

*Customer Satisfaction Survey of
the Community Welfare Service of
the Western Health Board*

*Final Report Prepared on Behalf of the
Community Welfare Service*



Department of Public Health

April 1999

**Consumer Satisfaction Survey of the Community Welfare
Service of the Western Health Board**

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the Community Welfare Service**

by

**The Department of Public Health
Western Health Board**

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April 1999

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Department of Public Health were commissioned to undertake a customer survey of the Community Welfare Service by the Western Health Board Superintendent Community Welfare Officer's Group. The survey aimed to determine applicants' perceptions and views of the Community Welfare Service in order to ensure that it is satisfying customers' needs.

A self completion postal questionnaire was sent to a 25% random sample of those currently applying, or in receipt of Supplementary Welfare Allowance within the Western Health Board. Respondents were asked to complete a confidential questionnaire, and return it to the Community Welfare Service using the freepost envelope provided.

Key findings of the survey are summarised as follows:

- €# The main assistance given is Rent Supplement (67%) and Supplementary Welfare Allowance (45%)
- €# Once initial contact is made the service is used over a number of years
- €# Only 8% of applicants first found out about the service from the Community Welfare Service leaflet
- €# 38% could have applied for benefit sooner (on average eight months sooner) if they were aware they were entitled to benefit
- €# The majority live less than five miles and take less than 20 minutes to travel to the nearest Community Welfare Office
- €# The average waiting time to see the Community Welfare Officer is 39 minutes
- €# 69% of applicants received all their requests. Only 4% were refused assistance
- €# There is scope for further improvement of waiting room facilities
- €# The service is rated overall as excellent or very good by 67% of applicants

The study recommended that consideration be given to the following in delivering the service in the future:

1. Improving the level of knowledge about the service. This refers to general information about the Community Welfare Service in addition to more specific information about the different types of benefit available and eligibility.

2. Continuing to improve waiting room facilities, particularly in terms of décor, reading materials, and baby changing facilities.
3. Reducing waiting times particularly in the Galway Superintendent Community Welfare Officer (SCWO) areas by considering the introduction of an appointments/queuing system
4. Increasing the opening hours of the service

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The Community Welfare Service of the Western Health Board seeks to meet social and financial need. It promotes social inclusion to enhance health and social gain at an individual, family, and community level. It provides a range of financial support schemes and information and advice on income maintenance schemes operated by the Health Boards, Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs and other statutory agencies. Services include:

- €# Payments under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance Scheme.

- €# Assessment and processing of back to school clothing and footwear scheme applications.

- €# Determination of eligibility for a range of health Board Schemes including:

- Ø General Medical Services Cards
- Ø Nursing Home Subvention
- Ø Mobility Allowance
- Ø Blind Welfare Allowance
- Ø Motorised Transport Grants
- Ø Domiciliary Care Allowance

A core service is the Supplementary Welfare Allowance. At any one point in time there are approximately 7500 individuals within the Western Health Board either in receipt of benefit, or applying for benefit. Approximately €16 million is spent on Supplementary Welfare Allowance annually within the Board. The Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme provides the following payments:

1. Basic weekly payment where an applicant has no income, or where an applicant's income falls below a prescribed level of income.
2. Supplementary payments for applicants whose basic income is insufficient to meet ongoing expense (e.g. accommodation, special dietary needs, special heating requirements), or any ongoing need which might be considered appropriate by the Health Board.
3. Exceptional need payments to assist with unexpected or exceptional costs which could not reasonably be met from an applicant's basic income (e.g. household furniture, funeral costs).

Figure 1.3: Roscommon SCWO Area



All those applying for benefit from the Community Welfare Service are assessed by Community Welfare Officers who employ national guidelines to ensure equitable treatment. If an applicant is not satisfied with the Community Welfare Officer's decision regarding benefit, there is an appeals process whereby the decision can be reviewed.

In order to ensure that it is satisfying customers' needs, it was decided by the Western Health Board Superintendent Community Welfare Officer's Group that a survey of applicants should be conducted across all Community Care areas within the Board to ascertain their perceptions and views of the Community Welfare Service. It is against this background that the Department of Public Health were commissioned to undertake a customer survey.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

The aim of the research was to determine applicants' perceptions and views of the Community Welfare Service in order to ensure that it is satisfying customers' needs. More specifically, the research aimed to determine:

- €# Levels of knowledge and sources of information about the Community Welfare Service

- €# Type of assistance given by the Community Welfare Service

- €# Accessibility of Community Welfare Service facilities

- €# Perceived fairness of the decision to give/not to give assistance

- €# Perceptions of waiting room and key elements of the service

2. METHOD

A self completion postal questionnaire was sent to a 25% (1480) random sample of those currently applying, or in receipt of Supplementary Welfare Allowance for each Superintendent Community Welfare Officer (SCWO) area within the Board (Galway 1(500), Galway 2 (500), Mayo (330), and Roscommon (150)). Respondents were asked to complete a confidential questionnaire, and return it to the Community Welfare Service using the freepost envelope provided. The questionnaire was structured in design and elicited:

€# Socio-demographic profile of those applying for or in receipt of Community Welfare Allowance

€# Length of time in contact with the Community Welfare Service

€# How applicants first heard of the Community Welfare Service

€# Type of assistance given by the Community Welfare Service

€# Accessibility of Community Welfare Service facilities (distance, time, mode of transport, use of nearest office)

€# Perceived fairness of the appeals process

€# Perceptions of Community Welfare Service staff

€# Perceptions of opening hours of service

€# Perceptions of waiting time and time spent with Community Welfare Officer

The questionnaire was administered in October 1998. A copy of the questionnaire is given in appendix 1.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Response Rate

A total of 506 questionnaires were returned which represented a 34% response rate (Galway 1- 37%, Galway 2- 29%, Mayo- 38%, Roscommon- 33%). Overall this represented 9% of applications to the Community Welfare Service for assistance during the time of the survey. This sample size was sufficient for the results to be representative of the total population in each Superintendent Community Welfare Officer (SCWO) area.

3.2 Socio-Demographic Profile

Table 3.1 shows that 41% of applicants are 30 years of age or younger. The majority of applicants (63%) are 40 years of age or younger (average age = 37.8 years). An equal number of males and females applied for Community Welfare Allowance (table 3.2). The age and sex profile is similar for each SCWO area, although Roscommon has a lower proportion of applicants aged under 30, and a larger proportion of male applicants.

Table 3.1: Age Profile of Applicants

Age Profile	Superintendent Community Welfare Officer Area									
	Galway 1		Galway 2		Mayo		Roscommon		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Up to 20	9	5	14	10	4	3	1	2	28	6
21- 30	74	40	48	34	43	34	11	22	176	35
31- 40	40	21	26	18	33	26	11	22	110	22
41 - 50	22	12	27	19	22	18	11	22	82	16
51 - 60	21	11	18	13	11	9	9	18	59	12
61 - 70	14	8	8	6	9	7	5	10	36	7
Over 70	5	3	1	1	3	2	1	2	10	2
TOTAL:	185	37	142	28	125	25	49	10	501	100

Table 3.2: Sex

Sex	Superintendent Community Welfare Officer Area									
	Galway 1		Galway 2		Mayo		Roscommon		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Male	89	48	74	52	58	46	31	63	252	50
Female	97	52	68	48	67	54	18	37	250	50
TOTAL:	186	37	142	28	125	25	49	10	502	100

Table 3.3 shows that the majority of applicants (55%) were single, with 19% married and 16% widow (er).

Table 3.3: Marital Status

Marital Status	Superintendent Community Welfare Officer Area									
	Galway 1		Galway 2		Mayo		Roscommon		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Married	33	18	30	21	17	13	18	37	98	19
Single	108	58	77	54	72	57	18	37	275	55
Co-habiting	10	5	4	3	8	6	7	14	29	6
Widow(er)	29	16	24	17	24	19	5	10	82	16
Separated	6	3	7	5	6	5	1	2	20	4
TOTAL:	186	37	142	28	127	25	49	10	504	100

3.3 Health Problems

From table 3.4 it can be seen that 13% of applicants experienced health problems that made it difficult for them to get out of the house by themselves (e.g. walking, breathing problems). These problems were greater in Roscommon (23%) than the other SCWO areas (9-14%). These health problems demonstrate the importance of accessibility of services. It also highlights the need for Community Welfare Officers to make house calls which currently are undertaken in circumstances where the applicant is too ill to travel to the Community Welfare Officer's premises

Table 3.4: Health Problems That Make it Difficult to get out of House

Health problems	Superintendent Community Welfare Officer Area									
	Galway 1		Galway 2		Mayo		Roscommon		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Yes	16	9	19	14	17	14	11	23	63	13
No	163	91	122	87	107	86	37	77	429	87
TOTAL:	179	36	141	29	124	25	48	10	492	100

3.4 Length of Time in Contact With Community Welfare Service

It can be seen from table 3.5 that 60% of applicants had been in contact with the Community Welfare Service for over two years (average number of years = 3.3). Only 27% had been in contact for 6 months or less. It appears that once initial contact has been made, the service is used over a number of years.

Table 3.5: Length of Time in Contact With the Community Welfare Officer

Length of time	Superintendent Community Welfare Officer Area									
	Galway 1		Galway 2		Mayo		Roscommon		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Up to 3 months	41	22	38	27	19	15	8	17	106	21
4 – 6 months	10	5	8	6	6	5	6	13	30	6
7 months – 1 year	25	13	11	8	24	19	8	17	68	14
2 – 3 years	50	27	44	31	41	33	10	21	145	29
4 – 5 years	26	14	15	11	15	12	7	15	63	13
3 – 5 years	27	14	21	15	13	10	10	17	61	12
6 – 10 years	8	4	6	4	8	6	8	17	30	6
TOTAL:	187	37	143	28	126	25	47	9	503	100

3.5 Type of Assistance Given

Table 3.6 shows that the main type of assistance given by the Community Welfare Service is Rent Supplement (67%) and Supplementary Welfare Allowance (45%). Galway 1 and Mayo applicants had received the largest proportion of Rent Supplement, whereas Galway 2 and Roscommon applicants had received the largest proportion of Supplementary Welfare Allowance.

Table 3.6: Type of Assistance Given

Type of Assistance (Benefit)	Superintendent Community Welfare Officer Area									
	Galway 1		Galway 2		Mayo		Roscommon		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	73	44	68	52	44	37	22	54	207	45
Rent Supplement	127	76	71	54	90	76	18	44	306	67
Mortgage Support	10	6	16	12	8	7	2	5	36	8
Diet Supplement	7	4	9	7	3	3	4	10	23	5
Exceptional Needs Payment	11	7	15	11	20	17	10	24	56	12
TOTAL:	167	37	132	29	118	26	41	10	458	100

3.6 How First Heard of Community Welfare Service

The main ways applicants first found out about the Community Welfare Service (table 3.7) was from a Department of Social, Community, and Family Affairs official (28%) and from a friend (26%). The leaflet produced by the Community Welfare Office was

only how 8% of applicants first found out about the service. Only a small proportion first found out about the service from other sources. The media (which does have the capacity to reach a large audience) was the way only 1% of applicants first found out about the service.

