

**Citizens Information Board  
Strategic Plan 2015–2018**

**Citizens First – Improving citizens’ access to quality  
information, advice, money advice and advocacy**

**December 2015**

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## Statement from Chairperson and CEO

The Citizens Information Board (CIB) is a statutory independent agency under the auspices of the Department of Social Protection. The CIB's strategy is consistent with the Department's overall mission of promoting active participation and inclusion in society. This strategy sets out how we will enhance citizens' access to high quality, information, advice, money advice and advocacy over the next three years.

It builds on what has been achieved to date by the Citizens Information Board and the services we fund and support. It has been tailored to reflect the changing needs of citizens as we emerge from a period of recession and our commitment to be effective in meeting those needs.

Our overall objective is to provide relevant, consistent and timely services to citizens through effective high quality delivery at local and national level. We aim to achieve a better understanding of the needs of citizens and to improve our response to those needs.

We acknowledge the exceptional work of all staff in CIB and of staff, volunteers and board members in our delivery services as well as the co-operation of all of our stakeholders which will help us to achieve our shared objectives.

We look forward to working with others to achieve the ambitious changes proposed in this strategy.

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Ita Mangan  
Chairperson

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Angela Black  
Chief Executive

## **1. Introduction and Development of the Strategy**

### **Introduction**

This strategy outlines the direction for CIB for the next three years and for the organisations we fund and for which CIB has statutory responsibility. These are Citizens Information Services (CISs), Money Advice and Budgeting Services (MABS), MABS National Development Limited (MABSndl), National Traveller MABS (NT MABS), Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS), the National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities (NAS), and Sign Language Interpreting Services (SLIS).

This strategy is an over-arching and inclusive plan for CIB and the services allowing us to work closely to ensure better outcomes for citizens. Full details of our component services, guiding principles and contextual analysis are included in the Appendix to this strategy.

### **Where we are now**

Since the last strategic plan was agreed in 2012, substantial progress has been made. This has been achieved during a period of deep recession which prompted CIB to take a more targeted approach towards the areas of greatest need. As a result, CIB has strengthened its role as the pivotal source of independent information, advice, money advice, and advocacy for citizens in understanding and accessing their rights during difficult times. We have achieved the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Gold Star Service Excellence Award, an accredited quality assurance system with a customer focus, in CIB and all our delivery services. In recent years, services have been stretched to capacity and all those involved, to whom we are deeply grateful, have recognised the increasing level of complexity of needs being highlighted by people who use the service.

### **Statistics for 2014**

**15 million visits to [citizensinformation.ie](http://citizensinformation.ie)**

**600,000 callers to CIS offices**

**150,000 queries dealt with by CIPS**

**40,000 people helped with problem debt by MABS and MABS Helpline**

**1,500 bookings and referrals through SLIS**

**1,000 people supported by NAS**

### **Development of the strategy**

The strategy was prepared with extensive and valuable inputs from CIB staff, all our delivery service staff, volunteers and board members, as well as government officials and other relevant external groups. We held workshops, bi-lateral meetings and broad structured discussions. The process has been underpinned by independent analysis of ideas with stakeholders, staff and focused engagement via submissions and staff surveys as well as research with citizens.

Additionally, as part of our recent research we have considered the method by which similar services are delivered in Northern Ireland, England and Wales by Citizens Advice Bureaux. Their structures are based on a central national co-ordinating structure with delivery by independent local charities. Some of the differences between the systems include the use of appointment systems, the integration of both information and money advice services and the use of specialist case workers to carry out advocacy on complex cases. This information also formed part of our considerations with regard to developing this strategy.

## **2. Components of the Strategy to Meet Citizens' Needs**

### **Objectives of the strategy**

The strategy is designed to ensure CIB and our delivery services meet the needs of citizens over the next three years in the most organisationally and economically effective way.

Our mission for the period of the Strategic Plan is:

**“to enhance citizens’ access to consistent and high quality information, advice, money advice, and advocacy to meet their needs, now and in the future.”**

The elements of the new strategy to achieve this are set out below.

