

Social Policy Update

February 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, activities and resources.

Contents

CIB Social Policy and Research News	1 – 3
<i>Submissions on young people and minimum wage; commissioning social services,</i>	
On the Ground: Social policy feedback from delivery services	4 - 6
<i>Social Policy Returns from services - 2015 review;</i>	
In the Oireachtas	7 - 8
<i>Medical cards, treatment of married and cohabiting couples;</i>	
Policy News, Resources and Opinion	9 - 10
<i>CISs and Direct Provision Centres, Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015, Social Housing Output Report 2015;</i>	

CIB Social Policy and Research News

This section provides information about CIB's Social Policy work, focusing in each issue on one or more selected areas of activity.

Introduction

Welcome to the February edition of CIB's Social Policy Update. In this edition, we look at the submissions that CIB has made in the early part of 2016, whilst noting that, during 2015, CIB made over 20 submissions to a variety of Government Departments and review processes. These submissions varied from the specific (such as those on the Employability Service Review and the Aras Attracta Review), to the broad - such as the National Disability Inclusion Strategy and the Pre-Budget Submission. These submissions drew on the social policy feedback that had been channelled from CIB's delivery services during the year. This feedback presents CIB with a unique source of evidence in drafting submissions and policy responses and it places our service delivery partners in a distinctive place in the context of highlighting issues of concern to users of their services.

In addition to the submissions so far in 2016, it should also be noted that CIB has met with officials from the HSE (with regard to the medical card issues that arise in CISs and CIPS) and from the Rent Supplement (RS) section of DSP - where social policy feedback around RS issues arising in information services was discussed in detail.

This issue of the Social Policy Update also provides an analysis of the key issues that emerged via the Social Policy Returns (and queries) as submitted by CISs and CIPS during 2015 – when information staff were busy dealing with ongoing difficulties for their clients in accessing services and benefits. These included ongoing difficulties with rent supplement, medical cards and jobseekers payments and also emerging issues of concern for service users - such as difficulties caused by changes to the One Parent Family Payment, water charges and the associated Water Conservation Grant, and the Housing Assistance Payment.

This edition also covers some relevant wider policy issues that arose for discussion prior to the dissolution of the Dáil in February 2015 - most notably on the topics of medical cards, and the treatment of married and cohabiting couples by Revenue and DSP. We also cover some of the policy issues of relevance coming from within the voluntary sector during the past two months and we also look at the current status of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015, which was passed by the Oireachtas in December 2015.

CIB submissions

Low Pay Commission

In February 2015, the Minister for Business and Employment, Mr Ged Nash, announced the appointment of the Low Pay Commission – an independent body (with nine members and chaired by Dr Donal de Buitléir) - the main

function of which is to advise the Government on the appropriate rate of the National Minimum Wage. The Commission was also requested to investigate “certain related matters” and, in early 2016 sought submissions in relation to two particular topics –

- the appropriateness of the sub-minima rates which currently apply to young people;
- issues surrounding the preponderance of women on the National Minimum Wage and the underlying causes.

The CIB has made a submission on sub-minima wage rates for young people and it can be accessed [here](#). The submission noted that the key concern in relation to these wage rates is if - and how - the lower rates of the minimum wage impact on younger people who are unemployed and not engaged in education or training. The submission argued that the appropriateness of these rates should be looked at in the broader context of addressing unemployment amongst this younger age cohort (particularly amongst those with lower educational attainment - that is, up to Leaving Certificate and post-LC).

The submission looked at recent trends in youth unemployment, education and training and noted that the youth unemployment rate in Ireland is more than double the population as whole (that is, 19.7% vs 8.8% in December 2015), that 18% of young Irish people are deemed to be not in education, training or employment and that the growth of internships and ‘precarious employment’ (such as temporary work, part-time or zero hours contracts) is frustrating the traditional entry of young people into well-paid and secure employment. The submission stated that reports from CISs and CIPS highlight these concerns for younger people who are seeking information and support from services across the country - with many cases indicating difficulties with welfare to work transitions, and particular worries in meeting the costs of ordinary daily living and the related financial strain (especially for those who are living independently of their parents).

