

Statement of Strategy



Office of the Ombudsman



*Secretariat to
Standards in Public Office Commission*



Office of the Information Commissioner

2004 – 2006

**Office of the Ombudsman
Office of the Information Commissioner
Standards in Public Office Commission Secretariat**

Statement of Strategy 2004 – 2006

Contents

Introduction by the Ombudsman & Information Commissioner	3
Introduction by the Chairman of the Standards in Public Office Commission	5
Overview by the Director General	6
Context of the Office	8
A Dynamic Business Environment	9
Our Core Purpose and Values	11
Our High Level Goals	12
High Level Goal (1) - Objectives and Supporting Actions	13
High Level Goal (2) - Objectives and Supporting Actions	14
High Level Goal (3) - Objectives and Supporting Actions	15
High Level Goal (4) - Objectives and Supporting Actions	16
Achieving Our Goals and Objectives	17
Appendix	19

March 2004

1. Introduction by the Ombudsman & Information Commissioner

The institutions of the modern Irish State deliver a diverse range of services, and touch the lives of individuals in a great many ways. For the most part, these interactions between the individual and the State result in a positive experience for the service user, and are typically marked by the provision of the service requested, or the service to which he or she was entitled.

Sometimes, however, these interactions can fall below the “quality service” requirement that has emerged in recent years as a central theme of the programme to modernise government and its activities. On such occasions, a public body may deliver a bad service, it may reach an ill-considered or unreasonable decision, or it may refuse to release information relating to its decision-making - a practice which is contrary to the body's duty to conduct its business in an open and transparent manner.

As Ombudsman and Information Commissioner, it is my responsibility to examine complaints of alleged maladministration and to adjudicate on disputes relating to the release of information under the Freedom of Information legislation. As a member of the Standards in Public Office Commission, it is my responsibility to contribute to the decision-making process of that body on matters arising in relation to the legislation under its supervision.

The common principle underpinning this work is that the institutions of the State must always conduct their business in a manner that is fully accountable. This principle has a number of reference points. At a very fundamental level it reflects a view that, in a modern democratic society, people have a right to be treated courteously and fairly, that they have a right to be given reasons for decisions that have been made and which affect their well-being, and that they have a right to a service that – while acknowledging the need to adhere to due process – is speedy and efficient. Not only do people have rights in this respect, but in a consumer driven society they increasingly have expectations that these are the behaviours that will characterise their encounters with public service providers.

At another level, these principles of openness, fairness and accountability reflect something of the organisational structure of the public sector itself. Unlike the private sector, public service customers cannot take their business elsewhere if they are dissatisfied. Consequently, the quality of the service they receive, and the manner in which they are treated, assumes an even greater significance. In my role as Ombudsman and Information Commissioner, I look forward in particular to making the resources of these Offices available to those who believe that the standard of service they encountered is not what it should have been. In approaching the Offices they can be confident that they will be treated with courtesy, and that their concerns will be fully and carefully examined in a fair and objective manner.

In 2004, the Office of the Ombudsman will mark the twentieth anniversary of its establishment. The Office of the Information Commissioner was established in 1998, and the independent Standards in Public Office Commission, which succeeded the former Public Offices Commission, followed in 2001. This first published Statement of Strategy sets out the broad direction for the related functions of the Offices of Ombudsman and Information Commissioner over the period 2004-2006, and takes

account of the service provided to the Standards in Public Office Commission by its Secretariat which is seconded from the Office of the Ombudsman. It therefore describes the principal strands of work that will be undertaken in pursuit of the goals and objectives of each function.

I am pleased to introduce this Statement of Strategy. I believe it represents a strong platform on which we can build our work programmes over the next three years, and so continue to promote and support the highest standards of practice and behaviour across the institutions of the State.

Emily O'Reilly
Ombudsman and Information Commissioner

March 2004

2. Introduction by the Chairman of the Standards in Public Office Commission.

This Statement of Strategy takes account of the service provided to the Standards in Public Office Commission (the Standards Commission) by its Secretariat. The Secretariat has links with the wider organisation by virtue of being seconded from the Office of the Ombudsman.

