

Social Policy Update

December 2016

Social Policy Update focuses on the social policy work of CIB and our delivery services throughout the country. It also provides information on national social policy news and activities.

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CIB Social Policy and Research News

Introduction

Welcome to the December edition of CIB’s Social Policy Update, which aims to provide an overview of some of the recent key developments within the social policy arena, in the context of the work of CIB, our delivery services and also at national level. In this issue, we focus in particular on our recent policy submissions on housing and childcare. During 2016, CIB made a total of 19 submissions to various government departments and policy fora, which are available on CIB’s website [here](#). This edition of Update also reviews some of the research and policy work that CIB has been engaged in of late – direct provision information sessions (with particular reference to the policy issues emerging) and policy research on the Housing Assistance Payment and on Supplementary Welfare Allowance payments. In this edition we also look at the social policy feedback received from Citizens Information Services (CISs) and the Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS) during October and November 2016 and focus on the issues arising in relation to ‘Moving Country’ as highlighted by services. Following on from the announcement of Budget 2017, Minister Varadkar has been taking the Social Welfare Bill through the Dáil and the Seanad and the ‘*In the Oireachtas*’ section looks more closely at the Bill, which provides the legislative framework for the social welfare-related budget measures. We also look at other policy-related questions arising in the Oireachtas – current DSP payment processing times, DSP policy reviews and local authority waiting lists. This edition concludes with some news on the recently announced Residential Rental Sector Strategy; South Mayo mortgage arrears research, the work of the ESRI, the publication of the National Positive Ageing Report 2016 and a DSP report on Disability Allowance.

CIB Submissions

Single Affordable Childcare Scheme

The Single Affordable Childcare Scheme that was announced as part of Budget 2017 will allow for both universal and targeted childcare provisions for low income households and it will replace all existing schemes from September 2017 (with the exception of the Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (ECCE) which will remain in place). As part of the public consultation on the scheme, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs published a policy paper and launched a consultation process via an online survey in November 2016, to which

CIB made a submission. Though not working directly within the sector, CIB delivery services have for many years been reporting how the lack of adequate childcare support structures has been a major barrier to parents (mainly women) taking up employment opportunities or participating in activation programmes. This issue has been at the core of many of the Social Policy Returns that have been submitted by services in relation to people moving from welfare to work or activation, and CIB had called for delivery of a stream-lined, over-arching system of subsidised childcare in a variety of submissions over the past number of years – most recently in the 2017 Pre-Budget Submission.

Whilst welcoming the new universal and targeted schemes, the CIB submission noted some of the issues that may arise for parents - and for childcare providers - as the scheme is developed and rolled out across the country in 2017. These include:

- The need to monitor the quality of childcare (and also the pay and conditions of workers) as the sector becomes increasingly subsidised and, related to this, the necessity for an increased focus on best-practice childcare and related investment in training and education;
- The need for greater investment in childcare services to cater for the increased demand that the scheme is likely to bring - and not to assume that private providers will have sufficient places to meet this demand. This may be particularly relevant in more sparsely populated areas or in areas where core funding has been removed from community providers;
- The need to be wary of the assumption that the new scheme will reduce costs for parents – indeed, it may happen that providers increase their charges to take account of the subsidy or, some providers may need to upgrade premises/services to bring their provision up to the required standards.

In welcoming a more comprehensively subsidised structure of provision, the CIB submission noted that, in the longer term, the Irish system should move towards a model that views childcare as a public service that is provided at local level through local authorities combined with a network of highly regulated non-for-profit providers.

Mortgage to Rent Scheme Review

In November 2016, the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government invited CIB to make a submission to the Review of the Mortgage to Rent (MTR) Scheme. The submission, made jointly with MABS, was based on the experience of MABS who, in providing a dedicated mortgage arrears advice service, explore the MTR Scheme as an option with clients who are facing repossession.