## **Strategic Priorities**

- A. Provide high quality consistent services to citizens, supported by robust quality assurance mechanisms**
- B. Revise the structures of CISs and MABS to better serve the citizen by improving management structures and governance, management of resources and the delivery of consistent high quality services; this includes aligning CIB structures accordingly to maximise effective use of resources**
- C. Provide targeted interventions to support the needs of our citizens in very vulnerable situations through specialist services**
- D. Improve awareness of the range of services provided by CIB and our delivery services particularly with regard to accessibility of services to citizens**
- E. Highlight issues of concern so that policy and administration of public services is continually enhanced**
- F. Continue to develop our people – staff volunteers, board members – through appropriate supports. A particular emphasis on the key role of volunteering will form part of our ongoing strategy.**





## **Priority A: Provide high quality consistent services to citizens, supported by robust quality assurance mechanisms**

### **What does this mean?**

In the last year, the combined range of CIB-funded services across the country have dealt with more than three-quarters of a million people. We have also seen that the queries that are being presented are becoming more and more complex, particularly when across topic areas such as social welfare, taxation, indebtedness and employment. It is crucial that our services continue to be seen as experts in providing information, advice, money advice and advocacy. Therefore, it is necessary to ensure that services are of a high quality and are delivered consistently throughout our networks. This will ensure that citizens continue to trust in and utilise our services as required and they are easily accessible when people are in vulnerable situations.

### **What will we achieve?**

We will provide and enhance quality people-centred services by building on our capabilities to achieve operational excellence and efficiency, including the establishment of centres of specialisation. We will also improve our quality assurance mechanisms and will promote best practice and continuous improvement. This will enhance services for citizens and will improve our cost-effectiveness.

We will work with government departments, statutory agencies, community/voluntary and private sector organisations to simplify and clarify administrative requirements for citizens and to present information in the most accessible way. We will ensure that the people who deliver for us at the frontline will continue to channel feedback from users of our services so that social policy and administration is continually enhanced.

### **How will we achieve this?**

#### **We will:**

- Continue to provide accessible, high-quality information through [citizensinformation.ie](https://citizensinformation.ie), targeted microsites and Citizens Information Board publications

- Develop and implement information "quality checks", to strengthen case reviews (for advocacy, NAS and MABS), and to share checklists, spot checks, and peer review
- Continue with the implementation of agreed standards for information, advice, money advice and advocacy
- Liaise with external organisations to ascertain best practice in service delivery and to create effective partnerships to enhance the services offered
- Continue to review and develop the existing mix of service delivery options and ensure appropriate configuration of delivery channels across electronic, telephone and face-to-face options. While some services can be most effectively delivered electronically, others will continue to require phone contact, face-to-face meetings and outreach programmes.
- Develop and undertake regular assessment of the service offer in its entirety
- Provide timely supports and resources in areas such as customer service, HR, governance, ICT, finance, pensions, FOI, dispute resolution and others.
- Increase use of customer satisfaction research
- Provide enhanced data collection, analysis and feedback systems to inform policy and to enhance effectiveness and efficiency
- Ensure our online offering is up-to-date

### **How will we measure success?**

#### **Success will be measured by:**

- Increase in use of agreed quality checks and other agreed mechanisms
- Increase in use of advocacy and money advice case management reviews
- Ensuring that the agreed standards of quality services are provided at every location
- Identified opportunities for quality improvements for services
- Increase in client satisfaction measures

**Priority B: Revise the structures of CISs and MABS to better serve the citizen by improving management structures and governance, management of resources and the delivery of consistent high quality services; this includes aligning CIB structures to maximise effective use of resources.**

**What does this mean?**

CIB has been working on reviewing existing structures for services to enhance delivery to clients through the identification of an organisational/governance model which best meets the requirements of citizens for an integrated, easily accessible service at local and regional level. A key deliverable of this strategy will be a clear blueprint and action plan to effect restructuring.

As a result of this exercise, CIB itself needs to critically examine its structures in order to attain efficiencies and a best fit for purpose.

