



Business Plan

2006 – 2007

If you have any queries or comments regarding this document please contact:
Strategic and Business Planning Unit, 2nd Floor, Lighthouse Building, Gasworks Business Park
1 Cromac Place, Ormeau Road, Belfast, BT7 2JB
Telephone us on - [90829350](tel:90829350) or [90829359](tel:90829359)



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FOREWORD BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

In my foreword to last year's business plan I drew attention to the sharp cutback in resources which the Agency faced and the need to shed hundreds of jobs, in fact one seventh of the Agency.

Our approach, therefore, was to prioritise the work of the Agency by focusing on frontline services to our clients and by radically cutting back on all non-vital activity.

That approach has worked. We are on course to improve our service to clients, to live within our constrained budget and to achieve our staff headcount reductions.

In this coming year, therefore, we propose to continue to focus on the priorities we have agreed with our Minister and which are now well understood by our staff. And we will continue to reduce staffing to achieve our headcount targets.

While this will continue to be our approach throughout the remainder of the spending period to March 2008 we must now also plan for what comes next. The strategic review of the Agency which we have just recently launched will be the opportunity to take account of emerging pressures and issues so that we can identify what needs to be done to continue to build on our good progress to date. In this coming year we will begin to lay firm foundations to develop the Agency's organisation and services, long into the future, for the benefit of our clients, taxpayers and our staff.

GERRY KEENAN
Chief Executive

1. INTRODUCTION

The Business

The Social Security Agency's main business is to:

- assess and pay social security benefits accurately and securely;
- give advice and information about these benefits;
- support people by helping them move closer to work;
- handle reviews and appeals;
- prevent and detect benefit fraud, prosecute offenders and recover any benefit which has been paid incorrectly;
- recover benefit which has been paid in compensation cases;
- assess people's financial circumstances if they are applying for legal aid; and
- provide services to clients in Great Britain on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions in Great Britain.

The Social Security Agency delivers its services to:

- the people of Northern Ireland, with a population of some 1.7 million; and
- the people living in 3 Districts within London.

Annex 1 provides more detail.

Our Organisation

The Agency is managed by a six-member Board as follows:

Chief Executive

Gerry Keenan

Director of Operations

Bryan Davis

Director of Finance and Planning

Heather Cousins

Director of Human Resources

Grace Nesbitt

Director of Business Development

Colum Boyle

Director of Medical Services

Dr Terry Dixon

2. OUR VISION & VALUES

The Agency aims to provide a fair system of financial help to those in need.

Our vision is to deliver a high quality, customer focused welfare service in Northern Ireland which will provide the right support to the right people at the right time.

Toward the achievement of this vision, we work to values shared with our colleagues in the Department:

- Integrity;
- Political Impartiality; and
- Fairness.

This vision and these values will influence how we approach our task and how we deal with people inside and outside the Agency.

3. GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

The Agency's Business Plan has its origins in the Department for Social Development's Corporate Plan. This plan sets out the key aims and objectives for the Department in the coming year and takes account of the Government's Priorities and Budget 2006-2008 which outlines the key strategic priority outcomes agreed by Ministers. Each department takes forward planned outcomes for the citizen in the form of Public Service Agreements (PSAs).

The diagram below illustrates the planning context and shows the linkages between the Priorities and Budget document and the PSA for 2006-08, the Departmental Corporate Plan and the lower level plans of the Department's Groups and Agencies.



4. THE AGENCY'S PSAs & PRIORITIES

Public Service Agreements (PSAs)

The Department is committed to a series of Public Service Agreements which set out its contribution to the delivery of key targets and milestones within Priorities & Budget for 2006-08.

The Agency is committed to the following:

PSA 1.2- Operational Performance

Improve the delivery of the Agency's services during 2006-2008 by meeting published annual targets for each major business area, addressing accuracy, value for money and customer service.

(SSA Priority Areas: Delivering Better Customer Services - Reducing Fraud and Error - Debt Recovery)

PSA 1.3- Modernisation & Efficiency

By 2008, make significant progress towards modernising welfare services by delivering major government Welfare Reform priorities, modernising and improving the efficiency of our internal systems and making services more accessible, joined up and integrated.

(SSA priority areas: Delivering Better Customer Services - Modernisation)

PSA 1.4- Anti-Poverty

By 2008, to contribute to combating poverty by supporting people to move from welfare to work, and by increasing benefit uptake through targeting the most disadvantaged groups, particularly older people and people with a disability.

(SSA priority areas: Delivering Better Customer Services - Promoting benefit take-up)

PRIORITIES

Government commitments remain unchanged from last year; the main thrust of Priorities and Budget 2006-08 is to continue to direct available resources to priority frontline services such as health and education. As a result resources available to the Agency will continue to be curtailed.