While the Statement of Strategy encompasses the role of all staff including the Secretariat to the Standards Commission, it has been carefully formulated to give explicit recognition to the separate and independent existence of the Standards Commission as well as its composition. The Standards Commission is chaired by a Judge of the High Court and includes in its membership the Comptroller and Auditor General, the Ombudsman, the Clerk of Dáil Éireann, the Clerk of Seanad Éireann and a former member of the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Given the wide range of statutory functions now being discharged by the Standards Commission and the increasing complexity of its remit, it is essential that the support and other input provided by its Secretariat should have a strategic focus and that the operational aspects of the Secretariat's work should be driven by a business planning process.

The Statement of Strategy will inform the development of annual business plans which will reflect the different areas of responsibility, including those of the Secretariat to the Standards Commission. I am confident that the Statement of Strategy will greatly assist the Standards Commission, in its independent role, and the Secretariat in carrying out its statutory duties over the next three years.

On behalf of the Standards Commission, I am pleased to endorse the Statement of Strategy and I look forward to the positive contribution which it can make to furthering the objectives of the Standards Commission.

Justice Matthew P. Smith
Chairman
Standards in Public Office Commission

3. Overview by the Director General

Each year the government sector processes millions of transactions involving Irish citizens and others either resident in, or visiting, Ireland. These transactions are conducted through a variety of public bodies including central government departments, local authorities, health boards and voluntary hospitals, An Garda Síochána, educational bodies, state-sponsored bodies, as well as a number of public service agencies. While these bodies do not fall equally within the remit of the Office of the Ombudsman and the Office of the Information Commissioner, both functions play an active role in reviewing standards and practice in public administration.

The Office of the Ombudsman also provides a Secretariat to the Standards in Public Office Commission, and in doing so provides the resources that enable this body to carry out its important work. In presenting this overview, I should also take the opportunity to underline the independence of the Standards in Public Office Commission. While the Secretariat to the Standards Commission is resourced through the provision of staff and facilities from the Office of the Ombudsman, the functioning of the Standards Commission, and the determinations it reaches, are at all times independent in their nature. Throughout this Statement of Strategy, references to the Standards Commission should be interpreted as referring to the role of the Secretariat in supporting the strategic goals and independent functioning of the Standards Commission. Indeed, throughout the organisation support for overall strategy will be developed through the formulation of individually tailored business plans within the respective offices which, in turn, will be implemented at staff member level through the performance management and development system.

As a joint resource supporting these three related strands of activity, the Office fulfils an important role in examining complaints coming within the remit of the Ombudsman, in making determinations in respect of applications for a review of decisions reached by public bodies under the Freedom of Information legislation, and in supporting the Standards in Public Office Commission in discharging its statutory functions under the relevant legislation. In this Statement of Strategy 2004-2006, we describe how we intend to continue this work over the next three years.

In 2003, the Ombudsman dealt with 9,496 enquiries and received 3,075 complaints, some 862 of which subsequently proved to be outside jurisdiction. Over the past ten years the Office has received an average of 2,518 valid complaints each year, suggesting a recurring baseline level of dissatisfaction among service users. In relation to Freedom of Information, a total of 17,196 requests seeking the release of information were received by public bodies in 2002. In the same year, the Information Commissioner received 687 applications for a review of decisions reached by public bodies in relation to the release of information. Of these applications, 585 were accepted for review in 2002. In 2003, the Information Commissioner received 1,117 review applications of which 924 were accepted for review.

While these figures represent a continuing and substantial workload for the staff of the Office, and while each case represents a matter of the greatest importance for the individual making the complaint or seeking the review, it is worth noting that the volume of cases remains small relative to the volume of transactions processed by

public bodies each year. Nevertheless, over the next three years, we expect that the core of our activities will continue to be driven by the casework generated by those who have complained to the Ombudsman, or who have requested the Information Commissioner to review a particular decision. However, we do not believe that the results of our work should be found only in the conclusions and decisions arrived at in our casework. In the past, the Office has also sought to interpret and understand some of the systemic causes that underlie those matters which members of the public bring to its attention.