The submission suggested that the Low Pay Commission should look at a number of factors over-and-above the actual wage rates per se. These include ensuring a balance between minimum rates of pay and social welfare income support, the need for good quality work opportunities for young people, the importance of applying the living wage concept in the longer-term to younger people and the need to look again at the implications of the lower rates of social welfare paid to younger people - in particular, to those participating in education, training and work experience programmes.

The CIB is also in the process of preparing a submission on the preponderance of women on the Minimum Wage which is due on 11 March.

Submission on commissioning human, social and community services

CIB has followed up on a call for submissions from a cross-Departmental group on the use of commissioning as a model of delivering public services. Such a model of funding aims to assess and identify the needs of a population, to pinpoint service priorities and goals, and to fund service providers that can deliver those priorities and goals in line with the identification of evidence-based evaluations. This form of funding contrasts with the traditional ‘block-grant’ system in Ireland, where the provision of state services to the citizen are secured through the funding of voluntary and community sector agencies, based on what an agency or a provider received historically - rather than because of the needs of the communities or end-users in question.

The submission is based on CIB’s experience of commissioning various pieces of work relating to strategic development, project management, service delivery and policy research involving both central services and service delivery partners. It suggests that the following questions need to be considered in any move to a commissioning model of funding:

- How will a stronger focus on commissioning impact on the responsibility of Government to provide health and social services?

- When are services best provided directly by Government and when should they be contracted out to other providers?
- What are the implications of a possible greater move towards the privatisation of health and social services as a result of commissioning?

The CIB submission was based on the consultation paper entitled “[Commissioning Human, Social and Community Services](#)” which was published in late 2015 by the four Departments involved - the Departments of Children and Youth Affairs; Environment, Community and Local Government; Health and Public Expenditure and Reform.

Other submissions

The CIB is also in the process of preparing a submission in response to a call from the Support and Advocacy Service for Older People (SAGE) in relation to long-term care. SAGE has recently established a [Forum on Long Term Care](#) with a number of concerned organisations and aims to prepare a draft report on the issues raised by the submissions, for a public forum prior to submission to the new government by May 2016.

CIB developments

NAS Access Review

Eustace Patterson researchers are carrying out an independent review of access to NAS – the National Advocacy Service for people with disabilities. NAS - funded and supported by CIB - provides an independent, confidential and representative advocacy service that works exclusively for people with a disability. CIB has commissioned the research in order to identify and recommend standardised processes for use by NAS to ensure effective and timely service responses to people who engage with the service. The review is part of the CIB’s research programme for this year.

The review will also identify demand patterns, the level of awareness of the service offer and the reach of the service and will consider how NAS currently manages demand. The protocols that NAS has in place for identifying the level of demand for its service, ensuring that those people who need the service know about it and targeting the service at identified priority groups will also be considered. A Steering Group involving representatives of NAS staff and CIB has been set up to support this research.

NAS has a particular remit for people with disabilities who are isolated from their community and services, who have communication difficulties, who are inappropriately accommodated, live in residential services, attend day services and have limited informal or natural supports. NAS currently supports over 1,000 people with disabilities around the country.

Make Work Pay for people with disabilities

CIB is represented on an interdepartmental working group set up by the Department of Social Protection to progress commitments under the Government’s Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities. A key focus of the strategy is to try and ensure that people with disabilities get a share of jobs in the economic recovery and do not become unemployed in the first instance with the onset of a disability.

Making work pay for people with disabilities is one of six strands under the strategy and the main actions in the Strategy include developing a ‘ready reckoner’ providing support for people in the activation process and improving links between income supports and employment. The other strands relate to building skills, capacity and independence; providing bridges and supports into work; job retention and re-entry to work ; co-ordinated and seamless support, and engagement with employers. There was general recognition that, whilst financial matters are important, there are also a range of other non-financial incentives and factors which impact significantly on the participation of people with disabilities in the workforce.