**What will we achieve?**

We will improve communication channels, enhance partnerships and ensure there is clarity of expected outcomes for all organisations funded by CIB. We will monitor results and performance. Operational decisions will remain devolved to the individual boards and management of the separate organisations. Additional structures such as local advisory groups may be created to ensure services we fund are flexible to local needs and are embedded in local communities while also achieving and monitoring outcomes.

CIB will also align itself to the new structures to provide an improved support service to front line service delivery.

**How will we achieve this?**

**We will:**

- Deliver improved management structures in delivery services
- Clarify key roles and required capabilities concerning provision of information, advice, money advice and advocacy

- Clarify key roles and responsibilities for representative structures and support services, specifically MABSndI
- Implement agreed prioritisation and referral systems
- Encourage improved cooperation between CIS and MABS services to better meet citizens needs
- Implement succession planning for CIB staff
- Revise the organisational structure within CIB to provide greater recognition of the pivotal role of support to our delivery services and the corporate co-ordination functions
- Introduce effective Service Level Agreements for delivery services
- Improve monitoring and reporting systems

**How will we measure success?**

**Success will be measured by:**

- Restructuring services in line with preferred option agreed by CIB Board
- More streamlined and effective communication mechanisms with delivery services and relevant external support organisations
- More effective management information
- Putting CIB re-organisation into effect

## **Priority C: Provide targeted interventions to support the needs of our citizens in very vulnerable situations through specialist services**

### **What does this mean?**

CIB has a particular legislative role to provide services to people with disabilities. It has also traditionally taken a strong position with regard to providing support to those members of society in vulnerable situations. It is crucial that this important work continues to be a central part of our work and the work of our delivery services in the mainstream and through the provision of specialist services.

### **What will we achieve?**

We will continue to develop our specialised services such as NAS and SLIS to ensure that people in need of these services can access them directly or be appropriately referred. We will also ensure that our delivery services are aware of and utilise the organisations that provide supports for specialised queries.

CIB will continue to highlight at national and regional level where there are gaps in support for citizens in vulnerable situations

- CIB's proposal to address the gaps in the availability of microcredit has been approved and will secure a source of microcredit for those who might otherwise approach moneylenders. We will inform and support eligible debtors to avail of this credit. Linked to this we will work with National Traveller MABS to ensure accessibility for the Traveller community to this new microlending scheme.
- We will support the enhanced role for MABS in supporting those in mortgage arrears to work with other relevant organisations including the development of new services in existing MABS offices dedicated to providing mortgage arrears expertise and advice.
- We will collaborate with other stakeholders to highlight and address gaps in service provision, including areas such as support for parents with disabilities in child care proceedings, housing and personal supports for people in transition from congregated settings, and gaps in advocacy support.

## **How will we achieve this?**

### **We will:**

- Undertake targeted promotion of certain services
- Improve linkages with websites of other relevant organisations
- Strengthen corporate identities of delivery services
- Provide Dedicated Mortgage Advice service through the MABS network
- Enhance provision of advocacy through CIS network and NAS
- Extend the IRIS (Irish Remote Interpreting Service) and develop and launch a national IRIS awareness campaign
- Increase awareness and usage of our specialist services
- Support effective mechanisms and referrals to ensure people, in particular people with disabilities have access to advocacy support
- Pilot dedicated advocate posts in CISs
- Complete CIS advocacy programme review

## **How will we measure success?**

### **Success will be measured by:**

- Increase in number of people in mortgage arrears in danger of repossession offered support through to resolution of their difficulties
- Increased awareness of specialist services amongst other service providers and the public
- Effective use of NAS services
- Effective use of advocacy services within CISs

## **Priority D: Improve awareness of the range of services provided by CIB and our delivery services particularly with regard to accessibility of services to citizens**

### **What does this mean?**

A relatively high percentage of citizens are aware of many of our services. Independent market research has shown that 78% of the public recognise the Citizens Information brand and 65% recognise the MABS brand. However, as part of the review of our organisation, we have identified that some citizens may not be aware of the full range of services that are provided. We need to work with others to ensure that all citizens are aware of our services and that we are one of the first options considered by citizens in looking for information, money advice and advice on their rights.

