



Citizens **Information** Board
information · advice · advocacy

Strategic Plan 2009 – 2012

Pathways to Services - Putting Citizens at the Centre



Advice Advocacy Active Citizenship **Responsive** Inclusive
Access for All Quality Proactive Information made Easy
Demand Delivery Value for Money

The Citizens Information Board provides independent information, advice and advocacy on public and social services through citizensinformation.ie, the Citizens Information Phone Service and the network of Citizens Information Services. It is responsible for the Money Advice and Budgeting Service and provides advocacy services for people with disabilities.



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Contents

Foreword	3
Our environment	6
Implications for us	8
Principles	10
Five priorities	12
Priority 1: delivering a seamless service to citizens	13
Priority 2: assuring quality of our services	17
Priority 3: a pivotal intermediary between citizens and public services	20
Priority 4: leading and developing MABS	26
Priority 5: organising to deliver	29
Appendix: our current functions and structure	32

Foreword

This is the fourth strategic plan of the Citizens Information Board (CIB). The services provided by CIB act as an important bridge between the citizen, and public and social services. This strategic plan has been developed during a very challenging period for people because of the economic downturn and changed public finances. In times like this, citizens' information services must be at the forefront in helping people to understand and access services and entitlements. The main functions of the Board are set out in the Appendix.

The Citizens Information Board works with the network of Citizens Information Services (CISs) and the Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS) to deliver information, advice and advocacy services for people who require access to public and social services in Ireland. In this context, the concept of citizenship embraces all citizens – not just people holding Irish citizenship. In fact, one of out of every five people using citizens information services is an immigrant underlining the inclusive nature of our services.

The Citizens Information Board also works through the Advocacy Programme with community and voluntary organisations to deliver advocacy services for people with disabilities. The Board has developed forty-six projects employing advocates to deliver services to people with disabilities. We are evaluating the Advocacy Programme this year and the result of that review will inform the future development of this programme. The development of the Personal Advocacy Services for people with disabilities was deferred by the Government in 2008.

The Citizens Information Board has earned a reputation as the leading provider in Ireland of information, advice and advocacy services. Through our website, citizensinformation.ie, and publications, and through working with our key delivery partners – the network of CISs, CIPS – we play a critical role in informing people about their rights and entitlements to public services.

Citizens' needs for information, advice and advocacy are changing – they are becoming more complex and we are seeing more demand than ever for our services. The current economic environment is bringing new people to these services, including those experiencing unemployment or income difficulties for the first time. In addition, the needs of vulnerable people in society, such as people on low incomes, people with disabilities, immigrants and older people, are becoming more acute. They are at even greater risk during tougher economic times.

The Board has recently been assigned responsibility for the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS). The Government's decision to bring MABS within the remit of CIB is a significant and exciting development. MABS has provided valued budgeting and money advice services for its clients over the past seventeen years. While there are distinctions, the services provided through Citizens Information and MABS are complementary in that they support people to move out of difficult personal circumstances through the provision of nationwide services that are confidential, free and independent.

The Citizens Information Board is also mindful of what is happening at Government level to improve public services. The Government is committed to putting the citizen at the centre of how services are delivered. While CIB has always had a citizen-centric approach, we need to ensure that the citizen remains at the centre of everything we do. Our commitment is that people will receive independent, reliable information, advice and advocacy wherever they are located in Ireland and in a way that suits their needs. We have identified five priorities in this strategic plan to achieve this:

- » Provide seamless access to information, advice and advocacy services across all our delivery channels for citizens
- » Assure the quality of services we deliver
- » Be a pivotal and trusted intermediary between citizens and public services
- » Lead the development of MABS as a vibrant, responsive and innovative service
- » Better organise ourselves to deliver these services

These interconnected priorities are the core building blocks of our strategy for the next three years. We set out *what* these mean and *how* we will deliver them. The strategy provides a single, overarching framework for the development of services provided by CIB, CISs, CIPS and MABS, driving how we all deliver our services over the next three years. To underline the importance we attach to the assignment of MABS to CIB, we have identified as a separate priority the need to lead the development of MABS and to successfully manage its transition within CIB remit. We expect this development to bring clear benefits for all MABS clients.

We deeply value the contribution of everybody involved in delivering Citizens Information, including boards of management, staff and volunteers. Our delivery structure is a model for active citizenship and engagement with local communities. We consider this an important asset in delivering our remit effectively. Our distinct delivery structures also reinforce the need for a holistic strategic framework for all our services as set out in this document.

MABS has a similar delivery structure to CIB that includes local services delivered by MABS companies with voluntary boards of management and paid staff, the recently developed MABS telephone helpline, and a website, MABS.ie. MABS approach to service is very compatible with the approach taken by CIB.

Our strategy for 2009 to 2012 sets out how we can be much more than the individual sum of our parts through working collectively to achieve shared priorities. We recognise that we will need to grow as our environment changes. Our strategy is a framework to guide us in our growth. The detailed implementation plan for this strategy is set out in a separate document.