In 1997 the Office published *The Ombudsman's Guide to Standards of Best Practice for Public Servants* in an effort to identify and promulgate best practice in public administration. The guide, which was updated and reissued in 2003, is set out under four headings - dealing with people properly, fairly, openly and impartially. The revised guide takes account of more recent developments such as freedom of information, ethics and equal status legislation, the principles of quality customer service and the provision of redress. Over the course of this Strategic Plan, we intend to develop this work further. We will use our experiences to identify ways of effecting long term improvements in public administration and, to this end, we will continue to foster good working relationships with those bodies falling within our remit.

In setting out a direction for our work over the next three years, we have identified four high level goals. The pursuit of these goals underlines our continuing concern to provide our clients with a high quality service, and to work with those bodies falling within our remit so as to evolve and apply principles of best practice in public administration. We also intend to draw upon the experience and authority of the Office to promote the highest standards of service, and we have set ourselves the challenge of operating as a “best practice organisation” in our own right. In that respect we act to ensure that our staff, and the systems they operate, are of the highest standard possible. Also of relevance is the Office's Human Resource Management Strategy 2003 - 2005, the implementation of which is on target.

In short, we aspire to provide our customers with a service that is accessible, fair, courteous, attentive and efficient. Furthermore, we feel strongly that this service must be delivered in plain and readily understandable language, and that our customers are at all times made fully aware of the reasoning behind our decisions. We look forward to operating to these high standards over the next three years, and to continue providing our clients with an efficient and valued service.

Pat Whelan
Director General

4. Context of the Office

The offices of the Ombudsman and the Information Commissioner, together with the Secretariat to the Standards in Public Office Commission (the Office), deliver on separate statutory functions through a structure of shared resources.

While the three functions are separate, they can at another level be considered to be complementary to, and supportive of, the government's broader modernisation programme. The Director General is the Accounting Officer for the organisation supporting these three statutory roles.

The Office has its roots in the early 1980s with the establishment in 1984 of the Office of Ombudsman as a new feature within public administration structures in Ireland. In 1995 it was decided that the Secretariat to the newly established Public Offices Commission, now the Standards in Public Office Commission, would be provided by the Office of the Ombudsman. Additional functions were added to the Office following the enactment of the Freedom of Information Act, 1997. As well as its original functions in providing a service to the Standards in Public Office Commission in relation to the ethics legislation, new responsibilities were assigned to the Standards Commission Secretariat in the context of the Electoral Acts, 1997 to 2002 and the Oireachtas (Ministerial and Parliamentary Offices) (Amendment) Act, 2001. The Office also provides support to the Referendum Commission.

The key functions of the Office may be summarised as:

- Investigating complaints made in relation to organisations within its remit. Where a complaint is held to be well founded, the Office recommends an appropriate course of redress and works with public bodies to improve standards of decision making and service delivery.
- Determining the rights of individuals to access information under the Freedom of Information legislation, and promoting good FOI practice.
- Providing the Secretariat to the Standards in Public Office Commission.
- Providing secretarial support to the Referendum Commission when established.

The Office has a budget of €5.50 million (2004) and it has a full-time staff complement of 80.

The legislation governing the functions associated with the Office gives it strong powers to act as an independent authority, intervening as appropriate, in relation to the dealings between individuals and the public bodies within its remit. The Ombudsman and Information Commissioner is appointed by the President, following a resolution passed by both Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann. The Ombudsman is also an *ex officio* member of the Standards in Public Office Commission, the Referendum Commission and the Constituency Commission, when established. The Standards Commission has a Chairman, The Honourable Mr Justice Matthew P. Smith of the High Court, who was appointed by the President on the advice of the Government following resolutions in Dáil and Seanad Éireann.

5. A Dynamic Business Environment

The Office, which now houses the three linked functions, operates in a more complex business environment than was the case when the Office of the Ombudsman was first set up in 1984. It deals with a greater range of organisations and individuals and on a more extensive range of issues.