The submission also drew on an analysis by South Mayo MABS of mortgage arrears among their clients. The submission noted that, in the past, CIB and MABS have welcomed the MTR Scheme but have expressed concerns that it can be unduly onerous and confusing for the borrower, can be protracted and may not be cost-effective for many of the stakeholders involved. The submission suggests that it would seem that these difficulties have not been tempered by the amendments made to the Scheme in July 2015 and these issues may be reflected in the continued low take-up of the scheme amongst borrowers who are in long-term mortgage arrears. The main recommendations of the submission include the following:

- The need to streamline and simplify the MTR process, which is currently considered to be protracted and involves the disparate perspectives and interests of lenders, borrowers, and housing bodies;
- The need to review the qualifying conditions for the scheme, and particularly the eligibility criteria for social housing generally. Such a review could be based on an evaluation of the circumstances of the 2,500+ households who have applied to the scheme to date;

- The need to establish a special purpose vehicle (SPV) to source social housing (as proposed in the Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness) and to include the MTR Scheme within the remit of the SPV, thereby streamlining the funding process and reducing processing time;
- the possibility of making the Scheme obligatory, rather than voluntary (in the context of a specific set of circumstances);
- looking at the possibility of Local Authorities replacing Housing Associations for the purposes of the Scheme, where Housing Associations are unable to purchase homes in question.

CIB news and policy developments

Direct Provision Information Sessions – policy issues arising

In early 2016, the Department of Justice and Equality requested that the CIS network co-ordinate a series of nationwide information sessions to meet the information needs of people living in Direct Provision Centres who have been granted status. This need for dedicated information and support had been identified in the Report of the Working Group on Improvements to the Protection Process and a number of sessions were delivered by CISs in April/ May and again in Autumn 2016. These sessions involved the delivery of relevant information by personnel from CISs, MABS, DSP, local authorities and ETBs to groups in the larger Direct Provision Centres, and CISs also set up focussed outreaches or information stands in those Direct Provision Centres with smaller numbers of residents.

The social policy feedback that was generated from the sessions highlighted that housing issues are consistently the biggest barrier for people with status trying to move from Direct Provision Centres. Some of these issues are in common with those affecting the general population, and some are exacerbated by the particulars that apply to those who have been living on a longer term basis within the direct provision system. These include - the lack of available accommodation within the rent limits and difficulty finding accommodation that will accept them as tenants, the requirement for a deposit and month's rent in advance, and the associated difficulty that the exceptional needs payment for a deposit is only available once the HAP application has been approved and the difficulties for residents in transferring housing applications from one local authority (LA) area to another.

The sessions also highlighted difficulties that residents had in the context of employment and education, with the issue of long periods of inactivity, while in Direct Provision, causing significant barriers for people looking for employment. Other issues relating to registration and identification were addressed in the sessions, with the cost of the requirement for a GNIB card being seen as a particular difficulty – at €300 - on a weekly allowance of €19.10. Some residents also noted that they were unable to provide passports as proof of identity for registration, given their refugee experiences. A summary of these issues has been submitted by CIB to the Department of Justice and Equality. We continue to welcome feedback from services regarding these and other relevant policy issues through the Social Policy feedback mechanism on Oyster.

CIB social policy research – HAP and SWA/ ENP

During 2016, CIB engaged with social researchers Kathy Walsh and Brian Harvey to undertake research on two policy related reports – one on the Housing Assistance Payment as it continues to be rolled out across the country and the other on Supplementary Welfare Allowance and Exceptional Needs Payments. The researchers and CIB are grateful to all services for the high quality policy-related feedback and associated case studies received during the research process and look forward to issuing the final Reports to all services in early 2017, following their approval by the CIB Board.

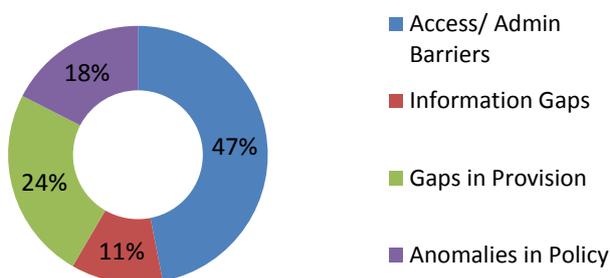
On the Ground: feedback from CISs & CIPS

This section features a selection of recent social policy returns from Citizens Information Services and the Citizens Information Phone Service.

Social Policy Returns – October and November 2016

During October and November 2016, CIB received a combined total of 717 Social Policy Returns –**SPRs** (individual cases identified by services to illustrate issues arising in relation to particular benefits and schemes) from CISs (641) and CIPS (76). This is consistent with the number of SPRs submitted during the same period in 2015, with the number of Social Policy Returns submitted by CIS staff onto the Oyster¹ system increasing by 24% during this time.