The Citizens Information Board developed this strategy in consultation with the Board's management team and staff, our key delivery partners including CISs, CIPS, MABS, advocacy projects and key partners across the public and voluntary sector including the Department of Social and Family Affairs. I would like to thank everybody for their contribution to the development of the strategy including PA Consulting Group.

John Hogan
Chairman of the Audit Committee
On behalf of the Board
July 2009

Our environment

In the past year, Citizens Information was provided to some 670,000 callers through the delivery network of forty-two Citizens Information Services (CISs), approximately 136,000 people called or emailed the Citizens Information Phone Service, and there were 216,000 monthly hits through the citizensinformation.ie website. In addition, MABS delivered services to 16,600 new clients in 2008.

We see the following key trends as being particularly important in terms of how we meet needs over the next three years:

- » **A growing demand for our services.** We are seeing new people avail of our services as they come to terms with the changed economic climate. Our services have always been particularly important for more vulnerable members of society. As a result of the economic downturn, more people experience difficulty and their needs are also becoming more pronounced. As well as growing demand, we are seeing people with more complex needs such as personal finance and indebtedness, employment rights, unemployment, and access to services.
- » **A more intricate landscape for delivering information, advice, advocacy and budgeting services for members of the public.** A range of organisations is involved in providing information and advice, including providers of public services themselves. However, the Citizens Information Board is the only body delivering integrated information services so that individuals can be confident they are getting information on and access to the full range of services they need. CISs are rooted in local communities and this is their major strength, allowing them to respond effectively and quickly to local need. This is also true of MABS, which provides a unique service for clients.

- » **Life events and the life cycle now define how Government delivers public services.** This approach looks at the needs of people across the main stages of their lives so it reflects broad age categories. The life cycle approach also identifies key constituencies who are most vulnerable – people on low incomes, migrant workers, people with disabilities, older people. These are also the main clients for Citizens Information. The Citizens Information Board has always shaped its services in terms of life events and we need to build on this work.
- » **Social inclusion is a clear Government priority with an extensive and wide agenda.** We see ourselves as having an important role through our services in addressing this agenda. The tighter fiscal environment means that social services must be more accessible and delivered with maximum efficiency at a time when demand is growing significantly. We will need to develop new ways of ensuring that people experiencing social exclusion access the social supports and services they require.

The Government's public sector modernisation programme has put down key markers for how public services will be delivered in the future. These include more integrated service delivery and a single point of contact, client-centred delivery of services, streamlined governance and service provision, and working with partners through networking. At the same time, the Government is underlining the importance for all organisations of being able to demonstrate value for money.

This wider Government agenda with its focus on the citizen has also been an important consideration in shaping our future direction and how we deliver our services. The Citizens Information Board has a strong reputation for facilitating access to services and we believe that we can play a key role in supporting the Government's overall objective to provide integrated, citizen-centric services.

Implications for us

The scale of the challenge in implementing our strategy is significant.

- » A priority will be to successfully manage the transition of MABS into CIB remit and to ensure that MABS will have enhanced capability to respond to the needs of its client base. While the assignment of responsibility to CIB offers potentially significant benefits we will have a more complex delivery structure and this will need to be addressed over time.
- » We have a range of key delivery partners providing services through face to face, phone, outreach service and local media. It is essential that we work in close collaboration with our key delivery partners to achieve the priorities and ambition of this strategy.
- » Our clients include some of the most vulnerable members of society – including people with disabilities, immigrants, new unemployed, people with low incomes and with high indebtedness, and older people. We know that we are already reaching many of these people. However, there are also vulnerable people in these categories with unmet needs who are not accessing our services. We wish to develop our services to reach all the people who need them. In doing so, we must ensure that our services are fully accessible and user-friendly.

- » Many needs can be addressed by relatively straight forward transactions such as providing information on rights and entitlements. Increasingly, some transactions are more complex such as multiple information and advocacy requests in CISs, advocacy services for people with disabilities or rescheduling personal debt with multiple lenders in MABS. Responding effectively to the more complex needs of people is much more resource and time intensive and requires a highly skilled professional approach.
- » We recognise that our services must be delivered efficiently and effectively without compromising quality and accuracy to ensure best value for money in the use of our resources.
- » Finally, our remit is defined by legislation and this sets out the scope of what we can do.

These factors have important implications for us. There are also real opportunities to develop streamlined pathways that will help people access information, advice and advocacy services to meet their needs. We are confident that we can build on these opportunities.

Principles

The following principles underpin our future direction and how we will deliver our services.

Maintaining a **citizen-centred approach** to keep the citizen at the centre of everything we do

This principle means that:

- » We will apply the **life cycle approach** to how we plan and deliver services so that they are geared towards the needs of people at different points in their lives.
- » We will empower people to access services within their personal capacity to do so and support vulnerable people in particular by advocacy services where required.
- » We will provide **equality of access** for all citizens wherever they are located, through multiple choice of channels.
- » We will be **responsive to citizens**, providing services that are relevant to their needs on an independent, free and confidential basis.
- » We will focus on **outcomes** for citizens as well as **inputs** and **outputs** – what people can expect from using our services.