A particular factor that impacts significantly on the work of the Office is the way in which the public service has been endeavouring in recent years to modernise and improve its own practices. For example, there has been a considerable emphasis on improving the quality and effectiveness of public services, and the efficiency with which they are delivered. More specifically, there has been a persistent focus on:

- Improving the quality of customer service - Customer Charters are being prepared and Quality Customer Service Action Plans are now the norm in most public service organisations.
- Greater accountability in relation to decision-making and the delivery of services.
- Better information to allow improved decision-making and "joined-up" services for individuals.

The Office recognises that significant progress has been achieved in this respect and that service standards and performance in the public service have improved considerably over the last decade.

Nevertheless, a continuing challenge for those working in the public service is to consolidate progress and build on achievements to date. In a context of budgetary constraint and increased service demand this can become more difficult. The challenge of 'doing more with less' now applies to all organisations in the public sector. While the public now expects higher quality service from all public bodies and from the Office itself, it is increasingly the case that this often has to be delivered with fewer resources.

The Office reports to the Oireachtas which, as an institution in its own right, has embarked on a significant programme of modernisation, particularly through an expanded system of Oireachtas committees. These committees have served to improve public accountability as the actions of public bodies and public servants are now increasingly subject to parliamentary scrutiny. The Office, by virtue of the experience derived from carrying out its functions, is well placed to support the Oireachtas in its scrutiny of administrative actions and in carrying out its legislative role.

The Office is committed to highlighting awareness of its role among the general public, and recognises the need to increase such awareness as a key challenge over the period of this Strategy Statement. National and local media can play a substantial role in this educative process.

In supporting the Information Commissioner in making determinations in relation to appeals submitted by members of the public, the Office plays a central role in

ensuring that the legislation governing the release of information held by public bodies is properly implemented. This service represents a practical support in ensuring that public bodies are more accountable than heretofore for their decisions and actions.

In providing the Secretariat to the Standards in Public Office Commission, the Office assists the Commission in ensuring that the obligations arising under relevant legislation are fulfilled. This resource represents an important support in ensuring that the standards expected of public representatives and other public servants, and set out in legislation, are being met.

The emergence in recent years of parallel 'Ombudsman' roles in other areas of public policy brings both a potential for greater awareness of the 'Ombudsman' role, and a greater potential for some confusion. Despite this, the Ombudsman concept in its broadest definition is now well-established nationally and internationally. The Office considers itself to be part of an international Ombudsman community. As such, it is associated with and participates in a number of international bodies such as the British and Irish Ombudsman Association, meetings with ombudsman offices of the member states of the European Union and the International Ombudsman Institute. These international linkages are valued by the Office as a way of monitoring international developments, and as an important means of 'benchmarking' the Office in relation to equivalent bodies internationally.

6. Our Core Purpose and Values

Our Core Purpose

To act independently to preserve and promote the highest standards in interactions between the Individual and the State.

Guided by the principles of Openness, Fairness and Accountability, and drawing upon our enabling legislation, we:

- Investigate complaints, decide upon redress as appropriate, and recommend actions to improve standards of public service.
- Determine the rights of individuals to gain access to information held by public bodies.
- Assist the Standards in Public Office Commission in overseeing compliance with the ethics and electoral legislation.

Our Values

The following values underpin how we give effect to our core purpose:

Independence	We will exercise our judgement independently and ensure that we have the trust and confidence of the public.
Authority	We will produce high quality reports and decisions in order to increase our influence with public bodies and our clients.
Credibility	We will maintain effective relations both with public bodies and with our clients.
Objectivity	We will ensure that our business is conducted fairly and effectively.
Accessibility	We will make it easy for people to do business with us, and we will work towards a high level of public awareness of our services and ensure that we are easily contactable.
Flexibility	We will continue to adapt to our changing environment in order to continue to meet the needs of our clients.

By adhering to these values in our work, we will provide a high quality service to our clients and deliver that service in a manner that is at all times professional, effective, and respectful.