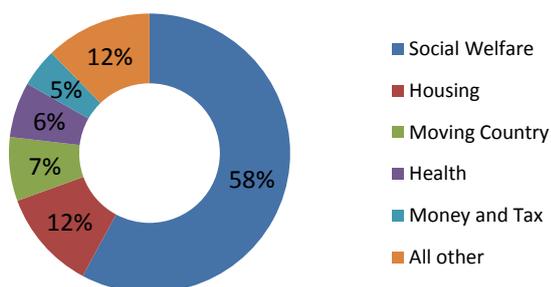
Nature of Policy Issue



Of these 717 Returns, information providers in CISs and CIPS classified 58% as being indicative of concerns with operational issues (that is, specific difficulties with ‘access barriers’ and ‘information gaps’) and in 42% of the Returns, information providers considered that the cases demonstrated difficulties caused by policies, legislation or guidelines - that is, either ‘anomalies in policy’ or ‘gaps in provision’. This classification of policy issues provides a useful basis on which CIB can analyse the anonymised case studies that are recorded by information services on a daily basis.

The Top Five **broad information query categories** that were logged most often in respect of the SPRs accounted for 88% of all Returns submitted during October and November – that is, in the areas of *Social Welfare*, *Housing*, *Moving Country*, *Health* and *Money & Tax*. The SPRs relating to the broad category of *Moving Country* increased significantly during these two months and the issues raised will be examined in more detail in this Update.

SPRs - Main Query Categories



Within this broad query categorisation, the five most-reported **specific benefits** or payments were:-

1. Family Income Supplement:
2. Illness Benefit:
3. Jobseeker’s Allowance:
4. Carer’s Allowance:
5. Fuel Allowance:

The FIS payment has featured prominently in the five most-reported payments during 2016, as has Disability Allowance and also Jobseeker’s Allowance. But it should be noted that this is the first period in which Medical Card or Rent Supplement has not appeared in the ‘Top Five’ of SPRs reported by services.

¹ Oyster is an electronic recording system used in Citizens Information Services to record the nature of queries presenting to services

Of the 58% of SPRs that related to broad **Social Welfare** issues, over half were concerned with difficulties that clients were experiencing with three particular sub-categories – *Families & Children, Disability & Illness and Unemployed People*. The main concerns that continue to be reported in relation to FIS include difficulties making contact with the section within the Department, delays in processing and reported financial difficulties for low-income self-employed people who are not eligible for the payment. As in previous months, the concerns with Illness Benefit (IB) continue to be focussed on the financial hardship caused by the six day wait for claimants, processing delays and also, an issue which emerged last year with the reinstatement of the Christmas bonus – cases where long-term recipients of IB are not entitled to the Christmas bonus, which stands at 85% of the payment this year.

The **Housing** category – though reduced during this period - continues to feature strongly amongst the SPRs, with some 14% of all social policy cases recorded as being housing-related. This includes the social welfare-located category of Rent Supplement – reports of which have reduced by 46% on the same period in 2015. It is likely that this reduction in SPRs reflects the move away from Rent Supplement to the phased implementation of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) amongst those deemed to be eligible for social housing support. As of 1 November 2016, there were 49,700 recipients of Rent Supplement – this figure stood at over 61,000 at the end of 2015. There are currently 14,960 tenancies in receipt of HAP - which has increased from 6,000 since the beginning of 2016 - and which is now operational in 28 local authority areas (and to homeless households in Dublin).

As noted previously, there was a significant increase in the number of SPRs from services relating to the broad query category of **Moving Country** during October and November. A number of reports continue to highlight the difficulties for individuals and families who are living in Direct Provision Centres, while waiting for processing. And in addition to these issues, this month most of these Returns were concerned with the immigration registration and visa re-entry services for non-EEA nationals, who are living in the Dublin region. As of mid-September 2016, this administrative process was transferred from the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) to the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) and one element of the transfer of this function was the introduction of an online-only appointment service in respect of the Burgh Quay Registration Office. This served to remove the requirement for applicants to wait in line outside the office for appointments, which had been causing lengthy (and sometimes over-night) queues. Feedback from Dublin-based services indicates that the new online appointments system, though welcome, has caused difficulties for many immigrants who have sought information and assistance from CICs. Services report that many clients could not get an appointment within the 10 week timeframe allotted by the website, as all appointments had been taken up. And in some cases, the next available appointment date was after their current registration ended. Thus, services reported that clients were concerned about their status and frustrated by the delays and lack of information, which in some of the cases reported, could affect their ability to remain in the country, to work, and also to travel home and re-enter the country.