Becoming more **proactive** so that we are constantly anticipating changes in our service environment and in citizens' needs

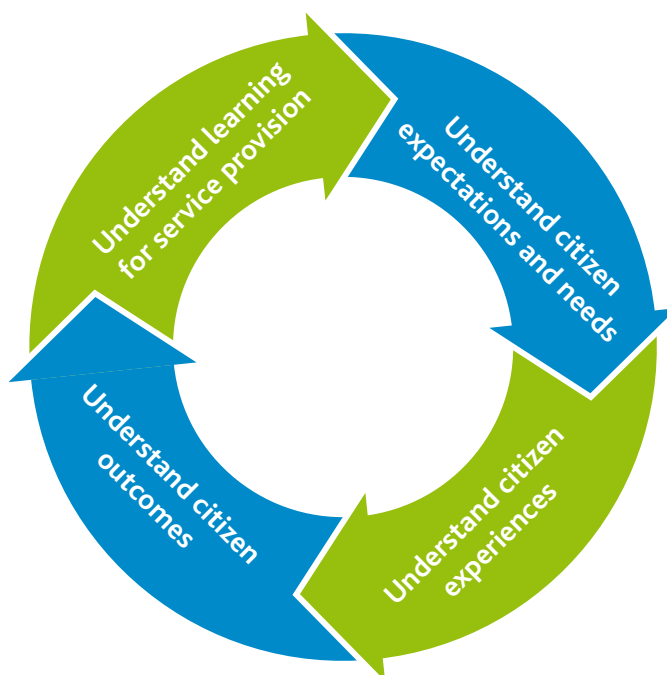
This principle means that:

- » We will **engage directly with citizens** to establish their needs.

- » We will review and evaluate citizens' **experience** of accessing social and public services and provide feedback to service providers on the basis of this evidence.
- » We will, as far as possible, facilitate access to all our services through a **single point of contact**.
- » We will **prioritise the needs of particularly vulnerable people** and customise services to meet their needs. We will prioritise the needs of people with disabilities, people on low incomes, older people, immigrants and new and long-term unemployed.
- » We will actively **partner** with organisations through **networks** so that people have seamless access to services.
- » We will **actively play our part in achieving the Government's vision for a more citizen-centred public service** – building on our considerable experience so far.

Our MISSION... To ensure that individuals have easy access to high quality, independent information, advice, advocacy and budgeting services on a confidential basis so that they can identify their needs and access their entitlements.

Our ETHOS... Is about putting the citizen at the centre of everything we do. Our systems will be designed to achieve the central elements illustrated below.



Five priorities

We have identified five interconnected priorities as outlined below. The first four look at how we will become more citizen-centred and proactive in delivering our services. The fifth looks at how we will organise ourselves to deliver our services, particularly given our unique delivery structure.



Priority 1: delivering a seamless service to citizens

To ensure that we deliver seamless access to information, advice and advocacy services across all delivery channels to meet citizens' needs

Why this is important

The primary concerns of citizens in relation to citizens information are to identify their needs and to access their entitlements and services. Our services, which include information, advice, and advocacy together with money advice and budgeting, are aimed at helping them to do so. Our priority therefore is to ensure that we provide a seamless service across all delivery channels and all of our services to meet citizens' needs.

We have already made considerable progress. However, we recognise that people should be able to navigate our services along pathways where they move easily between channels and services. This means that we must establish clear access points and facilitate easy progress between different delivery channels and types of support. It also means that we need to promote our services to ensure that people who need them know how to access them.

What we will do

1. We will **engage with our service users** to establish their needs. We undertake to:
 - » Consult our customers on their needs and how we should be meeting them.
 - » Interact with organisations representing the interests of vulnerable groups to determine their needs and how we can best meet them. We will be particularly anxious to expand our scope to include people we are not reaching at present.
 - » Track progress of individuals across our services through case-tracking systems.

2. We will advance **clear identifiable entry points for service channels** and direct people towards the most appropriate access point to meet their needs. We will:
 - » Actively promote web-based and phone channels as the first port of call to access our services.
 - » Expand our web-based services so that people can have as many questions as possible clarified at this point.
 - » Develop a single point of phone contact for all queries where people can be directed to local Citizens Information services as required.

3. We will develop referral **pathways to ensure that people can move easily between different channels and types of support**. This means setting up systems so that people only have to tell their story once, at the initial point of contact. We will:
 - » Establish a simple referral system to ensure that an effective service is provided for people across different delivery channels.
 - » Promote clear systems and protocols to provide simple pathways between information, advice, and advocacy as they apply to Citizens Information, MABS and Advocacy Projects for People with Disabilities.
 - » Extend our client management system so that it can record details of transactions across all services.
 - » Protect personal information given to us and guarantee it will not be disclosed to anyone without the consent of the person concerned.

