



## Public Service Performance Report 2017

PBO Note 9 of 2018

### Introduction

The [Public Service Performance Report 2017](#) (‘the PSPR 2017’) was published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on 27th April 2017. It is the second edition of this annual publication setting out and measuring how the Government has delivered public services in the *previous* year. The PBO assessed the initial 2016 report and this Note may be read in conjunction with [PBO Note 2 of 2017](#).

The format of the PSPR 2017 is essentially unchanged from the previous year. It presents (by Vote or Group) the gross amount spent at programme level in 2017 along with a set of metrics (under the heading ‘What has been delivered’). These metrics are presented in a ‘dashboard’ format and now also show the change between 2016 and 2017.

The PSPR is based on the *Revised Estimates for Public Services* (‘the REV’) which, from 2017, has increased its focus on numerical performance metrics. The REV 2018 also includes a Gender Budgeting pilot programme.

The Government, when releasing the first performance report, [stated](#) that, “the report, which is the first of its kind, aims to strengthen the focus on what is being delivered with public funds and create

an opportunity for meaningful dialogue between Ministers and Oireachtas Committees on government performance”.

### PBO comparison of PSPR 2016 v PSPR 2017

The PSPR 2016 (p.4) stated that, “the format of the report will be subject to review in advance of its next iteration. Feedback will be sought from the Oireachtas and other stakeholders that could assist in the evolution and refinement of this report so that it can best fulfil its purpose in future years”.

PBO Note 2 of 2017, in relation to the PSPR 2016, welcomed the report but also noted some improvements which could be made. The PBO believed that these, if implemented, would make it easier to utilise and navigate the report. Table 1 (over) summarises the PBO’s proposed improvements and whether they have been addressed in the PSPR 2017.

The Committee on Budgetary Oversight wrote (in 2017) to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to the PSPR 2016 raising a number of issues in relation to the format and presentation of the report.

Table 1 – Improvements suggested in PBO Note 2 of 2017

Improvement proposed in PBO Note 2 of 2017 in respect of PSPR 2016	Whether addressed or to what extent in PSPR 2017
Adding information from other years	<p>The ‘dashboard’ under the heading ‘What has been delivered in 2017’ in respect of each Vote does record the change from 2016. The question arises as to whether the report will, in future years, continue to track this change over multiple years, i.e. provide a trend over time.</p> <p>The PBO also suggested that there should be continuity in the use of metrics over time or that any change should be flagged – there is no indication as to whether or not metrics have changed or remained static.</p>

Improvement proposed in PBO Note 2 of 2017 in respect of PSPR 2016	Whether addressed or to what extent in PSPR 2017
<p>Adding information on the original targets for 2016 and 2017 – the original output targets for the metrics are not presented in the report.</p>	<p>Without including the original target the PSPR reports on activity (what was done) rather than performance (what was done compared to what was expected to be done). This undermines the concept that this is a performance report.</p> <p>In addition, providing both targets and outturns provides a perspective as to whether the latest targets are realistic/ambitious etc. in the context of what was achieved in the previous year.</p>
<p>Matching financial information to outputs at a more appropriate level.</p>	<p>As with the PSPR 2016, PSPR 2017 again presents financial information at programme level. It is not clear how much of this (financial) input goes towards achieving the specific outputs presented. The PBO continues to make the point that, as the Revised Estimates are presented at sub-programme level, it may be more appropriate to have more granular information in the report.</p>
<p>Consistently aligning the metrics presented in the performance report with the metrics presented in the <i>Revised Estimates for Public Services</i>.</p>	<p>The PBO noted, in respect of the PSPR 2016, that there was some inconsistency between the metrics reported and those listed in the Revised Estimates volume. A lack of consistency between reports makes performance budgeting less useful, particularly to Members and Committees of the Oireachtas.</p> <p>However, it would appear that some at least of this inconsistency has been addressed in the PSPR 2017 and this is a positive development.</p>
<p>Aligning the metrics chosen with strategic plans and annual reports – it is unclear how the performance metrics reported on are linked to the strategic plan of the Department or their annual reports.</p>	<p>This continues to be the case in respect of PSPR 2017.</p>
<p>Improving the quality of output metrics – the quality of many of the output metrics could be improved especially if they are to be used in a performance accountability context. For example, metrics on customer satisfaction and quality of service could be added.</p>	<p>The quality of the metrics is unchanged.</p>

