

1994

HEALTH -  
MAIN FUNCTIONS  
2004

2001 1994

BRIEF 1

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

Functions

1. The functions of the Department of Health and Social Services correspond broadly to those of the Departments of Health and Social Security in Whitehall. The Department administers three main "businesses":

- health and personal social services - which include hospitals, family practitioner services, community health and personal social services;
- social security - which covers the full range of benefits and other forms of financial support provided to those entitled to such assistance; and
- child support - which operates the new system for child support maintenance in Northern Ireland.

Aims, Objectives and Key Challenges

2. The primary aim of the Department is to improve the health and social well-being of the people of Northern Ireland.

3. The Department's overall corporate objectives are:

- \* to enhance the overall effectiveness of the Department by cultivating a strong corporate identity, by developing opportunities for staff and by providing cohesive management arrangements and support services for the DHSS family of businesses.
- \* to develop policies for maintaining and improving the health and social well-being of the people of Northern Ireland and to ensure the provision of a balanced mix of appropriate preventive, treatment and care services with special emphasis on health promotion and the needs of vulnerable groups such as children, elderly people, people with disabilities and people who are socially disadvantaged.
- \* to provide, within the Government's wider social and

economic policies and in parity with the social security system in Great Britain, an efficient and responsive system of financial help for people who, for example, are unemployed, sick, disabled, retired or in need.

- \* to promote and maintain charities legislation and a wide variety of social legislation appropriate to Northern Ireland; to encourage, promote and support an independent, vigorous and cost effective voluntary sector; to encourage and promote voluntary activity; and to promote and enhance community development.
- \* to develop and provide child support services, in parity with Great Britain, focused on the delivery of fair, efficient and effective arrangements for the assessment, collection, enforcement and payment of child maintenance.

#### Organisation

4. The administration of the Department is organised under the Permanent Secretary, Mr Alan Elliott, into two central policy groups, a Management Executive for the health and personal social services, a Social Security Agency and a Child Support Agency. The details are:

- Central Management and Social Security Policy Group, headed by the Principal Establishment and Finance Officer, Mr Peter Small, is responsible for social security policy and legislation, negotiates and manages the allocation and control of the Department's resources and provides central management services for the Department.
- Health and Personal Social Services Policy and Strategy Group, headed by Dr Jeremy Harbison, is responsible for setting the overall strategy for the health and personal social services and for policy development and legislation. A Division of this Command also administers the range of social and charities legislation and the voluntary and community development activity.
- The Management Executive is headed up by its Chief Executive, Mr John Hunter, and is charged with the implementation of policy on, and for securing the efficient and effective delivery of, health and personal social services.



- The Social Security Agency, headed by its Chief Executive, Mr Alec Wylie, administers social security benefits, collects National Insurance contributions and provides services for the Great Britain Department of Social Security, operating through central offices and a network of local Social Security Offices.
  
  - The Child Support Agency, headed by its Chief Executive, Mr Pat Devlin, provides child support services in parity with Great Britain, focused on the delivery of fair, efficient and effective arrangements for the assessment, collection, enforcement and payment of child maintenance. The Agency also runs one of the Great Britain Child Support Agency Centres, in Belfast.
5. The two central policy Groups are organised into Divisions headed by Assistant Secretaries (Grade 5). The Management Executive and the Social Security Agency both comprise a number of Directorates, headed by Directors who are Assistant Secretary equivalents. The Chief Executive of the Child Support Agency, himself an Assistant Secretary equivalent, is supported by a team of Directors at Grades 6 & 7.
6. The Department also has a strong cadre of professional staff organised in five groups headed by chief officers. They advise the Department on policy matters and the Management Executive on operational issues. They also provide direct services to other Departments and the Northern Ireland Office.