Overall these findings suggest that there may be scope to improve the level of information provision about the Community Welfare Service by the Western Health Board. In particular the distribution of the Community Welfare Service leaflet warrants attention. Consideration may also be given to using the media, as there is evidence to suggest it is under-utilised.

Table 3.7: How First Found out About Community Welfare Service

Source	Superintendent Community Welfare Officer Area									
	Galway 1		Galway 2		Mayo		Roscommon		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Family	21	12	19	14	19	15	2	4	61	12
Friend	51	28	41	30	25	20	12	24	129	26
Media	1	1	3	2	2	2	1	2	7	1
Dept. of Social Welfare	56	31	29	21	41	33	11	22	137	28
Health Board Offices	15	8	8	6	10	8	8	16	41	8
Leaflet from Dept. Social Welfare	10	6	8	6	6	5	4	8	28	6
Citizens Information Centre	8	4	6	4	4	3	1	2	19	4
Voluntary Organisation	3	2	3	2	2	2	1	2	9	2
Leaflet at the Health Board			2	2	5	4	2	4	9	2
Other	5	3	6	4	7	6	3	6	21	4
Don't Know	12	7	12	9	5	4	4	8	33	7
TOTAL:	182	37	137	28	126	26	49	10	494	100

From table 3.8 it can be seen that 38% of applicants were in a position to apply for benefit sooner, but were not aware they were entitled to the benefit. On average respondents could have applied for benefit eight months sooner, with applicants in the Galway SCWO areas being in a position to apply for benefit for the longest time period (Galway 1 = 8.2 months; Galway 2 = 10.3 months; Mayo = 6.9 months; Roscommon 5.2 months). This, coupled with the fact that the Health Board is not the main way people first heard about the service again indicates there may be a need to provide the public with more information.

Table 3.8: Apply Sooner if Knew Entitled Sooner

Apply Sooner	Superintendent Community Welfare Officer Area									
	Galway 1		Galway 2		Mayo		Roscommon		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Yes	60	34	57	41	50	40	16	34	183	38
No	75	42	61	44	48	39	24	51	208	43
Don't Know	42	24	21	15	25	20	7	15	95	20
TOTAL:	177	36	139	29	123	25	47	10	486	100

3.7 Accessibility of Community Welfare Service Facilities

The vast majority of applicants live less than five miles from the nearest Community Welfare Office (84%; table 3.9). On average, applicants within the Roscommon SCWO area live further away than applicants from other areas (4.0 miles compared to 2.3 miles on average overall). Over 90% live within 30 minutes travel time to the nearest Community Welfare Officer’s premises (figure 3.1). Although applicants in Roscommon SCWO area live further away, this is not reflected in their travel times to get from home to the nearest Community Welfare Office (16.8 minutes compared to 18.3 minutes on average overall). This is because a larger proportion of those in Roscommon SCWO area travel by car (65% compared to 25% overall; table 3.10) and a lower proportion walk (27% compared to 64% overall; table 3.10).

Table 3.9: Distance from Nearest Community Welfare Officer’s Premises

Distance	Superintendent Community Welfare Officer Area									
	Galway 1		Galway 2		Mayo		Roscommon		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Up to 1 mile	91	54	67	52	64	59	10	22	232	51
2 – 4 miles	63	38	41	32	22	20	19	42	145	32
5 – 7 miles	12	7	13	10	16	15	10	22	51	11
8 – 10 miles	1	1	5	4	7	6	4	9	17	4
Over 10 miles	1	1	3	2			2	4	6	1
TOTAL:	168	37	129	29	109	24	45	10	451	100

Figure 3.1: Journey Time to Nearest Community Welfare Officer’s Premises

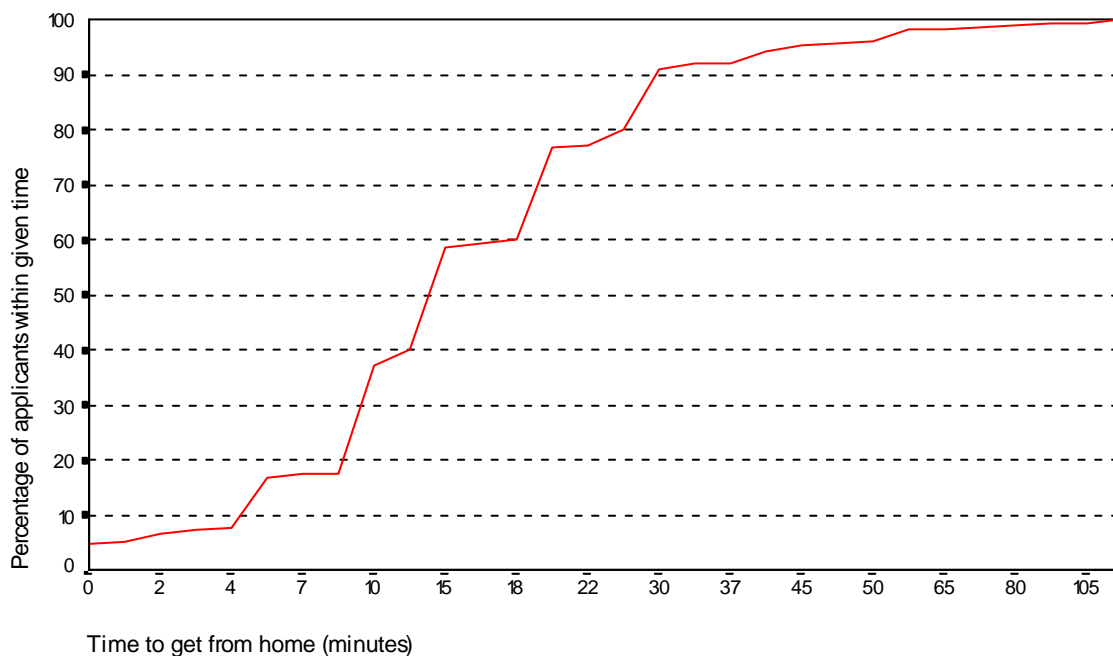


Table 3.10: Main Mode of Transport Usually Used

Mode of Transport	Superintendent Community Welfare Officer Area									
	Galway 1		Galway 2		Mayo		Roscommon		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Bus	18	10	8	6	1	1	2	4	29	6
Minibus	1	1							1	1
Taxi	3	2	2	1	1	1	1	2	7	1
Car (Driver)	22	12	15	11	27	22	13	27	77	15
Car (Passenger)	9	5	12	9	11	9	18	38	50	10
Walk	121	65	104	73	84	67	13	27	322	64
Other	11	6	1	1			1	2	13	3
TOTAL:	185	37	142	28	125	25	48	10	500	100

Table 3.11 shows that another Community Welfare Office would only be more convenient for 7% of applicants indicating applicants were using the most accessible office.

Table 3.11: Other Community Welfare Officer's Premises More Convenient

Other Premises	Superintendent Community Welfare Officer Area									
	Galway 1		Galway 2		Mayo		Roscommon		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
More Convenient										
Yes	8	4	9	6	11	9	6	13	34	7
No	151	82	117	83	108	86	39	81	415	83
Don't Know	25	14	15	11	7	6	3	6	50	10
TOTAL	184	37	141	28	126	25	48	10	499	100

Overall these results indicate that the Community Welfare Service is relatively accessible in that average travel times are less than 20 minutes. However, there may be scope to improve accessibility in Roscommon SCWO area, as the nearest Community Welfare Office is further away, which has meant greater reliance on private transport.

3.8 Time Spent Waiting to see Community Welfare Officer

The majority of applicants (64%) are seen by the Community Welfare Officer within 30 minutes, with 27% seen within 10 minutes and 37% between 11 and 30 minutes. However 36% have to wait more than 30 minutes (figure 3.2 and table 3.12). The average waiting time is 39 minutes. The relatively lengthy waiting times experienced by at least one third of applicants helps to explain the fact that waiting times were the least favourably rated element of the service (see section 3.14). Galway SCWO areas experience considerably longer waiting times than Mayo and Roscommon SCWO areas. These results indicate that there may be scope to improve waiting times (Whilst comparisons with other services are difficult, the Patients Charter in the UK states that patients should be seen within 30 minutes of their scheduled appointment). At the moment, the service is offered on a 'first come first served' basis. The introduction of

an appointments system in busy Community Welfare Offices may facilitate the reduction of waiting times.

Figure 3.2: Waiting Time on Last visit to Community Welfare Officer

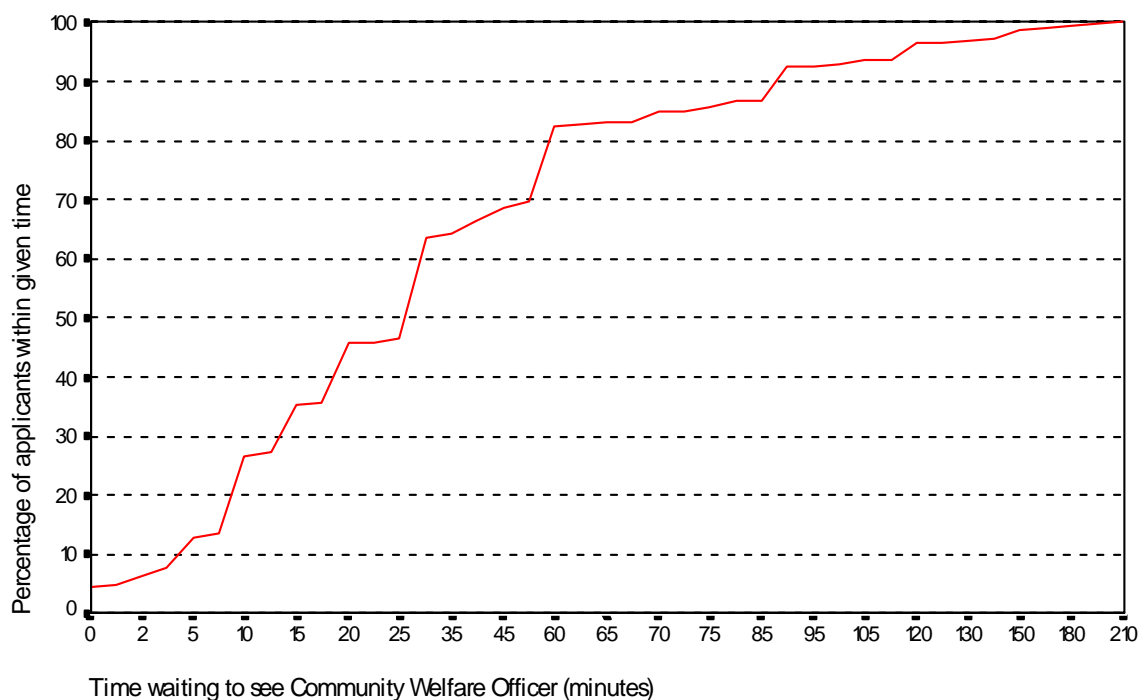


Table 3.12: Waiting Time on Last visit to Community Welfare Officer

Duration	Superintendent Community Welfare Officer Area									
	Galway 1		Galway 2		Mayo		Roscommon		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Up to 5 mins	19	10	17	12	11	9	17	35	64	13
6 – 10 mins	19	10	12	8	30	25	8	16	69	14
11 – 20 mins	34	18	22	15	29	24	11	22	96	19
21 – 30 mins	30	16	30	21	22	18	7	14	89	18
31 – 1 hour	42	23	26	18	21	17	6	12	95	19
1 – 2 hours	34	18	28	20	7	6			69	14
Over 2 hours	8	4	8	6	2	2			18	4
TOTAL	186	37	143	29	122	24	49	10	500	100

3.9 Preferred Time for Meeting With Community Welfare Officer

Currently the time Community Welfare Officers are available to meet applicants varies considerably within each SCWO area. Respondents were presented with a list of different times of day, and asked which of the times of day they would prefer to meet the Community Welfare Officer. The results are shown in table 3.13. It can be seen that 47% preferred to meet before 1pm, 39% did not mind what time they met the Community Welfare Officer, and 13% preferred to meet between 2pm and 5pm. The most popular preferred time of day was between 10am and 11am (26%).