On the Ground: feedback from CISs and CIPS

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

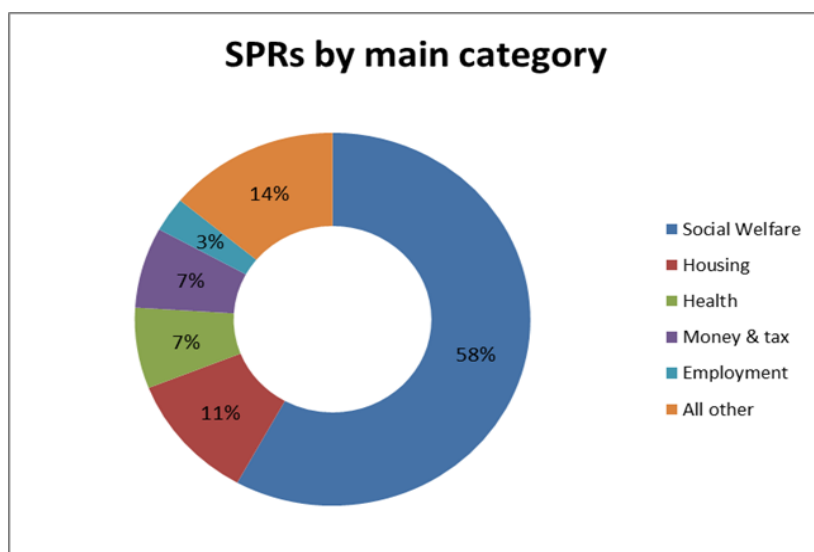
Review of 2015

An initial analysis of the caller and query data that was logged onto the Oyster system (an electronic recording system to record the nature of queries presenting to services) by CISs during 2015 shows that there were 607,286 callers to CISs and a total of 990,644 queries. Some 46% of all queries were related to social welfare, with health (at 8%), employment (at 7%) and money and tax (at 7%) being the next most queried categories. Queries relating to medical cards far outweighed all other payments or benefits (at 53,111 queries) and the next most queried payment was Jobseeker's Allowance at 37,471 queries.

During 2015, CIB received 3,056 Social Policy Returns (individual cases identified by services to illustrate issues arising in relation to particular benefits and schemes) from CISs across the country and a further 726 from the Citizens Information Phone Service – bringing the total amount received to 3,781 – a slight increase (1.5%) on the Returns submitted in 2014.

Citizens Information Services (CISs)

As is consistent with the general business of the services provided by staff within CISs, social welfare continues to be the focus of much of the Social Policy Returns that are submitted by services to CIB. During 2015, 58% of all SPRs were broadly related to **social welfare** queries and cases – this was followed by the **Housing** category at 11%, by **Health** and by **Money and Tax** at 7% each and by **Employment** at 3%. When combined, these five broad information categories accounted for 86% of all of the cases that were submitted by services - with the remaining 11 categories accounting for 14% of the SPRs.



When the broad nature of the policy concerns are looked at, some 54% of all of the SPRs submitted by CISs can be analysed as **operational issues** – that is, cases that were deemed by the information provider to be indicative of concerns with the operation or administration of services on the ground. Services are asked to classify these difficulties as an 'Access or administrative barrier' or separately as an 'Information Gap' when logging the issue on the Oyster system. In a further 37% of cases, information providers considered that the cases demonstrated difficulties caused by **polices, legislation or guidelines** – that is, either 'anomalies in policy' or 'gaps in provision'. These categorisations are useful when analysing the issues that are raised by services, as typically, the concerns that are focussed around administrative issues can be dealt with in a more straight-forward manner than those that are concentrated on policy or legislative difficulties.

Trends and changes in 2015

There was a 10% increase on 2014 figures in the number of SPRs submitted within the broad **social welfare** category. Nearly one half of the 1,785 social welfare SPRs were focussed on three particular areas – **Supplementary Welfare Schemes, Unemployed People** and **Families and Children**. The payments of particular concern were Rent Supplement, Jobseeker's Allowance and the Family Income Supplement (FIS). Basic SWA, Jobseeker's Benefit and the One Parent Family Payment also featured regularly in the SPRs during the year.

Rent Supplement (RS) continued to be an area of particular concern during 2015, as highlighted by both the quantity and quality of data submitted by information services in the form of the SPRs. There were over 24,000 queries specifically related to rent supplement in CISs and also 211 Rent Supplement-related SPRs logged during the year. It was the single issue, above all others, that was most-often logged by CISs in the SPRs.