#### Staff Numbers

7. The Department employs over 7,000 staff, most of whom are in the clerical and administrative grades. The majority of these staff - some 5000 - work in the Social Security Agency, which comprises 4 Headquarters Directorates and a network of 35 Social Security Offices.
8. During the last financial year, DHSS participated in two NICS wide early retirement programmes which were offered on

voluntary redundancy terms. The programmes were introduced as a necessary measure to enable Departments to function within their budgets and 67 DHSS staff were released. There was also a measure of redeployment of surplus staff to other Departments. Further reductions in staffing are necessary across the NICS to address continuing surpluses against running costs, and further early retirement programmes are now underway. It is anticipated that the Department will be required to release about 120 staff before 1995/96 financial year.

Expenditure

9. The Department's budget for the financial year 1994/95 amounts to some £4,195 million, which represents around half of total public expenditure in Northern Ireland Departments. The main components of this expenditure are:

	£ million
Health and personal social services	1,402
Social Security payments	2,599
Departmental administration - Running Costs	179
- Other administration costs	12
	4,192

**THE MAIN BUSINESSES**

Health and Personal Social Services

10. These services are provided under the Health and Personal Social Services (NI) Order 1972, which places a duty on the Department to provide or secure the provision of integrated health services to promote the physical and mental health of the people of Northern Ireland, and to provide or secure the provision of personal social services designed to promote their social welfare. The Health and Personal Social Services Order (NI) 1991 gives legislative authority



for the implementation of proposals for the reform of the health and personal social services in the White Paper "Working for Patients". It also covers the proposals for community care services set out in the Department's policy paper "People First".

11. Four Health and Social Services Boards - Northern, Southern, Eastern and Western - are responsible as agents of the Department for commissioning the delivery of health and personal social services for their resident populations. Whereas in Great Britain personal social services are administered by local authorities separately from the NHS, in Northern Ireland the procurement of both health and personal social services is the responsibility of single Boards. The Health and Social Services Boards were reconstituted with effect from 1 April 1991 in line with the proposals in the Government's White Paper, "Working for Patients". Membership consists of a Chairman and 6 executive and 6 non-executive members. The Chairman and non-executive members are appointed by the Minister with the approval of the Secretary of State.

12. From 1 April 1992, Health and Social Services Boards became purchasers of health and social care for their resident populations. At 1st April 1994, thirteen of the Boards' former Units of Management had become Health and Social Services Trusts. These provider units comprise 6 acute hospital, 4 hospital and community services including personal social services, 2 community health and personal social services and 1 ambulance service. Formal applications from two other provider units will shortly be submitted for decision. If successful, it is anticipated that the new trusts will become operational with effect from 1 April 1995. Baroness Denton decided that the ambulance service should be delivered on a regional basis through the medium of a trust. Proposals are being brought forward to secure this objective.

13. The GP fundholding scheme in Northern Ireland was

introduced on 1 April 1993, two years later than in Great Britain. To date, a total of 43 fundholding units (practices or groups of practices) have been established. A further nine practices are preparing to join the scheme from 1 April 1995, when the list size requirement for entry reduces to 6,000. By then, some 31 per cent of the population of Northern Ireland will belong to fundholding practices.

14. A Central Services Agency provides certain services on a regional basis on behalf of Boards. These include the payment of family practitioners, legal services, supply services and advice on domestic supportive services. There is non-statutory Council for Postgraduate Medical Education and a statutory National Board responsible for recruitment, training, registration and discipline of nurses, midwives and health visitors within a United Kingdom framework. The Health Promotion Agency has a Province-wide remit on health promotion and education. NICARE is a separate body which is funded by the Department. It aims to establish co-operative links between the Health Service and health care institutions and services overseas and to promote the involvement of health sector personnel in overseas projects to the mutual benefit of the countries concerned and Northern Ireland.
15. Certain functions are discharged directly by the Department, which administers the capital works programme through the Management Executive's Estate Services Directorate. The Executive's Directorate of Information Systems provides advice and services to Boards and Trusts in the field of information technology.