### **What will we achieve?**

We will achieve greater awareness of what CIB and the organisations that we fund can deliver and ensure a seamless service, while respecting confidentiality.

In particular, we will ensure that key decision-makers such as government departments are fully aware of the CIB's role both as a provider of services via our websites and microsites and our role as the competent authority and funder of front-line delivery services.

We will place greater emphasis on using technology to provide accurate information in a cost-effective way while also ensuring that our services continue to be accessible to those who need alternative delivery channels, for example, IRIS (Irish Remote Interpreting Service).

### **How will we achieve this?**

#### **We will:**

- Promote the continued use of [citizensinformation.ie](http://citizensinformation.ie) and targeted microsites
- Deliver targeted presentations to relevant departments and agencies on specific issues

- Ensure accessibility of information through a range of channels for those citizens who cannot access information digitally through continuation of our publications, face-to-face and telephone services
- Ensure that our websites continue to develop in line with accessibility guidelines
- Increase promotion of our range of services and avail of opportunities to partner with other organisations
- Support the Government move to “Digital First” for citizens by linking to and promoting digital channels and by investigating digital options for new and existing CIB services.
- Develop and co-ordinate improved channels for communication to the public
- Improve access to and usage of services such as CIPS, IRIS and MABS Helpline

#### **How will we measure success?**

##### **Success will be measured by:**

- Increased level of awareness by citizens of the range of services provided
- Increased recognition of our services
- Improved level of awareness of specialist services among organisations who may make referrals
- Survey of Relate subscribers with regard to awareness of role of CIB
- Delivery of a range of projects linked to the Digital First agenda
- Increased usage of telephone services such as CIPS and MABS Helpline



## **Priority E: Highlight issues of concern so that policy and administration of public services is continually enhanced**

### **What does this mean?**

CIB receives regular data from front-line delivery services giving an accurate picture of the current issues that are bringing people to use services. The data also highlights difficulties and anomalies within schemes and policies which are preventing people from accessing their rights and entitlements. It is a core role of CIB to highlight needs arising through feedback and seek ways to have these issues addressed.

### **What will we achieve?**

We will achieve better outcomes for citizens by working with other organisations to enhance access to citizens' information and advice. We will continue to collaborate with other government, statutory and voluntary agencies.

We will use the various networking channels available within the public and civil service to highlight relevant policy and administrative difficulties that have been brought to our attention through the social policy report data.

### **How will we achieve this?**

#### **We will:**

- Use social policy report data, collected by Citizens Information Services and our partner agencies each year, to predict trends and to guide future targeted approaches with a particular focus on people who are in vulnerable situations
- Undertake and fund research to identify policy issues impacting on service users and to support targeted service interventions or responses
- Contribute to public policy formulation through submissions and responses to policy consultations
- Publish reports on current and topical social policy issues
- Use [citizensinformation.ie](http://citizensinformation.ie) to highlight changes or amendments to schemes and policies

### **How will we measure success?**

#### **Success will be measured by:**

- The number of reports and submissions on social policy issues
- Structured engagement with policymakers in government departments and other relevant stakeholders on public services, resulting in policy changes where appropriate

**Priority F: Continue to develop our people – staff, volunteers, board members – through appropriate supports. A particular emphasis on the key role of volunteering will form part of our ongoing strategy.**

**What does this mean?**

All of our people – paid and unpaid, within CIB and across our delivery services – are CIB's most important resources. A key element of this strategy will be to continue to develop our people.

CIB and MABSndI provide both accredited and non-accredited training to staff, scheme workers and volunteers throughout the year. This training covers a wide range of information-related topics relating to social welfare, taxation and income maximisation along with other specific courses relating to debt management and advocacy.

All services currently use the PMDS (Performance Management and Development System) mechanism to ensure that all employees have clarity in relation to their roles and have pathways to develop their skills. Training is provided to both managers and board members to maintain a quality approach to the PMDS process at local level.

