

Fianna Fáil Submission Paper

Public Service Pay Commission - Public Consultation



Submission to the Public Consultation on the Public Service Pay Commission Overview

This submission paper is a response to the public consultation on the establishment and role of the Public Service Pay Commission initiated by the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform on July 28th 2016.

Ireland's public servants are dedicated, committed and conscientious. Fianna Fáil recognises the huge sacrifices that have been asked of them in recent years. Major progress has been made to date in delivering improved public services with fewer resources. This was a process started by Fianna Fáil as part of the Croke Park Agreement. There is a clear need to link future agreements with on-going reform and improvement of public service delivery.

There have been continuous attempts to denigrate the role of public servants by certain commentators. The country must not be divided into competing groups of public sector and private sector workers. There is mutual dependence between both groups of employees that must be recognised. Furthermore all sections of society rely on public services such as the hospitals or housing supports, in particular the elderly, disabled and low income groups. Investing in a strong public service with adequate levels of remuneration and clear processes of reform and improvement is vital to building a fairer society.

Every family in Ireland has suffered financially in recent years. All have contributed to Ireland's recovery and each section of society should feel the benefit of improved living standards. The work of the Public Service Pay Commission must acknowledge that and work towards ensuring that economic recovery is felt by all.

Key Principles to guide the Commission

- (1) We welcome the establishment of a Public Service Pay Commission to examine pay levels across the public service, including entry levels of pay. This was a key demand of Fianna Fáil in our discussions on an arrangement to facilitate a minority Government. We are committed to contributing constructively to the work of the Commission and seek an early conclusion of its task.
- (2) We are also pleased to have secured a commitment to the gradual, negotiated repeal of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Acts having due regard to the priority to improve public services and in recognition of the essential role played by public servants. The work of the Commission must take place in that context.

- (3) We note the recent developments in relation to allowances for public sector staff recruited post 2012 including the agreement with firefighters, which provided for the restoration of allowances to new employees in certain circumstances. Ongoing discussions between the TUI, INTO and the Department have indicated that this forms a precedent that can be applied to other groups namely Teachers, Gardai, Nurses and Prison officers. It is vital that this precedent is fairly and equitably applied to these groups in a fiscally sustainable manner.
- (4) We believe that that ongoing public sector pay improvements should in the first instance be focused on low to middle income earners. This can best be achieved by a combination of flat rate pay increases together with a percentage increase. As resources allow we would continue to improve the take home pay of public servants through a combination of changes to basic pay rates, reductions in the pension levy and tax rates. This would be done in a way that honours Ireland's legally binding commitments on budget rules and in line with the general improvement in the economy.
- (5) A key element of our position is to ensure that improvements in take home pay of public servants are in line with general wage improvements in the economy. Both the private and the public sector should feel the benefit of improved living standards. The public and private sector must move in line together and neither should run ahead or lag behind the other.
- (6) The previous Government failed to engage with representatives of retired public servants in the recent negotiations. They were also excluded as part of the Haddington Road process. Fianna Fáil believes that this should be addressed in the Public Service Pay Commission. Removing retirees up to a pension of €50,000 from the pension related deduction should be addressed in the commission's work.
- (7) Separately the Government must address the restoration of frontline services, especially in the areas of health, education and security. Adequate pay is a key part of that. This will be the real test of the Government's commitment to improving public services for all in our community.
- (8) The public service cannot stand still. Ongoing reform is needed to ensure there is continuous improvement in the services delivered. This will include the implementation of new technology and the roll out of more services online. This should be done in a way that does not negatively impact on the work life balance of public service staff.