## Equality Reporting

Subsequent to the publication of the PSPR 2016, the Government indicated that a pilot project with respect to gendering budgeting would be initiated in the *Revised Estimates for Public Services 2018*. As outlined in [PBO Note 1 of 2017 on Gender Budgeting](#), this pilot would (for a number of programmes) introduce high level gender objectives and indicators. The pilot indicators would be published in December 2017 in the *Revised Estimates for Public Services 2018* and progress would be published in the *Public Service Performance Report 2017*. The Government has implemented these steps and the PBO has published [Briefing Paper 4 of 2018](#) setting out its evaluation of the pilot indicators in REV2018.

The PSPR 2017 provides context and updates to developments in relation to the indicators set out in the REV2018. However, the PSPR notes (p.61) that “data is not available on all objectives”.

## Conclusions

The PBO has considered the *Public Service Performance Report 2017* with three objectives in mind:

- Whether, or to what extent, the report is useful to individual Members and Committees of the Houses of the Oireachtas;
- Whether improvements suggested by the PBO based on PSPR 2016 have been implemented; and,
- How the document can be improved in future iterations.

The publication of the *Public Service Performance Report 2017* is welcome. The change in the budget calendar in 2013 has meant that the annual *Revised Estimates for Public Services* are now published prior to the end of the year and thus cannot include information on the achievement of output targets in that year. The publication of the report provides an opportunity to close that gap should the Department choose to do so. At present, the lack of **targets** presented means that the report is an *activity* report rather than a *performance* report. Ultimately, discussion of the **impact** of voted expenditure on public services cannot take place without transparency around **inputs** (funding, staff etc.) and the **outputs** produced.

The report does present members and committees with information in an easy to view, accessible style. Importantly, it also reinforces the use of quantitative performance metrics. The use of the ‘dashboard’ format is of particular value. The performance report can therefore be used by members and committees to get a ‘bird’s eye’ overview of the range of services provided as a result of Government expenditure. However, without improving the presentation of targets and output indicators, it will not substantially assist them in scrutinising Government performance.

A review of the improvements made in PSPR 2017 are included in this Note along with those previously identified by the PBO which have not been addressed. The PBO remains of the opinion that, if implemented, these would make it easier to navigate and utilise the report.

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## Recent Publications

*PBO Initial Objectives and Services* 4 October 2017

## Commentaries

*Quarterly Economic and Fiscal Commentary (Q1 2018)* 16 April 2018

*Quarterly Economic and Fiscal Commentary (Q4 2017)* 23 January 2018

## Briefing Papers

**Briefing Paper 5 of 2018:** *An overview of Public-Private Partnerships in Ireland* 16 March 2018

**Briefing Paper 4 of 2018:** *The Gender and Equality Budgeting pilot in the Revised Estimates for Public Services 2018* 27 February 2018

**Briefing Paper 3 of 2018:** *Revised Estimates for Public Services 2018* 20 February 2018

**Briefing Paper 2 of 2018:** *Local Property Tax: Issues to be considered with the revaluation of the base* 15 January 2018

**Briefing Paper 1 of 2018:** *European Semester 2018 and how it interacts with Ireland's Budget 2019*, 15 January 2018

## PBO Notes

**Note 7 of 2018:** *Note on Sugar Tax* 27 April 2018

**Note 6 of 2018:** *Overview of the Stability Programme Update 2018* 23 April 2018

**Note 5 of 2018:** *Note on Central Bank of Ireland Surplus Income* 22 March 2018

**Note 4 of 2018:** *2018 European Semester: Country Report Ireland* 22 March 2018

**Note 3 of 2018:** *The Multiannual Financial Framework of the EU* 9 February 2018

**Note 2 of 2018:** *Note on Revaluation of the Local Property Tax base* 15 January 2018

**Note 1 of 2018:** *Note on Ireland's budgetary process and the European Semester 2018* 15 January 2018

## Infographics

**Infographic 4 of 2018:** *Total Gross Voted Allocation and Expenditure Cycle 2017* 27 April 2018

**Infographic 3 of 2018:** *Revised Estimates for Public Services, subheads by expenditure* 23 April 2018

**Infographic 2 of 2018:** *Exchequer revenue – Significant months 2018* 6 March 2018

**Infographic 1 of 2018:** *Budgetary Cycle 2018* 10 January 2018