Citizens Information Services originated through the hard work and dedication of volunteers within their own local communities. Over the years, we have been fortunate to retain many of these volunteers and their unique brand of enthusiasm and expertise. As the needs and demands of services change, we must future-proof the network based on the strong tradition of volunteering by ensuring skills and competencies continue to meet the changing needs of services. We also acknowledge in recent years the growing reliance in some services on Community Employment scheme workers.

**What will we achieve?**

We will support staff and volunteers to contribute fully to the success of services by the provision of supports such as training, skill development and recognition. We will seek to improve the linkages between staff in CIB and the staff and volunteers in the

Citizens Information Service network to improve the quality and continuity of the service offered to citizens. We will review the Volunteer Strategy and the formal mechanisms in place to recognise the contribution of volunteers within services including the many board members at local level. We will assist services to better support volunteers by building on the volunteer co-ordinator initiative that has been rolled out. We will also work with services to improve planning and review processes over the next strategic period.

### **How will we achieve this?**

#### **We will:**

- Continue to provide ongoing training and continuous development for staff and volunteers
- Partner with an educational institution(s) to develop additional opportunities for accredited professional development
- Develop a Learning and Development Strategy for CIB and our delivery services to improve sharing of knowledge
- Review the current Volunteer Strategy
- Develop open engagement channels between CIB staff and those working in the delivery services including volunteers

### **How will we measure success?**

#### **Success will be measured by:**

- The level of implementation of PMDS across all services
- A Learning and Development Strategy put in place
- Increase in numbers of staff and volunteers undertaking accredited and other training
- Completion of the review of the Volunteer Strategy
- Continued recognition of the contribution of volunteers in service delivery and on boards

### **3. Next Steps**

This strategy has outlined clear priorities for CIB and our delivery services. This will provide an over-arching framework for all the organisations for which we have statutory responsibility.

To achieve the priorities outlined will be a challenge for CIB and our delivery services and will require a focus on delivery and implementation. Detailed measurable key performance indicators will be established in all services' business plans. This will include measurement of results of all funding in terms of the impact on citizens. This strategy will also be subject to a mid-term review to ensure that it remains effective in addressing emerging needs and issues.

We look forward to working with staff, volunteers and with government departments, agencies and other organisations in implementing this strategy. In implementing this strategy and putting citizens first, the aim is to achieve a better understanding of and response to the needs of citizens.

## Appendix to CIB Strategy 2015–2018

### Legislative Basis

The statutory functions of the Citizens Information Board are set out in the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2008, the Citizens Information Act 2007 and the Comhairle Act 2000. The legislation states:

7. (1) *The functions of the Board shall be –*

(a) *To support the provision of or, where the Board considers it appropriate, to provide directly, independent information, advice and advocacy services so as to ensure that individuals have access to accurate, comprehensive and clear information relating to social services and are referred to the relevant services,*

(b) *To support the provision of or, where the Board considers it appropriate, to provide directly, advocacy services to individuals, in particular those with a disability, that would assist them in identifying and understanding their needs and options and in securing their entitlements to social services,*

(bb) *to provide, or arrange for the provision of, a Personal Advocacy Service to qualifying persons and in so doing, the Board shall take account of the following:*

(i) *The financial resources of the Board; and*

(ii) *Whether the qualifying persons can obtain advocacy services otherwise than under this Act,*

(c) *To support, promote and develop –*

(i) *greater accessibility, co-ordination and public awareness of social services, and*

(ii) *the provision and dissemination of integrated information in relation to such services by statutory bodies and voluntary bodies,*

(ca) *to support the provision of a service to be known, in the English language, as the Money Advice and Budgeting Service or, in the Irish language, as An tSeirbhís Buiséadaithe agus Comhairle Airgid, to provide advice to individuals for the purpose of the management, avoidance, reduction and discharge of personal debt and in relation to money management,*