Table 3.13: Preferred Time of day for Meeting with Community Welfare Officer

Time	Superintendent Community Welfare Officer Area									
	Galway 1		Galway 2		Mayo		Roscommon		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Between 10 a.m. and 11 a.m.	40	23	39	29	36	30	10	22	125	26
Between 11 a.m. and 12 noon	19	11	19	14	19	16	4	9	61	13
Between 12 noon and 1 p.m.	10	6	9	7	15	12	4	9	38	8
Between 1 p.m. and 2 p.m.	2	1	5	4	1	1	1	2	9	2
Between 2 p.m. and 3 p.m.	20	11	9	7	7	6	3	7	39	8
Between 3 p.m. and 4 p.m.	7	4	3	2	2	2	1	2	13	3
Between 4 p.m. and 5 p.m.	2	1	3	2	2	2			7	2
Other			1	1					1	0
Don't mind	77	44	47	35	40	33	22	49	186	39
TOTAL:	177	37	135	28	122	26	45	9	479	100

3.10 Type of Facilities Used for Meeting With Community Welfare Officer

The vast majority (83%) of applicants met with Community Welfare Officers at health centres (table 3.14); the vast majority of interviews took place in an office (86%; table 3.15). Galway 2 SCWO area is the only area where a sizeable number of interviews take place at a hatch/counter (32% compared to 2% for other areas). Hatches have been introduced in areas where the safety of the Community Welfare Officer has been a concern. Although hatches may provide an inferior facility compared to offices (e.g. those interviewed in offices significantly rated privacy better than those interviewed in hatches; $p < 0.01$), discussions with Superintendent Community Welfare Officers revealed that the hatches are regarded as 'a necessary evil' to protect Community Welfare Officers and make them feel at ease when interviewing applicants.

Table 3.14: Where met Community Welfare Officer on Last Visit

Venue	Superintendent Community Welfare Officer Area									
	Galway 1		Galway 2		Mayo		Roscommon		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Health Centre	169	93	109	77	94	76	35	76	407	83
Community Hall	4	2	9	6	4	3	6	13	23	5
Other	9	5	23	16	26	21	5	11	63	13
TOTAL:	182	37	141	29	124	25	46	9	493	100

Table 3.15: Where Interviewed on Last Visit

Location	Superintendent Community Welfare Officer Area									
	Galway 1		Galway 2		Mayo		Roscommon		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
In an office	170	94	91	65	115	94	45	98	421	86
At a hatch/counter	4	2	45	32	2	2	1	2	52	11
Other	6	3	5	4	5	4			16	3
TOTAL:	180	37	141	29	122	25	46	9	489	100

3.11 Outcome of Application to Community Welfare Service for Assistance

It can be seen from table 3.16 that 90% of applicants received some or all of their requests, with 69% receiving all of their requests. Only 4% of applicants were refused assistance. The majority of those who were refused assistance (69%) believed they were given an adequate explanation for the refusal. This perhaps explains why only 18% (four applicants) of those refused assistance appealed the decision, two of whom had the decision overturned.

Table 3.16: Requested Services Received

Request Received	Superintendent Community Welfare Officer Area									
	Galway 1		Galway 2		Mayo		Roscommon		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Received all of my requests	125	71	84	63	85	73	34	73	328	69
Received most of my requests	21	12	27	20	13	11	4	9	65	14
Received some of my requests	14	8	7	5	10	9	3	6	34	7
Was refused	5	3	5	4	4	3	3	6	17	4
Don't know – awaiting outcome	10	6	10	8	5	4	3	6	28	6
TOTAL:	175	37	134	28	117	25	47	10	473	100

3.12 Other Assistance from the Community Welfare Service

The majority of applicants (68%) were assisted in other ways by the Community Welfare Service. Table 3.17 shows other ways in which the Community Welfare Service assisted applicants. It can be seen that the main additional assistance is providing relevant information (68%), advice (58%), and helping with form filling (51%). It is clear that the Community Welfare Officers provide assistance in addition to processing application forms.

Table 3.17: Additional Assistance

Additional Assistance	Superintendent Community Welfare Officer Area									
	Galway 1		Galway 2		Mayo		Roscommon		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Help with form filling	60	50	46	46	44	50	24	71	174	51
Referral to a more appropriate service	18	15	22	22	18	21	10	29	68	20
Offered advice	69	57	54	54	55	63	22	65	200	58
Provided with relevant information	85	70	66	65	60	68	24	71	235	68
Talked to other agencies on my behalf	8	7	12	12	10	11	8	24	38	11
TOTAL:	121	35	101	29	88	26	34	10	344	100

3.13 Perception of Waiting Room Facilities

The Community Welfare Service has recently made improvements to waiting room facilities. Table 3.18 shows applicants' ratings of key elements of waiting room facilities. It can be seen that there are a mixed set of responses; some elements were rated favourably, whilst others were rated unfavourably. The elements rated most favourably were heating (60% scoring one and two on the five point scales), privacy from other services (59% scoring one and two), and security (53% scoring one and two). The elements rated least favourably were baby changing facilities (21% scoring one and two), reading materials (28% scoring one and two), and décor (35% scoring one and two). Waiting room facilities in Roscommon SCWO area overall were rated more favourably than the other SCWO areas, with Mayo being the second most favourably rated area. Whilst improvements have been made to waiting room facilities, the results indicate there is scope for further improvement. Figure 3.3-3.5 shows some of the waiting room facilities currently available within county Galway.

**Table 3.18: Perceptions of Key Elements of Waiting Room Facilities
(1 = very good; 5 = very bad)**

Key Elements of Waiting Room Facilities	Superintendent Community Welfare Officer Area									
	Galway 1		Galway 2		Mayo		Roscommon		Total	
	Mean	% scoring 1 and 2	Mean	% scoring 1 and 2	Mean	% scoring 1 and 2	Mean	% scoring 1 and 2	Mean	% scoring 1 and 2
Space	3.1	39	2.9	42	2.5	53	2.1	66	2.8	46
Décor	3.4	28	3.4	32	2.9	39	2.8	55	3.2	35
Seating	3.0	39	2.9	41	2.5	52	2.3	59	2.8	45
Heating	2.2	64	2.6	55	2.4	62	2.5	58	2.4	60
Radio facilities/music	2.8	48	3.4	36	3.0	51	2.9	48	3.0	45
Reading materials	3.8	27	3.6	28	3.7	26	3.4	36	3.7	28
Toilet facilities	2.6	55	3.2	41	3.0	44	2.5	56	2.8	49
Queuing system	2.9	44	3.2	39	2.8	47	2.5	54	2.9	44
Security	2.2	63	3.4	34	2.9	53	2.2	69	2.7	53
Privacy from other services	2.3	61	2.2	53	2.6	61	2.3	64	2.2	59
Baby changing facilities	4.1	35	4.0	22	4.3	16	3.6	33	4.1	21

Figure 3.3: Waiting Room Facilities at Shantalla Clinic, Galway



Figure 3.4: Waiting Room Facilities at Ross House, Galway



Figure 3.5: Waiting Room Facilities at Prospect House, Galway



3.14 Perceptions of key Elements of Community Welfare Service

From table 3.19 it can be seen that the vast majority of applicants rated each of the key elements of the service they were asked about favourably (50-86% scoring between one and two on the five point scales). As with waiting room facilities, Roscommon SCWO area is rated the most favourably, followed by Mayo. The most favourably rated elements of the service were confidentiality of the information given (86% scoring one and two on the five point scales), privacy of the meeting with the Community Welfare Officer (84% scoring one and two), outcome of the meeting with the Community Welfare Officer (82% scoring one and two), and the general manner of the Community Welfare Officer (82% scoring one and two). The least favourable ratings were the length of time waiting to see the Community Welfare Officer (50% scoring one and two) and the opening hours of the Community Welfare Service (54% scoring one and two). Both these elements are rated least favourably in Galway 1 and 2 SCWO areas. As stated in section 3.8, waiting times are relatively lengthy with scope for improvement. Opening hours also vary considerably with some offices open for less than three hours a day and only on certain days of the week.

Overall it is evident that the Community Welfare Service is rated favourably by the vast majority of applicants across a number of key elements. This finding is reflected in respondents' overall rating of the service (table 3.20) with 67% of applicants perceiving the service as excellent or very good.

