24 April 2012 - Oral Answers

116. Deputy Seamus Kirk asked the **Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform** the timetable he envisages for the next review of the Croke Park Agreement; if the format and information content in the Implementation Body Review Report will be improved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. **[20272/12]**

141. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the **Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform** if he has attended any meetings in relation to the implementation of the Croke Park Agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. **[19790/12]**

Deputy Brendan Howlin: I propose to take Questions Nos. 116 and 141 together.

Under Paragraph 1.16 of the Public Service Agreement 2010-2014, the implementation body is required to carry out an annual review of the sustainable savings generated from the implementation of the agreement and of the agreements in each sector. The body carried out its first such review last year and published a detailed first annual report last June. The period under review related on that occasion to the first year of operation of the agreement — 1 April 2010 to the end of March 2011.

The body's report was comprehensive and robust, providing a detailed account of the sustainable savings that had been achieved under the agreement to date. It is worth recalling that the report estimated sustainable pay bill savings in the order of €289 million were achieved in the first year. In addition, examples were provided of administrative efficiency or non-pay related savings of some €308 million. Furthermore, the report outlined in some detail the progress being achieved on implementing the change and reform agendas as set out in the action plans in place in each sector. The body also provided a frank assessment of the progress made in the first year, concluding that "solid and measurable" progress was being made during the implementation year plan.

The second annual review of the agreement by the body is currently under way and, as before, this review will examine the extent of savings and reform that have been achieved under the framework of the agreement in its second year. The relevant review period is 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012. The exact structure and content of the implementation body's report arising from this review is a matter for the body itself under its independent chair. I look forward to receiving the report and I expect it will be published in June 2012. I take a very close interest in the implementation of the public service agreement. I meet with members of the implementation body, including meeting them with the Taoiseach, and am due to do so again shortly. It is also worth emphasising that officials in my Department are integrally involved in overseeing implementation of the agreement in their capacity as members of the implementation body. The secretariat to the body is also provided by my Department.

Deputy Sean Fleming: ask the Minister to take up the issue of the Croke Park agreement in subsequent meetings. I am being kind when I described the format and content of the original annual report as unsatisfactory. We let it go but only two sentences mentioned

the saving of €300 million. At the meeting of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, we told Mr. Fitzpatrick that we want to see savings broken down by Department. We want to see the detail because it is not good enough in the public interest to give an overall figure. Perhaps the Minister can give us the method by which he will assess the report. It is possible that the report will be a good one. However, can the Minister envisage a situation where he says it is unsatisfactory if it is so?

Many of the savings have nothing to do with the Croke Park agreement. The reduction in public service numbers was changed by the incoming Government, of which Deputy Howlin is a member, when it took office last year. I would say the savings were as a result of a Government decision rather than as a result of the implementation of the Croke Park agreement. Therefore, I ask the Minister to explain which savings come under the Croke Park deal and which savings were achieved in the public service outside of the Croke Park deal. Somehow or other, these are always aggregated as being part of the Croke Park deal. Will the Minister tell us which category of savings did not come under the deal?

Deputy Brendan Howlin: I heard the Deputy's criticism of the format of the first annual report last year and I take note of it. I know that Mr. Fitzpatrick met the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform and I suppose that point was made to him there. We look forward to seeing the nature and content of the next report and I note what Deputy Fleming has said.

I do not accept the point that some of the savings that are not encompassed by the Croke Park agreement are calculated within it. Although as an incoming Government we have revised the numbers reduction targets upwards, all of that had to be done within the existing public service. It was the capacity of the Croke Park deal to allow redeployment to deal with stress points that made the additional downsizing possible. Therefore, I would not say that was a Government decision that had nothing to do with the Croke Park agreement. The entirety of the framework that gives us flexibilities to operate public services in a new and imaginative way, to move people, to have shared services and to do all of the things in our reform agenda are attributable to the Croke Park deal.

Deputy Eoghan Murphy: We had the implementation body for the Croke Park agreement before the Committee of Public Accounts recently and I found it interesting that there were no members of the private sector on that body. What is the Minister's view on that? Does he think it necessary to have someone from the private sector or someone not directly affected by the outcomes and the work of the implementation body appointed to it? Otherwise, we cannot avoid the potential risk of bias, objective or subjective, in reviewing the work and outcomes of the body.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: The normal way of implementation within the workforce is to involve employers and the workers. An external person who has nothing to do with the process has nothing to do with it normally. The employers — my Department — are

represented and the workers are represented through their unions and an objective outcome is demonstrable. If any of their presentation is not robust, that can be checked