- (cb) to promote and develop the provision of the Money Advice and Budgeting Service and to provide information in respect of such provision,*
- (cc) to provide, subject to the consent of the Minister, and in accordance with subsection (1A), financial assistance to a voluntary body in respect of any matter related to the functions referred to in paragraphs (ca), (cb), (cd), (ce), (cf) and (cg),*
- (cd) to promote and develop education in respect of money management,*
- (ce) to compile and publish data relating to the provision of the Money Advice and Budgeting Service,*
- (cf) to promote and disseminate awareness and information to the public relating to the provision of the Money Advice and Budgeting Service,*
- (cg) to undertake, or commission, research relating to the functions referred to in paragraphs (ca), (cb) and (cd) and on any matter, as the Minister may, from time to time, request, in relation to the functions referred to in paragraphs (ca), (cb) and (cd) to (cf),*
- (ch) to provide advice, information and assistance to the Minister in respect of the functions referred to in paragraphs (ca) to (cg) and such advice, information and assistance in relation to those functions as the Minister may, from time to time, request.*
- (d) To 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,*
- (e) To promote and support the development of voluntary bodies providing social services including, where the Board considers it appropriate, the provision of financial or other resources such as integrated information, training and development services,*
- (f) To furnish advice, information and assistance to the Minister in relation to the development of any aspect of social services,*
- (g) Whenever the Minister so requests, to design schemes relating to social services to address needs identified by the Minister concerning such services, and, where the Board considers it appropriate to do so, to provide such services directly,*
- (h) To promote, develop, encourage and assist, through the provision of financial or other resources, the work in relation to social services of such bodies as the Minister may specify,*

- (i) To prepare strategic plans in accordance with section 8, and*
- (j) To perform any additional functions assigned to the Board under subsection (2).*

*(1A) The Board shall, subject to the approval of the Minister, determine the terms on which and the conditions subject to which it may –*

- (a) Support the provision of information, advice or advocacy services under subsection (1),*
- (aa) support the provision, promotion and development of the Money Advice and Budgeting Service under subsection (1)(ca) and (1)(cb) and the functions referred to in subsection (1)(cd) to (1)(cg),*
- (b) Provide financial or other resources to a voluntary body under subsection (1)(e) or to a body specified by the Minister under subsection (1)(h) and*
- (ba) provide financial assistance to a voluntary body under subsection (1)(cc) and different terms and conditions may apply under paragraphs (a), (aa) and (b) and (ba) and in relation to different types of bodies.*

*(1B) The Board shall, in determining the terms and conditions under subsection (1A), have regard to the objective of it promoting the provision of an integrated, reliable and comprehensive information service of the highest quality.*

*(1C) The Board may, for the purpose of providing the support referred to in paragraphs (a) and (aa) of subsection (1A) or the financial or other resources referred to in paragraphs (b) and (ba) of that subsection, request the body or person concerned to furnish it with information in such form and at such times as it may require.*

*(1D) The Board may refuse to provide the support referred to in paragraphs (a) and (aa) of subsection (1A), or the financial or other resources referred to in paragraphs (b) and (ba) of that subsection, if the body or person concerned does not comply with the terms and conditions determined or if it fails or refuses to furnish the Board with any information requested by the body or person concerned under subsection (1C).*



*(1E) The Board, in performing the functions conferred on it, shall have regard to the need for it to co-operate with statutory bodies and voluntary bodies.*

*(1F) The Board, in performing the functions conferred on it under subsections (1)(ca) to (1)(ch) shall have regard to –*

*(a) The provision in particular, of the Money Advice and Budgeting Service to persons on low income who are, or are at risk of becoming, over indebted, and*

*(b) Government policy, in particular social inclusion policy.*

### **Key focus on citizens**

The *Citizens First – Improving every citizen’s access to quality information, advice, money advice, and advocacy*\_Strategic Plan 2015–2018 was developed by CIB in the context of ensuring that we use our resources in the best way possible to meet the needs of citizens. A “Citizens First” approach also underpins all aspects of the 2015–2018 strategy. To achieve participation and social inclusion for citizens in society requires access to information, advice, money advice and advocacy services.

### **Our mission**

Our mission is to enhance citizens’ access to consistent and high quality information, advice, money advice and advocacy to meet their needs, now and in the future.