Table 3.19: Perceptions of Key Elements of Community Welfare Service (1 = very good; 5 = very bad)

Key Elements of Community Welfare Service	Superintendent Community Welfare Officer Area									
	Galway 1		Galway 2		Mayo		Roscommo n		Total	
	Mean	% scoring 1 and 2	Mean	% scoring 1 and 2	Mean	% scoring 1 and 2	Mean	% scoring 1 and 2	Mean	% scoring 1 and 2
Helpfulness of community welfare officer	1.7	79	1.9	73	1.6	83	1.5	83	1.7	79
Length of time waiting to see community welfare officer	2.8	46	3.1	39	2.5	57	1.9	77	2.7	50
Length of time with community welfare officer	1.7	79	2.0	70	1.7	83	1.5	88	1.8	79
Privacy of meeting with community welfare officer	1.5	85	1.8	78	1.6	85	1.5	91	1.6	84
Outcome of meeting with community welfare officer	1.6	84	1.9	75	1.6	86	1.6	86	1.7	82
Opening hours of community welfare service	2.6	50	2.6	51	2.4	61	2.0	72	2.5	55
Ease of being able to talk to community welfare officer	1.8	79	2.1	69	1.8	81	1.7	82	1.9	77
Confidentiality of information given	1.5	89	1.7	78	1.5	89	1.4	91	1.5	86
Entrance and exit to community welfare officer's premises	2.3	64	2.4	62	1.9	76		83	2.2	69
Speed with which claims are processed	2.1	68	2.3	61	2.0	74	1.9	76	2.1	68
General manner of community welfare officer	1.7	81	1.8	78	1.6	87	1.5	85	1.7	82

Table 3.20: Overall Opinion of the Community Welfare Service

Overall Opinion	Superintendent Community Welfare Officer Area									
	Galway 1		Galway 2		Mayo		Roscommon		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Excellent	57	31	30	22	29	23	17	35	133	27
Good	67	37	45	33	70	56	14	29	196	40
Reasonable	38	21	42	31	16	13	11	23	107	22
Poor	16	9	12	9	5	4	3	6	36	7
Very Poor	4	2	7	5	5	4	3	6	19	4
TOTAL:	182	37	136	28	125	26	48	10	491	100

3.15 Additional Comments/Suggestions

Applicants were given the opportunity to provide additional comments/suggestions regarding the Community Welfare Service. 41% of applicants gave additional comments/suggestions. These are summarised in table 3.21 (a complete list of comments/suggestions by SCWO area is given in appendix 2-5). It can be seen from table 3.21 that a wide variety of comments/suggestions were made. On the positive side, the Community Welfare Officers (24%) and the service in general (14%) were praised for being very good. However, on the negative side, 16% of those with additional comments referred to the poor manner/attitude of the Community Welfare Officer. Whilst the vast majority were satisfied with the manner of the Community Welfare Officer (table 3.19) the negative comments suggest that some Community Welfare Officers could improve their manner/attitude. One to one communication training may be useful here. The main suggested areas of improvement were the provision of information (14%) on what you can claim for (some suggested this should be given by the Community Welfare Officer, while others thought the information could be provided in a booklet) and the introduction of an appointments/queuing system (11%) to reduce waiting time and improve the queuing system.

Table 3.21: Summary of Additional Comments/Suggestions

Comments/ suggestions	Superintendent Community Welfare Officer Area									
	Galway 1		Galway 2		Mayo		Roscommon		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Opening hours should be longer	2	2	3	5	2	6	1	3	8	3
Crowded waiting room/lack of space	6	6	2	3					8	3
Facilities for children (e.g. toys, books)	3	3	1	1			1	3	5	2
Long waiting time	9	10	3	5	1	3			13	6
Improve queuing time/introduce appointments/tickets system	12	13	9	15	2	6	1	3	24	11
Information on what you can claim for (e.g. booklet, from Community Welfare Officer)	10	11	10	16	4	12	7	25	31	14
Query/comment regarding benefit	7	7	6	10	5	15			18	8
Community Welfare Service very good	14	15	8	13	5	15	4	14	31	14
Community Welfare Officer very good	24	26	13	22	5	15	9	33	51	24
Improve toilet facilities	1	1	5	8	1	3	1	3	8	3
Enforce no smoking in waiting room	1	1							1	0.5
Poor manner/attitude of Community Welfare Officer	15	16	12	20	7	21	1	3	35	16
Increase number of days a week service open	3	3	2	3	3	9			8	3
Provide advice over the phone	1	1							1	0.5
Provide reading materials in the waiting room	2	2	2	3			1	3	5	2
Informed to come prepared with all the necessary information	2	2							2	1
Poor premises/facilities (general plus waiting room)	4	4	4	6	5	15			13	6
Someone to provide general information without having to queue to see officer	1	1							1	0.5
Occasional home visit useful	1	1			1	3			2	1
Delay in processing claims (e.g. rent Allowance)	4	4	3	5	1	3	1	3	9	4
Hassle collecting all evidence required	3	3	1	1					4	2
Poor service/could be a lot better	3	3	5	8	1	3	2	7	11	5
Pay rent allowance directly into the bank	2	2	1	1					3	1
One officer to deal with medical cards only	1	1	1	1					2	1
Daunting system	1	1	1	1			1	3	3	1
Music too loud in waiting room			1	1					1	0.5
Provide radio			1	1			1	3	2	1
Poor security/feeling intimidated by others			1	1					2	1
Not wheelchair friendly							1	3	1	0.5

* Multiple response, therefore percentages may not add up to 100%

4. DISCUSSION

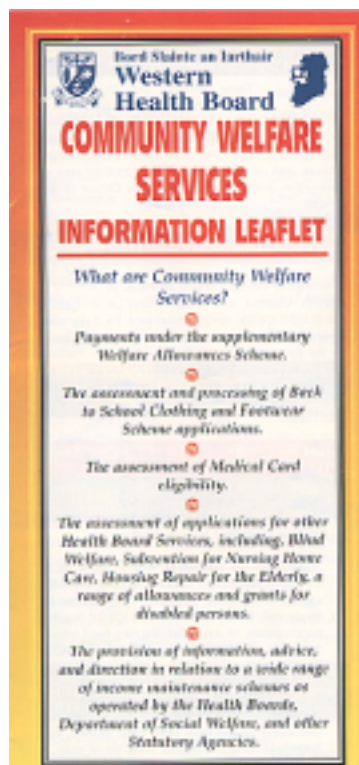
4.1 Introduction

The main aim of the study was to establish how well the Community Welfare Service is satisfying customers' needs with a view to identifying potential areas of improvement. The main issues arising from the survey will now be outlined, stating their implications for the future delivery of the service.

4.2 Knowledge and Information About the Community Welfare Service

Providing information about assistance available is very important, as such assistance can potentially have a significant effect on applicants' quality of life. The research results indicate however that there is considerable scope to improve information provision. This is demonstrated by the fact that 38% of applicants could have applied for assistance sooner if they had been aware that such benefit was available to them. On average these applicants could have applied for benefit eight months sooner. There is evidence to suggest that the Community Welfare Service leaflet could be more widely distributed. In addition, there may be scope to develop a booklet describing entitlements in more detail (as suggested by applicants) or enhancing the content and presentation of the existing leaflet (see figure 4.1). This could help reduce workload for Community Welfare Officers, as it may lead to less need for potential applicants to talk to the Community Welfare Officer. Consideration may also be given to using the media, as there is evidence to suggest it is under-utilised.

Figure 4.1: Current Information Leaflet for the Community Welfare Service



4.3 Type of Assistance Given

The main assistance given to applicants is rent supplement (67%) and Supplementary Welfare Allowance (45%). Applicants also receive information and advice from Community Welfare offices in addition to assistance filling in forms. Many of the additional comments given by applicants revealed the helpful support and advice given in addition to financial assistance. However there may be a need for Community Welfare Officers to do more in terms of preventing where possible the reoccurrence of social distress/exclusion. The service appears to be used from time to time over a number of years by the majority of applicants which indicates problems may not be prevented in the long term. Although it may not be possible to prevent some problems, perhaps more could be done in the future to reduce the long term dependency on the Community Welfare Service for assistance.

4.4 Accessibility of Community Welfare Facilities

The need to provide an accessible service was highlighted by the fact that 13% experienced health problems that made it difficult to get out of the house. The Community Welfare Service is currently relatively accessible throughout the Board, with the majority of current users living within five miles or twenty minutes travel time. The vast majority are referred to the nearest office. Roscommon SCWO area is the only area where there may be a need to improve accessibility.

4.5 Fairness of Decision to Give/not to Give Assistance

It is important that the Community Welfare Service delivers an equitable service to those who apply for benefit. Only 4% of applicants were refused assistance, 69% of whom believed they were given an adequate explanation for the refusal and only four applicants appealed the decision. This suggests that the majority of applicants believe that they are treated fairly, although the numbers involved are too small to be conclusive.

4.6 Perceptions of Waiting Room Facilities

The Community Welfare Service has recently made improvements to their waiting room facilities. The rating of waiting room facilities however produced a mixed set of responses, with some elements rated favourably, and others unfavourably. This indicates that more could be done to improve waiting room facilities particularly in terms of baby changing facilities, providing reading facilities, and improving the décor.

4.7 Perceptions of Key Elements of the Service

Overall the Community Welfare Service was rated as excellent or very good by 67% of applicants (50-86%). Specific key elements overall were also rated favourably by the majority of applicants. It appears that the service is greatly appreciated by the majority of applicants. This is demonstrated by the following comments:

“I have found my Community Welfare Officer to be a very helpful nice lady. I was never rushed on a visit to her. She took the time to explain everything. The system is fantastic and greatly appreciated. Thank you.”

“I think the Community Welfare Service is very good. I was really stuck when I went for help and they got me well started and I will always be grateful.”

Although most elements of the service are rated favourably, there appears to be a need to improve waiting times and opening hours of the service. These were the least favourably rated elements of the service. Over one third of applicants have to wait longer than 30 minutes before they see the Community Welfare Officer (average = 39 minutes). These appear to be relatively lengthy waiting times and should be addressed, particularly in the Galway SCWO areas where the problem is worse. At the moment the service is offered primarily on a ‘first come first served’ basis. The introduction of some form of appointments/queuing system (as suggested by some applicants) in busy Community Welfare Offices may facilitate the reduction of waiting times. In terms of opening hours, it appears that the length of time as opposed to the time of day is the main concern. At present these vary considerably by SCWO area. Extending opening hours in offices which experience lengthy waiting times should be considered as a way of improving the overall quality of service.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the survey can be summarised as follows:

- €# Applications for assistance come from all age groups, although the largest proportion are under 40 years of age. The majority of applicants are single, with an equal number of males and females.
- €# 13% experience health problems that make it difficult for them to get out
- €# The main assistance given is Rent Supplement (67%) and Supplementary Welfare Allowance (45%)
- €# Once initial contact is made the service is used over a number of years
- €# Only 8% of applicants first found out about the service from the Community Welfare Service leaflet
- €# 38% could have applied for benefit sooner (on average eight months sooner) if they were aware they were entitled to benefit
- €# The majority live less than five miles and take less than 20 minutes to travel to the nearest Community Welfare Office
- €# The average waiting time to see the Community Welfare Officer is 39 minutes
- €# 69% of applicants received all their requests. Only 4% were refused assistance
- €# There is scope for further improvement of waiting room facilities
- €# The service is rated overall as excellent or very good by 67% of applicants

In conclusion, the study has shown that the Community Welfare Service is satisfying the needs of those who use it. However, it is recommended that consideration be given to the following in delivering the service in the future:

1. Improving the level of knowledge about the service. This refers to general information about the Community Welfare Service in addition to more specific information about the different types of benefit available and eligibility.
2. Continuing to improve waiting room facilities, particularly in terms of décor, reading materials, and baby changing facilities.

3. Reducing waiting times particularly in the Galway SCWO areas by considering the introduction of an appointments/queuing system
4. Increasing the opening hours of the service
5. Sending Community Welfare Officers on one to one communication training courses to ensure all maintain an appropriate manner/attitude in dealing with clients.
6. Examine the future role of Community Welfare Officers in preventing the reoccurrence of social distress and exclusion.

