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Ms Fiona Cashin
Committee Secretariat
Committee of Public Accounts
Leinster House
Dublin 2



12 July 2012

Dear Ms Cashin,

I refer to your letter of 29th June seeking further information relating to issues raised regarding Vote 38 during the Committee's examination of the 2010 Annual Report of the C&AG and Appropriation Accounts, which took place on 21st June last. The information sought and responses are as follows:

1. **A note outlining the waiting times across the State in respect of Job Seekers Allowance, specifically including the variation.**

The national average waiting time to decide on a Job Seekers Allowance Claim as of June 2012 is 4.01 weeks. Waiting times can vary, with the longest timeframe currently being 12.5 weeks and the shortest being 0.95 weeks. In relation to Jobseekers Benefit, the longest timeframe is currently 5.47 weeks and the shortest is 0.48 weeks. The national average waiting time to decide on a Job Seekers Benefit Claim as of June 2012 is 1.73 weeks. A full breakdown of times in local offices nationwide is contained in Appendix 1.

2. **A breakdown of the overpayments concerning fraud and error made between 2007 and 2008 and the total of overpayments in terms of fraud for 2011.**

The following table shows a breakdown of overpayments by fraud and error from 2007 to 2011:

	2007		2008		2009		2010		2011*	
	Number of cases	Value €m	Number of cases	Value €m	Number of cases	Value €m	Number of cases	Value €m	Number of cases	Value €m
Fraud	18,112	21.4	18,338	21.1	13,039	20.7	15,899	25.9	20,585	34.9
Client Error	24,507	19.7	26,701	24.1	24,728	31.5	29,180	42.4	36,292	40.5
Departmental Error	3,483	2.7	3,768	3.1	4,375	4.0	7,204	5.2	6,062	5.5
Total Error	27,990	22.4	30,469	27.2	29,103	35.5	36,384	47.6	42,354	46
Estate Cases	301	6.7	294	7.3	372	10.6	320	9.9	371	11.5
Total	46,403	50.5	49,101	55.6	42,514	66.8	52,603	83.4	63,310	92.4

*Please note that 2011 are currently being audited and remain provisional.

3. A breakdown of the statistical figures which show what has been done in the Cork, Tallaght and Galway offices to improve controls.

Control initiatives taken at Local Offices in Cork, Galway and Tallaght:

(I). Cork LO (Hanover St)

Management Audit - The management audit has been re-instituted. The audit is carried out on each Thursday on a collective basis by Executive Officers and their Manager. It is envisaged that the targeted number of audits will be completed by year end.

Daily Verification Audits – Transaction Information System (TIS) checks are carried out in full compliance with requirements.

Recording of control savings - All savings from control activities are now closely monitored. Savings are recorded on the ERIN database system and are available both to local management and divisional/regional management. Considerable resources have been devoted to training staff on the ERIN system and the continued training and familiarisation of staff with the system are reviewed on a constant basis.

Control savings - in the year to 30th June 2012, control savings amounted to €307,395. This figure is in excess of the savings recorded for the same period in 2011.

A dedicated “Genuinely Seeking Work” project is being carried out at present and it is hoped that increased targeted activity can be undertaken with the appointment of a full complement of staff.

The allocation of staffing to the application of control procedures – Local office control measures consist of the application of control projects both at national and regional level, as well as co-operating with local initiatives initiated by the Regional Office and by the Special Investigation Unit. Within the local office, an Executive Officer and a Staff Officer had been assigned to control work.

The increasing focus on customer activation provides added value to the control agenda. Over 230 persons are referred each week for progression under the activation programme and penalty rates are applied to those who fail to engage. Repeated and on-going failure to engage by any customer calls in to question their right to a continued payment and highlights this customer cohort for a review of GSW and availability.

