

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



Strategic Plan 2019 – 2021

**Delivering Information, Advice, Money
Advice and Advocacy services for our
Communities**

MAY 2019

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Context of the strategy

Introduction

The Citizens Information Board (CIB) is the statutory body which supports the provision of information, advice, money advice and advocacy services to members of the public on the broad range of social services. CIB was established under the Comhairle Act 2000, as amended by the Citizens Information Act 2007, the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2008, and the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2011. In 2009, the Government assigned responsibility for the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) to CIB.

As a statutory agency, CIB comes within the remit of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

CIB's mandate, as defined by the Acts, is to:

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

Mission

The Citizens Information Board's mission is to ensure that people can access excellent information, advice, money advice and advocacy services, and to inform and influence social policy development, based on the experiences of individuals.

CIB runs the citizensinformation.ie website and produces several publications and periodicals. Services are delivered both directly (through the website) and through 21 service delivery companies. These are:

- 8 Citizens Information Service (CIS) regional companies
- 8 Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) regional companies
- National Advocacy Service for people with disabilities (NAS)
- Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS)
- MABS National Development (MABS ND)
- National Traveller MABS (NT MABS)
- Sign Language Interpreting Services (SLIS)

This strategy is an over-arching and inclusive plan for CIB and the service delivery companies, allowing us to work closely together to ensure better outcomes for people.

Background

Our last Strategic Plan focused on revising the structures of the CISs and MABS to better serve people by improving management structures and governance. That work was successfully completed in October 2018 and we have already begun to see the quality of the service delivery companies being enhanced.

Technology is changing the way that services are delivered, with an increased focus on digital services and providing and promoting services through social media. Use of Artificial intelligence (AI) through chatbots and machine learning, voice service, and video on demand are increasingly becoming the norm. These technology enhancements offer opportunities for CIB to build the digital services that the next generation will expect.

This strategy has been prepared in the context of:

- The need to support and consolidate the restructuring of service delivery in a way that enhances the quality of services
- Revised legislative and regulatory requirements, including more stringent requirements for charities and data protection
- Alignment with the strategic objectives of Government and of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, our parent Department
- Opportunities presented by technology developments
- Structural changes within the network of CIB services, including the re-organisation of management structures within CIB
- A realistic view of the anticipated availability of additional resources
- Our commitment to public sector equality and human rights duty

Development of the strategy

To develop this Strategic Plan, the Board of CIB established a workgroup with the responsibility of setting the strategic direction and providing leadership. They engaged in extensive consultation with management, staff and the executive in CIB to set out broad aspirations and goals for the future. Through consultations, workshops and submissions from the service delivery companies, the workgroup narrowed down those goals into three actionable strategic priorities.

Vision and values

Vision

An Ireland where everyone is adequately equipped with information and advice in order to realise their rights, delivering in particular for the most vulnerable.

Our strategy has been informed by the following values, which we will uphold and apply to all aspects of our work:

- **Available to all.** We will offer independent, impartial, confidential and non-judgemental information, advice, money advice and advocacy accessible to all.
- **Responsiveness:** We will continually listen, reflect and review our services to ensure that they are responsive to changing situations and emerging needs. We will make the best use of new technologies and other opportunities.
- **Customer service:** We are committed to supporting a professional, impartial and timely service that is responsive to people's needs.
- **Confidentiality:** We will respect and promote the right to privacy of individuals.
- **Focus on quality.** We will work to continually improve our processes, products and services to meet the requirements of all our stakeholders.
- **Excellence:** We will seek to achieve superior performance by motivating our staff to deliver products and services that exceed objectives, needs and expectations.
- **Leadership:** We will offer supportive leadership and thought leadership in our areas of expertise in a way that benefits everyone.
- **Promotion of equality and human rights:** We will ensure that promoting equality and human rights underpins all our activities.

Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty

Under Section 42(1) of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014, CIB, in common with all public bodies, is obliged, in the performance of its functions, to have regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination
- Promote equality of opportunity and treatment of its staff and the people to whom it provides services
- Protect, promote and fulfil the human rights of its members, staff and the people to whom it provides services

In its strategic plan, CIB must assess and identify the human rights and equality issues it believes to be relevant to its functions and purpose, and the actions it is taking or proposes to take, to address those issues. CIB is committed to carrying out a full assessment of the human rights and equality issues relevant to our functions over the lifetime of this plan.

CIB's activities all involve promoting the rights of the people we serve. The right to information is a key element of promoting and enforcing all other rights. All elements of this Strategic Plan are aimed at ensuring that individuals have access to services and information that enable them to enforce their rights.

Strategic priorities

Objectives of the strategy

The dual objective of the strategy is to build on the restructuring and rebuilding work undertaken in recent years and to harvest the benefits of these investments to deliver greater quality and accessibility of services.

The completion of the restructuring in 2018 provides significant opportunities, but we recognise that the recently implemented changes require support and consolidation over the lifetime of this plan, especially during the next year or two. This is reflected throughout the plan, with several specific actions set out under our third Strategic Priority to consolidate and deliver the benefits of restructuring.

The strategic priorities to achieve our dual objective are as follows:

- 1. Enhancing service quality and availability to achieve a consistently high standard through a modern, measurable framework of Information, advice, money advice and advocacy services.**
- 2. Identifying, promoting and implementing service development and innovation.**
- 3. Building the capacity of the network of CIB services, including leadership and support, to consolidate and deliver the benefits of restructuring.**

Strategic priority 1 – Enhancing service quality and availability

Enhancing service quality and availability to achieve a consistently high standard through a modern, measurable framework of Information, advice, money advice and advocacy services.

Our services are provided through a range of access channels (online, telephone and face-to-face). The Citizens Information website is provided by CIB directly, while all the telephone and face-to-face services are provided by our service delivery companies. How we further develop the range and quality of services must be based on the needs and expectations of the public.

Over the lifetime of this plan, we will do the following:

- Support and promote regional service development strategies to deliver consistent, high-quality services through the service delivery companies.
- Establish baseline measures of quality and efficiency against which progress can be measured, reported and analysed. To do this, we will develop and implement the systems and tools needed to track and report on the outputs delivered.
- Create and implement a digital strategy to develop the range and accessibility of all our online resources including citizensinformation.ie, using the latest technology developments in areas such as social media. This will include assisted digital support.
- Promote a sharper focus on outputs delivered and outcomes achieved, building on the development of systems to manage individual cases.
- Support the development of enhanced advocacy services in CIS and in NAS and review our capacity to take on a central or co-ordinating role for the provision of advocacy services.
- Develop external networking and collaboration with national and international agencies.
- Develop enhanced services for people who use MABS, including money management education, a redeveloped website and online services.
- Review our public relations and communications policies with a view to demonstrating more clearly how we are making a difference.

Over the lifetime of this strategic plan, we will develop a set of key performance indicators which will be included in each annual Business Plan.

Strategic priority 2 – Service development and innovation

Identifying, promoting and implementing service development and innovation.

Over recent years, the nature and patterns of demand for services have changed. Increasingly, people access our information services online, although a significant proportion of people continue to rely on the telephone and face-to-face channels. In parallel with this, the demand for advisory and advocacy services continues to grow, both in volume and in complexity. Our capacity to be always responsive to change requires the continued development of a culture of excellence.

Our objective is to ensure that consistently high-quality services are delivered throughout the country, with required standards explicitly set out in the Service Level Agreements. In tandem with this, we want to ensure that individual companies have the flexibility and discretion to tailor their service delivery to the particular requirements of their region and are encouraged to be innovative and developmental in all aspects of their operations.