7. Our High Level Goals

Drawing upon our statement of core purpose, we have identified four High Level Goals to guide the work of the Office over the next three years. These are:

High Level Goal 1: We will deliver a high quality service to our clients that is efficient, easily accessible, and that produces clear and fair decisions

High Level Goal 2: We will work with the public bodies and institutions within our remit to support them in achieving and maintaining the highest standards in their interactions with individual service users.

High Level Goal 3: We will commit the experience and authority of the Office to serve civil society and, working together with those institutions and public bodies falling within our remit, we will seek to ensure that the public interest is properly served.

High Level Goal 4: We will develop as a best practice organisation operating to the highest standards in the delivery of our services.

In the following sections, we set out the particular objectives associated with each of these goals and we identify the supporting actions that will enable us to achieve them.

8. High Level Goal (1) - Objectives and Supporting Actions

We will deliver a high quality service to our clients that is efficient, easily accessible, and that produces clear and fair decisions.

Objectives

- (1.1) To the greatest extent possible, we will make it easy for our clients to do business with us.
- (1.2) We will tell our clients what they can expect from the Office at all stages of their interaction with us.
- (1.3) We will make clear and fair decisions.

Supporting Actions

Actions Supporting (1.1)

- We will make our Office as accessible as practicable to all clients and, in particular, to those with disabilities.
- We will recognise and respond to the increasing diversity of Irish society in the provision of our services.
- We will provide our services in the Irish Language where Irish is the client's language of choice.
- We will improve our websites to make them client-friendly providing easily understood information on all Office services and with clear links, as appropriate.
- We will regularly review the effectiveness of our case/project management systems in delivering a high quality service to our clients.
- Subject to the need to track all communications with the Office, and subject to meeting our obligations under legislation, we will take steps to ensure that it is easy for our clients to communicate with us through a number of routes - phone, letter, e-mail, or via our website.

Actions Supporting (1.2)

- We will introduce additional client feedback mechanisms.
- We will assess levels of awareness of the Office among the general public, and take steps to increase current levels of awareness particularly among the disadvantaged.
- We will give our clients clear information on how they can expect their case/file to progress – this will include indicative timescales, a description of the process, and a contact point.
- We will develop effective mechanisms for reviewing cases regularly and informing clients of progress.
- We will review our current protocol for handling telephone enquiries to ensure that clients who contact the Office speak to the nominated contact person for the case/file as quickly as possible.

Actions Supporting (1.3)

- We will write our decisions, letters and reports in clear, jargon-free "plain English".
- We will ensure that our 'letter of closure' outlines in detail the reasons behind our decisions.
- We will ensure that all relevant facts are taken into account in reaching our decisions.

9. High Level Goal (2) - Objectives and Supporting Actions

We will work with the public bodies and institutions within our remit to support them in achieving and maintaining the highest standards in their interactions with individual service users.

Objectives

- (2.1) We will develop mutually productive working arrangements with public bodies within our remit.
- (2.2) We will provide timely feedback to public bodies on their performance in relation to the Office's statutory functions.

Supporting Actions

Actions Supporting (2.1)

- We will review, as necessary, existing liaison arrangements with public bodies.
- We will engage more closely with public bodies to ensure that they are fully informed about the Office's remit and what they can expect from the Office.

Actions Supporting (2.2)

- We will develop regular opportunities to meet with representatives of public bodies to review performance under our enabling legislation.
- We will provide 'thematic' feedback on the performance of key public bodies under the legislation as necessary and appropriate. Such feedback will address the extent to which public bodies have reviewed their administrative procedures by taking account of past recommendations or decisions of the Office.

10. High Level Goal (3) - Objectives and Supporting Actions

We will commit the experience and authority of the Office to serve civil society, and working together with those institutions and public bodies falling within our remit, we will seek to ensure that the public interest is properly served.

Objectives

- (3.1) We will support the Oireachtas in its scrutiny of administrative actions and in its legislative role.
- (3.2) We will contribute, where appropriate, to emerging aspects of public policy as they relate to our statutory functions. In this respect, we will be guided by our understanding of how such aspects might impact either on the functioning of the Office, or upon the wider public interest.
- (3.3) We will contribute to debate in civil society by promoting awareness of issues and principles relevant to the work of the Office.

