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What reforms are being sought in return for €5bn public pay deal?

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4–5 minutes

The Government believes the new public service pay agreement will facilitate its plans to drive greater adoption of new technology and artificial intelligence (AI) across the State sector.

In return for the €5 billion accord, Ministers also want to use provisions in the document to introduce new rostering arrangements – across a seven-day week in some cases – where they believe this is needed to meet the demands of the public.

The deal also involves co-operation by trade unions with redeployment arrangements for staff.

While the text in the deal may seem a little vague on the detail of what the Government side is seeking, it maintains that individual reform plans will be drawn up for the different parts of the public service: the Civil Service, health, local authorities, justice and the Defence Forces.

The agreement also maintains that unions and management will co-operate with new arrangements aimed at the speedy resolution of disputes.

Where agreement cannot be reached, or a dispute arises, resolution will be pursued within the "industrial peace provisions" of the agreement, starting with a six-week period of initial bilateral engagement.

The agreement states that the parties agree to work together constructively and in consultation to drive modernisation, promote innovation and ensure the effective use of technology as a key enabler of change.

The deal also agrees on enhancing customer support for digitalised services, including in-person and phone services.

But what exactly does the Government want?

Minister for Public Expenditure Jack Chambers told The Irish Times on Wednesday that the Government had "really ambitious plans to drive digital transformation right across the public service".

He said for a lot of citizens there were "too many repeated interactions or whatever, duplicating, replicating, inputting information, to access services".

“As part of our wider plans to build a better State, we want to have much more digital integration across the public services that will drive greater efficiencies, improved outputs, and also outcomes for citizens in their interaction with public services,” he said.

“And to have that collective buy-in around the enhancement of digitalisation across the public service provides real opportunity for an improved interface of public services, but also reforms and efficiencies being delivered as well.”

In relation to rostering, Chambers said the deal contained provisions for aligning staff shifts with service demands.

He pointed to the health service and said the Government would work with representative groups and trade unions “around ensuring that we’ve a better spread of rostering across a seven-day week, for example”.

[Jack Chambers warns public sector pay deal could be reviewed if economy contractsOpens in new window]

For staff, the deal says existing remote and blended working arrangements will remain subject to “ongoing review” to ensure they “align with organisational priorities, service delivery requirements and relevant legislative provisions”.

The agreement also maintains that the public service workforce of the future “will be supported by improved, modern, standardised and accessible human resource policies and procedures”.

These will be designed to “actively enable effective people-management practices and … enhance workplace flexibility and inclusive working practices and arrangements”.

The deal also provides for the “alignment of existing and new lateral-movement policies to public service delivery needs” and points to mobility, secondment, redeployment, temporary assignment and temporary deployment arrangements.

It calls for agility within organisations “to allow unions and management to engage on optimised rostering across the week and the alignment of working hours with patterns of service demand”.

It also provides for “service-based redeployment” across sites in line with existing agreements, as well as maximising the efficient use of the State’s property portfolio.