

2016 Annual Report

Tuarascáil Bhliantúil

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



A photograph of a woman with red hair petting a brown and white dog in a field of tall grass. The dog is looking to the right. The sky is blue with light clouds. Three green circles are overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the text 'Information', 'Advice', and 'Advocacy' from top to bottom.

Information

Advice

Advocacy



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

2016 Annual Report

Tuarascáil Bhliantúil

The principles that underpin the ongoing development of all our services include:

Community

The service offering is continually adapted in response to the needs of communities

Flexible

Thinking ahead and moving quickly to meet changing needs of citizens

Citizen first

The focus is on organising ourselves and delivering services to get the best outcome for citizens

Trust and respect

For citizens, each other and our community, and for voluntary sector/public service stakeholders

Delivering value and positive outcomes

For citizens and other stakeholders

Developing potential

To ensure that the work of the staff and volunteers who work in CIB and the delivery services is satisfying, meaningful and makes the best use of their commitment to our services

Available to all

Independent, impartial, confidential and non-judgemental information, advice, advocacy and budgeting services



***“They did an
excellent job with
explaining available
services”***

FEEDBACK FROM CIS CLIENT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

From the Chairperson	7
2016 in numbers	11
From the Chief Executive	13
The Citizens Information Board	15
Providing information - websites and publications	29
Citizens Information Services	35
Citizens Information Phone Service	53
The Money Advice and Budgeting Service	57
National Traveller MABS	69
The National Advocacy Service	71
Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS)	77
Appendix 1: Customer Service Charter	81
Appendix 2: Board Members 2016	83
Appendix 3: Service Teams and Structure, 2016	84
Appendix 4: Organisation Chart	87
Appendix 5: Energy usage in 2016	88
Appendix 6: Protected Disclosures Act 2014	89
Appendix 7: Citizens Information Board main offices	90
Appendix 8: Grants in 2016	91

FROM THE CHAIRPERSON



The aim of the Citizens Information Board (CIB) is to provide the public with information, advice and advocacy on all aspects of social services, as well as providing money and budgeting advice. While our goal is clear, the context in which we operate is constantly changing. Citizens' needs and expectations, governance requirements, technology, policy and information channels develop and evolve continually. Our responsiveness to these changes, and our willingness to undertake new initiatives and projects, is

vital to keeping our services relevant and focused on the citizen. This need to adapt was very much to the fore in the Board's work in 2016, during which important decisions were made on the future shape of CIB, the Citizens Information Services (CIS) and the Money Advice and Budgeting Services (MABS).

In 2016, CIB began a process of internal change that will see the organisation working in four overarching 'pillars'. With this restructure, the Board is seeking to increase CIB's direct engagement with citizens and policy makers and to modernise CIB's own service offer, both to citizens and to the companies we support.

In October, the Board of CIB made the decision to proceed with reorganising the governance arrangements for 93 CIS and MABS companies based on a more streamlined regional model. It has since been decided that each network will be made up of eight regions and eight companies. This is a very significant step in the development of CIS and MABS, and I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the remarkable work of the many hundreds of

volunteer Board members involved in both networks. The dedication of these volunteers has made CIS and MABS the success they are today, and I look forward to continuing to work with many of these volunteers through the 16 new governing Boards that will be formed and through the networks of local Advisory Committees that will be established to help guide the CIS and MABS to even greater successes in the future.

While 2016 featured change and new initiatives, CIB and our delivery services continued to provide essential frontline assistance to hundreds of thousands of people in all parts of the country. CIB's website, citizensinformation.ie, received more than 19 million visits in the course of the year. There were just under 608,000 callers to Citizens Information Centres, representing more than 1 million queries. MABS dealt with more than 17,300 new clients in 2016 and the MABS Helpline responded to more than 20,800 calls. The National Advocacy Service for people with disabilities (NAS) provided advocacy to 1,000 people, while the Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS) provided 3,127 remote interpreting sessions to members of the Deaf community and the Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS) answered in excess of 139,000 telephone enquiries.

A significant development from MABS in 2016 was the roll-out of Abhaile, the mortgage arrears resolution scheme by MABSndI, the MABS Helpline and the MABS services. The scheme aims to help mortgage holders in arrears to find the best solution for them and to keep them, wherever possible, in their own homes, by availing of free advice from a Personal Insolvency Practitioner, a solicitor or an accountant. There has been great take up of the scheme with 3,537 vouchers issued by the end of 2016 and more than 6,000 vouchers issued by the time of writing.