4. We will design and **target our services so that they reflect the needs of citizens at different stages in their life**. An important concern will be to focus on the needs of particularly vulnerable groups of people. We will:
 - » Design information around the key points in the life cycle.
 - » Engage with community groups representing vulnerable people to look at alternative ways of reaching them – both in terms of the message and the medium.

- » Design information so that it meets the needs of vulnerable groups.
5. We will **communicate the Citizens Information and MABS brands** widely to ensure that people know about pathways to public services, and to money advice and budgeting services. We also recognise the importance of communicating with everybody involved in providing our services. We will:
- » Conduct client research into the level of awareness and understanding of our services.
 - » Work actively with our key delivery partners to understand their needs and how we can serve them.
 - » Communicate the roles of different channels and services, and how people can access them.
6. We will **expand our multi-channel approach to take advantage of new forms of communication**. Increasingly society is accessing information in different ways, via SMS, email and social networking. We will explore how we can use these new ways of communicating with citizens. This means:
- » Developing our web-based services so that they meet as many peoples' information needs as possible.
 - » Investigating the potential for information provision via SMS and social networking.
 - » Continuing to examine and improve the accessibility of all our information.
 - » Working with the Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS) to provide interpreting services for the deaf community and public services. We will also support SLIS to expand its services through the development of remote interpreting services.

Measuring success for delivery of a seamless service

Quantitative Indicators

- » Number of clients accessing each delivery channel (Oyster, CIPS, CIS/MABS internal data)
- » Nature of clients accessing each delivery channel (Oyster, CIPS, CIS/MABS internal data)
- » Increasing proportion of clients accessing web and phone based delivery channels (internal CIS/MABS data)
- » Level of awareness of Citizens Information and MABS brand (market research)
- » Level of understanding of nature of Citizens Information service and MABS (market research)
- » Source of awareness of CIS and/or MABS (survey)
- » Number of queries generated and responded to via new delivery channels (internal data)
- » Level of awareness of the Advocacy Programme for People with Disabilities
- » Number of cases handled by the Advocacy Programme for People with Disabilities

Qualitative Indicators

- » Establishment of single Citizens Information phone number
- » Implementation of an effective cross-channel referral system
- » Establishment of new delivery channels
- » Detailed understanding of overall Citizens Information and MABS client base

Priority 2: assuring quality of our services

To ensure that our service users receive consistently high quality services that meet their individual needs and requirements

Why this is important

This is a key priority for the Citizens Information Board. The quality of our services largely depends on the people who deliver them. We recognise that assuring a high level of consistency and quality in the delivery of our services is a real challenge. We believe this challenge can be overcome by gaining the support and full commitment of everyone involved to quality assurance. While we have already developed some standards, we still have significant work to do to ensure that they are being fully applied across our services.

What we will do

1. We will strengthen **quality assurance standards and monitoring** across all delivery channels and services. This means that we will:
 - » Develop simple step-by-step processes for providing services.
 - » Review current implementation of standards for information and advice services.
 - » Support people delivering our services in implementing quality standards.
 - » Develop comprehensive quality standards for advocacy services, taking existing guidelines as our starting point and drawing on international standards.
 - » Establish a monitoring process to ensure that quality standards are being met.

- » Explore the scope for external accreditation of how these standards are being implemented.
2. We will strengthen **our supports to people delivering services** so that they have the knowledge and skills to meet citizens' needs. This means that we will:
- » Refocus our programme of training and development as required to ensure that the people delivering services have the necessary level of knowledge, skill and expertise to provide quality service.
 - » Increase the supports for people delivering services to facilitate their capacity to offer a consistent and quality service.
 - » Seek out ways to strengthen supports for volunteers in the context of the current (2009) survey of volunteers in the CISs.
 - » Explore the potential for recruiting volunteers with specialist expertise to complement expertise available.
3. We will develop our **approaches to understanding our clients' experiences**. We will:
- » Expand our client intelligence across all delivery channels to garner feedback on clients, the services delivered, and outcomes.
 - » Engage with our clients through research to understand their experiences of our services.
 - » Engage with our partners to get feedback on our services and how we might work more effectively with them.
4. We will make commitments to service standards across all our services. We will:
- » Publish a statement that outlines the nature and quality of service which people can expect to receive.
 - » Evaluate our service delivery performance against the standards set.
 - » Facilitate learning and continuous improvement in relation to our service delivery.