It should be noted also that the SPRs logged in the main **Housing** category in 2015 (338) increased by 67% on the 2014 figure, indicating further signs of the scale of the difficulties with private rented accommodation, the role of the RS payment in this, and the knock-on effect on social housing. This can be evidenced in the SPRs that were logged in the main Housing sub-categories - such as 'Homelessness', 'Rent Arrears/Rent Problems', 'Emergency Accommodation', 'Applying for Local Authority/social housing', and 'Housing Assistance Payment'. Rent Supplement was referenced in the majority of the case evidence supplied in these categories.

The **Water Conservation Grant** emerged as a prominent issue within the social welfare category in the latter part of the year (logging 5% of all social welfare-related SPRs) with the deadline for grant applications being 22 October 2015. The majority of the cases submitted were concerned with administrative issues – such as the difficulties that people had in making the online-only application (particularly older people) and the problems that people encountered when trying to contact the Support Team telephone line.

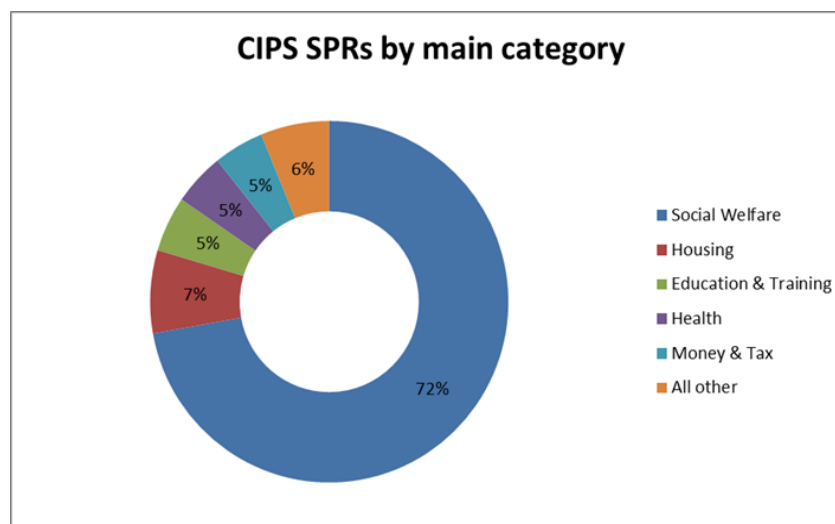
The issue of **medical cards** continues to be the dominant one within the broad Health category, with 67% of all Health-related SPRs focussing on concerns with the application, assessment, review and renewal of cards. In 2015, there was a notable decline in the SPRs concerning medical cards - with a reduction of 38% on the 2014 figure. Despite this reduction, medical card SPRs were the third most-logged by information staff during the year.

Within the broad area of **Money and Tax**, the number of SPRs has reduced by 28% on 2014 figures. This overall reduction can be attributed to the waning of the Local Property Tax (LPT) as an issue of concern since its introduction in 2013 - the LPT logged 250 SPRs in 2013, 128 in 2014 and this dropped by 72% to 35 SPRs in 2015.

During 2015, the dominant concern within Money and Tax was **Water Charges** and this accounted for 42% of all of these Returns. The majority of the concerns logged in relation to water charges were focussed around the deadline for registering with Irish Water (in June 2015) and also with the issuing of the first Irish Water bills from April 2015. When combined with the SPRs related to the Water Conservation Grant (as noted previously), concerns around this new household charge and grant amounted to 6% of all SPRs submitted in 2015.

Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS)

The 726 Social Policy Returns that were submitted by CIPS show broadly similar trends to those that were logged by CISs – although, notably, the Returns relating to social welfare featured more regularly in the overall total at 72% (as compared with 58% from CISs).