It's clear from the increasing numbers of people using our services that there is great demand for the information, advice and advocacy offered by CIB. It is worth remembering that behind every one of these phone calls, appointments and meetings is a person or a family in need of assistance, and a member of staff or a volunteer willing to do what he or she can to help. Our aim is to make sure CIB and its services meet the needs of citizens in the most effective way possible, whether that's as a front-line advisor in a centre or as a Board member discussing how best to reorganise and adapt our services at a national level.

I'd like to thank all the staff and volunteers involved in delivering Citizens Information across

the country, as well as the staff providing the MABS service nationwide, including through MABSndI and National Traveller MABS. I would also like to thank the CIS and MABS Boards of Management again for their work during 2016, and the Board and staff of the National Advocacy Service for people with disabilities and of the Sign Language Interpreting Service.

After some months without a quorum, we welcomed seven new members to the Board of CIB in 2016, each bringing a fresh perspective to the work of the organisation. I would like to acknowledge and thank all my colleagues on the Board for their valuable input. It is with sadness that I also note the death of former Board member Martin Naughton, in October. Martin was a strong advocate in the disability sector and made a considerable contribution to the Board of CIB.

I would like to thank the former Minister for Social Protection, Joan Burton TD, and the former Minister of State, Kevin Humphreys TD, for their support during their terms of office. I would also like to thank the former Minister for Social Protection, now Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar TD, as well as the Minister of State, Finian McGrath TD; the Secretary General of the Department of Social Protection, Niamh O'Donoghue; and all the staff of the Department for their ongoing assistance and support. I would like to take the opportunity to welcome the Minister for Employment and Social Protection, Regina Doherty TD, to her new role.

Finally, I would like to thank the Chief Executive, Angela Black, her management team and all the staff of the Citizens Information Board for their work during the year.



ITA MANGAN
Chairperson

"Thanks for the encouragement and support when I could not be there for myself or my family and thought we would lose our home...you were my safety net"

FEEDBACK FROM MABS CLIENT



2016 IN NUMBERS



Over
607,000
callers

There were **607,913** callers to Citizens Information Services during 2016, and **1.01 million queries**.

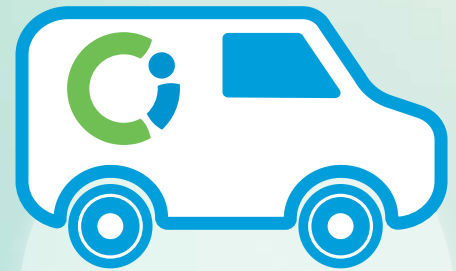


Citizensinformation.ie had more than **19.3 million visits** in 2016 and an average of **911,887 unique visitors per month**. During the year the site recorded more than **53.5 million pageviews**.



139,426
queries

CIPS information officers dealt with **139,426 telephone enquiries** and responded to **1,164 Live Advisor enquiries**.



The Citizens Information Mobile Information Unit spent **20 weeks** on the road in 2016.



607
CIS
STAFF

607 CIS staff attended the **39 events** during the spring and autumn periods on the CIB National Calendar of Training Events.



MABS dealt with over **40,000** clients/callers in 2016 – 17,366 new clients, 2,500 information clients and the MABS helpline had 20,832 calls.



"It Makes Sense" loans were available from **78 Credit Unions** at the end of 2016 and as of April 2017 were available from 105 Credit Unions representing 225 sites.



In the first five months of Abhaile, the Mortgage Arrears Resolution Service, a total of **3,537 vouchers** were issued in respect of 2,353 Principal Private Residences. By May 2017 more than 6,000 vouchers had been issued.



The Irish Sign Language Interpreting Service responded to **1,355 requests for support** in finding interpreters and provided **3,127 remote interpreting sessions**.



ABHAILE

FREE MORTGAGE ARREARS SUPPORT

Abhaile is a new service to help homeowners find a **resolution to home mortgage arrears**.

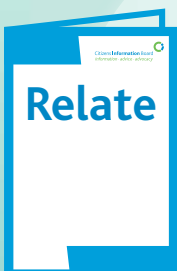
It provides vouchers for free financial and legal advice and help from experts, which are available through MABS.



The National Advocacy Service for people with disabilities provided casework to **1,000 people** in 2016 and provided one-off information, advice and advocacy to **1,152 people**. There were circa **2,000 calls** to the national line in 2016.