Quantitative Indicators

- » Proportion of people delivering services in CISs who have completed baseline training (internal data)
- » Number of CISs meeting agreed standards (internal data)
- » Response time to phone services in Citizens Information and MABS (CIPS/MABS data)
- » Length of time per call in Citizens Information and MABS phone service (CIPS/MABS data)
- » Length of time spent with client in CIS, MABS and advocacy projects (survey)
- » Consistency of information source used to provide Citizens Information services (Oyster)
- » Satisfaction with service received (survey)
- » Accuracy of information provided via each delivery mechanism (post-service sampling)
- » Number of clients accessing other services as result of contact with Citizens Information or MABS (post-service sampling)

Qualitative Indicators

- » Quality standards further developed, agreed and implemented
- » Understanding of how customer experiences compare across all services
- » Advocacy standards developed
- » Oyster system fully implemented
- » Clear understanding developed of clients' experiences in accessing Citizens Information services and MABS and the outcomes and impacts generated
- » Advocacy case management system implemented for advocacy work

Priority 3: a pivotal intermediary between citizens and public services

To serve as a pivotal and trusted intermediary between citizens and public services

Why this is important

Our services are designed to enable people to access public services and their rights and entitlements. Success depends on working effectively with providers of public services to ensure that we can guide citizens towards these entitlements and services.

A central tenet of the Government's public sector reform agenda is for streamlined access and effective provision of public services. The Citizens Information Board has potential to expand its role as a trusted intermediary between citizens and public services to contribute significantly to achieving this agenda. This will mean building on our reputation as a recognised port of call for public service access, learning from the experiences of our clients to help shape service provision, working with clients and services to ensure access to rights and entitlements, and providing expertise to improve the quality, consistency and accessibility of information provision for the citizen by the public service.

We could not deliver our services without working in partnership with a large number of other organisations in addition to service deliverers. We already have close working relationships with a number of central Government Departments and agencies including the Department of Social and Family Affairs, the Department of Health and Children, the HSE, the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

Our ambition is to bring more focus and coherence to working with partner organisations. For simplicity we have grouped partner organisations in this context into five broad groups. In outlining what we will do to become a trusted intermediary under this priority, we also say how we envisage developing these relationships.



What we will do

1. We will establish ourselves as an accessible and authoritative **port of call for information about all public services** in Ireland. This will build on our web-based services, phone services and Citizens Information Services (CISs) to provide comprehensive, integrated information in relation to all public services. This means **working closely with service deliverers to become trusted intermediaries**, building on the experience that we have already gained with them. We undertake to:
 - » Expand our syndication arrangements with public service providers to improve the quality and consistency of information and to minimise duplication.
 - » Explore opportunities with a number of service deliverers to provide shared services where there are evident benefits and/or potential savings. This is consistent with the Government's policy on shared services.
 - » Offer our experience to assist in the development of integrated services, including a single point of phone contact for all public services.

- » Investigate the potential to expand integrated public service approaches at local level through initiatives with local authorities and service providers. This will require structured arrangements at national level to support these initiatives.
2. We will develop our approach to **learning from client experiences to produce objective, fact-based evidence**. This can help public sector bodies to understand emerging service needs and issues with regard to rights and entitlements within their remits. By developing good working relationships with policy, planning and service development functions in these organisations, we will be able to influence policy and practice to ensure a more person-centred approach to public service delivery. We undertake to:
- » Expand our client information system to routinely capture client experiences in accessing public services.
 - » Track progression of selected clients to see how they navigate through our services to get access to public services and to check the ultimate outcome for the client. This will help to provide a deeper insight into our clients experience.
 - » Produce objective, evidence-based reports for public service providers that will distil learning from client experiences in accessing services. This will provide valuable intelligence to service providers in addition to information they already have on emerging trends and practical ways in which services need to be changed to reflect client needs.
 - » Engage with public service agencies as appropriate to provide feedback on public services based on the evidence that we get from our clients.
3. Where our clients have particular difficulties, we will **facilitate them in securing access to their rights and entitlements. The Citizens Information Board will take a lead role in promoting the value of advocacy for individuals and service providers in securing access to rights and entitlements**. We recognise that, for many people, information and advice will be sufficient to empower them to access their rights and entitlements. For people who need more support, advocacy services have a key role to play in facilitating access. We provide both mainstream and specialised advocacy services for people, including people with disability. In promoting advocacy, we undertake to:

- » Work with advocacy partners in CISs and elsewhere to promote the value of advocacy for individuals who need it and to create awareness and acceptance of advocacy among service providers. This will mean developing and promoting a clear and coherent understanding of advocacy.
 - » Lead the development of quality assurance and standards for advocacy services provided by the Citizens Information Board.
 - » Clarify and streamline the advocacy interventions to ensure that there is a seamless pathway from information and advice to advocacy for people who need the service. Our focus will also be to ensure coherence between mainstream advocacy and specialised services for people with disabilities.
4. The Citizens Information Board has a particular role under legislation to provide **advocacy services for people with disabilities**. We are currently funding forty-six projects in a pilot Advocacy Programme for People with Disabilities. The programme is currently (2009) being evaluated. We undertake to:
- » Assess the pilot programme of disability advocacy projects in the light of the current evaluation to ensure the best possible national coverage and access to services.
 - » Develop the advocacy programme for people with disabilities in line with our existing legislation.
 - » Commence the Personal Advocacy Service when sanctioned by Government.
5. We will continue to work actively with the **community and voluntary sector**, focusing on partners who represent the most vulnerable members of society. We are aware that there are many vulnerable people who require specialised help and support to access services. We will:
- » Expand our reach to include vulnerable people who are not accessing our services at present.
 - » Design and deliver our services so that they best meet the needs of vulnerable people.