In the Oireachtas

This section looks at policy-related questions and debates in the Oireachtas, with a particular focus on issues currently arising in social policy feedback from Citizens Information Services. The text may be edited. For the full text of any PQs/debates featured here, go to oireachtas.ie or kildarestreet.com

Social Welfare Bill 2016 – second stage speech, Minister Leo Varadkar [29 Nov 2016]

The Social Welfare Bill 2016 was presented to the Seanad on 29 November 2016 by Minister for Social Protection Leo Varadkar, by way of the second stage of the five stages of the legislative process. The Bill provides the legislative framework for the implementation of the measures announced in Budget 2017. Minister Varadkar stated that a social impact assessment of the social welfare budget package using the ESRI SWITCH model on a non-indexed basis found that people who are in the lowest income quintile - the bottom 20% - gain the most from Budget 2017. Some of the core elements of the Minister's speech are noted below.

“Section 9 of the Bill provides that from March 2017, the **self-employed** will be entitled to access the optical, dental and hearing benefits currently available to employees under the treatment benefit scheme. This section of the Bill also provides that when the range of optical and dental treatments is expanded from October of next year, both employees and the self-employed will benefit equally.

Section 4 of the Bill provides that the self-employed will be entitled to apply for invalidity pension with effect from December 2017. Where a self-employed person is no longer able to continue to work because of long-term ill-health or injury, they will have access to the safety net of State income support without a means test. They will no longer be asked about their assets or savings or their partner's income as that will no longer be relevant.... In the course of the passage of the Bill through the Dáil it was evident that everyone who had contributed to the debate was keen to ensure the impact of the reforms to the **one-parent family payment** since 2012 would be thoroughly evaluated. Section 12 is a new section of the Bill, as amended by the Dáil, and provides for an independent evaluation to be completed within nine months of its enactment. We anticipate having it done prior to the summer in order that it can feed into the budgetary process. Section 24 increases the income disregards for the one-parent family payment which, from the start of next year, will rise by €20, from €90 to €110 per week. This measure reverses in part previous reductions and is designed to encourage one-parent families to stay in or return to work or work more hours. It will also apply to persons in receipt of the jobseeker's transitional payment. It is intended that it will kick in on 5 January, subject to the Bill being passed by the Seanad. As part of the Government's commitment to rural Ireland, the Bill, in section 23, reverses completely the cuts made to the Farm Assist scheme in 2012 and 2013. This will provide enhanced support for approximately 8,000 farm families throughout the country.

Young jobseekers under the age of 26 years generally receive age-related reduced rates of jobseeker's payments of either €100 or €144 per week. These will increase proportionally with the general rate increases. A similar approach will be taken to others such as qualified dependent adults. ...from next September, when a young jobseeker participates in the Department's back to education scheme, he or she will be entitled to receive the full maximum rate of jobseeker's payment which will then be €193 per week, as opposed to the €160 he or she currently receives. This 21% increase represents an extra €33 a week and demonstrates the State's support for young jobseekers who try to help themselves by enhancing their education and skills. It is the biggest single increase in the social welfare package and specifically targeted at young jobseekers....”

The Minister concluded by noting that “this is the first Social Welfare Bill to be introduced under the partnership Government. We intend that future budgets will continue to improve the living standards of all of our people, assist people to move from welfare into work, support self-employment and self-reliance and develop a strong social insurance system based on the contributory principle...”. His speech was followed by various inputs from the Senators present and the debate can be accessed [here](#). The Bill is currently in the Fourth (Report) stage of its progress through the Houses of the Oireachtas, where consideration is being given to the proposed amendments that have been raised in the Seanad and Dáil.