19 submissions were made by CIB to a range of government departments and policy fora on a diverse range of topics.



12 issues of the Relate journal were published, and over **100,000 leaflets** and wallcharts were published and distributed.



4,324 Social Policy Returns were submitted to CIB, highlighting administrative or operational issues around access to payments or services, policy anomalies or gaps in the provision of service.

FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE



The year 2016 marked the beginning of a serious endeavour to modernise and streamline the internal organisation of the Citizens Information Board (CIB). With the support and guidance of the Board of CIB, the executive has set about restructuring the organisation into four pillars that reflect our future direction and strategy, including in relation to our delivery services, research, information, digital channels and analytics. Our aim is to maximise services to the citizen by changing not just our structure

but also the way we work. By establishing cross-pillar projects, sharing expertise and introducing more flexible resources, as well as investing in technology, we will ensure that CIB is delivering the service citizens need and expect.

Following the decision of the Board of CIB, in October 2016, to proceed with reorganising the delivery services on a regional model, the executive's efforts are now also focused on the modernisation of the companies we fund and support. The planned governance changes will provide the foundation for more responsive, more flexible services that can adapt to local and regional trends. Driving service delivery improvements at regional and national level, we are engaging with key participants across the services, sharing best practice and learning about the changing needs of citizens through continual engagement. In 2016, technology continued to disrupt and change modern patterns of information provision, challenging conventional models and compelling organisations to adapt and re-adapt. Technology is a tremendous opportunity for CIB, and we cannot take for granted that the old delivery channels

will remain relevant for citizens. Therefore it is vital that initiatives like Abhaile – the mortgage arrears resolution scheme or the Dedicated Mortgage Arrears advice service can be replicated at pace in other sectors, in order to address citizens' needs that cannot yet be foreseen.


The evolving needs of citizens will always be our priority and we will improve our methods of evidence gathering to ensure that our services are timely, comprehensive, and, above all, focused on the citizen. We will seek to distinguish issues that arise, for example, for urban and rural-based citizens, for young people and older people, for long-term residents and recent arrivals. We will look to identify the channels that people prefer to use to communicate their information requirements and we will tailor our information to suit those requirements. To that end, we are establishing a dedicated social policy committee that will be active across the full cycle of our projects, from providing research and analytics to representing citizens' experiences to policy makers.

CIB is becoming a more agile and responsive organisation. We are modernising our own services and the services we fund and support. We have a clear roadmap on how to deliver on our commitments and our change process is already well underway. I am confident that we are putting ourselves on the best possible footing for the future, and that our change programme will have a profound impact on the services we provide and, most importantly, on citizens across the country.



ANGELA BLACK
Chief Executive

THE CITIZENS INFORMATION BOARD



"Many thanks for your invaluable information and for the service that you offer the public who, like myself, are not aware of the rights they have."

FEEDBACK FROM CIS CLIENT

The Citizens Information Board (CIB) supports the provision of information, advice and advocacy services on a wide range of public and social services. These services are delivered in three different ways – online, phone and in person.

Our mandate is clearly defined through a number of Acts:

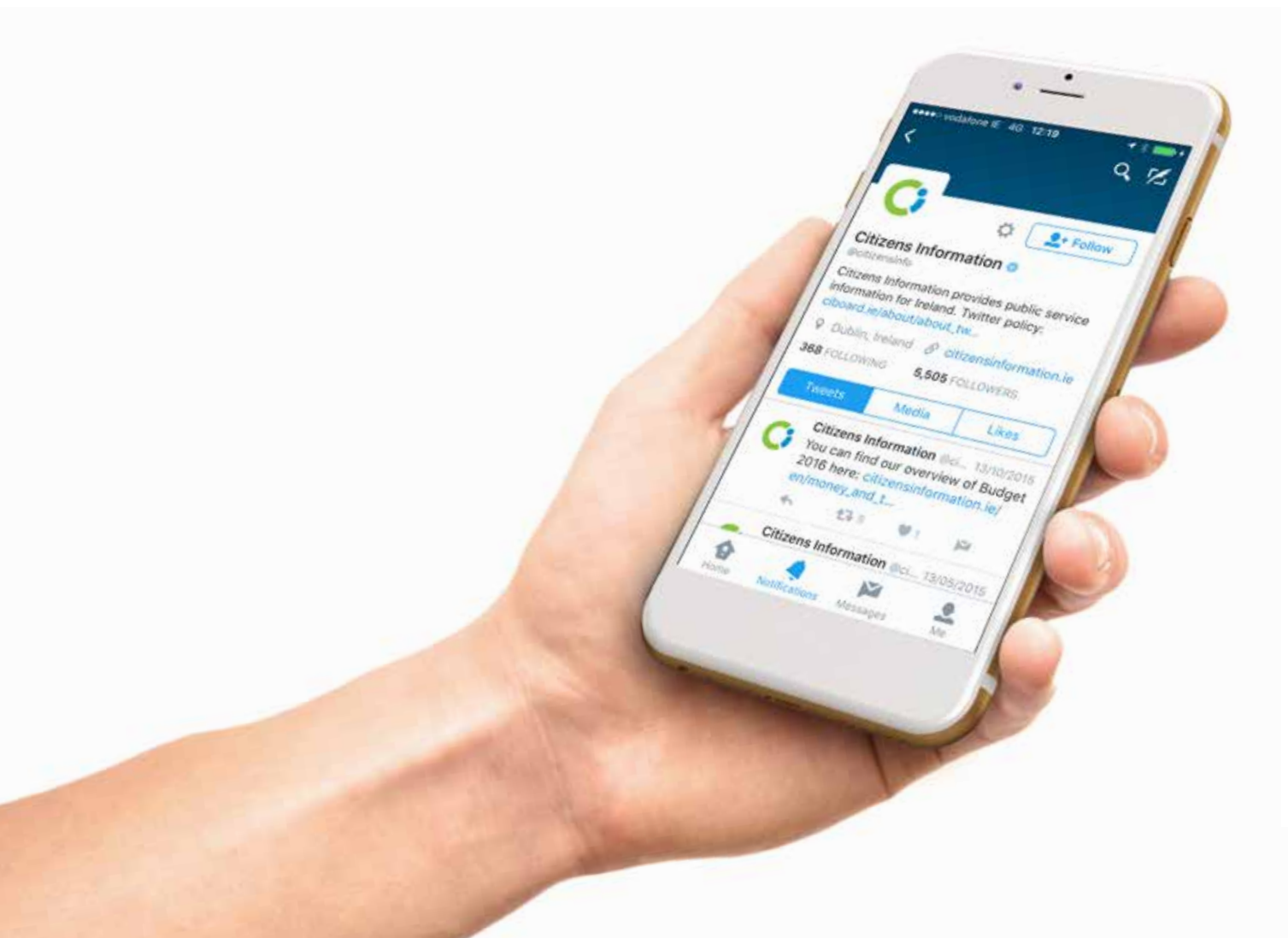
- To ensure that individuals have access to accurate, comprehensive and clear information relating to social services
- To assist and support individuals, in particular those with disabilities, in identifying and understanding their needs and options
- To promote greater accessibility, coordination and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

It is a core role of CIB to highlight needs arising through feedback and seek ways to have these issues addressed.