APPENDIX 1

SURVEY OF COMMUNITY WELFARE SERVICE CUSTOMERS

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH, WESTERN HEALTH BOARD

Q1 How long have you been in contact with the Community Welfare Service? _____ years
 _____ months

		CODE IN GRID		Yes	No
Q2	Have you recently received any of the following benefits?	Supplementary Welfare Allowance (basic payment)		1	2
		Rent supplement		1	2
		Mortgage support		1	2
		Diet supplement		1	2
		Exceptional needs (e.g. ESB assistance, household items, travel costs)		1	2

Q3 What is your age? _____ years

Q4	Are you:	Male	1
		Female	2

Q5	Marital status	Married	1
		Single	2
		Co-habiting	3
		Widow (er)	3
		Separated	4
		Divorced	5

Q6	Do you suffer any health problems that make it difficult for you to get out of the house by yourself? e.g. walking, breathing problems	Yes	1
		No	2

Q7 How did you **first** find out about the Community Welfare Service?
(circle one number only)

Family	1
Friend	2
Media e.g. TV, newspapers	3
Dept of Social, Community and Family Affairs Official (e.g. employment exchange)	4
Health Board Official	5
Leaflet at the Dept of Social, Community and Family Affairs (e.g. employment exchange)	6
Citizens Information Centre	7
Voluntary organisation	8
Leaflet at the Health Board	9
Other	10
Don't know	11

Q8 Would you have been in a position to apply for benefit sooner if you knew you were entitled sooner?

Yes	1
No	2
Don't know	3

Q9 How many months sooner could you have applied for benefit _____ months

Q10 Approximately how far do you live from the nearest Community Welfare Officer's premises? _____ miles

Q11 Approximately how long does it usually take to get from your home to the Community Welfare Officer's premises? _____ hours _____ minutes

Q12 What is the **main** mode of transport you usually use to travel to the Community Welfare Officer's premises?
(circle one number only)

Bus	1
Minibus	2
Taxi	3
Car (driver)	4
Car (passenger)	5
Walk	6
Other	7

Q13 Would another Community Welfare Office premises be more convenient for you?

Yes	1
No	2
Don't know	3

Q14 On your last visit, how long did you have to wait before you saw the Community Welfare Officer? _____ hours _____ minutes

Q15 Which of the following times of day would you prefer to meet the Community Welfare Officer?

Between 10am and 11am	1
Between 11am and 12pm	2
Between 12pm and 1pm	3
Between 1pm and 2pm	4
Between 2pm and 3pm	5
Between 3pm and 4pm	6
Between 4pm and 5pm	7
Other	9
Don't mind	10

Q16 From your last visit, what is your overall opinion of the following elements of the Community Welfare Service? (1= Very **Good**: 5 = Very **Bad**) :

CODE IN GRID (CIRCLE NUMBER)

	Very Good				Very Bad	Don't know
Helpfulness of Community Welfare Officer	1	2	3	4	5	9
Length of time spent waiting to see the Community Welfare Officer	1	2	3	4	5	9
Length of time spent with the Community Welfare Officer	1	2	3	4	5	9
Privacy of meeting with Community Welfare Officer	1	2	3	4	5	9
Outcome of meeting with Community Welfare Officer	1	2	3	4	5	9
Opening hours of Community Welfare Service	1	2	3	4	5	9
Ease of being able to talk to the Community Welfare Officer	1	2	3	4	5	9
Confidentiality of information given	1	2	3	4	5	9
Entrance and exit to Community Welfare Officer's premises	1	2	3	4	5	9
Speed with which claims are processed	1	2	3	4	5	9
General manner of Community Welfare Officer (e.g. courteous, pleasant)	1	2	3	4	5	9

Q17 On your last visit, where did you meet the Community Welfare Officer?

Health centre	1
Community hall	2
Other	3

Q18 On your last visit, were you interviewed:

In an office	1
At a hatch	2
Other	3

Q19 What is your overall opinion of the following elements of the Community Welfare Officer's waiting room? (1= Very **Good**: 5 = Very **Bad**):

CODE IN GRID (CIRCLE NUMBER) →	Very Good				Very Bad	Don't know
	1	2	3	4	5	9
Space	1	2	3	4	5	9
Decor	1	2	3	4	5	9
Seating	1	2	3	4	5	9
Heating	1	2	3	4	5	9
Radio facilities/music	1	2	3	4	5	9
Reading materials	1	2	3	4	5	9
Toilet facilities	1	2	3	4	5	9
Queuing system	1	2	3	4	5	9
Security	1	2	3	4	5	9
Privacy from other services	1	2	3	4	5	9
Baby changing facilities	1	2	3	4	5	9

Q20 On your last visit to the Community Welfare Officer, did you receive the service(s) you requested?

Received all my requests	1	GO TO Q 24
Received most of my requests	2	GO TO Q 24
Received some of my requests	3	GO TO Q 24
Was refused	3	CONTINUE
Don't know- awaiting outcome	3	GO TO Q 24

Q21 Did you receive an adequate explanation for the refusal?

Yes	1
No	2

Q22 Did you appeal the decision?

Yes	1
No	2

Q23 What was the result of the appeal?

Decision overturned	1
No change in decision	2

Q24 Did you find the appeals process fair?

Yes	1
No	2

Q25 Were you assisted in any of the following ways by the Community Welfare Service?

CODE IN GRID	Yes	No
Help with form filling →	1	2
Referral to a more appropriate service	1	2
Offered advice	1	2
Provided with relevant information	1	2
Talked to other agencies on my behalf (e.g. ESB, lending agencies)	1	2

Q26 What is your overall opinion of the Community Welfare Service?

Excellent	1
Good	2
Reasonable	3
Poor	4
Very poor	5

Q27 Further comments/suggestions

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE

APPENDIX 2

Additional Comments From Galway 1 SCWO Area

I think the opening hours for the Community Welfare Officer should be longer and accommodate people who are on a Community Employment Scheme. I work Wednesday 1-5pm Thursday 9-5pm and Friday 9-5 pm. My Community Welfare Officer only operates on Wednesday afternoon and Friday morning, although I am able to telephone and speak to him openly.

The waiting room is daunting as it is always packed and very long queuing. Also toys for youngster would be a great idea. Children get bored waiting around and this stresses out both parent and child.

Instead of queuing, each person should be given a specific time for an interview with the Community Welfare Officer; if they can't make that time it's up to them to phone to arrange a further appointment. This will cut out the waiting.

They always tell you what you can't get. They never tell you what you can claim for.

An improvement on the queuing system in Shantalla Health Centre would be very helpful.

My son is blind in one eye. He cannot work in a factory or any other place. He is still going to school. I would like to know would there be any money that he could get that would help him to have a few pence for himself. He is 16½. Thank you - would you be able to let me know.

Community Welfare service - very good;
Community Welfare Officer – excellent.

Separate male and female toilet facilities. Non-smoking waiting room - rule enforced.

1. With reference to q16 confidentiality, even with the Data information Act, one can't be sure of who sees or uses information; this applies to any institution that holds information on people. I could not possibly answer this question, as I don't know what any institution does with its information.

2. My Community Welfare Officer was absolutely great. xxxx was very encouraging re: plans to create work and my past and present efforts for re-education. This was especially good to hear at this stage in life.

The Health Board should seriously consider other alternatives than Shantalla Health Centre and move office somewhere more appropriate. It's absolutely ridiculous waiting around a full hour and the place is usually crowded anyway.

The Community Welfare Officer should be pleasant, and xxxx should not call the person on the other side of the desk rude. xxxx should not be awkward and difficult; in a word ignorant. Also when xxxx is on the phone enquiring about your case an element of discretion is required.

It would be more convenient for people on a back-to-work Rent allowance if the

allowance was paid direct into their Bank Account
People should be treated with more dignity when they are on welfare.

Could have been treated a bit better and don't like to be treated like a sponger as I have paid taxes and don't expect to be on welfare that long. More information could have been given to let me know what I was entitled to.

I have never had any problems with the Community Welfare Officer or its offices. I have always found them courteous and helpful as I have outlined in the form. The only problem I find is the amount of space and the current queuing system

When queuing there should be tickets given like in Galway. It would be more easier and there would be no jumping the queue.

In general, I found the Social Welfare Service officers excellent. But I found waiting time very very poor; waiting facilities also very poor.

I have always found the Community Welfare service very helpful and pleasant

Increase number of days in week that Community Welfare Officer is open for example 4-5 days

I found xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx very helpful and kind.

I have put in for one parent but I haven't heard anything since August. I have to live on £108 per week, which is not easy. Could you tell me who to contact please?

I would prefer that each person was not regarded as the riff raff of society. I chose to come home to my county and my Welfare Officer was under the impression that I might commute back and forth to England to work. Clever idea actually but no that's not what I am like. I think the Welfare Officer should not have their battle defenses up all the time as that gives off a negative vibe. I understand that there are many difficult situations and people so I appreciate that I was looked after O.K. However, my Rent allowance has ceased and I'm off in today to investigate why and hopefully to get it reinstated as soon as possible.

Suggestions: appointments system - client could phone and request an appointment and also have an assistant Community Welfare Officer to answer incidental questions and give advice to new comers over the phone, even limited hours if there is not enough staff. This Romanian family I think were in the waiting room slapping each other and spitting their nut shells onto the floor - if I could possibly avoid this spectacle I would if I had children I would have got up and left.

Community Welfare Officers should be more helpful and not so ignorant and rude. The queuing system needs to be improved badly - more spacious waiting room with magazines.

1. Notices for applicants to come prepared with all necessary information, Birth Certs etc. might be of help;
2. A microphone so that the Community Welfare Officer could announce "next person" instead of having xxxx to come out of xxxx office into the waiting room to see or ask who the next person on line is.

Queuing could be done with an electrical counter. As it is at present, there is no notice of what you have to do to get your turn.

Overall, I feel as if the system has improved over the years, Welfare Officers themselves seem to have developed their skills in dealing with customers

I found my Community Welfare Officer very helpful and pleasant indeed. The only complaint I have are over the waiting area being rather unpleasant and cramped and some confusion at times over the queuing system

The Community Welfare Officer is helpful and does her job. The premises and facilities are very poor however there should be a receptionist of information and entitlements point where you can find out information and entitlements without actually having to queue to see the officer. I feel that you have to be very pushy and forward if you are new to the system or you may not get your full entitlements - as happened me.

I am currently pregnant and understand I am entitled to maternity clothes, a cot plus other things which I will not be applying for because of the attitude of the Community Welfare Officer xxxx. It is xxxx job to be helpful, not to try to reduce people to tears and make them feel like dirt. I am currently receiving Rent allowance and my cheque often does not come until Monday and my Rent is due on a Friday, this tends to cause problems. When I explained this to the Community Welfare Officer, I was basically told that they go out on time so I must be getting them on time. An adult should not have to feel intimidated by approaching another adult for something they are entitled to. I would be very interested in knowing the outcome of this survey as I am sure many people in this area, due to their comments would also be too.