- Genuinely Seeking Work (GSW) checks - GSW checks are a follow through and complementary activity to the EAP process. Over 186 cases are currently being reviewed in a dedicated control activity.
- Fraud Analytics Survey – A fraud analytics survey of jobseeker cases is currently underway based on work being done for the Department by Accenture Consultants. Of the overall total, 66 cases are proper to the Cork local office and are currently being reviewed.
- Commencement of Employment - 40 cases are reviewed each week in relation to commencement of employment. These cases involve both Jobseekers Assistance/Jobseekers Benefit and One Parent Family Payment.
- Taxi Regulator Data Matching Project - The local office participated in a project of matching data in relation to information received from the Taxi Regulator. The office participated in a control project within the Southern Region involving the review of 1,028 primary payments and 147 qualified adult payments.
- Student Matching Data Project - The entitlement of 1,203 students was reviewed, including 3rd level and PLC courses.

Local initiatives with the Regional Office - 100 JA cases were reviewed in conjunction with the Regional Office. This involved the issuing of a questionnaire to establish both the employment status and means status of qualified adult dependants, to primary payments.

(II). Galway Local Office

Management and Transaction Information System (TIS) Audits - Full TIS management audit was re-introduced in Galway local office in February 2012. An EO was assigned to this work on a full-time basis at that time. Prior to this, 33% of the audit was being done.

Daily Transaction Information System (TIS) Verification - TIS checking is carried out in full compliance with the circulars.

Control Projects undertaken by Galway Local Office since 2011:

A range of control initiatives were undertaken by Galway local office and its associated inspectorate since 2011. In 2011, 1,420 cases were reviewed in Galway local office in 2011 with 302 cases yielding savings of €1,807,474. These include reviews following Employment Action Plan/Group Engagement (including penalty rates from April 2011) and routine local office reviews.

In addition, a number of special projects were undertaken including the following:

- TÚS – 51 customers (43 in 2011 and 8 so far in 2012) who declined TÚS participation were reviewed commencing June 2011; and
- Postal Signers - 200 customers were reviewed commencing in August 2011.

Apart from on-going reviews, a number of special projects were undertaken by Inspectors:

- March 2011 – One Parent Family Payment Fraud and Error Survey - 27 cases
- August 2011 - Self-employment exercise - 52 cases
- November 2011 – Jobseekers Benefit Fraud and Error Survey - 13 cases

In 2012 to date, 806 cases have been reviewed with 92 cases yielding savings of €414,380.

Divisional Control Project - In July 2011, a JA control project commenced and review work in Galway local office has concentrated on this project since then.

A special questionnaire was issued by post to randomly selected customers. Four initial categories were chosen and 3,304 cases have been reviewed to date. The categories are:

- Former casual workers (319 in 2011, 144 in 2012 to date)
- Spousal earnings (356 in 2011, 155 in 2012 to date)
- Non-nationals (727 in 2011, 419 in 2012 to date)
- Under 25s (519 in 2011, 665 in 2012 to date)

All replies were reviewed and reminders were issued if no reply received. Follow-up action was taken where necessary.

This exercise has yielded savings of €848,501 in 2011 and €163,551 in 2012 to date, which have not been included in the local office savings figures above.

(III). Tallaght Local Office

Transaction Information System (TIS) checks and Management Audits:

Daily Verification Procedures - TIS checks are done on a daily basis. Any checks that are not done on the day appear in a following list and are then completed.

Management Audit - The bulk of Management Audits are currently being done by Executive Officers and the office manager in the office. A cross check of audits done by Executive Officers is also carried out by the manager.

Up to the end of the February 2012, two staff (1 Executive Officer & 1 Staff Officer) were engaged in control work. The EO subsequently transferred to another office. Pending the filling of that vacancy, another EO, who works on a week on/week off basis, has been assigned to control work. As part of the introduction of the activation/case management function in Tallaght National Employment and Entitlement Service (NEES) recently, the Staff Officer, heretofore engaged in control work primarily on the TUS project, is now fully engaged in the activation/case management support team. However, resources in the control area will be kept under review.

Area Manager Checks - A quarterly questionnaire check of control activity was introduced by regional management in 2011. The process involves Area Managers confirming that a range of control procedures are in place in respect of the local and branch offices within their responsibility. The check also involves randomly selecting a number of Jobseeker's Allowance, Jobseeker's Benefit and One-Parent Family Payment claims for examination. The questionnaire is attached.

