

Government warns of 'difficult' public sector pay talks ahead

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By **Brian O'Donovan**
Work & Technology Correspondent

Unions have been informed by the Government that it is ready to enter exploratory discussions on public sector pay.

Officials at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform have written to members of the Public Services Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions informing them that they have been instructed to enter talks on a review of the current public sector pay deal 'Building Momentum'.

No date for the discussions has yet been set.

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform Michael McGrath said he had directed his officials to arrange to enter into talks in relation to an agreed way forward on public service pay issues.

"These will be difficult discussions against a very challenging backdrop," Mr McGrath said.

"The discussions must be cognisant of the multiple challenges that the country is currently facing including the impact of rising inflation and the conflict in the Ukraine."

RTE News

<https://www.rte.ie/news/business/2022/0505/1296369-senior-civil-servants/> 06.05.2022

"However, I believe that there is scope for all Parties to engage constructively on a way forward that is reasonable and fair to both public servants and taxpayers generally," he added.

Building Momentum delivered a 1% pay increase last year, with a further 1% due in October.

Unions triggered a review clause in the agreement in light of soaring inflation.

The Association of Higher Civil and Public Servants held its annual conference in Dublin today and passed a number of motions calling for the next public sector pay deal to adequately reflect increases in the cost of living.

"The Building Momentum pay agreement, that is due to expire at the end of this year, was the first actual pay increase for our grades in 14 years," said Ciaran Rohan, General Secretary of the Association of Higher Civil and Public Servants.

"With inflation running at an over 20-year high, the cost of living is sharply impacting on members. We trust that this will be addressed and welcome the fact that the Irish Congress of Trade Unions has been invited to attend exploratory talks on a review of the current agreement," Mr Rohan added.

Senior civil servants also called on the Government to put measures in place to protect their privacy after recordings of conversations were leaked to the media.

Delegates at the conference said it was "unacceptable" and "egregious" that the names of civil servants had appeared in the press in relation to leaked recordings and that this had had an impact on the mental health of those involved.

The union passed a motion calling on the Government "to respond appropriately by putting in place measures to protect the privacy rights of our members in the workplace."

Other issues that were debated at today's conference included blended working and workload pressures.

The AHCPS called on the Government to consider introducing new legislation to underpin its 'right to disconnect' proposals to allow civil and public servants the opportunity to better manage their work/life balance.

"We welcome the Workplace Relations Commissions code of practice on this issue. However, the adoption of specific right to disconnect legislation should not be ruled out, particularly if the code proves unsuccessful in protecting workers against the negative effects of modern work practices," Mr Rohan said.

Pay talks between Government and public service unions will be difficult, says Minister

Minister Michael McGrath has directed officials to begin exploratory discussion

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Mark Hilliard

Forthcoming pay talks between Government and public service unions will be “difficult”, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform Michael McGrath has warned.

On Friday, the Minister said he has directed officials to begin exploratory discussions with unions and staff associations regarding pay issues.

“These will be difficult discussions against a very challenging backdrop,” he said in statement confirming the move.

“The discussions must be cognisant of the multiple challenges that the country is currently facing including the impact of rising inflation and the conflict in the Ukraine.”

Mr McGrath said he was nonetheless confident about a method of progress that could be “reasonable and fair to both public servants and taxpayers generally”.

His comments come as senior civil servants have agreed to press Government in forthcoming talks for increases large enough to tackle record levels of inflation.

At Friday’s annual conference of the Association of Higher Civil and Public Servants (AHCPS), the body representing over 3,000 employees, several motions on pay and conditions were adopted.

THE IRISH TIMES

<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/pay-talks-between-government-and-public-service-unions-will-be-difficult-says-minister-1.4871503> 06.05.2022

Future pay

They included support for a strategy ensuring future pay awards “adequately reflect the rapid cost-of-living increases that have eroded members living standards”.

The conference heard that while a 2 per cent rise is due under the Building Momentum Pay Agreement this year, the first actual increase in 14 years, it jars with a record inflation rate of 6.7 per cent.

“It is clear that there is not an immediate intention from Government to fully meet the threat of pay erosion from inflation in terms of pay increases,” Trevor Noonan, chair of the AHCPS executive told the conference.

While welcome, the existing level of pay increases “are just the tip of the iceberg of what is required to meet the challenges of rising inflation”, he said.

The conference heard that on Wednesday, public service representatives received a letter from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform regarding forthcoming talks.

The approach to pay adopted by the AHCPS is of little surprise given a groundswell of unions signalling their intention to press for significant pay increases in both the private and public sectors.

Despite an appetite to counter sharp rises in the cost of living, the pursuit of pay rises has drawn cautionary responses - in February, Taoiseach Micheál Martin advised of a need to be “careful that we don’t try to chase inflation and then end up causing more harm than good.”

Irish Daily Mail

Top mandarins call to have their privacy protected

By **Sharon McGowan**
Political Correspondent

SENIOR civil servants are urging the Government to put in place measures to protect their privacy after leaked recordings of a departmental meeting made headlines.

The annual conference of the Association of Higher Civil and Public Servants (AHCPs) passed a motion yesterday calling for extra privacy safeguards for Government staff.

It comes after the Business Post reported in February on a leaked taping of an internal meeting between Department of Health officials, where concerns were raised about 'fake targets' for HSE recruitment and 'sloppiness' in the health service's financial reporting.

The motion, supported by a majority of AHCPs members yesterday, said there was 'deep concern' over recordings being made 'without consent' and leaked to the media.

'Conference calls on civil service management to respond appropriately by putting in place measures to protect the privacy rights of our members in the workplace,' the motion stated. Speaking to the Irish Daily Mail yesterday, the deputy gen-

eral secretary of the AHCPs, Paul Malone, said the onus is on departments to ensure staff are aware of their 'obligations' under data protection legislation.

'Our concerns are that our members should have rights to privacy and that they should be able to carry out their duties without the threat of secret recordings and subsequent leaks to the media,' Mr Malone said.

'We've asked for management inside in the civil service to react to this by putting into place protections for the rights of our members.'

Asked what protections the AHCPs is seeking, Mr Malone said: 'There could be compulsory training on data protection obligations for all employees, reinforcing that there are sanctions for the breach of that regulation. Also, the privacy policy within the civil service could be updated to cater for this issue.'

Civil servants are also calling on the Government to consider new legislation allowing staff the 'right to disconnect' for a better work/life balance.

Meanwhile, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Michael McGrath, confirmed that his officials are set to enter public pay talks with unions. It comes after public service unions triggered a review clause in the current pay agreement due to inflation. Mr McGrath said the discussions would be 'difficult'.

07.05.2022

A portrait of Shane Beatty, a man with short dark hair and a light beard, wearing a mustard-colored button-down shirt. He is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background of the portrait is a solid red color.

BREAKFAST BRIEFING

WITH SHANE BEATTY

06.05.2022

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Coverage begins at 4:30