Supporting Actions

Actions supporting (3.1)

- We will avail of opportunities, where appropriate, to report to and appear before relevant committees of the Oireachtas.
- We will encourage public representatives to use the services of the Office in support of their constituents. We will provide guidance relating to the obligations of public representatives under the ethics and electoral legislation.

Actions Supporting (3.2)

- We will prepare submissions on proposed and existing legislation of relevance to the Office to appropriate government departments.
- We will take all necessary steps to promote the principles of openness, fairness, accountability as well as the role of the Office in public policy in Ireland.

Actions Supporting (3.3)

- We will produce special reports on aspects of our functions as appropriate.
- We will contribute to programmes/activities organised by other organisations as appropriate (speeches/presentations).
- We will interact with the media to alert them to the activities of the Office.

11. High Level Goal (4) - Objectives and Supporting Actions

We will develop as a best practice organisation operating to the highest standards in the delivery of our services.

Objectives

- (4.1) We will develop the skills and confidence of our staff to deliver a high quality and fair service to our clients.
- (4.2) We will review and develop all our business processes so that they enable us deliver a high quality service to our clients.
- (4.3) We will ensure that our technology supports us in delivering a high quality service for our clients.
- (4.4) We will develop 'benchmarks' against which to test our performance.

Supporting Actions

Actions Supporting (4.1)

- We will encourage, train and develop our staff.
- We will develop the leadership competencies of our managers.
- We will encourage innovation in the way we approach our work.
- We will strengthen the focus on the links between individual and organisational performance.

Actions Supporting (4.2)

- We will develop on-going performance management processes for monitoring cases, files and projects.
- We will ensure that staff have, or acquire, the skills and competencies necessary to support core business processes.
- We will review all procedures manuals to ensure that they support staff in their daily work.
- We will review and improve our records management systems.

Actions Supporting (4.3)

- We will develop our websites to ensure that they are client friendly and provide clear, comprehensive information on our services.
- We will develop an on-line service to allow clients 'register' with the Office.
- We will improve our electronic business processes to enhance communication between the Office and our clients.
- We will develop our IT systems to provide improved support for case management processes - through, for example, improved signposting of case 'milestones'.

Actions Supporting (4.4)

- We will develop structured client feedback mechanisms to track our performance as an organisation.
- We will report to the Performance Verification Group in relation to progress on the commitments made under *Sustaining Progress*.
- We will identify appropriate 'benchmark' organisations against which to monitor our organisational performance.

12. Achieving Our Goals and Objectives.

General

Implementing this Strategic Plan will require each of the business units within the three functions - Office of the Ombudsman, Office of the Information Commissioner and the Secretariat to the Standards in Public Office Commission - to prepare an annual Business Plan for each of the three years over the period 2004-2006. This will require the senior management team in each of the three functions to:

- Prioritise the Supporting Actions set out in this document.
- Identify the resources required by each supporting action and to allocate available resources within the Office accordingly.
- Set out agreed target output measures that will reflect the volume and quality of achievements to be secured.
- Develop a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that will allow progress in achieving declared targets to be tracked. This will include KPIs to track caseload flow and management as well as other interim measures to monitor the nature and frequency of communications with clients. Performance measures will also be developed to track progress in other areas such as the preparation and dissemination of special reports, the extent of liaison with the bodies and institutions within our remit, and our success in strengthening our own internal business systems.
- Identify the impacts secured under each objective (in terms of beneficial impacts secured either for clients or in relation to bodies and institutions within our remit).
- Prepare a timeframe for each year of this strategic plan within which the stated supporting actions are to be taken, and the associated achievements are to be secured.

These Business Plans will be used to guide the work of the Office on an annual basis, and will serve as a focal point for monthly progress reviews which will be led by the Director General and will involve the senior management team across the Office. In addition, the Office's Human Resource Management Strategy 2003 - 2005, the implementation of which is proceeding on target, will facilitate an integrated approach to achieving the goals and objectives in the Statement of Strategy and the Business Plans.