As with CISs, housing concerns ranked second at 7%, and Education, Health and Money and Tax were the next most-often reported concerns – combining to account for 95% of all of the CIPS Returns. In terms of the **types of policy issue** being reported, about one half of all of the Phone Services SPRs can be broadly analysed as operational issues, while 33% of the cases submitted related to perceived difficulties caused by polices, legislation or guidelines. As noted previously, of the 726 SPRs submitted by CIPS, 72% were focussed on **social welfare** issues and payments. Within this, the main payments or benefits that were referenced most often by the Phone Services information staff who recorded issues of concerns were as follows:-

Payment/ benefit	% of social welfare SPRs
1 Rent Supplement	16%
2 Jobseekers Allowance	10%
3 Family Income Supplement	8%
4 One Parent Family Payment	7%
5 Fuel Allowance	5%
Total Top Five issues	46%

These figures are broadly consistent with the main concerns emerging from the CISs during 2015, although the issue of Fuel Allowance did not feature as relatively often amongst the CIS Returns. In this comparative context, it should also be noted that difficulties with the **Water Conservation Grant**, or the **Water Charges**, were rarely reported in the Returns from CIPS during the year – and as noted previously, these issues when combined accounted for 6% of all of the SPRs from CISs. Perhaps this reflects the fact that those seeking telephone support regarding difficulties with the grant/ charges made contact with either of the Irish Water or DSP helplines. **Rent Supplement** registered significant concern amongst the SPRs submitted by CIPS staff – with over 16% of social welfare SPRs logging it as an issue. In addition to this, the broad housing category also referenced difficulties with the payment regularly – with a growth in reports of landlords increasing rent following the announcement of a series of reforms for the private rented sector in November 2015.

The SPRs that were related to the **Money & Tax** category were primarily focussed on difficulties with **Income Tax Credits and Reliefs** - with many cases referencing the financial loss for people caused by the inconsistency in how Revenue and DSP assess married versus co-habiting couples. There were also a significant number of reports concerning unequal access to the Single Parent Child Carer Credit.

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 www.oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie or www.kildarestreet.com

Discretionary medical cards [PQ 43945/15; Tuesday 8 December 2015]

James Bannon (Longford-Westmeath, Fine Gael) asked the Minister for Health his views on “the bureaucracy within the Health Service Executive faced by persons acquiring discretionary medical cards..”

In a response on behalf of Minister Leo Varadkar, Minister of State at the Department, **Kathleen Lynch** (Cork North Central, Labour) stated that “medical cards are provided to persons who are, in the opinion of the HSE, unable without undue hardship to arrange GP services for themselves and their dependants....Every effort is made by the HSE, within the framework of the legislation, to support applicants in applying for a medical card and, in particular, to take full account of difficult circumstances, whether medical or social which might result in undue financial hardship in arranging medical services. In doing so, the HSE may seek additional supporting information which can be, at times, intensive but necessary to ensure a fair discretionary review for applicants whose income has exceeded the income limits.

I recognise that the existing assessment system is complex because it tries to ensure that a wide range of personal circumstances can be taken into account. We are still committed to further improving the existing system and the work of the Clinical Advisory Group on medical card eligibility will be central to this in the immediate future. The Group was established by the Director General of the HSE and is continuing its work on developing a framework for assessment and measurement of the burden of disease and appropriate operational guidelines for the medical card scheme.

As evidenced by the increase in the number of discretionary medical cards in circulation from about 52,000 in mid-2014 to nearly 96,000 at the beginning of November this year, the HSE is exercising greater discretion in its medical cards assessments than ever before”.

Medical cards and routine blood-testing [PQ 2942/16; Tuesday 26 January 2016]

Noel Coonan (Tipperary North, Fine Gael) asked the Minister for Health if “it is appropriate for a general practitioner to put additional charges in the region from €20 upwards on a medical card holder for the purpose of taking blood samples...”.

In a response on behalf of Minister Varadkar, Minister of State, **Kathleen Lynch** stated that “persons covered by the General Medical Services (GMS) Scheme should not be charged for routine phlebotomy services provided by their GP, or the Practice Nurse on behalf of the GP, which are required to either assist in the diagnosis of illness or the treatment of a condition. Consultation fees charged by GPs outside the terms of the GMS contract are a matter of private contract between the clinicians and the patients. While I have no role in relation to such fees, I would expect clinicians to have regard to the overall economic situation in setting their fees.

The Department of Health and the HSE are cognisant of the need for a new contract with GPs that will help modernise our health service and develop a strengthened primary care sector and negotiations are underway with the IMO in this regard. The development of appropriate contractual arrangements in relation to the

management of chronic conditions and issues such as phlebotomy services are amongst the significant issues to be considered during the contractual talks”.