In the last year we have made significant progress towards delivering efficiencies and headcount reductions. This has been achieved through our strategy of directing resources to frontline activities and scaling back on support activities.

Our 5 key priorities will remain in the period ahead. These are:

Delivering Better Customer Services

Our frontline staff have responsibility for assessing and paying social security benefits accurately and securely. They also provide an information and advice service. Financial accuracy and clearance time targets have been established across the 6 main benefit areas. The focus over the coming year will be to manage performance and continuously improve decision making and accuracy in order to meet client expectations and reduce financial losses.

Promoting benefit uptake

Tackling poverty is a key issue for Government in Northern Ireland, and the Agency needs to do more to combat poverty. The Agency is committed to promoting benefit take-up across the main client groups, namely Pensioners and Disability and Carers, to ensure that our clients receive the financial assistance and services to which they are entitled.

Reducing Fraud and Error

The Agency is committed to ensuring that benefits are paid only to those who are entitled to them. The implementation of a robust benefit security strategy will help to prevent fraud and error at the outset, and deliver greater public confidence in benefit administration.

Debt Recovery

The Agency has responsibility for the recovery of public funds where benefits have been incorrectly paid out through fraud or error. We will continue in our efforts to reduce the number of overpayments of benefit being made, to record and account for those overpayments more accurately, and to be more effective in securing recovery when appropriate.

Modernisation

Working with Department for Work and Pensions in Great Britain and the Department for Employment and Learning, the Agency is continuing to participate on a major programme of ICT development. This modernisation programme will improve the efficiency of internal systems and provide a more accessible and integrated service for our client groups; namely customers of working age, pensioners and those customers with disabilities and their carers.

5. BUSINESS PLAN TARGETS

As outlined previously, the Agency will continue to target resources on 5 priority areas while continuing to reduce staffing to agreed headcount targets. Our 5 priority areas and associated business plan targets are as follows:

Delivering Better Customer Services

Manage performance and continuously improve decision making and accuracy in order to meet customer expectations and reduce financial losses.

- Achieve within tolerance the following overall financial accuracy targets of total expenditure in relation to:

Income Support	99%	Retirement Pension	99%
Incapacity Benefit	99%	Pension Credit	98%
Job Seekers Allowance	99%	Disability Living Allowance	98%

- Achieve actual clearance times for the following benefits:

Income Support	12days	Incapacity Benefit	23days
Jobseekers Allowance	12days	Retirement Pension	20days
Disability Living Allowance	52days	Pension Credit	12days

Technical Note

Financial Accuracy targets have a tolerance in the range +/- 1- 2% to allow for statistical imprecision.

Promoting Benefit Uptake

Tackling poverty through a commitment to promoting benefit take-up across Pensioners and Disability and Carers client groups, to ensure that they receive the financial assistance and services to which they are entitled.

- **To implement benefit uptake strategy in relation to identified target groups.**

Reducing Fraud and Error

Implementation of a robust benefit security strategy which will help to prevent fraud and error at the outset, and, deliver greater public confidence in benefits administration.

- **Reduce the loss from customer fraud and error by 5% in the following benefits:**

Income Support , Pension Credit, Jobseekers Allowance, Disability Living Allowance and Incapacity Benefit

Debt Recovery

Recovery of public funds including benefits which have been incorrectly paid out through fraud or error.

- **To implement new Debt Manager system by October 2006**
- **To have made an overpayment recovery of £6 million**
- **To have made a compensation recovery of £6 million.**

Modernisation

To modernise the Agency's services to clients by reviewing current organisational arrangements, while continuing to work closely with the Department for Work and Pensions (GB) on a major programme of ICT development, and by improving internal business processes.

- **Implement the SSA-DEL Modernisation Programme.**
- **Continue to deliver key Welfare Reform Projects, including the Jobs & Benefits process and Pathways to Work.**
- **Develop opportunities to pioneer initiatives on behalf of DWP**
- **Complete Stage 1 of the Strategic Business Review.**
- **Continue to implement the Efficiency Strategy.**
- **Participate in NICS reform initiatives**

6. ADDITIONAL KEY TARGETS

In addition to the PSA commitments and supporting Business Plan targets the Agency has a series of additional targets across other areas of the business to secure improvements in business performance, client service and in how we treat our staff.

Internal Control

Throughout the year ensure controls are in place to provide substantial assurance levels of governance and control.