Would appreciate more information on entitlements rather than having to find out through friends, at the time of initial claim.

Overall my benefits and supplements off the welfare have been reasonably fair and hope this continues thanks.

Keep up the good work.

As I live alone with no living relatives close by and do not have a telephone I sometimes worry that if I am taken very ill as I never received a visit from the Welfare Officers, I would just lay in my bed and die; maybe an occasional visit would help.

Thank God I didn't have to look for too much only Rent Supplement and I was treated very well the person who dealt with me was very nice, helpful and pleasant with me.

Entitlements should be that mandatory, not arbitrary. Benefit of doubt should be better informed of all benefits. Too many petty regulations to delay payment. Postal service not a dependable means of receiving benefit.

Quite a long delay in processing claims seems like an alternative state deterrent for applying for benefits.

I am presently receiving mortgage support and I appreciate this payment - but it took 3 months for my claim to be processed - stressful experience.

They are not there enough days of the week.

When making original claim in Augustine Street, one should be completely informed of all forms and letters, one will need for Augustine Street/ Health Centre and Claddagh. I was asked for the same letter in three different places and had to return to landlord, previous employer several times to get the same letter.

I was left waiting for two hours with a small child, when I finally got to see the Community Welfare Officer xxxx wasn't very helpful and gave me more forms to fill out and return again the next day. I could have filled out the forms there and then but he would not let me. All my information is on computer; all xxxx had to do was look it up and there would have been no extra forms or waiting and more queuing again.

Queuing system out-dated. On my last visit, there was no background music to drown out conversation persons were having with Officer. When I enquired about help with electric/oil for our rented house, I was told I was not long enough in the premises to qualify. I was not told about any appeal system. Welfare Officer should be there a couple of days a week. Overall Welfare service is good/reasonable. There is a lack of information available to the public.

I have found my Community Welfare Officer to be extremely competent and helpful also very courteous in all my dealings with xxxx.

I found all Community Welfare Officers I have dealt with extremely helpful, but obtaining the evidence needed by their Supervisor, it meant a lot of hassle and running around which I found very tiring in my condition

Try to be a small bit nicer to people because if we did not have to be there for a little help I would not.

Although the above is my opinion, I have talked to many people who have found the Community Welfare Officers to be a very poor service indeed. In fact I don't think I've ever met anyone who would rate it as a good or excellent service.

I find Community Welfare very helpful in my own situation. I need to find out more information on helping me pay bills e.g. E.S.B., etc.

I think it should be possible to get Rent allowance paid directly into the bank as I pay all my rent by direct debit every month and it is very tempting to cash some of the weekly payments during the month.

Toys or childrens' books to keep children amused while waiting.

Service could be improved if there was one Community Welfare Officer to deal with Medical Cards only.

Less running around for clients e.g. for Rent allowance. I found the attitude of Welfare Officer to be very poor. I wrote and nearly sent a letter of complaint to the Health Board .

I have one meter in my flat E.S.B. it is the only source of heating I have for drying clothes. I pay about £10 every 2 months. I would be grateful for any help.

The Welfare Officers that I have dealt with have always been helpful in every way.

The Welfare Officer is working under very bad conditions at the moment. Apart from that, I am very satisfied.

The Welfare isn't too bad, but the service could be a lot better. If people would show a little respect then they might get some back.

The guidelines for eligibility are not very clear when applying and when you apply for benefit or assistance you should automatically be informed of other benefits available to you.

Inadequate explanations for refusal- borrowed money from relations as presumed no point in appealing to a process involved with regular negative results when applying. Surely the Officer should have known initially if we qualified for allowance or not. We were never told what criteria necessary to qualify - which was frustrating as so much paperwork and details from bank necessary to then find we never qualified in the first place.

I have found the gentlemen always respectful and pleasant. The females "hurtful and offensive"

On the whole the service is excellent and I'm very appreciative of the job that the Community Welfare Officers do.

This is my first time looking for any assistance and did not know my entitlements and very uncomfortable on my second visit a very nice Community Welfare Officer xxxxxxxxxxxx very helpful. I have not been down to the Centre in Galway since. Still not sure of what I should be looking for as regards my entitlements e.g. Medical cards for myself and children even though form filled out and sent in .etc.

Community welfare Officers generally seem overworked. The waiting room is depressing and miserable. There are no facilities for children and no space to allow for babies or push chairs.

More available hours would be helpful, then perhaps one may not have to wait so long to see the Community Welfare Officer

I am awaiting call to Merlin Park Hospital for surgery to my right knee. Also I cannot walk about much due to being sore-a pain from limb as my pelvis is damaged and painful also.

I believe that the Community Welfare Officers provide an important service within the community. The only problem I've come across is waiting time, but I'd rather wait for a forthcoming payment than not to be paid at all.

I generally find service of my local Social Welfare service to be adequate to my needs and find my Social Welfare officer to be very efficient and pleasant to deal with, however this possibly reflects my own succinctness and understanding of what can seem to be a very daunting system. I hope that this questionnaire is also targeted at individuals with poor literacy skills.

I have found my Community Welfare Officer to be a very helpful nice xxxx. I was never rushed on a visit to xxxx. xxxx took the time to explain everything. The system is fantastic and greatly appreciated - thank you.

I'm mentally disturbed and get Disability Allowance.
xxxxxxxxxxxx is my Welfare Officer and xxxx has been good in listening to me because of the way my mind is affected, other people treat me like a child. I would like to know more of people that's affected like I am. Would it be possible to get into the Rehab in xxxx, I might learn a trade or something if you can help I'd be grateful. Thank you

Under the circumstances, the Welfare staff do their best especially nowadays. I must honestly say what ever training, xxxxxxxxx and xxxxxxxxxxxxxx got it stands to their credit. They have a job to do and I think they do it well.

Staff could be a lot more pleasant and use good manner and a nicer attitude towards clients and needs to be more efficient and the queuing system needs to be organised as there is no way of knowing which number has gone in to the office at Shantalla. Maybe the same system as the main offices in the town Centre . The questionnaire has been filled in about Shantalla Clinic Social Welfare offices

I would like when my suggestions are offered that they would be dealt with accordingly. I would like information that when I hear it I understand it to my mental equivalence

Exterior of Health Centre is awful

Almost all my dealings have been with xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx who was an excellent officer. Always correct and helpful. Had only one interview with xxxxxxxxxxxx who is the new Community Welfare Officer

I have been treated very well by my Community Welfare Officer and find her a very nice person to talk to.

With regard to the Community Welfare Officer whose jurisdiction I fall under - in spite of being efficient and business like – that officer's manner could be more friendly and less patronising

I have never received any other help only what I was entitled to. Once I asked for help with the cost of a pair of shoes and trousers and they said no with no explanation

In my opinion the Community Welfare Officers are doing a very good job, the premises could do with a refurbishment and some good reading material

In Shantalla Clinic, I was standing outside door of a full waiting room for 20 minutes on my first visit before realising that there was a ticket system in operation. A sign indicating this would have been helpful

There is a general sense among people who use your services that Community Welfare Officers abuse their position of power over their clients, often humiliate them unnecessarily and wasting their time by making them repeat journeys for different forms and information. There are certain officers who shout at their clients. Make value judgements on their clients financial, emotional and living conditions.

When one goes to the Community Welfare Officer you are in dire financial straits - one of the vulnerable in society - not out to waste someone's time or abuse their services which is the impression they give you. They make you feel you are begging for money not requesting financial assistance to help you survive – there is a considerable difference having said that is a valuable service which would be much improved by better behaviour by the officers. Perhaps a sabbatical room from dealing with the public - its a difficult job and easy (I imagine) to behave bitter and resentful towards clients.

Still don't know why I get £26.90 rent allowance on £45.00 pw which leaves me with £52.40 out of £70.50

Very good no complaints. I find them excellent when your down and have no money to live or pay your bills and nobody to turn to.

Community Welfare Officers need to remember that 90% of people in their clinics do not want to be there. We are still human beings and should not be stripped of all dignity

When applying for any assistance - one is made feel inferior and unwelcome. In my own case I was made feel as if I was trying to steal and claim falsely. When I got upset over questions and innuendoes no effort was made to allay any worries I had about my situation.

I am a single mother living in a 3 bedroom house as it is cheaper than most 1 or 2 bedroom accommodation in Galway. However, because it has 3 bedrooms I have been told I am over accommodated and rent allowance will not be granted. As a result I face being homeless by the end of the month. I really have no faith in my Community Welfare Officer as xxxx laughed when I got upset and offered no alternative suggestions.

Sometimes Community Welfare Officers are condescending. I also find you must always ask for entitlements. No one is ever forthcoming with information, while I respect the fact that they work hard and deal with difficult clients. I feel they are sometimes too quick to judge, job satisfaction for them as for anyone else is not perfect but if you take such a position then perhaps you should make the best of it. Thanks for asking for my opinion.

I am a single parent and my rent costs £100.00 per week, out of which I get £76.90 rent supplement. I'm living on £85.70 per week which I have to pay £23.00 towards my rent. I find it hard to live on the rest which is about £62.00 as I have a small baby to care for. I asked my Community Welfare Officer would I not be entitled to a bit more help with my rent but he said no, that was the going rate for £100.00 rent pw. I would be grateful if you could give me some assistance/ information on this..

Take a look at the people you represent. They don't all have money to buy clothes, shoes, you can't get them on your dole other than that your welfare officer are very helpful thank you.

Do not get information on shoe allowance or grant for back to school for people over 25 - not being told about it. P.s. Any information you have on the above please send to home.

Just a lovely bunch of people

A better system would need to be introduced in the Shantalla Clinic. Conditions are deplorable

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX Community Welfare Officer has always been very courteous and helpful towards me and understanding , as I have trouble with filling out forms and he's always been a great help in every aspect.

Queuing system was too long, claims not processed quickly enough

I am very lucky to have such a helpful and courteous xxxx in xxxxxxxxxxxx. xxxx gives you what you are entitled to and I think this is where a lot of Welfare Officers fail.

I would like a post paid envelope to posting my rent receipts. I would also like my Rent allowance to arrive on time (i.e. every Thursday); however, I understand that it is dependent on the postal service.

APPENDIX 3

Additional Comments From Galway 2 SCWO Area

Get a queuing system for Ross House and put the name of the duty officers on the door with a list of streets covered.

Service is good but I think that people like myself should be able to go on courses etc. Without upsetting our money entitlements.

The office in which I see my Community Welfare Officer is absolutely terrible. There are no facilities for children whatsoever. The building itself has to be left if I need to bring the child to a toilet. There is no people queuing system in meaning nobody knows where they are sometimes resulting in verbal argument which can be quite degrading.

Overall the prompt service I receive from my Welfare Officer is excellent.

I think a booklet of entitlements should be freely available and information about the documentation needed to make claims should be given altogether initially to save people having to continually go back with forms they didn't realise they needed.