6. Working with **key Government Departments to influence policy and practice.** Our interaction with citizens means that we are already well positioned as a leading provider of information and guidance. This puts us in a unique position to:

- » Contribute to the Government approach to the provision of integrated, client-centred services.
- » Influence the policy framework in line with our statutory remit to communicate gaps in policy that are affecting citizens' access to services.

7. **Working with other information providers.** We provide a comprehensive range of information and advice services across all public services. We will work closely with other providers to promote the production and delivery of high quality, accessible information and to ensure that we complement each other so that the public experience a comprehensive and quality service. We will:

- » Work with relevant organisations on a cross-border basis to develop the delivery of information, advice and advocacy services, for example with Citizens Advice Northern Ireland, the North-South Ministerial Council , Centre for Cross Border Studies.
- » Develop opportunities to collaborate closely with statutory and community and voluntary organisations that already have a well-established presence in local communities.

Measuring success – a pivotal intermediary between citizens and public services

Quantitative Indicators

- » Increase in the number of public sector bodies regularly reviewing CIB/MABS evidence (direct feedback/targeted survey)
- » Public service provider or other agency to which the client was referred (Oyster)
- » Number of advocacy cases progressed and resolved or closed (Oyster and Advocacy Case Management Systems)
- » Level of recognition of CIB social policy role among policy makers (market research)
- » Number of public service providers with whom we work on a syndicated basis (internal data)
- » Awareness of relevant public sector organisations of the activities of CIB, CISs, CIPS and MABS (targeted survey)
- » Awareness of community and voluntary sector organisations of the activities of CIB, CISs, CIPS and MABS (targeted survey)

Qualitative Indicators

- » Role in delivery of Government public service single point of contact initiative
- » Establishment of Personal Advocacy Service in line with legislative requirements
- » Impact of social policy role on public policy and services
- » Change achieved in the nature of a public service as a result of raising an issue
- » Changes in policy achieved as result of raising an issue
- » Establishment of CIB/MABS shared service initiatives with public sector bodies
- » Establishment of CIB/MABS community education initiatives
- » Establishment of mechanism to engage more systematically with the community and voluntary sector
- » Joint initiative with advocacy partners to promote the value of representative advocacy

Priority 4: leading and developing MABS

To lead the development of MABS as a vibrant, responsive and innovative service

Why this is important

The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) came under the remit of the Citizens Information Board (CIB) in July 2009. This is a significant development for CIB and the 52 MABS companies and MABSnd. Citizens Information and MABS are both strong brands and both have built solid reputations for their respective services. While there are important distinctions between the services offered, Citizens Information and MABS in essence provide information, advice and advocacy to enable people to identify their needs and take appropriate action to address them.

Our short-term objective will be to ensure that we can successfully manage the transition of MABS into CIB so that the distinct brands can be enhanced while taking advantage of likely synergies. An integral part of our work with MABS will be to finalise how the three previous strategic priorities will be implemented in practice for them. These are also important priorities for MABS and we will need to actively consider how they might be implemented given their unique structure and service profile. We will outline detailed arrangements in the Implementation Plan to support this strategy. Our overall objective in the longer term will be to ensure that we maximise the potential synergies with MABS to ensure that we deliver the most effective services for citizens.

What we will do

- 1. Work with MABS to develop a seamless service through clear referral pathways for clients (Priority 1).** This will mean applying the broad actions identified in priority 1 to MABS including:
 - » Advance clear identifiable entry points and pathways between service channels both within MABS and with Citizens Information services and delivery channels.

- » Develop pathways to ensure that MABS clients can move seamlessly between different channels and types of support.
- » Target our services to reflect the needs of clients at different stages in their life.
- » Communicate the MABS brand.
- » Actively promote MABS to people on low income.
- » Engage with the MABS representative fora and agree mechanisms for ongoing co-operation and consultation.
- » Promote web-based and phone services as a first port of call for all MABS clients, giving them the information and tools they need to manage their own money and debt as far as possible.

2. Develop quality assurance of MABS and client outcomes (Priority 2). The needs of MABS clients are becoming more complex and it is important that systems are in place to ensure a consistent and quality service.

3. Support MABS role as a pivotal intermediary between citizens, financial and public services. The growing level and complexity of personal and household indebtedness means that MABS is also interacting with an ever larger number of private creditors, utilities and public bodies to negotiate financial and budgeting plans appropriate to individual needs.

4. Develop effective community education. The growing volume of personal and household debt is a key concern for MABS. While MABS is responsible for education and prevention programmes, this is becoming increasingly difficult due to the growing demand for services and resourcing. We will prioritise working with partners in the community, voluntary and financial sectors to develop community-based education programmes aimed at promoting effective money management and preventing problem debt.