#### Social Legislation and Charities Responsibilities

16. Northern Ireland has traditionally enacted separate social legislation, eg in relation to betting and gaming, liquor licensing and the registration of clubs. The Registration of Clubs Order 1987 was designed to provide stricter



controls on the operation of clubs with the aim of preventing exploitation by paramilitary and other criminal organisations. The Licensing Order 1990 among other things introduced Sunday opening of pubs. Reviews of these Orders have recently been completed.

17. In December 1993, the Department of Finance and Personnel's responsibilities for charities and for charities legislation were transferred to the Department of Health and Social Services. These include providing an alternative to proceedings in the High Court for the numerous legal functions which charities require. These functions are now discharged by the Voluntary Activity Unit.

#### Social Security

18. Social security legislation and services in Northern Ireland are separate from, but administered in parity with, the corresponding legislation and services in Great Britain. The same National Insurance contributions are levied, the same conditions of entitlement generally apply and the same levels of benefits are paid. There are 2 main groups of benefits.

- **contributory benefits** financed from the National Insurance Fund, including sickness and invalidity benefits and unemployment benefit;
- **non-contributory benefits** financed from the Exchequer, of which the chief are income support, family credit, certain disability benefits, child benefit, housing benefit and the social fund. Housing benefit is administered by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Department of Environment.

19. The policy of **parity** in the social security field, pursued by successive administrations, means that decisions on the level of and conditions for social security benefits and contributions are taken at national level by reference to national conditions.

### Northern Ireland Social Security Agency

20. In line with the Next Steps initiative the Department of Health and Social Services set up from 1 July 1991 a Northern Ireland Social Security Agency which is responsible for administering over 30 different social security benefits and the collection of National Insurance Contributions. In 1994/95 the Agency is responsible for programme expenditure of the order of £2.6 billion with gross administrative costs in excess of £130m. It is headed by Alec Wylie as Chief Executive, comprises 5,084 staff, some 78% of the total staff in the Department and 23% of the NI Civil Service.
21. Work on the three - yearly Next Steps review of the Agency is underway, including a reconsideration of Prior Options. The review in Northern Ireland mirrors developments in the Benefits Agency in Great Britain.
22. The Agency also has responsibility for the handling of encashed social security orders on behalf of Great Britain, through a Unit based at Lisahally, Co Londonderry, and for claims processing work which the Department of Social Security decided to relocate from London. Northern Ireland obtained one of three centres, and the Belfast Benefits Centre opened for business in a new office block in the centre of the City in June 1990, with about 500 staff now dealing with a caseload of approximately 207,000.

### Child Support

23. The Northern Ireland Child Support Agency is a Next Steps Agency within the Department. It was launched in April 1993. Its purpose is to administer the Child Support Order (NI) 1991 which mirrors the Child Support Act in Great Britain. The Agency replaces the role of the Courts in assessing and collecting child maintenance.



24. The Chief Executive is Pat Devlin, appointed in November 1991 following open competition.
25. The Agency works closely with the GB Child Support Agency and uses the same IT and supporting systems. In addition to providing a service to Northern Ireland, the Agency administers one of the GB Agency's Child Support Agency Centres which services the east coast of England.
26. The Agency's Business Plan for 1994/95 sets out a range of service and financial targets. It reports quarterly to the Minister on progress.
27. The Agency has over 900 staff in a new building in Belfast City centre. Some 700 staff are employed in servicing the GB Agency's business.
28. The Agency's running costs in 1994/95 are approximately £18 million, of which the GB Agency contributes £13 million.

#### Conclusion

29. Although health and personal social services, social security and child support are different programmes, the aim of the Department is not merely to develop them in parity with Great Britain, but to build them into an interlocking and mutually supportive system of health and social care, coupled with income maintenance for needy and vulnerable members of society. While DHSS is thus essentially a "social" or "caring" Department, its activities also have major economic implications in providing employment and maintaining purchasing power.