Control Projects undertaken by Tallaght Local Office since April 2011:

A range of control initiatives were undertaken by Tallaght local office and its associated inspectorate since April 2011. These include the following:

- Garda National Immigration Bureau Review – May 2011: 34 clients were requested to present a current Garda National Immigration Card to the local office along with a letter from the Department Justice, Equality & Law Reform which details the conditions of leave to reside in this country.
- Unemployment Assistance Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT) Review - September 2011: As part of this review, unemployment assistance clients paid by EFT were asked to provide a copy of a statement showing transactions in the last 12 months on each bank account, building society or credit union account they held.
- Back To Work Review – November 2011: 186 customers on the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance were asked to provide a copy of a statement showing transactions in the last 12 months on each bank account, building society or credit union account they held.

• Jobseekers Benefit Fraud & Error Survey	November 2011	15 claims
• Student Match Survey	November 2011	30 claims
• One Parent Family Payment localised claims	March 2011	53 cases
• Non-Residency Project	July –August 2011	440 cases
• Private Residential Tenancies Board	August 2011	71 cases
• Blessington Survey	October 2011	21 cases
• Jobseeker's Benefit	November 2011	16 cases
• One Parent Family Payment Birth Certificates	December 2011	10 cases
• Students	February 2012	10 cases
• Child Benefit	April 2012	32 cases
• Fraud Analytics Survey	June 2012	18 JA and 1 JB cases

In 2011 to date, 1,509 cases were reviewed, yielding savings of €609,302. Savings from One Parent family parent reviews have not been recorded thus far in 2012. However, reviews of Jobseekers Allowance and Jobseekers Benefit cases have yielded €81,992 up to the end of June 2012.

4. A note outlining the percentage of cases where a Domiciliary Care Allowance was refused and then not appealed.

In 2010 a total of 3,275 applications were disallowed (some of these decisions relate to claims from the end of 2009), with 1,858 of these customers appealing the decision.

1,417 customers did not register an appeal and accepted the decision to refuse Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA). This represents 43% of the total cases refused in that period.

Further statistics on Domiciliary Care Allowance applications and appeals for the period April 2009 to December 2011 are contained in Appendix 2.

Yours sincerely,



Niamh O'Donoghue
Secretary General

Appendix 1:**Timescales for Decisions on Jobseekers Benefit and Jobseekers Allowance applications-**

<u>OFFICE</u>	Jobseekers Benefit	Jobseekers Allowance
	Time to decide in weeks	
ACHILL	0.48	1.21
APOLLO HOUSE	1.03	2.74
ARDEE	1.54	1.91
ARKLOW	1.06	1.17
ATHLONE	1.86	2.69
ATHY	1.95	4.29
BALBRIGGAN	1.03	5.47
BALLINA	1.61	4.13
BALLINASLOE	1.94	3.89
BALLINROBE	2.35	6.30
BALLYBOFEY	1.50	2.49
BALLYCONNELL	1.99	4.34
BALLYFERMOT	0.67	2.01
BALLYMUN	1.43	2.50
BALLYSHANNON	1.37	1.79
BALTINGLASS	2.58	4.41
BANDON	4.00	4.93
BANTRY	2.03	4.31
BANTRY CO	0.94	4.59
BELMULLET	1.51	2.04
BIRR	1.86	5.64
Bishop Square	1.19	4.58
Blanchardstown	0.99	5.58
BOYLE	3.20	4.85
BRAY	2.14	3.11
BUNCRANA	2.06	4.06
CAHIR	0.64	1.48
CAHIRCIVEEN	1.43	2.13
CARLOW	1.24	1.88
CARRICKMACROSS	1.66	3.91
CARRICK-ON-SHANNON	1.21	1.69
CARRICK-ON-SUIR	2.73	8.26