Social Welfare Payments processing times [PQ: 36039/16, 22 November 2016]

Deputy Thomas Pringle (*Donegal, Independent*) asked the Minister for Social Protection for “his plans to improve the decision timeframes on all core social protection payments made by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter”. **Minister Leo Varadkar** (*Dublin West, Fine Gael*) responded by saying “my Department is committed to providing a quality service to all its customers. This includes ensuring that applications are processed and that decisions on entitlement are made as quickly as possible. Across the main social welfare schemes, last month my Department received over 38,000 applications for processing and cleared over 42,000....Reducing waiting times is a priority for my Department and they are working hard to make this

happen. For example, the processing time for **Carer's Allowance** has dropped from 22 weeks in May 2016 to 14 weeks in September 2016 and continues to fall. As part of its programme of service delivery modernisation, a range of initiatives aimed at streamlining the processing of claims, supported by modern technology, have been implemented by my Department in recent years. In addition, staffing needs are regularly reviewed, having regard to workloads and the competing demands arising, to ensure that the best use is made of all available resources”.

Table of Main DSP Schemes Processing Times

Scheme	Awaiting Decision at end October	Average weeks to award
Carer's allowance	3,833	14
Child benefit	1,400	3
Disability allowance	5,671	12
Domiciliary care allowance	2,059	16
Family income supplement (new claims)	3,639	4
Invalidity pension	2,003	9
Jobseeker's allowance	6,955	2
Jobseeker's benefit	1,741	1
One-parent family payment	1,244	6
State pension contributory	4,115	6
State pension non-contributory	1,834	14

DSP reviews [PQ: 35345/16, 16 November 2016]

Deputy Willie O’Dea (*Limerick City, Fianna Fáil*) asked the Minister for Social Protection “the schemes which are currently under review by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter.”

Minister Leo Varadkar (*Dublin West, Fine Gael*) responded stating that “my Department administers over 65 separate schemes and services which serve a diverse group of clients including families, employees and employers, jobseekers, people with disabilities, carers and older people. All of these schemes and services are kept under constant review with a view to ensuring that they continue to meet the needs of my Department’s customers. In line with the Programme for a Partnership Government and the responsibilities of my Department more generally, a number of specific focussed reviews are currently underway, or will commence shortly. These include:

- **Back to Work Family Dividend** –a Focused Policy Assessment (FPA) of the Back to Work Family Dividend scheme is currently being undertaken, which is examining the rationale underpinning the scheme and its effectiveness in helping families transition from welfare to work.
- **Jobseeker’s Allowance Transition** -a formal review of the Jobseeker’s Transitional Payment (JST) will commence in 2017. This review will take the form of a Value for Money review and will examine the JST since its inception in 2013.
- **Working Family Payment** -in line with the Programme for a Partnership Government, the effectiveness of the Family Income Supplement (FIS) scheme is currently being examined, along with a range of other supports to both jobseekers and to those in employment, in the context of the development of a new Working Family Payment.
- **Reduced Rates of Jobseeker’s Allowance for Young Jobseekers** -the National University of Ireland, Maynooth is currently undertaking research which is examining the effectiveness of the reduced rates of Jobseeker’s Allowance in encouraging young jobseekers to avail of education, training and employment programmes/opportunities. The findings of this research will inform my Department’s review of the

effectiveness of the reduced rates in encouraging young jobseekers into education, training or employment opportunities.

- **Community Employment (CE) Scheme** - a review of the Community Employment (CE) Scheme has recently been conducted by my Department and the findings of that review are now being considered”.

HAP and local authority transfer lists [PQ: 368665/16, 29 November 2016]

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire (Cork South Central, Sinn Féin) asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the guidance his Department has provided to local authorities regarding the circumstances in which a person in receipt of HAP and who is on a transfer list for the local authority will be housed by that local authority.

In response, **Minister Simon Coveney** (Cork South Central, Fine Gael) stated that “on 16 December 2014, a statutory direction was issued to all authorities involved in the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme, instructing them to take the necessary steps to ensure that households benefiting from HAP can avail of a move to other forms of social housing support, should they wish to do so, through a transfer option. Local authorities were also directed that HAP recipients who apply to go on the transfer list should get full credit for the time they spent on the waiting list and be placed on the transfer list with no less favourable terms than if they had remained on the waiting list. It is ultimately up to the household to choose if they wish to be placed on a local authority’s transfer list, and I understand that the majority of HAP households do avail of this option. As of the start of November 2016, over 190 households across the country have transferred from the HAP scheme to other forms of social housing support. The practical operation of transfer lists is a matter for each local authority to manage, on the basis of their scheme of letting priorities”.

