

**Address by Paschal Donohoe TD, Minister for Finance and
Public Expenditure and Reform**

**Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and
Reform, and Taoiseach**

Tuesday 13 February 2018

Item - *Our Public Service 2020*

Introduction

I am pleased to have the opportunity to address you today. In December last I launched the new framework for development and innovation in the public service, *Our Public Service 2020*.

There has been much progress since the first reform programme was started in 2011, in areas including procurement, shared services and civil service renewal, and public service reform continues to play a key role in Ireland's development.

A recent report by the Institute of Public Administration includes many positive findings. For example,

- Ireland's Public Administration comes first in the EU28 for being the most professional and least politicised and
- Ireland comes 6th in the EU28 for the quality of its public administration (a relatively consistent score over last three years).

These results are very encouraging and provide a strong foundation for the next phase of reform set out in *Our Public Service 2020*.

Our Public Service 2020

So how does this reform framework differ from what has gone before? In reflecting on the previous phase of reform, including through an OECD Assessment, a number of lessons for this framework came into focus:

- a greater emphasis on the outcomes of reforms;
- improving the linkages between reform and expenditure;
- a stronger emphasis on innovation and on working collaboratively and working better across whole of government;
- a strengthened model of governance including a Public Service Leadership Board; and
- the importance of digital delivery and data in achieving greater efficiency.

These are all important themes that we have taken into account in developing *Our Public Service 2020* and I will return to them in a moment.

The framework itself is built on three pillars and includes both new initiatives and actions that expand on and embed reforms already in place. The three pillars are;

Delivering for our public, which includes for example, the continued development of digital services under the Public Service ICT Strategy to deliver improved public services;

Innovating for our future to support and encourage new thinking and innovative solutions; and

Developing our people and organisations to improve strategic human resource management to ensure the right mix of skills and tools are there to support public servants in delivering quality services.

In addition to reflecting the lessons from previous reform initiatives, these pillars were developed following an intense process of engagement with the public and public servants themselves – for it is they who will be responsible for putting the actions in this framework into practice.

Outcomes focus

How we will ensure we are measuring our efforts and the impact they are having on the public and the country? This is a key question that was firmly to the forefront of our minds when designing *Our Public Service 2020*. We have listened to the advice of the OECD in relation to outcomes. We are moving the focus of reform to achieving outcomes, in line with their advice and with best practice internationally. The approach we have taken in *Our Public Service 2020* is to first identify six high level outcomes which we are aiming to achieve in the public service in the long term and to which this Framework can significantly contribute.

These outcomes include:

- Increased customer satisfaction;
- Increased public trust;
- Greater use of digital tools;
- Better government effectiveness;
- Quality of public services and
- Greater employee engagement.

We are going to make better use of evidence and evaluation in how we assess the performance of the framework. This will help us to be more

effective, efficient and achieve our overall goal of delivering better outcomes for the public. Our vision for the future of the public service is one that is anchored in outcomes for our people and our country

With this goal in mind, within my Department we have recently established a Reform Evaluation Unit to focus on monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of reform as well as creating greater links between expenditure and reform.

Innovation

One element of *Our Public Service 2020* that I would like to highlight is the need to foster a culture of innovation across the public service. Innovation is about creating, testing and rolling out new ways of policy-making or delivering services to the citizen. A great example of this is Service RePublic, Ireland's first public service design centre, which is a collaboration between Cork County Council and Cork Institute of Technology.

The Irish public service has always been innovative in responding to issues that face our citizens. We want to build on that wealth of existing experience but also to draw out new innovations by creating a network of innovators across the public service to connect the right people. Globally, innovation in the public sector is becoming increasingly important as a means of effectively meeting new challenges. It is my view that if we act in an innovative way we can develop different solutions that are both cost effective and citizen-centred. Public service organisations need new ways of working, new ways of interacting with citizens, new ways of gathering and using data to keep up with a rapidly changing status quo. *Our Public Service 2020* will be instrumental in

achieving this aim. Looking to the future, we are going to work with stakeholders nationally and internationally to establish a bespoke strategy to better embed innovation in the Irish public service.