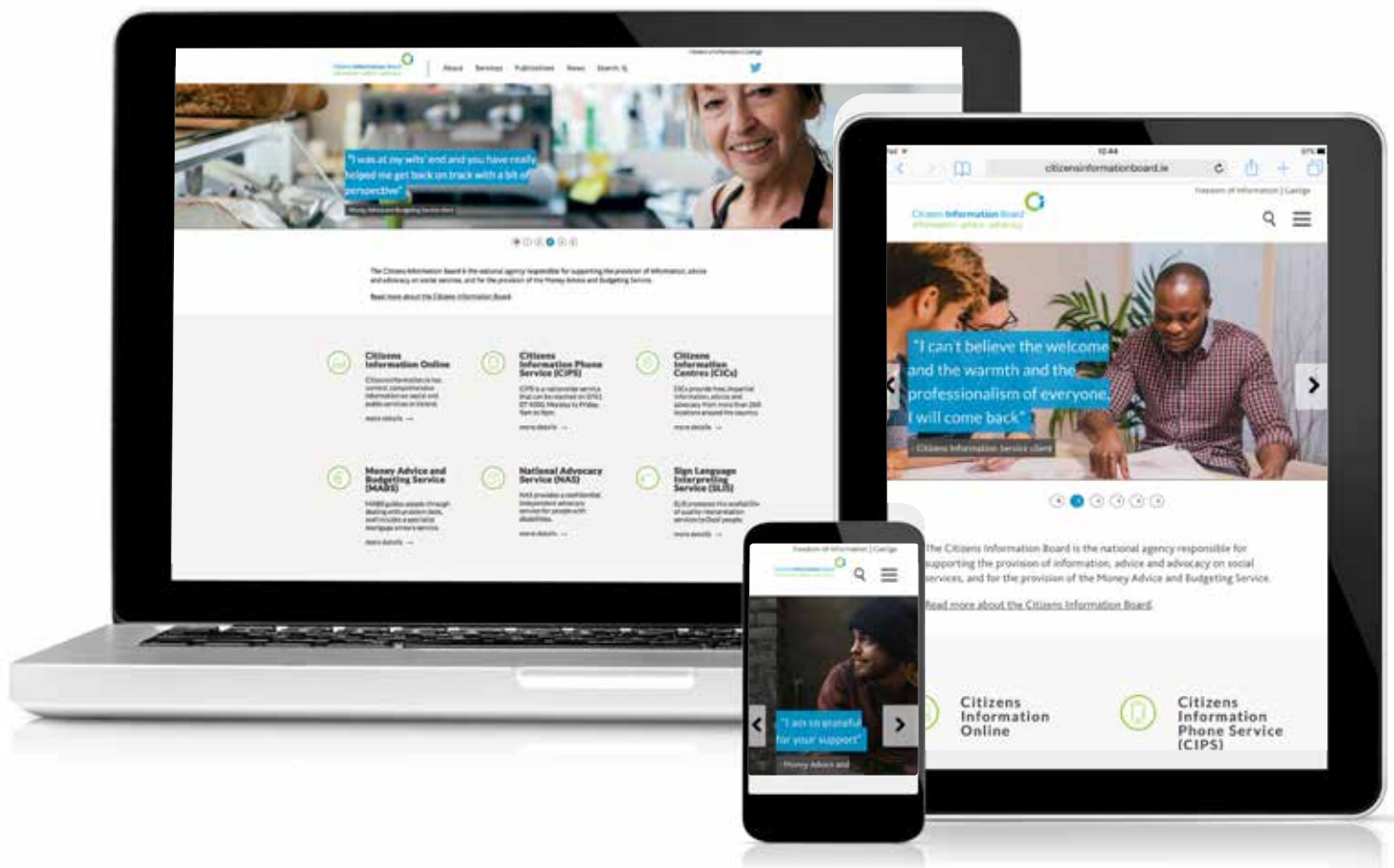
Our services

CIB delivers support in a number of different ways:

- Information is available directly to the public via the Citizens Information website (citizensinformation.ie), our microsites and publications.
- The nationwide network of **Citizens Information Services (CIS)** allows the public to meet with someone face to face and to get free, impartial and confidential information on a range of social and public services. CIS also provide an **advocacy service** to people who may have difficulties accessing their entitlements.
- The public can also seek advice and information through the **Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS)**.



- The **Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS)** offers free, confidential and independent assistance for people in problem debt or in danger of getting into problem debt.
- In addition, the **National Traveller MABS** advocates for the financial inclusion of Travellers and helps Travellers to access legal and affordable savings and credit.
- The **National Advocacy Service** for people with disabilities (NAS) meets the needs of people with disabilities in more vulnerable situations.
- The **Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS)** provides Irish Sign Language (ISL) interpreting services directly through remote interpreting, as well as arranging referrals.



Providing support

CIB works very closely with every one of these delivery services to ensure the public gets the very best service possible. We also work to ensure our services comply with best practice in all aspects of finance, governance, human resources and premises management.

CIB provides infrastructure and supports to aid the services in dealing with citizens' enquiries and linking in with local communities. We ensure a quality service by setting and monitoring quality standards, providing ICT services, equipment and infrastructure, putting in place training and expert advice, and offering a range of other supports such as websites and publications.

CIB's Target Operating Model 2020

During 2016, CIB worked with consultants from BearingPoint to generate a vision for the organisation over the next number of years. Following extensive research and consultation, a Target Operating Model was developed, which organises our services into four pillars: information, research and policy; citizens information and advocacy; money advice; and corporate services.