Irish Sign Language [PQ: 39168/16, 8 December 2016]

Deputy Ruth Coppinger (Dublin West, Anti-Austerity Alliance) asked the Minister for Justice and Equality “her views on the motion passed by the European Parliament on 23 November 2016 regarding Irish Sign Language and sign interpreters and her plans to provide for regulation and training of interpreters here; and if she will make a statement on the matter”.

In response on behalf of Minister Fitzgerald, Minister of State with responsibility for disability, **Finian McGrath** (Dublin Bay North, Independent) stated that “the Department of Justice and Equality has recently completed a three-phase consultation process with a view to developing a new National Disability Inclusion Strategy. It is within this framework that I aim to address, in a practical way, the needs of the approximately 5,000 users of Irish Sign Language (ISL) in the State. Issues in relation to the Deaf Community featured strongly in the consultation process and I intend that the new Strategy will respond credibly to the issues raised, including making a real difference in relation to facilitating the use of ISL. The key action in relation to this is a proposal for legislation that will ensure that all public bodies provide ISL users with free ISL interpretation when availing of their statutory services. In order to respond effectively to the needs of ISL users, a pragmatic and feasible approach is required, and I am certain that this action - and another action in the Strategy which relates to expanded translation services - will be an effective way forward once implemented. A draft of the Disability Strategy will be prepared with the assistance of the National Disability Strategy Steering Group for consideration by Government in early January, and I intend that the Strategy will be in place shortly afterwards. I am aware of the European Parliament motion referred to. Interpretation services for deaf people on a state-wide basis are provided by the Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS), which is funded by the Citizens Information Bureau (CIB) and also undertakes training of interpreters”.

Policy News, Resources and Opinion

This section features developments, resources, events and opinions likely to be of interest to those engaged in policy work.

CIB does not endorse or otherwise any of the policy positions featured.

Residential Rental Sector Strategy

On 14 December 2016, Simon Coveney T.D., Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, launched the ‘Strategy for the Rental Sector’, following Government approval of the plan at Cabinet. The publication of the strategy document follows a public consultation process that received over 500 submissions from a range of stakeholders. As part of this consultation, CIB made a submission based on the significant amount of feedback received from delivery services in connection with their clients’ experiences of renting homes within the private sector. The submission noted the growing number of people who seek help and support from CISs to maintain their tenancies in the face of rising rents and to negotiate the tightrope between finding accommodation within existing rent caps and homelessness. It focussed on four main issues – high rents and the absence of rent security, difficulties in integrating social housing supports with private sector tenancies (particularly within the context of landlords willingness to participate in these schemes and also the cap on RS and HAP rent limits), housing standards and repairs (in particular, the limited resources available to local authorities to monitor and enforce minimum standards) and finally, breaches of tenancy agreements. The CIB submission also highlighted the importance of a “tighter form of rent control in the sector for a defined period during the present supply crisis”. The full text of the Submission can be accessed [here](#).

At the core of the new Strategy is a proposal for a rent predictability measure (which aims to moderate the rate of rent increase in areas of the country where rents are highest and rising quickly). This measure is based on the concept of *Rent Pressure Zones*, where rent increases will be capped at 4% per annum for the next three years. These ‘zones’ are areas where annual rent increases have been at 7%, or more, in four of the last six quarters and where the rent levels are already above the national average. The *Rent Pressure Zones* will be designated as such for a maximum of three years, and Minister Coveney plans on declaring the four Dublin Local Authority areas and Cork city as *Rent Pressure Zones* following the enactment of the legislation. Following negotiations with Fianna Fáil, it is expected that there will also be an early review to include Limerick, Galway and Waterford, as well as commuter counties around Dublin.

The Strategy also contains a number of measures to support supply by encouraging new investment and bringing unused capacity to the market. Measures include ‘Build to Rent’ developments and the accelerated roll out of ‘Repair and Leasing’ and ‘Buy and Renew’ Initiatives. There are also measures in the Strategy that will broaden and strengthen the role and powers of the RTB to more effectively provide key services to tenants and landlords.

