



26th July 2022

Ms Sarah Cremin
Committee of Public Accounts
Leinster House
Dublin 2

Dear Ms Cremin

I refer to your correspondence of 20th July 2022 seeking further information concerning the decision of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to terminate funding to Benefacts. Thank you for providing a link to the transcript of the Committee's proceedings for the 30th of June 2022 and the associated correspondence, which was helpful in providing this response.

I wish to advise the following in respect of the information sought by the Committee:

1. Details of how comparable statistical information can be obtained:

In my correspondence of 11th July 2022, I outlined to the Committee that on the 15th April 2021, I wrote to the heads of seven departments/public service bodies, who were known users of the Benefacts database. In this letter, I encouraged the relevant organisations to nominate a senior official to attend a regular oversight group concerning the data services provided by Benefacts. I also highlighted the need for those organisations to begin considering their own future needs in respect of the data services they may need.

The group in question met on eight separate occasions prior to the cessation of Benefacts. One matter in particular that this group considered was how each organisation could identify replacement mechanisms for sourcing the data they hitherto obtained from Benefacts.

As part of these meetings, officials from the relevant organisations confirmed that they had made necessary arrangements, or were in the process of putting in place interim or alternative solutions. As the Committee will be aware, most of the relevant data published by Benefacts is available to public bodies as open data from other official bodies. However, where gaps may arise, it is a matter for Departments or Public Service Bodies themselves to obtain the data directly from source.

2. Where the Department will source information to facilitate relevant decision making in the absence of the Benefacts database:

As has been outlined previously to the Committee, this Department did not consider itself to be a primary user of the Benefacts service. While there may have been some minor occasional historical use of the database since 2014, it has not been relied upon

in any systematic way for decision-making by this Department. This formed part of the reasoning to terminate this Department's funding relationship with Benefacts.

3. Whether the Department is aware of the extent to which other Departments use Benefacts data:

As above, I wrote to the relevant organisational heads of known public service users of Benefacts in July 2021 and thereafter a group was established to ascertain this information. This group also sought to identify alternative mechanisms for public bodies to secure data sources in the event of Benefacts' cessation.

Furthermore, the Department also received reports from Benefacts in respect of usage by relevant public service bodies (see point 4. below).

4. Whether the Department kept notes in respect public bodies' use of the freely available data (that was funded under this arrangement):

The Department has retained these records. In November 2021, officials of the Department wrote to relevant public service bodies concerning their use of the Benefacts service. In respect of this correspondence, Benefacts provided usage reports concerning those public service bodies. These reports were retained on file.

5. Information in relation to public procurement of economic consultants:

The record of the Committee's proceedings appears to suggest that the Indecon report was not subject to a proper public procurement process. That is not the case. Indecon was the successful bidder following a public procurement exercise that was advertised to the market on 21st September 2018 (using a multi-supplier framework agreement for the provision of business and management and ICT consultancy services).

It is the policy of this Department that public procurement procedures should be employed for engaging economic consultants and all other such external services, as appropriate.

I hope the Committee finds this information useful.

Yours sincerely



David Moloney
Secretary General