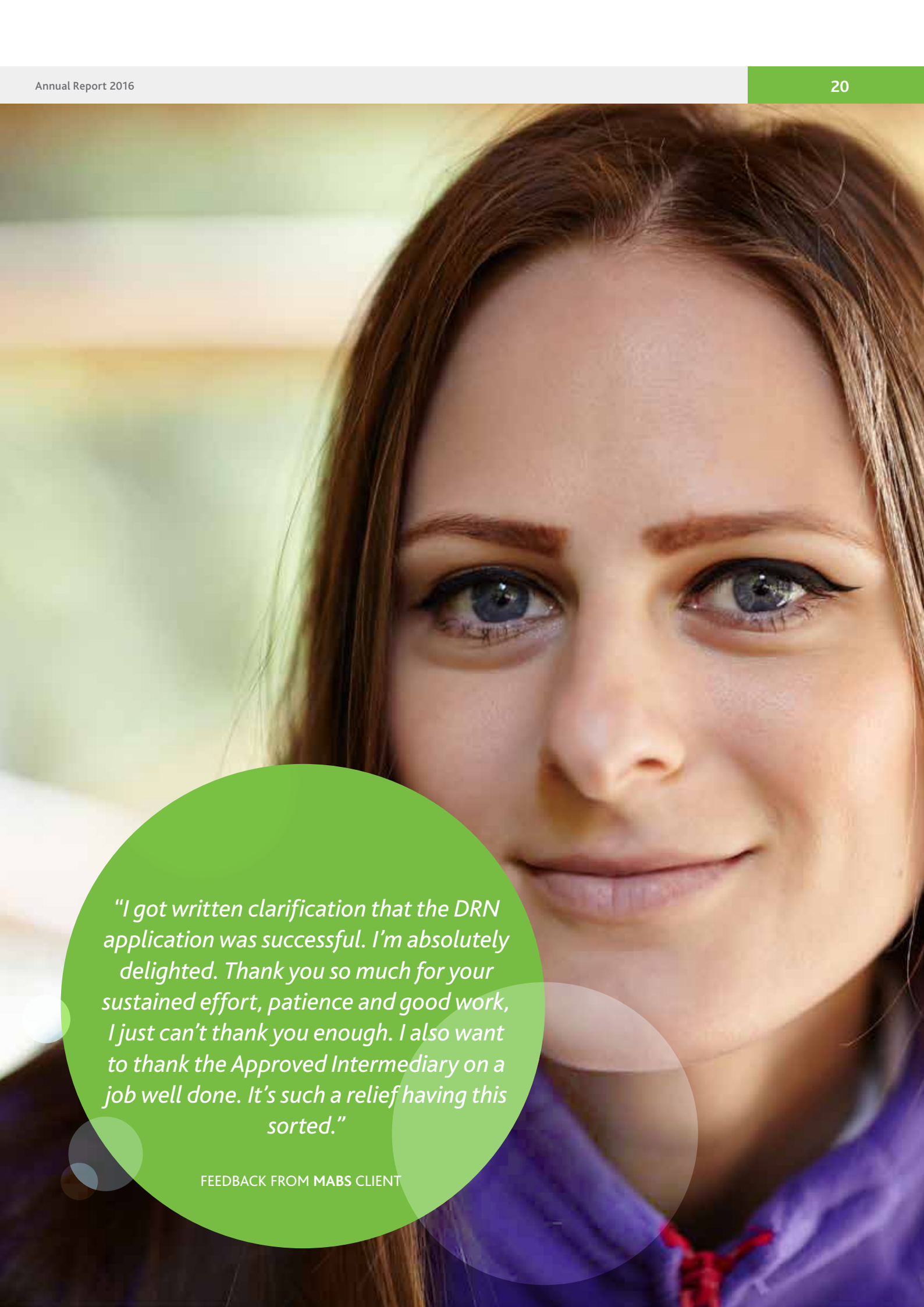
The Target Operating Model also emphasises new ways of working, including cross-pillar projects and the implementation of a broader research function to underpin all our work. CIB will be working throughout 2017 and 2018 to implement these four pillars to ensure that our services remain as current and as comprehensive as possible.

Governance

CIB has set out a comprehensive financial control and reporting framework for delivery services that receive an operational grant to ensure that appropriate services are provided in return for the funding.

Service agreements between CIB and each of our delivery services (98 separate legal entities)¹ clearly set out the commitments both sides have made to each other. These agreements include delivery, governance, financial controls, HR practices,

¹ 42 Citizens Information Services and the Citizens Information Phone Service. 51 MABS companies, National Traveller MABS and MABSndI, the National Advocacy Service and the Sign Language Interpreting Service.



"I got written clarification that the DRN application was successful. I'm absolutely delighted. Thank you so much for your sustained effort, patience and good work, I just can't thank you enough. I also want to thank the Approved Intermediary on a job well done. It's such a relief having this sorted."