### **Our guiding principles**

CIB values and principles are fundamental to all our staff and to the staff and volunteers in our delivery services as well as the individuals we assist. These core values are fairness for all those who access our services as well as equal treatment. Individuals using the service will be consulted and their feedback will be used to inform service provision. No one will be discriminated on the basis of their background or situation and services will be provided free from other vested interests or obligations. Respect will be shown to all those who access our services.

Our guiding principles reflect our values and remain constant and include the following:

- Citizens First – The focus is on organising ourselves and delivering services to get the best outcome for citizens. When we use the term citizen, we are talking about citizens of Ireland and all other people who live in Ireland and who may use our services at any time.
- Services to community – The services on offer are continually adapted in response to the needs of communities.
- Flexibility – We will think ahead and move quickly to meet changing needs of citizens and changes in the policy context.
- Trust and respect – These will be shown to citizens, each other, our community and voluntary sector and public service stakeholders.
- Available to all – Independent, impartial, confidential and non-judgemental information, advice, money advice and advocacy accessible to all.
- Delivering value and positive outcomes – We will deliver these for citizens and stakeholders across various sectors of society.
- Developing potential – We will ensure that the work of the staff and volunteers who work in CIB and the wider organisation is satisfying, meaningful and makes the best use of their commitment to our delivery services and to the public we serve.

## **Our Organisation**

The Citizens Information Board delivers on its remit through providing information directly via its website [citizensinformation.ie](http://citizensinformation.ie), as well as partnering with our delivery networks to provide services to the public. Our website information is supplemented by microsites, and through a range of periodicals and other publications.

## **Citizensinformation.ie**

The website provides comprehensive information on public services and on the entitlements of citizens in Ireland both in Irish and English. CIB's microsites, [keepingyourhome.ie](http://keepingyourhome.ie), and [gettingbacktowork.ie](http://gettingbacktowork.ie), provide comprehensive information on areas of specific interest to citizens. The [assistireland.ie](http://assistireland.ie) website provides details on nearly 7,000 assistive technology products aimed at older people and people with disabilities.

The Citizens Information Board provides direct funding and a wide range of resources and developmental supports to assist in the establishment and functioning of services nationwide including:

### **Citizens Information Services (CISs)**

The network of 42 Citizens Information Services with over 110 offices provides direct access to information, advice and advocacy across the country. Critical to the success of these services is the adequate staffing by a combination of paid and volunteer staff.

### **Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS)**

CIPS, a service based in Cork, provides a central source of citizens' information and advice with a current capacity to deal with an average of 150,000 calls a year.

CIPS also operates a Live Advisor instant chat service. Live Advisor is available between the hours of 9am and 5pm (Monday to Friday) and is targeted specifically toward people with hearing and speech difficulties and to others who have difficulty communicating by telephone.

### **Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS)**

SLIS, based in the Deaf Village, Cabra, Dublin, promotes, represents, advocates and ensures the availability of quality interpretation services to deaf people in Ireland.

### **The National Advocacy Service (NAS)**

The National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities (NAS) provides an independent, representative advocacy services for people with disabilities in vulnerable situations across the country.

### **Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS)**

The network of 51 local MABS services, with over 60 offices, offers free, confidential and independent assistance for people in debt or at risk of getting into debt.

The MABS Helpline, managed by MABSndI, provides a central source of money advice and assistance over the phone.

A new service of Dedicated Mortgage Arrears (DMA) advice in MABS is being introduced in 2015 to target the particular financial and legal difficulties people face, in relation to late-stage mortgage arrears. It is expected that a dedicated mortgage arrears service will become a feature of certain MABS services where demand is greatest, over the coming three years.

### **MABSndI**

MABSndI is a central technical support service which provides support with technical casework, money management education, social policy issues and training to MABS companies in conjunction with CIB. MABSndI also manages the MABS national telephone helpline, website and MABSIS client information system and responds to media queries on money and debt management.