- 5. Work with key Government Departments to influence policy and practice.** MABS has developed a social policy role which will be enhanced as a result of coming within the statutory remit of CIB. We have a responsibility to communicate gaps in policy that are affecting clients, based on evidence from client feedback and to highlight issues of concern including anomalies in services and the legal framework.
- 6. Develop the necessary supports for MABS companies to ensure effective management and delivery of service to clients.** In particular, we will review our current support structures to coordinate and enhance MABS, working through MABSndI as appropriate to provide robust supports.

Measuring success – leading and developing MABS

Quantitative Indicators

- » Level of support provided by CIB to MABS
- » Level of clients using MABS.ie
- » Number of clients using MABS helpline
- » Number of new clients helped by MABS
- » Number of existing clients who have become self reliant
- » Client profile across CISs and MABS
- » Number of community education programmes delivered

Qualitative Indicators

- » Joint-working initiatives between CISs and MABS
- » System of cross-referral between MABS and CISs established
- » Joint training events held
- » Outcome-focused quality assurance system established

Priority 5: organising to deliver

To ensure that we are organised to deliver quality services to our clients, with clear referral pathways between channels while demonstrating value for money

Why this is important

The Citizens Information Board delivers services through our central support and regional services, our websites, our key delivery partners in the network of CISs, CIPS, advocacy projects and Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS). Since July 2009, our delivery structure has also included the 52 MABS companies delivering services to clients and MABSndL. The challenge for CIB is to ensure that we work effectively with all of these key delivery partners who are crucial to achieving our strategic priorities. We know that this will require careful balancing between the requirements of local services and the focus required to achieve the priorities set out in this strategic plan. Our overall priority is to ensure that we deliver services in the most effective way possible, maximising the synergies that exist between our key delivery partners.

What we will do

1. We will **strengthen our corporate governance arrangements** to ensure that there is clear accountability and transparency.
2. We will **strengthen the Citizens Information and MABS brands and identities** both internally and externally. This means improving communications at all levels within the organisation and with our partners. In addition it is important to:
 - » Use new technology to enhance communications including the development of a corporate Web portal with document and records management functions and facilities for collaborative working.
 - » Develop shared databases.

3. We will ensure that effective **risk management policies** are in place including an ongoing control process to identify business risks and procedures for addressing them. We will also develop a culture of risk awareness throughout the organisation. We undertake to:
 - » Review and update the Risk Register to ensure that risks are identified and managed on an ongoing basis.
 - » Ensure risk management principles are embedded in the strategy implementation planning process.

4. We will **review current organisational supports, resources and ways of working** to ensure that they are appropriate and that they underpin the achievement of this strategy. We are mindful that implementing this strategy will have resource implications that pose a particular challenge in the current economic climate. We undertake to:
 - » Build on the Performance Management and Development System to create a culture of learning in our organisation where people delivering our services are valued for their expertise and professionalism. We will create opportunities for people delivering our services to develop their skills and expertise to confidently and competently deliver services.
 - » Review the role of our regional and central supports.
 - » Review ways of working, communication and decision-making to underline the sense of working towards a shared purpose and to ensure that we respond flexibly and quickly to emerging needs. We believe it is particularly important that the role of everybody involved in delivering our services is fully valued.
 - » Review our resource allocation to ensure that staff and budgets are allocated on the basis of the priorities outlined in this strategy.

- » We will undertake a fundamental, comprehensive review of how we deliver all our services to ensure that they are delivered in the most effective way possible. This review will cover all aspects of our operations including our structures, governance, core business processes and systems, and resource allocation. The purpose will be to take advantage of potential synergies across the network of our services and develop a well-recognised brand identity for our core services.

Measuring success – organising to deliver

Quantitative Indicators

- » Number of staff who have completed PMDS
- » Cost and benefits per client across each delivery channel (combination of sources)
- » Cost per client across each CIS (combination of sources)
- » Cost per advocacy case progressed (combination of sources)

Qualitative Indicators

- » Opportunities taken to promote Citizens Information and MABS
- » Organisational review conducted and recommendations implemented
- » Development of resource allocation model
- » Corporate governance structure further developed
- » Risk Register reviewed and updated quarterly
- » Risk management included in implementation plans

Appendix: current functions and structure

The main functions of the Citizens Information Board, as defined in the Comhairle Act 2000, the Citizens Information Act 2007, and the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2008 are to:

- » Ensure that individuals have access to accurate, comprehensive and clear information relating to social services
- » Assist and support individuals, in particular those with disabilities, in identifying and understanding their needs and options
- » Promote greater accessibility, co-ordination and public awareness of social services
- » Support, promote and develop the provision of information on the effectiveness of current social policy and services and to highlight issues which are of concern to users of those services
- » Support the provision of, or directly provide, advocacy services for people with disabilities
- » Support the provision of the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS)

The Citizens Information Board delivers on this remit via direct provision, by supporting a network of delivery partners and by facilitating project-based interventions.

Direct provision is principally in the form of web-based information, issuing of periodicals (for example, *Relate*, *Voice*) and the production of various information guides and leaflets and support materials.