HR Strategy

To implement the HR Strategy, key targets include:

- To reduce average staff absence levels from 18.5 days to 12.4 days
- To continue to implement the G6/G7 leadership programme
- To review Alternative Working Patterns and make sure they are effectively managed
- To develop and implement as required a redeployment strategy to deliver required headcount reductions.

Business Continuity Plans

- To have these in place in all business areas by the end of March '07, including a continuity plan developed specifically to deal with a potential influenza pandemic.

7. PLANNING ASSUMPTIONS

The Agency's Business Plan has been developed on the basis of resource and workload assumptions which are detailed in Annex 2 and 3. The Agency's Corporate Balanced Scorecard is also attached at Annex 4.

Corporate Governance and Risk Management

Successful delivery of our business and the achievement of the targets and objectives set out in the previous sections are not without risks. These range from shortfalls in resources to unexpected peaks of work.

The Agency has developed a corporate governance framework which details the arrangements which have been established in order to properly manage the Agency's business. A key element of corporate governance is the implementation of a risk management system. This Agency's risk management system:

- identifies and manages the significant risks for the Agency in relation to delivering its objectives; and
- provides an assurance chain that the proper controls are in operation to enable the Agency to identify the risks to delivering its business objectives.

We will continue to identify all significant risks and will develop and implement plans to counteract and manage them.

The implementation of these systems will allow the Chief Executive, as Accounting Officer, to sign the Statement on Internal Control in the Annual Report and Accounts.

Services provided to the people of Northern Ireland

We are responsible for managing the following **social security benefits**.

- Attendance Allowance
- Disability Living Allowance
- Incapacity Benefit
- Income Support
- Benefits under the Industrial Injuries Scheme
- Carer's Allowance
- Jobseeker's Allowance (income and contribution based)
- Lump-sum payments (Christmas bonus)
- Maternity Allowance
- Pension Credit
- Retirement Pension
- Old Person's Pension
- State Second Pension
- Severe Disablement Allowance
- Social Fund payments, grants and loans
- Bereavement Benefits
- Cold-weather payments

We are also responsible for:

- providing information, advice and help to the public and employers;
- recovering Social Fund loans and funeral payments;
- preparing and presenting appeals to appeals tribunals;
- deciding on policy relating to social security fraud and for developing and putting in place a strategy to prevent and detect social security fraud and abuse and prosecuting offenders;
- preventing, raising and recovering overpayments of benefits;
- recovering social security payments from compensation awards; and
- working with social security authorities in other countries to decide who is entitled to benefits for those who are living, or have lived, abroad.

Services provided for the Department for Work and Pensions in Great Britain

We are responsible for delivering the services provided by:

- the Belfast Benefit Centre; and
- the Benefit Delivery Centre, Lisahally.

Services include:

- Processing Jobcentre Plus benefit work for Brent, Harrow and Hillingdon and South East London and reserve benefit work for parts of North London.
- Dealing with new claims, reviews adjudication and appeals for Income Support, Jobseekers Allowance, Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance and Maternity Allowance.
- Making third party deductions for housing and fuel costs.
- Providing a Debt Management centre for calculating overpayments for Income Support and Jobseekers Allowance for all Districts of the London region.
- Delivering a telephone service, providing both enquiries and information services to customers and front-end Local Service Outlets (LSOs)

Other services

We are responsible for handling the following services.

- **Health service charges** – we assess and issue certificates of entitlement to help with prescriptions, dental treatment, wigs and fabric supports, travel to hospital for treatment, sight tests and vouchers for glasses or contact lenses.
- **Assisted prison visits** – we assess entitlement and pay travelling expenses, to visit a partner or close relative in prison.
- **Housing and fuel costs** – for customers who have been supplied with housing or fuel credit, we deduct the repayments from their benefits and pay directly to the organisations concerned.
- **Legal Aid Assessment** – we assess customers' financial circumstances if they are applying for legal aid.
- **We provide relevant information** to employers and other organisations to help them to decide on entitlement to, and pay, Housing Benefit, Statutory Sick Pay, Statutory Maternity Pay, Criminal Injuries Compensation, free school meals and educational clothing.
- **We provide** a National Insurance Number allocation service on behalf of the Inland Revenue.
- **We provide information** on and pay Disability Living Allowance (higher-rate mobility component) to Motability.
- **Vehicle Excise Duty Exemption** – we issue certificates of entitlement to people who receive Disability Living Allowance (higher-rate mobility component).
- **Training Allowance** – we pay training allowances to those taking part in recognised Department for Employment and Learning schemes.
- **Data Sharing with other Government Departments** – for example the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland, Compensation Recovery Agency and the Department for Regional Development

		2006 to 2007 £ million
Resources	For Northern Ireland services	155.5
	Welfare Reform and Modernisation Programme	21.7
	For Great Britain services	11.8
Capital	For Northern Ireland services	1.1
	Welfare Reform and Modernisation Programme	41.6
	For Great Britain services	0
Non-Cash	For Northern Ireland services including Welfare Reform and Modernisation Programme	6.4
	For Great Britain services	0.8

Resource Budgeting

The Agency Accounts are prepared on an accrual basis and preparations are being made to take forward resource budgeting.