FEEDBACK FROM MABS CLIENT

reporting guidelines, evaluation and monitoring. Our internal audit process makes recommendations that are used to update and improve compliance with the governance and reporting requirements.

We also provide support for the governance of the delivery services. These supports include employer and staff handbooks and guidelines on recruitment, including the drafting of employment contracts. Delivery services can also access a separate structure for industrial relations and human resource advice and support and a Professional Trustee service for their occupational pension schemes (funded by CIB). An Employee Assistance Programme is available to all delivery services. We also provide training for the boards of management of delivery services.

CIB's CEO appointed to Board of Legal Services Regulatory Authority

The Chief Executive of the Citizens Information Board, Angela Black, was appointed to the Board of the newly formed Legal Services Regulatory Authority in 2016. The role of the LSRA is to establish independent regulation of the legal profession, to improve access and competition, make legal costs more transparent and ensure adequate procedures for addressing consumer complaints.



Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality, Frances Fitzgerald TD, with the Board of the new Legal Services Regulatory Authority.

Staff

At the end of 2016, CIB had 67.6 Whole Time Equivalent staff operating from offices in Dublin, Cork, Kilkenny, Limerick and Galway.

Draft Financial Statements

At the time of writing, the annual draft financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2016 report €50,712,465 in income and €49,813,846 in expenditure. The financial statements have been prepared in the form prescribed by section 22 of the Comhairle Act 2000 and in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles. The financial statements will be audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General and will be published on citizensinformationboard.ie when this audit is complete.

2015-2018 Strategic Plan: Citizens First

Our three-year strategic plan for the period 2015-2018 takes a “Citizens First” approach to our work, and aims to ensure that CIB and our delivery services meet the needs of citizens in the most effective way possible. We want to better understand the needs of citizens and to respond as effectively as possible to those needs.

Over the period of the plan we aim to:

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

Our priorities in this strategy are:

- To provide high quality consistent services to citizens, supported by robust quality assurance mechanisms
- To revise the structures of CIS and MABS to better serve the citizen by improving management structures and governance, maximising effective use of resources and ensuring consistent quality of services
- To provide targeted interventions to support the needs of our citizens in very vulnerable situations through specialist services

- To improve awareness of the range of services provided by CIB and our delivery services particularly with regard to accessibility of services to citizens
- To highlight issues of concern so that policy and administration of public services is continually enhanced
- To continue to develop our staff, volunteers and board members through appropriate supports, with a particular emphasis on the key role of volunteering

2016 Developments

Once again, 2016 was a busy year for CIB and its delivery services in fulfilling the six main aims of our 2015-2018 Strategic Plan.

Reorganisation of our delivery services

In late 2016, the Board of CIB decided to proceed with reorganising our delivery services at the governance level. A subcommittee was formed to investigate possible regional structures and subsequently recommended a structure with eight companies in the CIS network and eight companies in the MABS network. During 2017 an implementation group will be working towards the deployment of this new regional model.

Quality of Information

In 2016, a new standardised procedure on conducting Quality of Information Reviews was developed and circulated to Citizens Information Services, along with an accompanying Quality of Information Review Form. Workshops were held with Development Managers in Cork, Carlow, Sligo and Dublin to discuss the implementation of this procedure and to identify any further training needs. Feedback has been compiled and will assist in developing further resources to support implementation. A new standardised procedure relating to assisting customers with online applications was also circulated to CIS in 2016. This brings the total number of Standardised Procedures developed by the Quality Team to support CIS' provision of consistent, high-quality services to 16.

Training

Fifty-seven CIS learners received the QQI Advanced Certificate in Information, Advice and Advocacy at an Awards Ceremony (Level 6) at the Croí Centre in the Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown (ITB), in November 2016. Another four CIS learners received a QQI Component Certificate for completing a number of Information, Advice and Advocacy Practice (IAAP) modules.



Learners who achieved the QQI Advanced Certificate in 'Information, Advice and Advocacy' are pictured at the Awards Ceremony in the ITB with staff members from CIB and ITB.

In 2016, the ITB redesigned and launched a Level 6 Information Provision and Advocacy Practice (IPAP) Programme, a replacement for IAAP. The first semester began in September 2016, with 75 learners taking part.

In 2016, the CIB Training Team developed the Essential Training for Information Providers (ETIP) pilot programme. This 18-week programme combined online lessons on core information topics with tutorials and virtual classroom sessions. It began in April 2016. In November 2016, 80 learners received CIB Certificates of Completion.