Progress against these Business Plans will also be dependent upon the continuing roll-out and implementation of a number of significant initiatives which are already underway within the Office as part of the Government's continuing modernisation programme in the civil service. Principal among these is the important work being carried out under the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) and the Management Information System (MIF). The full implementation of PMDS will support the Office in ensuring that our staff possess the appropriate skills and competencies to do their job in a fully efficient manner, thereby supporting the effective functioning of business systems within the Office. The application of the MIF, and its use by all in the Office, will, in time, support a more quantitative measurement of performance against our business targets.

Targets and Timeframes

Drawing upon the Supporting Actions listed under each of the four High Level Goals, we will develop a series of targets, the achievement of which on an incremental basis over the three-year period covered by this Strategic Plan, will culminate in the realisation of the Objectives stated under each Goal. In order to map out the periodic achievement of these targets, we will frame them within quarterly periods for each year of the Strategic Plan. Monthly review of progress against these targets will be set as an agenda item for meetings of the Management Advisory Committee (MAC) within the Office.

As already indicated, this work will be set out in Annual Business Plans for each of the business units of the three separate functions represented within the Office.

Performance

We believe that monitoring performance in an organisation depends upon two important factors:

- The frequency and nature of performance reviews against targets set out in Business Plans. This depends ultimately upon the willingness of management to lead the performance review process at MAC level, and to draw upon emerging PMDS structures to extend this practice of performance review across the organisation.
- Access to a relevant series of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that allow measurement of performance to be carried out in a structured manner. While the set of KPIs to be used in the Office is set out in some greater detail in the Business Plans for each function, a summary of some indicative measures is presented in Appendix 1.

Reporting on Progress

Progress will be reviewed on a monthly basis against an agreed suite of KPIs in each of the three functions represented in the Office. Under the Public Service Management Act, 1997, departments and offices are required to produce an annual progress report. This provides an opportunity to report publicly on implementation of the statement of strategy. Although the Act does not apply to our Office, in the interests of best practice, an annual statement of progress will be presented in the Annual Reports of the Ombudsman, the Information Commissioner, and the Standards in Public Office Commission.

Appendix

Summary of Indicative KPIs

High Level Goal 1: We will deliver a high quality service to our clients that is efficient, easily accessible, and that produces clear and fair decisions

(Supporting actions are shown in brackets)

KPIs relating to

Actions supporting (1.1) (Make it easy for clients to do business with us)

- **Degree of compliance with National Disability Authority Guidelines** (physical access)
- **Number of information leaflets published in languages other than English or Irish** (responding to diversity)
- **Extent to which obligations have been met under the Official Languages Act, 2003** (service through Irish)
- **Range of changes; frequency of updates; feedback from users** (website improvements)
- **Case number targets; case quality reviews; case progress reviews; feedback from clients; number of complaints about service** (case/project management effectiveness)

Extent to which all sections are adequately staffed during opening hours; number of communications received (use of phone, letter, email, website)

KPIs relating to

Actions supporting (1.2) (Tell clients what they can expect)

- **Range and frequency of client surveys and changes effected** (additional client feedback mechanisms)
- **Number of awareness surveys; number of initiatives taken** (assessing and increasing awareness)
- **Case quality reviews** (giving clients information on how their case will progress)
- **Number and frequency of case reviews at all grade levels; case quality reviews** (effective case reviews; keeping clients informed of progress)
- **Number of complaints from switch and clients, staff cover in sections during opening hours, number of Corporate Services - Support Unit meetings** (telephone enquiries from clients)

KPIs relating to

Actions supporting (1.3) (Clear and fair decisions)

- **Case quality reviews; number of comebacks from clients** (plain English; reasons for decisions; taking account of relevant facts)

High Level Goal 2: We will work with the public bodies and institutions within our remit to support them in achieving and maintaining the highest standards in their interactions with individual service users.