		Average Weekly Figures 2006 to 07
Main benefits	Activity	
Disability Living Allowance	Claims	488
	Liveload (monthly average) (see note 2)	173750
	Reconsiderations (previously reviews)	365
	Appeals	140
Incapacity Benefit	Claims	646
	Liveload (monthly average)	113579
	Appeals	92
Income Support	Claims	670
	Liveload (monthly average)	101285
	Change of circumstances	6977
Jobseeker's Allowance	Claims	1314
	Register (monthly average) (see note 1)	30066
Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance	Appeals	35
Other benefits	Activity	
Attendance Allowance	Claims	173
Carers Allowance	Claims	233
Retirement Pension	Claims	311
Pension Credit	Claims	223
Bereavement Benefit	Claims	21
Social Fund	Crisis loans	2200
	Budgeting loans	2382
	Community-care grants	1082
	Reviews	239
Other activities	Activity	
Recovering compensation	Requests for certificates	1784
Overpayments	Caseload (each year)	65736
Agency Benefit Claims		296

Note 1: - Liveload refers to customers currently receiving benefit.

Note 2: - The Jobseeker's Allowance register includes the Job Training Programme and Welfare to Work register.

CLIENTS					OUR PEOPLE																																				
<p>To provide a high quality service which meets our clients' needs</p> <p>By March 07 to achieve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Financial accuracy and Clearance times figures for our 6 main benefits of:- <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="4">Financial Accuracy</th> <th colspan="4">Clearance Times</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>IS</td> <td>99%</td> <td>DLA</td> <td>98%</td> <td>IS</td> <td>12days</td> <td>DLA</td> <td>52days</td> </tr> <tr> <td>JSA</td> <td>99%</td> <td>RP</td> <td>99%</td> <td>JSA</td> <td>12days</td> <td>RP</td> <td>20days</td> </tr> <tr> <td>IB</td> <td>99%</td> <td>PC</td> <td>98%</td> <td>IB</td> <td>23days</td> <td>PC</td> <td>12days</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ To have Business Continuity Plans in place in all business areas, including a plan specifically developed to deal with a Flu Pandemic. <p>To tackle poverty and encourage social inclusion through a commitment to promoting benefit take-up</p> <p>By March 07 to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Have implemented the Benefit Uptake Strategy 					Financial Accuracy				Clearance Times				IS	99%	DLA	98%	IS	12days	DLA	52days	JSA	99%	RP	99%	JSA	12days	RP	20days	IB	99%	PC	98%	IB	23days	PC	12days	<p>To develop appropriate Human Resource strategies across a range of activities including organisational culture, behaviours and leadership</p> <p>By March 07 to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Reduce average staff absence levels from 18.5 days to 12.4 days. ➤ Continue to implement the G6/G7 leadership programme. ➤ Review Alternative Working Patterns and make sure they are effectively managed. ➤ Develop and implement (as required) a redeployment strategy to deliver required headcount reductions. 				
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FINANCE					PROCESSES																																				
<p>To maintain a sound system of internal control</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Throughout the year ensure controls are in place to provide substantial assurance on levels of governance and control. ➤ Monitor and report progress on the efficiency strategy on a quarterly basis. <p>To live within budgets</p> <p>By March 07 to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Identify business processes which can be delivered in a more efficient way. 					<p>To further develop strategies to modernise services and protect public funds</p> <p>By March 07 to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Reduce the loss from customer fraud and error by 5% in the following benefits: Income Support, Job Seekers Allowance, Incapacity Benefit, Pension Credit and Disability Living Allowance. ➤ Implement the new Debt Manager system (by Oct 06) ➤ Have made an overpayment recovery of £6 million. ➤ Have made a compensation recovery of £6 million. ➤ Implement the SSA-DEL Modernisation Programme. ➤ Continue to deliver key Welfare Reform Projects, including the Jobs & Benefits process and Pathways to Work. ➤ Complete Stage 1 of the Strategic Business Review. ➤ Continue to implement the Efficiency Strategy. ➤ Develop opportunities to pioneer initiatives on behalf of DWP. ➤ Participate in NICS reform initiatives. 																																				