Treatment of cohabiting couples for the purposes of income tax and social welfare

[PQ 4135/16; Tuesday 2 February 2016]

Sandra McLellan (Cork East, Sinn Féin) asked the Minister for Finance “why an unmarried couple are deemed a cohabiting couple when claiming social protection but are deemed single persons when one of the partners gains employment and is trying to claim tax back”.

In response, **Minister Michael Noonan** (Limerick City, Fine Gael) stated that “where a couple is cohabiting, rather than married or in a civil partnership, each partner is treated for the purposes of income tax as a separate and unconnected individual. Because they are treated separately for tax purposes, tax credits, tax bands and reliefs cannot be transferred from one partner to the other. Cohabitants do not have the same legal rights and obligations as a married couple or couple in a civil partnership which is why they are not accorded similar treatment to couples who have a civil status that is recognised in law. The basis for the current tax treatment of married couples derives from the Supreme Court decision in *Murphy v. Attorney General* (1980). This decision was based on Article 41.3.1 of the Constitution where the State pledges to protect the institution of marriage. The decision held that it was contrary to the Constitution for a married couple, both of whom are working, to pay more tax than two single people living together and having the same income.

To the extent that there are differences in the tax treatment of the different categories of couples, such differences arise from the objective of dealing with different types of circumstances while at the same time respecting the constitutional requirements to protect the institution of marriage. Any change in the tax treatment of cohabiting couples can only be addressed in the broader context of future social and legal policy development in relation to such couples.

From a practical perspective, it would be very difficult to administer a tax regime for cohabitants which would be the same as that for married couples or civil partners. Married couples and civil partners have a verifiable official confirmation of their status. It would be difficult, intrusive and time-consuming to confirm declarations by individuals that they were actually cohabiting. It would also be difficult to establish when cohabitation started or ceased. There would also be legal issues with regard to 'connected persons'. To counter tax avoidance, 'connected persons' are frequently defined throughout the various Tax Acts. The definitions extend to relatives and children of spouses and civil partners. This would be very difficult to prove and enforce in respect of persons connected with a cohabiting couple where the couple has no legal recognition. There may be an advantage in tax legislation for a married couple or civil partners as regards the extended rate band and the ability to transfer credits. However, their legal status has wider consequences from a tax perspective both for themselves and persons connected with them.

The treatment of cohabiting couples for the purposes of social welfare is primarily a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Social Protection, Ms. Joan Burton TD. However, it is also based on the principle that married couples should not be treated less favourably than cohabiting couples. This was given a constitutional underpinning following the Supreme Court decision in *Hyland v. Minister for Social Welfare* (1989) which ruled that it was unconstitutional for the total income a married couple received in social welfare benefits to be less than the couple would have received if they were unmarried and cohabiting”.

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.

CISs and Direct Provision Centres

In June 2015, the Government published the Report of the Working Group to Report to Government on Improvements to the Protection Process. The report identified that people were having difficulty moving from direct provision and needed supports and information to assist them and it made some recommendations in relation to the improvements to supports for persons within the system. Some of these recommendations were of particular interest to CIB and its service delivery partners - Social Policy Returns that are submitted by services demonstrate the difficulties that people have when trying to move from Direct Provision accommodation. These people are unable to access Jobseeker's Allowance or Supplementary Welfare Allowance while in Direct Provision and are unable to save for a deposit in anticipation of a move to private rented accommodation. Many SPRs highlight cases where those who have been granted status are unable to move out of Direct Provision centres due to the shortage of private rented accommodation in the State.

In following up on the recommendations contained within the Report, the Department of Justice asked the Citizens Information Service network to be the lead on providing information sessions for people moving out of direct provision centres. The CIB Transitional Supports Working Group was set up and is developing a template for information sessions for people leaving direct provision and is coordinating with the DSP, Local Authorities and other local organisations to roll-out these sessions to centres around the country. The first sessions are scheduled for Spring 2016.

The Department of Justice and Equality has also produced an information guide for people who have been granted refugee status, subsidiary protection status, or permission to remain in Ireland. 'Your Guide to Living Independently' provides information for people transitioning from direct provision and covers a range of topics including housing, finances, healthcare and education. The booklet has been distributed to all Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) centres and is available on their website and [here](#).