I have never had any reason to complain. I have always received a courteous and helpful service. My Community Welfare Officer has always been there for me in times of trouble, and despite xxxx heavy workload has given me time and consideration and a helping hand. I believe it is an excellent service overall.

I have been waiting for a visit from an officer for 3 weeks now. I called 3 or 4 times. xxxx was very unreasonable and extremely unpleasant.

The Community Welfare Officer was new to me, I have just changed over from another one due to change of address. The first Community Welfare Officer was very helpful and understanding with me.

Give more information on what people are entitled to.

Tuam should be open longer Wednesday morning as Thursday morning is not long enough. Why not Friday 3-4 as well

Overall the Community Welfare Officer was helpful in my dealings with him. My only complaint is the waiting room where no queue numbers were available and hence people were skipping turns. Also very little reading material - but that's minor - I could bring along a book which I often do. Overall no major complaints. Hope this is helpful.

The Community Welfare Officer that I saw acted as if the money was coming out of her own pocket. I would not have been there unless totally necessary. I was made feel like a beggar looking for a few pennies. I have always worked and paid tax and I did not appreciate being made feel so belittled. I understand that it is not entirely the fault of the system but if they could screen their Officers more thoroughly it would ensure a lot more help and politeness from their claimants.

xxxxxxxxxxxx my Community Welfare Officer is an intelligent sympathetic human being that is a thorough xxxx.

Keep up the good work.

I have been dealing with Community Welfare Officers for the best part of 20 years. Now I have a couple of comments to mention. 1. My own Community Welfare Officer, I was in college R.T.C. I was waiting for my D.A. to come through. I went down to dole office. The lady in the dole office did help me very much, excellent actually. She rang my Community Welfare Officer. My Community Welfare Officer gave her a mouthful for no reason at all. The Community Welfare Officer didn't want to give me my own money at all. It was terrible how the Community Welfare Officer treated her. She rang Longford, who were very helpful. Longford had to ring Community Welfare Officer because Community Welfare Officer had only given a lot of grief to the lady at the dole office. It was terrible. Points I would like to point out when dealing with xxxx Community Welfare Officer I will make them brief. 1. Attitude stinks 2. Forms filled in right - asks questions which are completely irrelevant and personal 3. Keeps you hours waiting, asks your life story. 4. I feel like a beggar getting my own money 5. Sheer grief and terrible trauma you get from xxxx Community Welfare Officer. xxxx Community Welfare Officer's much better, they give you your money no hassle much quicker etc. xxxx are much more compassionate

Note: I have been living on my own for years. I have gone through the system boarding school etc. I am delighted to have filled in your questionnaire, call me for interview anytime. I have met and dealt with a lot of people in all walks of life. I have a lot of experience in dealing with them. I would be glad to help you anytime. God bless

Thanks for sending me the questionnaire I enjoyed filling it in. Another note ! A friend of mine, she has 3 children. She had to go to another Community Welfare Officer, she was living in xxxx. She collected her money on a Thursday. She got nothing but grief and terrible trauma from Community Welfare Officer. She got her money eventually, but she was in tears leaving the Health Centre. She hated Thursdays because she had to collect her money in afternoon. She had to wait a long time, also xxxx insulted her every time she went down and snide remarks about herself and her 3 children every time. Tips I would give you in bettering the service.

1. Get rid of men in the offices, too old, past their sell-by-date;
2. Put in younger men or women who will be helpful, and who want to help the public;
3. Base your reforms on the dole office its better you will have no problems. The dole office is very good. The place is freezing and no privacy when you want to get your business done.

I find that the Social Welfare officer in question does not know the in's and out's of other social welfare services. xxxx stopped our Rent Allowance at one stage with no notification, and when I contacted xxxx, xxxx said we were due for a review but never told us. Also we had to go from our last accommodation as our rent was always late for the landlady, and actually had to call to xxxx home numerous times where xxxx would forget to post it out. (used to pay rent monthly)

I found the rent board to be very unprofessional. I suggest they make some rules and stick to them. My claim took 6 weeks to come through, during which time I was nearly evicted. I found the rent authorities negligent on this occasion. I was made to feel too despondent about the affair to file a complaint. The dole office in comparison is excellent and overall I am very grateful that I have the opportunity to attend a third level university because of the T.L.A. Grant, and thank you.

I have dealt with the Community Welfare offices before with no problems. My Community Welfare Officer at present is new. I think they should be given at least one months training with an experienced Community Welfare Officer before being left alone to deal with the public. My present Community Welfare Officer certainly was not trained to a high enough standard to do xxxx job effectively. xxxx could also do with some "people training." Some Community Welfare Officers in Galway need this very badly. Their attitude seems to be very disrespectful to those members of the public that have to use the service for whatever reason - often personal reasons (i.e. Medical Card) they look down on people because they are claiming a payment from the state or whatever. People are using this service mainly because of circumstances beyond their control - that if they could change I am sure they would. We are ordinary people who deserve to be treated with manners and respect. Unfortunately sometimes that is not the case with certain Community Welfare Officers – pity.

The present Community Welfare system is very poor in my view. I have dealt with only two courteous Community Welfare Officers in my time, both were women. In general I feel the Community Welfare Officers treat people with disrespect.

I have found the Community Welfare Officer to be extremely helpful and professional in all my dealings with the Officer and I would like to thank your service for the excellent services you provide.

More information on what entitled to.

I should receive Rent allowance every Thursday but since I got a new Officer I might have only received it on time once, which cost me time and money on phone calls trying to sort it out and see where my cheques are and I still have not found out why the cheques might come up to nearly four days late. It would be nice to get them the same day every week.

Community Welfare Officer's job is obviously difficult and stressful but those I have come across (6 different people) were in general badly trained, bad mannered and hugely inefficient and seemingly disinterested with one exception. They volunteered no information as regards to my real rights on occasions when I was obviously ignorant of them. There may be an argument for splitting times of interview for different services e.g. Medical cards 9-11; Supplementary Welfare Allowance: 11:30 - 1:00 etc.; and for having some kind of service to queue people and direct them. The waiting rooms are a serious nightmare and with people stressed as they must be in these situations there is the danger of a serious flare up and violence. Health Board waiting rooms incubate problems.

While waiting in the waiting room the blaring of pop music on the radio was pathetic came out of the waiting room in the doctor surgery and had a splitting headache. I would appreciate if you could change that music to soft music.

I asked for travel assistance to Merlin Park Hospital, Galway and all he says I am entitled to is £10.00 a turn, that is no good. We get a taxi to Ballinasloe, train to Galway, taxi to Merlin Park. I also applied for a gas cooker and I was refused. Please can you help in any way?

Lived in one area of town, Community Welfare Officer very helpful and pleasant. Moved to other side of town - Community Welfare Officer very different. Very hard person to deal with; had to argue to get what I was entitled to, as was told from previous Community Welfare Officer.

Welfare officer not very friendly - make you feel inferior.

To let us know what we are allowed to claim for.

Sometimes from the Community Welfare Officer a sense of one is inferior just because people are on social welfare. This stigma actually does follow anyone on the dole, and I feel if people on social welfare were treated like people and less as scroungers this would be a better world, then again if it was a better world, I would not need to be on social welfare would I?

I would like a toilet and radio in health centre in Corrandulla and more reading books, newspapers, otherwise ok.

More information and more helpful.

I believe my Community Welfare Officer could be more forthcoming in information relating to social welfare entitlements. Also xxxx manner could improve to the public.

When I got my house I asked my Community Welfare Officer if I was entitled to curtains and carpets and xxxx said no, as some one who got a house a few doors away from me got a grant for them. I asked xxxx again last year about it and xxxx said I should have got a grant for curtains and carpets when I got my house 5 years ago, as where 5 years ago xxxx said no. I have borrowed curtains loads of times as I

cannot afford to buy curtains myself also my carpet is very old and torn. Maybe you can help me out here. Thank you xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx.

Not always informed of full entitlements with regards to Supplementary Allowances when in stressful financial position. More openness would be helpful to those genuinely seeking help.

Toilets at Ross House. - some queuing system - longer opening hours.

A proper numbering system in queue. If you don't stand up when you get near your turn someone always wants to walk straight in, because of back and leg problems I can't stand for any length of time.

There is a vast improvement since the Rent allowance was made postal. It is a long time since I have had to visit my Community Welfare Officer.

I think xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx is fair and is a good officer.

My husband xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx died on the 13th Oct 1998, he was 2½ years ill, we didn't have to attend to social welfare office, but when I needed a Medical Card and assistance for extra clothing (he had put on excess amount of weight due to steroids) xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx was very kind and xxxx also helped me with finances for b & b and travel when Peter was in St Luke's. xxxx handled everything with dignity and compassion as you can understand it was a very difficult time and we never had to ask for assistance before but xxxx was great.

My Community Welfare Officer is very good and Community Welfare services are excellent. I am very happy with the Western Health Board services. Thanking you

A better system for us and the Community Welfare Officer - e.g., extra hours, perhaps separate days/times for different areas, better queuing system, start on time as waiting area is not adequate.

Payment for courses that will give adequate skills for employment as they cannot be afforded on allowance.

Queue by ticket system is necessary, a more comfortable environment. Repetition of form filling for Western Health Board and Social Welfare should be unnecessary.

Communication between the Dept of Social Welfare and the Community Welfare service should be increased. This would lead to a more efficient service as documents frequently have to be copied for both.

Need to know more about what I am entitled to especially fuel allowance.

The Western Health Board is very good. As when I heard about the Western Health Board I applied for my benefits.

I would like to see the facilities improved such as the waiting room.

xxxx could tell me more about all the help available e.g. household items, help with E.S.B. and heating etc. Not very forthcoming when asked but I didn't know all I was entitled to at the time.

It would be nice if when you got to your Community Welfare Officer you do not have to wait a long time before they see you.

I returned from London a single parent with two children aged 9 & 6 years. The moving from London was a tough enough ordeal for me all alone on my own. I lived with my mother the first 6 weeks in a one-bedroom granny flat, while waiting to get private rented accommodation. I did not know that I could receive benefits so my children and me lived off my pensioner mother. As I found rented accommodation in xxxx. I first approached the Community Welfare Officers as my area officer was out on leave I happened to suffer at the hands of a ms designate. When I approached the office for benefits and rent allowance I felt like an alien the treatment was appalling, as I had handed in my income support book back to the D.S.S. in Cricklewood London, they demanded proof and treated me like a criminal at the xxxx office. As I had one long birth certificate for one child and a short Cert for the other, they would only pay me for one child, also OT took weeks to get one parent and I'm still waiting for my children's allowance as my Community Officer xxxxxxxxxxxx has to get the long birth Cert for my other child from Brent Town Hall in London. Also when I approached the Community Welfare Officer first there was no explanation about anything. I had no idea what I was supposed to do and I did not understand their system here as it was different to London. In London everything was fully explained to you, but here in xxxx. I felt I was just another person ready to live off the Government. Explanations were given in minutes and you were then practically shoved out the door. It nearly gave me a nervous breakdown. I was stunned with the way these officers treated me and I reacted with anger. I was told by one officer if I did not leave the office a man would "break" down the door any minute. I did not see any man angry. It was just to get rid of me, as I was appealing to xxxx to please explain the benefits. I was told abruptly if you need the benefits you will soon find out. Absolutely awful conditions.