We will do the following:

- Identify gaps in services and opportunities for service development. We will evaluate options to join up the online, telephone and face-to-face channels to provide a more seamless and streamlined service.
- Analyse changes in patterns of demand across all our services and on citizensinformation.ie and respond to those changes. A particular focus will be placed on the development of advocacy services to meet the increasingly complex needs of people.
- Develop our social policy role through the full cycle of activity from an individual query through to action by the Board of CIB, so that we make more effective use of feedback systems. In particular, the Board of CIB will play a more active role in reviewing social policy priorities arising from our interactions with the public and providers and in promoting policy change where appropriate.
- Create mechanisms to give staff, volunteers and the public opportunities to contribute their ideas. We will systematically review examples of best practice and innovation

within individual service delivery organisations and to support the rolling out of such innovations.

Strategic priority 3 – Consolidate and deliver

Building the capacity of the network of CIB services, including leadership and support, to consolidate and deliver the benefits of restructuring.

Under the previous Strategic Plan, the structure of CIS and MABS service delivery companies was streamlined, establishing a total of 16 new regional companies to replace the 93 companies formerly in place. In preparation for this, the organisation and management structures of CIB itself were also reformed, to respond to the changes in service demand priorities as well as requirements for active leadership and support across the network of CIB services.

As outlined earlier, the primary objective for the next three years is to consolidate and embed the change process and to deliver the benefits of these changes to the people we serve.

We will do the following:

- Prepare and commence the implementation of a multi-annual investment plan in the ICT networks, hardware and software needed to underpin the delivery of the business objectives of this plan.
- Clarify and develop new working relationships with the service delivery structures, with the objective of creating a culture of performance and excellence.
- Review periodically, and amend as required, the structures and systems of national service delivery supports (including the supports provided by CIB) to ensure they are fit for purpose.
- Evaluate options for the streamlining and integration of back-office activities (such as payroll, payments, financial management and human resource management) across the network of CIB services, through the development of shared service models.
- Develop and implement strategies for the sharing of offices, facilities and reception services by the service delivery companies and by CIB where practicable, thereby reducing overhead costs and providing a more integrated service.
- Support capacity building within the service delivery companies (including the new Boards of these companies) to sustain and develop excellent standards of information,

advice, money advice and advocacy in ways that meet the expectations of the public and deliver effective outcomes.

- Develop and implement a staffing strategy and workforce plan for each service. This plan will provide a framework to effectively manage the recruitment, deployment and development of staff, having regard to changes in patterns of demand, new service delivery strategies and the development of technology.
- Strengthen governance and accountability through the oversight and leadership capacity of the Board of CIB and its committees, within an integrated framework of strategic and business planning and with key performance indicators.
- Strengthen management reporting systems to facilitate the assessment of service quality and value for money.
- Ensure our compliance systems and procedures (such as internal control, audit, risk management, health and safety, procurement, data protection and security) are effective and fit for purpose.

Implementation

Our Strategic Plan 2019-2021 sets out the broad objectives for the next three years. Starting in 2019, we will build a strategic framework which will set out how we will implement that strategy through annual Business Plans for 2019, 2020 and 2021.

We will use each Business Plan to set out the strategic context, including key performance indicators, for the work programmes to be delivered during that year. This approach will promote greater organisational agility within CIB and build on the achievements of the previous year, while allowing us to concentrate on any new risks, opportunities or challenges which must be mitigated and addressed.

Each Business Plan will be broken down further into team workplans, which will include the high-level tasks for each team. Budgets can then be directly aligned with each high-level task.

The Business Plans will provide the framework within which the Board of CIB and its committees review progress on the achievement of the strategic objectives outlined in this Plan and exercise their oversight responsibilities. The Business Plans will also provide the basis for the service delivery and support organisations to prepare and implement their annual work programmes.

Our statement of strategy is intentionally brief so that the business of the organisation can be highlighted in greater detail in each Business Plan. The further development of our management reporting systems will facilitate an integrated bottom-up and top-down approach from the operational (frontline service delivery) to the strategic level.