Better services and better engagement with the public is key

It is sometimes easy to forget how the public service plays a part in so many aspects of our everyday lives. Improving our public services and ensuring better outcomes for our people remains a key priority for this Government. Ireland compares very well internationally in digital services but moving more services online is a goal of *Our Public Service 2020*. This will be achieved under the Government's ICT Strategy. But we also recognise that not all services should be digital or that not everyone can easily access digital services. This leads me to an important point - we need to be better at listening to the public and understanding their needs to be able to deliver real and targeted service improvements. To do this we need to communicate more clearly and more simply with the public. A good example for others to follow is HSELive, a new health information service launched last September.

A joined-up approach will be important

To really make change happen we need to be working together. To make sure that we are able to respond to challenges. The Local Community and Development Committees, for example, provide for collaborative and coordinated responses to local issues across the country. Collaborating together to solve shared problems is how we will achieve success. *Our Public Service 2020* is designed to increase collaboration across every pocket of the public service. This is

something that will have an effect on the success of many of our shared strategies, which *Our Public Service 2020* sits alongside.

There are huge opportunities to do more with data

We are already leaders in the EU in Open Data. Ireland recently achieved first place in the European Commission's Open Data Maturity assessment for 2017. This is a fantastic achievement for Ireland. We will continue to encourage all public bodies to open up their data. Open Data creates opportunities to exploit data in new and innovative ways, especially as more data becomes available. It also helps us to achieve greater transparency and accountability in Government. We want to make better use of data. This will support better decision-making, help to improve services and access to services.

Our public servants are key to success

I take great pride in the work done every day by our public servants. The continuous development of public service people and organisations underpins delivery of the *Our Public Service 2020* as a whole. We will support our staff to develop their skills and capabilities, to be able to reach their best.

Public Service Leadership Board

To oversee and provide collective leadership for public service reform and development a new Public Service Leadership Board will soon be established. This Board will include Secretary General/CEO level participation drawn from the Civil Service Management Board and representation from a broad range of public service organisations.

Government Reform

In addition to progress in public service reform, we continue to pursue a wide ranging reform programme aimed at delivering an open, accountable and ethical government underpinned by a transparent and effective public system.

The Committee will recall that we are trying to progress the Public Sector Standards Bill and the Data Sharing and Governance Bill. Committee stage on the Public Sector Standards Bill took place in April 2017 and the briefing requested by the Committee was provided. The Bill aims to significantly enhance the existing framework for identifying, disclosing and managing conflicts of interest and minimising corruption risks, to achieve a shift towards a more dynamic and risk-based system of compliance and to ensure that the institutional framework for oversight, investigation and enforcement is robust and effective.

Minister of State O'Donovan is taking the Bill forward and he has had meetings with Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin and local government representative groups on the issue. In light of the public interest in implementing the Mahon Tribunal recommendations and the central role of this Bill in underpinning public trust and confidence in the ethical standards of public officials, I am asking that committee stage of this Bill be completed promptly.

The Data Sharing and Governance Bill is another priority. We need to deliver more digital services and we need to ensure that public bodies share data in a manner that complies with the enhanced data protection regime under the forthcoming General Data Protection Regulation. The purpose of the Bill is to promote and encourage data sharing between public bodies by providing a statutory framework for data sharing for

legitimate and clearly specified purposes that are compliant with data protection law, and to improve the protection of individual privacy rights by setting new governance standards for data sharing by public bodies.

Work is well advanced on drafting the Bill and has been informed by the findings and recommendations in the Committee's report on the pre-legislative scrutiny. I expect the Bill to be published in the first quarter of this year and I am asking the Committee to support the Bill and prioritise its passage through the Oireachtas.

In addition to these Bills, real progress has been made on several different fronts with a number of significant legislative and public governance measures being delivered such as the Open Data Initiative, Freedom of Information legislation, the introduction of the Lobbying Register and the system for the making of protected disclosures. My Department provides support and guidance to assist the implementation of these measures.

Conclusion

The context in which the public service operates is becoming increasingly complex and challenging. It is very important we support better collaboration, innovation and joined-up approaches across the public service to respond to future challenges while making best use of emerging technology. We have designed *Our Public Service 2020* with this to the forefront of our minds. We have come a long way over the last few years. Our economic recovery is particularly remarkable when viewed in terms of the scale of the turnaround that was required and the challenges that had to be confronted. However the world is changing. Fast. Today's uncertain and unpredictable global environment poses

significant challenges for Ireland. *Our Public Service 2020* will help the public service, as a whole, to be able to prepare for this.

Thank you for your attention and I look forward to your comments and questions.