior notice. The PBO accepts no responsibility for any references or links to, or the content of, any information maintained by third parties.*

*Note: In the interest of transparency, the PBO would like readers to note that the Director of the Parliamentary Budget Office, Annette Connolly, was until August 2017, the Principal Officer of the Central Expenditure Policy Division within the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The Public Services Performance Report 2017 was an output of the Central Expenditure Policy Division.*

Contact: [PBO@oireachtas.ie](mailto:PBO@oireachtas.ie)

Go to our webpage: [www.Oireachtas.ie/PBO](http://www.Oireachtas.ie/PBO)

Publication date: 17 November 2017