South Mayo MABS Mortgage Arrears Research

In November 2016, South Mayo MABS published a research report which provided an analysis of mortgage arrears amongst their clients in South Mayo. The study, which was conducted by Dr. Stuart Stamp of Maynooth University, suggests that there is a spatial dimension to mortgage arrears, across a range of areas such as borrower age, household composition, lender profiles, arrears persistence, housing stress and shelter poverty. It also recommends that emerging policy developments, such as those in the Programme for Government and Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness, aimed at “difficult to solve” cases, need to factor in a spatial dimension, and radically address affordability, power imbalance and questionable lending issues from a household perspective. The research also raised a number of concerns around the two key policy instruments that are currently available to those experiencing unsustainable mortgage debt - the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (and the Mortgage Arrears Resolution Process contained within it), and the Mortgage to Rent Scheme. The Report (*‘An analysis of mortgage arrears among South Mayo MABS clients’*) can be accessed on the MABS website [here](#).

ESRI – Fifty years of social research



In November 2016, the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) marked its fiftieth year of conducting research on social issues, during which time it developed a scientific basis for evidence-based policy making in a broad range of social policy areas including education, healthcare and poverty alleviation. The ESRI was founded in 1960 as the Economic Research Institute and its brief was expanded in 1966 to embrace a broader approach to evidence-based policy research which allowed for new thinking on critical social issues in Irish society. This was to be underpinned by the development of new ways of measuring poverty, deprivation and quality of life. During the past fifty years, the ESRI has been involved in a number of large-scale longitudinal studies that have provided policy makers with a range of data on a variety of social groups – these include the Growing Up in Ireland study (which from 2006 tracks almost 20,000 children across Ireland) and The Irish Longitudinal Study of Ageing (TILDA) which tracks 8,000 individuals who are aged over 50. These studies continue to provide policy makers with Irish-based data from infancy to old age, which the ESRI suggests “could yield new insights into policy levers that could ameliorate the cumulative effects of inequality and disadvantage over time”.

During this time, the ESRI has also conducted a number of large-scale studies on young people’s experiences of the school system and has also developed particular measures of poverty, social inclusion and income inequality within the Irish context. The organisation’s research has also focussed on healthcare and the health inequalities that are part of the Irish public-private healthcare mix, at gender inequalities in the labour market and has contributed to an annual analysis of the Irish budgetary process through its Budget Perspectives series. It also provides the basis for the Social Impact Assessment (SIA) of the main tax and welfare measures of successive budgets in the form of the SWITCH model. This is an evidence-based approach that uses CSO data to estimate the likely distributive impact of policies and income and social inequality, and it is carried out each year by the Department of Social Protection. The SIA for Budget 2017 was conducted in November 2016 by the DSP and can be accessed [here](#).

Positive Ageing 2016 Report



In November 2016, Minister of State with responsibility for Mental Health and Older People, Helen McEntee, launched ‘Positive Ageing 2016’ – the first National Positive Ageing Indicators report. This Report links in with, and reports on, the three pillars identified in the National Positive Ageing Strategy, which was published by Government in 2013. These three pillars are highlighted as that of participation, health and security for older people - as well as the cross-cutting objectives of combating ageism and increasing access to information. A set of 56 National Positive Ageing indicators were developed which are to be used to monitor changes in older people’s health and wellbeing at a national and local level. At the launch of the Report, Minister McEntee stated that the Report “offers us a benchmark for the future which will allow us to measure the progress we have made and the challenges that lie ahead”. The Report can be accessed [here](#).

DSP – Disability Allowance survey



In November 2016, the Department of Social Protection published the results of a survey of Disability Allowance recipients conducted during 2015. The overall objective of the survey was to “inform the design of supports and interventions which will assist people in receipt of the allowance to participate in the labour force according to their capacity”. The report was based on the responses of over 3,000 DA recipients and it explores their experiences and ambitions in four key areas – education level, work experience, employment supports and ambitions and barriers to achieving employment ambitions. The research found that 13% of those in receipt of DA are currently working, and that almost one third had never worked. Regarding what supports they considered to be most important in helping them achieve their employment ambitions, the Medical Card was the most often referenced support (at 64% of respondents), with family mentioned in second place (at 59%). The full text of the Report can be accessed through the DSP website [here](#).