### **National Traveller MABS (NT MABS)**

National Traveller MABS, based in North Dublin, promotes the financial inclusion of Travellers and focuses on issues of indebtedness, money education and financial participation.

### **Second-tier supports**

CIB also grant aids and partners a range of other organisations including FLAC, Immigrant Council of Ireland, Treoir and Threshold to provide specialist information on citizens' rights to the CIS network.

### **Cooperation with other agencies**

CIB is grateful to a range of bodies and individuals with whom we also work closely, including Insolvency Service Ireland (ISI), the Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB) and the Housing Agency.

## **Context and Background to New Strategy**

As we have focused all aspects of the new strategy on what will best work for people in their daily lives, it is important to recognise the current factors which are influencing citizens' requirements for information, advice, money advice and advocacy. Key factors and developments which are relevant include:

### **Citizens have a right to high quality information, advice, money advice and advocacy**

A fundamental part of democracy is that people are informed of their rights so that they can participate effectively in society. Citizens have a right to high quality information, advice, money advice and advocacy. CIB is the pivotal national organisation which is responsible for delivering those services locally for citizens.

### **Increasing complexity of requirements faced by citizens**

The demands placed on citizens to be able to access their entitlements have become more onerous as people's situations become more complex. Additionally the information needed by citizens to make informed decisions is often available from a range of sources. People often face a wide range of financial and personal challenges when choosing services which make it more critical that they can easily access information and advice across the full range of public services.

### **Economic pressures**

The scale of the impacts of the Irish economic crisis on citizens cannot be overestimated. Individuals and families who access our services have experienced unemployment, rising debt, escalation of mortgage arrears and a dramatic reduction in disposable incomes. Many citizens who would previously not have had to access services and supports have found themselves in very difficult situations. An economic upturn is underway but is unevenly spread. While recently there have been notable reductions in unemployment, the levels are still high and this combined with legacy debt and other factors means that many citizens are facing difficulties. Often clients of MABS have faced levels of indebtedness which have driven them to moneylenders. The combined impact of economic and social developments has resulted in intense pressure on citizens in Ireland and CIB is determined to ensure its strategy mitigates these pressures to the fullest extent possible.

## **Challenges faced by people experiencing disadvantage**

There are added challenges faced by certain individuals who have particular vulnerabilities. These include some individuals with disabilities as well as those from certain socio-economic groups and members of the Traveller community. Individuals with literacy or other educational disadvantages have added difficulties in accessing information and advice, the extent to which can sometimes be underestimated. Individuals who are marginalised are in particularly vulnerable situations and require more intensive support to access services and ensure they obtain their rights.

## **Emerging Issues**

Access to appropriate affordable accommodation to prevent homelessness has been an ongoing challenge for some people. We are engaging locally and nationally through our strong working relationships with relevant statutory and voluntary organisations to provide support to those affected by this issue.

Another significant and currently evolving challenge facing Europe and Ireland relates to assistance for migrants and refugees in the context of the current crisis. CIB, alongside its delivery services, has developed our services to meet the needs of this target group, and will continue to play its part in working with relevant bodies to provide direct and indirect information, advice and advocacy supports to this group of people.

## **Increased use of technology-based dissemination of information**

The increased use of technology-based dissemination of information can enable access to information at lower costs and is to be welcomed. However, for many individuals who do not have specific technological skills or access to broadband, the use of technology by providers as the source of information can result in barriers. It is essential that information and advice is available to all citizens who need it and this will require a multi-channel approach including outreach programmes and improved access to helpline services.

## **Diversity and security of information sources**

The diversity and range of information sources often results in conflicting information which hinders rather than facilitates citizens in their information needs. Our services have now earned a high level of trust with citizens as to the security and accuracy of the information provided.

### **Commitment of public services to deliver value**

Our commitment to provide an agile and flexible response to the needs of our public is in tandem with our goal to ensure value for money. As such, the governance and proper financial administration of CIB and our delivery services are key factors in ensuring we achieve our strategic objectives. CIB, as a statutory agency under the aegis of the Department of Social Protection, is engaging with the Government agenda on public sector reform and Digital First among other initiatives.