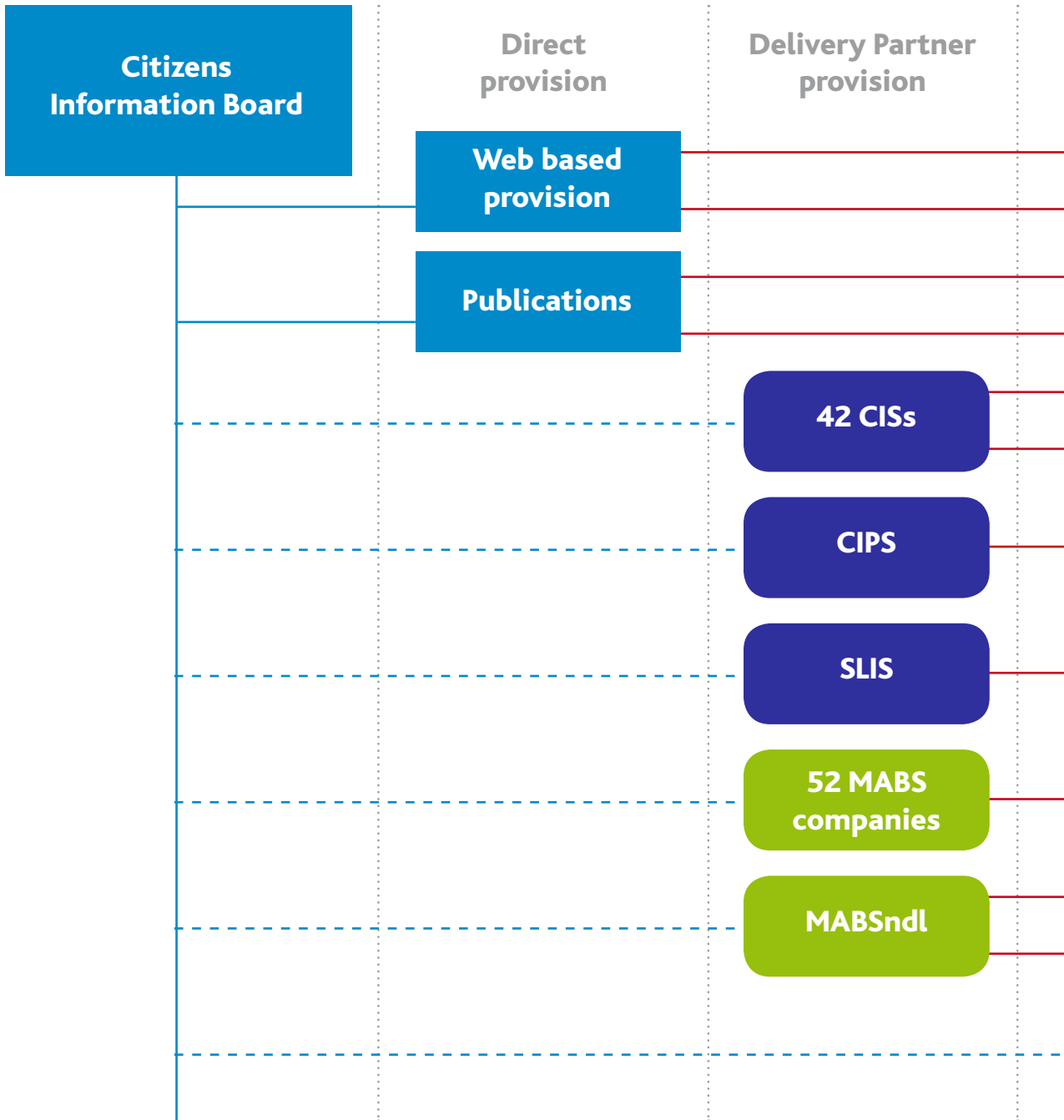
From its head office in Dublin and a regional structure involving 5 regional and 9 local offices, the Citizens Information Board provides core developmental supports and direct funding to:

- » The network of 42 Citizens Information Services (CISs), providing direct access to information, advice and advocacy from 268 locations.
- » The Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS), providing a central source of citizens' information and advice by phone.
- » The Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS), providing sign language interpreting services to the deaf community, public and private services and to individual members of the public.

Delivery is also facilitated through project-based funding, where an intervention is provided by a third party or partnership of organisations in order to deliver on an aspect of the Board's remit. The Citizens Information Board uses this system to deliver a range of pilot advocacy services to people with disabilities via the community and voluntary sector.

In Budget 2009, Government announced that the Citizens Information Board was to be assigned responsibility for MABS. MABS offers free, confidential and independent assistance for people in debt or in danger of getting into debt. This will involve the direct funding, leadership and support of 52 MABS companies around the country, a national telephone helpline, the MABS website and MABSndI, a central support agency for management and staff in MABS offices.

Outline of our service delivery structure



Project provision

Delivery to the Citizen