When I found out xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx of the Western Health Board was in xxxx one Friday, I asked to see xxxx I explained to him the dreadful conditions and what I went through. xxxx was so helpful, and explained everything to me so nicely, and treated me with respect. I cannot thank xxxxxxxxx enough. I wished they all had the same approach. Now when I approach my Community Welfare Officer I find a complete change in xxxx. xxxx is now very helpful and in no way is xxxx abrupt to me; in fact xxxx is very pleasant, thanks to xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx. I am very happy and can now approach xxxx without fear (Community Welfare Officer)

The service provided by our local Community Welfare Officer is excellent however, the venue - Health Centre is very cramped and ought to be expanded - it has no baby changing facilities

I am now 5 years on the waiting list to be housed, a person came to inspect the house I am staying in, it is covered with wood-lice at night in the kitchen, there are 5 & 6 slugs around the floor. One evening a worm got up into the sink, I went to the Housing Department on numerous occasions, but was told where I am staying is adequate, so if I want to get housed it seems one has to live in squalor even if it affects your health. I'd be very grateful if you could check up on this, it is really awful when one wants a house you have to canvass all T.D.s in your area.

Overall it's reasonably good, it has improved a lot, quicker decisions has improved, toilet facilities needed in Ross House, people in seats should be queued properly, they argue a lot, for the self employed the rent allowance should be lodged like social welfare.

Claims very slow to come through. Bureaucracy
Used as excuse to delay and dissuade legitimate claims. However, a lot better over last 9 months than before that.

I pay £272.00 per month mortgage; all I received was £15 per week from the Western Health Board. As my wife and I are on Disabled Benefit and we find it very hard to live on it. If there is anything you can do to help us we would be grateful.

There should be toilet facilities.

I would like to be given more information as to what I am entitled to. The room down in Ross House should be cleaned up rapidly because it is very unhygienic for children.

The Welfare Officer xxxx is very helpful and pleasant. People have been put in awkward situations in the waiting area due to out of control drunks also waiting for assistance. (Ross House)

APPENDIX 4

Additional Comments From Mayo SCWO Area

Sometimes you have to wait a long time, no toilets, too small , no one keeping up security in case of trouble in the Clinics.

I find xxxx very competently and very pleased with the service. However, xxxx dole office is in my opinion an absolute disgrace with ignorant and intimidating staff.

I have only had dealings with two Officers a xxxxxxxxxx and xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx and found both to have been kind, considerate and caring in every way.

xxxxxxxxxxxx has been very helpful to the understanding.

The District Nurse told me all about the Welfare Officer, I didn't know till then when my husband died on August 7th, 1998 I got paid on his pension so when 6 weeks were paid I didn't know what to do till the Nurse that looked after Jack told me that the Community Welfare Officer would look after me which xxxx did till I got my Pension Book. I got my Pension Book from Dept of Social Welfare Office (D.S.C.F.A.). I suffer from MS, diabetes and from arthritis on my spine and back. Your officer told me not to go up to xxxx, anymore he brought the money to me. I was very thankful to him and the Dept for looking after me.

Being a single parent especially in Winter with 2 small children, it is almost impossible to find money for E.S.B., oil bills, fuel etc. I found a very unsympathetic attitude. Income is £100.90 + £57.90 rent allowance. Outgoings in the form of rent, play schools fees and groceries amount to £131.00, leaving a total of £27.00 for medicines, emergency items, clothes, bills, etc. I currently am in need of items for myself and cannot possibly afford them, and due to the attitude and unhelpfulness of my C.W.O. I feel I cannot approach xxxx for anything since xxxx paid an E.S.B. bill for me. Home visits would be helpful on occasions, e.g. Winter so C.W.O. can see first hand how people live.

An improvement in the queuing and waiting room facilities.

More help should be given to people who need it.

I find our Community Welfare Officer very helpful. I feel all the information is not provided to xxxx about lone parents and FAS courses and other places of employment. New laws that come in are not explained to xxxx. I feel xxxx does a really good job and encourages you in whatever you try to do and without xxxx in this town there would be a lot more unemployment and problems.

The Community Welfare service is good but depending on our Community Welfare Officer's mood can be a very traumatic experience.

Could improve waiting room area, and have longer opening hours.

My rent is £60 per week and I receive £25 rent supplement. Am I entitled to more? Am I also entitled to help with E.S.B.? Please reply. Happy to be of assistance..

More plants needed within Clinic and some colour on walls would create an even friendlier more healing/warming environment - also big posters (as encouragement and support) for breast-feeding and self-development.

Would prefer if there was a heating system and baby changing facilities.

I felt intimidated by the “tinkers”.

I think the Community Welfare Officer should be got rid off. xxxx has no manner, no patience when it comes to dealing with the public. xxxx thinks the money is xxxx own. xxxx has asked me to go out and get a job and get off the sick. I suffer with severe epilepsy and have regular fits. I think xxxx is sicker than I am by suggesting such a thing. I have to go to Beaumont Hospital on 22nd November for a C.A.T. scan to see what damage has been done to me over the fits.

The service can only be as good as those providing the service. Some Community Welfare Officers are less well adapted at dealing with the public than others.

My money has been stopped on me now. I don't receive any money from anyone and have no money. I don't know why it was stopped.

Please give more money.

I found none of the Social Welfare Officers any help. I feel degraded every time, and wished I did not have to go and see them, I have been made feel like a beggar. I have returned from England after being away for 14 years and I feel that the Social Welfare Officers here need a lot of training in dealing with people who need real help from the State. I know there are a lot of cowboys out there, but I can say I'm not one. I will sign my name to this form.

When a person is in the waiting room, everyone should be given a card with a number on it or something so that person before you will not jump the queue as it has been done.

Well if you had long opening hours and opened every day for a few hours that way you could get every thing done, and know in day when you had to do something else.

I am quite happy with the service as it is.

I can't understand why some people can get more Rent allowance than the disabled people even if they are getting a few pounds more - they still have to spend it on the rent, whereas unemployed people don't. Please note!

1. slow in dealing with appeals;
 2. slow to tell a person what they are entitled to;
 3. I have to travel 6 miles to my Community Welfare Officer and there is an Officer 1 mile away but xxxx does not cover my area.
- After 6 months a person should be entitled to fuel allowance, E.S.B. allowance.

I think that the Community Welfare Office should be opened more days in the week; that way it might reduce the number of queues

I do feel that anyone who is in receipt of a Welfare allowance should be given as to what services are available and also what forms apply and conditions apply together with what allowances are available. I am sure this would save you Community Welfare Officers valuable time and then this could reduce queuing and the officers could spend more time with the more practical cases and offer advice and assistance only when needed. Presently, I do feel a booklet would assist someone like me and possibly many others and save the Community Welfare Officer's time and me queuing.

That the Community Welfare Officer would let you know your entitlements and that xxxx manner could improve a lot.

There is actually no waiting room at all. You have to stand outside the door. Apart from that, without the help I received I could not cope. It's an excellent service you provide and thank you.

I would like to say a very special thanks to my Community Welfare Officer for his help and courtesy, and for caring for people who are not that well off, for taking time out to see how one is getting along. This world would be a much better if we had more people like xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx, may God bless and spare xxxx.

Always find my Community Welfare Officer pleasant, helpful and easy to talk to.

I believe more time should be taken to explain each process of each claim until the claimant is satisfied and understands fully what has been explained.

APPENDIX 5

Additional Comments From Roscommon SCWO Area

It would be of help if more time was spent informing people of what they are entitled to claim, and less time telling them what they are not entitled to.

More information given to clients. Clients should not be refused help without being given a reason there and then, more help given when spouse is in hospital which is 13 miles from residence and expenses should be paid and not just a one off payment.

Since I have started living in xxxx. I have no problems with the Community Welfare Officer

I would just like to say my Community Welfare Officer is doing an excellent job, very helpful and courteous unlike other public services.

Could not be better, very helpful to deal with.

There are no toilets facilities, no toys or books to occupy children and no room for prams.

I find the service good

The Welfare Officer in my area is most pleasant and helpful, that means so much to old people like me.

People who are genuine should get help when in trouble, not asking so many stupid questions

A place closer to me would be a lot more handy

As and from Sept '97, xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx has been a full time client of Aras Attracta, Swinford, with holidays and every second weekend at home, he has been handicapped since birth and is unable to read or write, there is also a degree of mental disability, therefore I (in place of his mother R.I.P. Sept '97) speak and write on his behalf.

Overall service are good, speaking personally only the bare minimum of information is given. Having recently gone sick with what seems to be a long-term illness I need more information for the long term and can get it from no one. Can you help please ?

Requests answered quicker.

Where people just below 65 requiring essential house repairs they should be considered on an individual basis. Thank you for helping us, you take some awful strain off trying to make ends meet especially in the Winter. I attend Community Care Offices as it is more private and I am sure of personal attention very private.

Longer opening hours and more advice.

Need to have another person there, to advise people of what they are and are not entitled to especially in my case coming from the North which has a totally different system.

Always helpful and pleasant and do the work to the best of their ability.

Very pleased with xxxxxx Community Welfare Officer in xxxx. xxxx was very friendly and co-operative and processed all my claims quickly and efficiently.

In contact with Social Welfare Office by letter only. Did not visit office.

When many people have to wait for the C.W.O. then there seems to always be confusion, who comes next. Maybe a number ticket system might be helpful.

Very helpful in every way, God Bless xxxx.

We were in a crisis situation - only once did I apply for Supplementary Welfare Allowance when I really needed it. There was so much red tape I just gave up and borrowed money from the bank. My wife works - I am sure if I had been an itinerant or a new age traveller I would have got money no problem . So thanks very much !!!

There is no information given to the unwaged by the Roscommon Employment Exchange as to the existence of the Community Welfare Officer which proves distressing when there is a delay in benefits.

My C.W.O. is xxxxxxxx whom I find very good and pleasant, but I have dealt with xxxxxxxx whom I found very nice but was very slow, but as for xxxxxxxxxxxx in xxxx xxxx is the most ignorant, unhelpful and rude C.W.O. I have ever dealt with, xxxx makes a person feel very small.

Dear xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx, I find your assistant very helpful, thank you very much & also xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx C.W.O..

There could be more reading materials and maybe a radio/background music in the Waiting Rooms.

I think the Community Welfare service is very good I was really stuck when I went for help and they got me well started and I will always be grateful.

The Community Welfare Office is not wheelchair/disabled friendly and maybe more information leaflets should be available on display but overall our C.W.O. xxxxxxxxxxxx is brilliant and very helpful and we have no complaints.