CARRIGALINE	1.39	2.68
CASHEL	0.77	1.47
CASTLEBAR	2.83	3.12
CASTLEBLAYNEY	1.28	4.04
CASTLEPOLLARD	3.58	7.93
CASTLEREA	2.92	5.79
CAVAN	0.72	2.83
CLAREMORRIS	2.74	5.48
CLIFDEN	2.24	2.96
CLONAKILTY	3.07	6.21
CLONDALKIN	0.62	2.67
CLONES	0.97	3.51
CLONMEL	0.51	0.95
COBH	0.50	1.44
Coolock LO	1.00	1.86
CORK	1.48	5.10
DINGLE	1.30	4.11
DONEGAL	1.33	2.57
DROGHEDA	0.97	5.86
DUNDALK	1.12	2.40
DUNFANAGHY	0.74	1.17
DUNGARVAN	2.80	4.29
DUNGLOE	2.19	2.04
DUN LAOGHAIRE	1.86	4.68
EDENDERRY	3.37	11.53
ENNIS	1.03	2.88
ENNISCORTHY	1.88	5.12
ENNISTYMON	1.88	2.90
FERMOY	2.02	5.45
FINGLAS	3.08	1.41
GALWAY	5.47	6.69
GOREY	1.98	3.71
GORT	3.22	5.58
KELLS	4.83	12.50
KENMARE	1.51	3.93
KILBARRACK	1.58	3.08
KILKENNY	1.15	1.74

KILLARNEY	1.19	6.41
KILLORGLIN	1.33	4.86
KILLYBEGS	0.79	2.31
KILMALLOCK	1.48	2.03
KILRUSH	1.20	3.83
Kings Inns Street Local Office	0.58	2.14
KINSALE	3.27	5.50
LETTERKENNY	0.42	2.50
LIMERICK	1.32	5.15
LISTOWEL	1.42	3.22
LONGFORD	2.97	4.88
LOUGHREA	1.70	2.77
MACROOM	1.96	2.72
Mallow Branch Office	2.16	4.11
MANORHAMILTON	0.68	2.20
MAYNOOTH	2.38	2.94
MIDDLETON	2.57	7.36
MONAGHAN	1.58	3.26
MUINE BHEAG	1.46	3.11
MULLINGAR	2.22	7.07
NAVAN	0.87	9.42
NAVAN ROAD	1.81	4.72
NENAGH	3.11	3.81
NEWBRIDGE	1.62	3.53
NEWCASTLE WEST	3.43	2.56
NEWMARKET	1.88	11.33
NEW ROSS	4.37	5.37
NUTGROVE	0.62	1.69
PORTARLINGTON	1.18	3.78
PORTLAOISE	2.01	4.14
RATHDOWNEY	1.62	5.25
ROSCOMMON	1.81	3.88
ROSCREA	2.25	2.95
SKIBBEREEN	2.67	4.56
SLIGO	0.77	2.38
SWINFORD	2.03	4.82
Swords LO	2.24	2.33

TALLAGHT	0.81	4.71
THOMAS STREET	1.31	3.96
THOMASTOWN	2.24	3.54
THURLES	1.19	2.09
TIPPERARY	1.99	1.30
TRALEE	2.11	3.48
TRIM	2.23	11.88
TUAM	1.70	6.46
TUBBERCURRY	0.27	1.19
TULLA	1.66	2.90
Tullamore Control Office	1.50	2.47
TULLOW	3.30	4.99
WATERFORD	2.32	4.37
WESTPORT	1.74	1.41
WEXFORD	1.33	5.99
WICKLOW	1.28	1.68
YOUGHAL	0.84	4.04

Appendix 2:

Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) statistics April 2009 to December 2011-

	Applications received	Applications fully processed in year	Applications allowed incl. on review*	Applications refused
2009 (from 1 st April)	3,389	2,823	1,220	1,603
2010	5,457	5,333	2,576	2,757
2011	5,525	5,396	2,502	2,894

Appeals on DCA – statistics from April 2009 to December 2011-

Year	Appeals registered	Appeals w'drawn (allowed*on review)	Medical reviews outstanding on appeal	Appeals W'drawn/ registered in error	Sent to SWAO	Appeals allowed	Appeals disallowed	Appeals outstanding
2009	836	189	0	8	639	296	342	1
2010	1858	515	0	16	1327	579	742	6
2011	2292	474	32	6	1780	525	727	528
Total	4986	1178	32	30	3746	1400	1811	535

* Based on new/additional medical information being supplied after original decision was made.