(Supporting actions are shown in brackets)

KPIs relating to

Actions supporting (2.1) (Working arrangements with public bodies)

- **Number of meetings with (or letters to) public bodies about liaison arrangements** (liaison arrangements)
- **Number of presentations to public bodies** (explaining the Office's requirements)

KPIs relating to

Actions supporting (2.2) (Feedback on performance to public bodies)

- **Number of meetings with (or letters to) public bodies about their performance in meeting our requirements** (degree of co-operation)
- **Number of meetings with (or reports issued to) public bodies about their performance over a specified period in dealing with complaints, requests, etc.** (learning from recommendations, decisions etc of the Office)

High Level Goal 3: We will commit the experience and authority of the Office to serve civil society and, working together with those institutions and public bodies falling within our remit, we will seek to ensure that the public interest is properly served.

(Supporting actions are shown in brackets)

KPIs relating to

Actions supporting (3.1) (Supporting the Oireachtas)

- **Number of submissions to, or appearances before, Oireachtas Committees and evaluation of outcome** (Oireachtas Committees)
- **Number of briefing sessions with public representatives; number of approaches received from them on behalf of constituents** (engaging with public representatives)

KPIs relating to

Actions supporting (3.2) (Contributing to emerging aspects of public policy)

- **Number of submissions made in relation to legislation and evaluation of outcome** (legislation of relevance to the Office)
- **Number of speeches delivered, articles published and evaluation of outcome** (promoting the contribution of the Office in public policy debate)

KPIs relating to

Actions supporting (3.3) (Contributing to debate in civil society)

- **Number of special reports published and evaluation of outcome** (special reports on aspects of our functions)
- **Number of speeches delivered, articles published and evaluation of outcome** (promoting the contribution of the Office to debate in civil society)
- **Number of press releases issued, articles published; degree of media interest, effect on demand for Office's services** (interacting with the media to promote the Office)

High Level Goal 4: We will develop as a best practice organisation operating to the highest standards in the delivery of our services.

(Supporting actions are shown in brackets)

KPIs relating to

Actions supporting (4.1) (Developing the skills and confidence of our staff)

- **Percentage of budget spent on training; number of training days delivered and evaluated through PMDS; other established indicators of training effectiveness** (training and development of staff)
- **Training, coaching and competency development through PMDS** (developing leadership competencies)
- **Extent to which staff are creative problem solvers, self reliant with delegated powers; evaluate through PMDS reviews of performance and upward feedback** (encouraging innovation)
- **Periodic reports by each MAC member outlining the linkage between the section business plan, individual role profiles, the suite of competencies and the training and development plan** (developing the link between individual and organisational performance)

KPIs relating to

Actions supporting (4.2) (Reviewing and developing business processes)

- **Range and frequency of statistical reports; case targets and key deliverables specified under PMDS** (developing performance management processes to monitor work outputs)
- **Extent to which outputs against targets are delivered under PMDS; formulation and delivery of training and development plans under PMDS** (developing staff skills and competencies to support core business processes)
- **Number of procedures manuals identified for review and updated** (review procedures manuals)
- **Extent to which records management systems have been reviewed and updated** (review and improve record management systems)

KPIs relating to

Actions supporting (4.3) (Developing technology supports to deliver a high quality service)

- **Range of changes; frequency of updates; feedback from users** (making websites more client friendly)
- **Specify on-line service elements and track progress in development** (on-line service for clients)
- **Specify improvements and track progress in implementation and evaluate effectiveness** (improving electronic business processes to enhance client - Office communication)
- **Specify improvements and track progress in implementation and evaluate effectiveness** (develop IT systems to provide improved support for case/project)

management procedures)

KPIs relating to

Actions supporting (4.4) (Developing "benchmarks" to test organisational performance)

- **Range and frequency of client surveys and changes effected** (developing structured feedback mechanisms)
- **Comprehensive reports delivered on time and approved by the Verification Group** (reports to the Performance Verification Group under *Sustaining Progress*)
- **Number of benchmark organisations identified, range of data collected and analysed and conclusions drawn** (identifying appropriate benchmark organisations against which to monitor organisational performance)