Current status of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015

In December 2015, the Oireachtas passed the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Bill 2013, and following its enactment by President Michael D. Higgins, it became the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015. It is expected that it will take up to six months to commence the legislation. This Act repeals the Lunacy Regulation (Ireland) Act 1871 and the Marriage of Lunatics Act 1811, and it sets out the guiding principles that are intended to safeguard the autonomy and dignity of the person with impaired capacity. Supported decision-making is a central component of the Act, which strongly reflects the recommendations of various Law Reform Commission reports. The guiding principles state that:

- There is a presumption of decision-making capacity unless the contrary is shown;
- No intervention will take place unless it is necessary;
- Any act done, or decision made, under the Act must be done, or made, in a way which is least restrictive of a person's rights and freedoms;
- Any act done, or decision made, under the Act in support or, on behalf of, a person with impaired capacity must give effect to the person's will and preferences.

Many commentators have welcomed the Act as "ground-breaking legislation" which will result in significant improvements in the lives of persons with intellectual disabilities, as their ability to make decisions for

themselves will be enshrined in law. The legislation has also been cited as a considerable cultural shift away from a paternalistic and ‘best interests’ approach towards persons with intellectual disabilities to a right-based approach of choice, control and consent. In welcoming the legislation, Minister Kathleen Lynch noted that “those with capacity difficulties will be able to avail of support options directly targeted to their needs. Families and carers will be able to get information on the options available. There will be robust safeguards to protect vulnerable people against exploitation and abuse. A Decision Support Service is being established in the Mental Health Commission to provide information on the Bill. It will also act as regulator and will supervise those taking decisions on behalf of another person”. CIB made a submission on the Bill in the consultation stages in 2013, following on from a previous submission made on the Scheme of Mental Capacity Legislation in 2010.

Social Housing Output Report, 2015 - The Housing Agency

In January 2016, the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Alan Kelly, with the Housing Agency, launched the first annual ‘output report’ of the Government’s programme of social housing delivery under the Social Housing Strategy 2020 (published in November 2014) – the main target of which was to provide 110,000 homes to those on social housing waiting lists by 2020.

The Report, entitled “Social Housing Output in 2015”, contains details on the progress made under each of the social housing programmes during 2015. At the launch, Minister Kelly noted that over 13,000 new social housing units/sets of keys were delivered in 2015, that exchequer funding for social housing increased by €210 million on 2014, to €800 million, that 2,700 vacant social housing units (or ‘voids’) were brought back into use and that nearly 9,000 social housing units were delivered through social housing leasing, the RAS and the HAP schemes. The Report also provides details on current figures with regard to NAMA-related social housing provision, Traveller-specific accommodation, homeless services and provisions for the protection of tenancies. The Housing Agency was set up in May 2010 to work with and support local authorities, approved housing bodies, and the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government in the delivery of housing and housing services to people and their families. The Social Housing Output in 2015 Report is available [here](#).

CIB’s Social Policy Grants Scheme

During 2015, CIB (through the Social Policy Grants Scheme) funded four separate projects amongst our delivery services, each with a focus on a particular concern at a local level. These grants were awarded to:

- Roscommon CIS (with Roscommon Leader Partnership) – the grant has been provided to support research into the policy issues affecting older people with respect to ongoing changes in banking and telecommunications services, which will be published in 2016.
- Co Clare CIS (in conjunction with Clare CIL) – the grant provided by CIB funded two seminars which highlighted the obstacles and opportunities for people with disabilities in seeking activation and employment.
- CIPS – the grant was awarded to research the barriers to taking up paid employment for one parent families. In particular, the research will focus on employment barriers associated with access to childcare in the public and private market. A report will be published in 2016.
- National Traveller MABS – the grant is part-funding a comparison study of how utilities are administered and rents are collected in two Dublin Local Authority halting sites.
- ASW programme – the grant funded a seminar on employment rights, advocacy and social policy which is to be held on 2 March 2016.

This funding continues to be available to services who wish to engage in a small-scale policy initiative at local level – whether it is a research piece, policy network or seminar with a policy focus. Any service that is interested in developing projects such as these (or other initiatives) can contact any member of the social policy team in CIB for further information or support in seeking the grant.