A new set of interactive resources was developed to support the delivery of the New

Information Providers Induction Training 2016. These cover nine different topic areas and are available on CIB's Learning Hub.



Screenshot of CIB's Learning Hub, a key eLearning resource for Citizens Information Services.

The online application form for the CIB National Calendar of Training Events was introduced in 2016, and allowed learners to apply for calendar courses through the CIB Learning Hub. A total of 607 CIS staff and 87 members of the voluntary and community sector attended the 39 events during the spring and autumn calendar periods.

We continued to develop our eLearning initiative, with two of the calendar courses delivered by eLearning in 2016: "Responding to Queries on PAYE, PRSI and USC" and "Immigrants' Rights and Entitlements". Each consisted of topic content being delivered through three virtual classroom sessions together with a number of specially developed eLearning elements.

IBEC, on behalf of CIB, delivered a Dublin Institute of Technology-accredited training programme, Practical Management Skills, to 39 participants. This programme was run over four days and proved highly successful.

PR & Promotions

A key aim of the strategy programme is to promote our services to the public. Our websites (citizensinformation.ie, mabs.ie and citizensinformationboard.ie) provide easy access for people to get information about all our services, including the CIS, MABS, the National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities (NAS) and the Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS).

Clear signage to both CIS and MABS locations strengthens our brand awareness among the public. We also strive to partner with the local community wherever possible, and engage in local promotional events and activities such as leaflet drops. To help promote our services, CIB provides a range of marketing materials to services, including posters, leaflets, pens and roll-up banner stands.

A Know Your Rights column distributed by the CIB information team regularly appears in local print media and acts as a catalyst for numerous local radio slots.

National Campaigns

CIB also manages communications campaigns at national level to promote awareness of our services and to actively encourage the public to look for help and advice if they need it. Some of our activities in this area include radio advertisements, print advertisements, material made available in health outlets and digital partnerships with key websites.

Our services are also promoted annually at national events, such as the National Ploughing Championships, the Over 50s Show in the RDS, and the Which Course Exhibition in Croke Park.



Outside the Citizens First marquee at the National Ploughing Championships are from left Michelle O'Hara, Manager, Carlow CIS, Susan Ryan, Manager, Offaly CIS, Minister Varadkar, Mary Errity, Money Advice Co-Ordinator, Offaly MABS and Noel O'Meara, CIB.

Key partnership initiatives in 2016 include the Green Ribbon Mental Health Campaign, the HSE whatsupmum.ie Information Campaign, and the Insolvency Service of Ireland (ISI) Information Campaign.

Media Coverage

CIB actively engages with the media to highlight the value and importance of our services. For example, in October 2016, there was extensive coverage of the official launch of Abhaile, the Free Mortgage Arrears Support service. This highlighted the pivotal role of MABS as the gateway to this State-funded service.

Social Policy Reports

One of the six priorities in CIB's three-year strategic plan is to highlight issues of concern so that policy and administration of public services is continually enhanced. The services funded and supported by CIB are in a unique position, as they are dealing with the everyday queries from the public regarding important social policies. In some cases, a particular query may be indicative of an underlying difficulty or concern with a policy, practice or piece of legislation. This is submitted to CIB as a Social Policy Return.

The feedback that CIB channels from services users, via CIS, MABS and NAS services, to relevant Government departments and other agencies is of particular importance given CIB's statutory role in providing information on the effectiveness of the policies and practices that affect people's lives.

During 2016, the content, nature and extent of this feedback can be considered particularly important as the Irish economy continued its recovery – and as families, people in work and seeking work, carers, people with disabilities and older people, migrants and those experiencing unsustainable debt continued to seek assistance from CIB-funded information, money advice and advocacy services across the country.

During 2016, 4,324 Social Policy Returns were submitted to CIB (3,729 from CIS and 595 from CIPS), which is a 14% increase on the 2015 figure. Some 56% of these returns highlighted administrative or operational issues around access to payments or services, indicating that operational matters remain a key concern for people accessing benefits. The remaining returns were focused on policy anomalies or gaps in the provision of services. Much of the evidence submitted by services in relation to policy concerns related to social welfare matters. Other categories with a significant number of returns included housing, health, and money and tax.

In 2016, CIB made 19 submissions to a range of Government departments and policy fora on a diverse range of topics such as the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, the National Medical Card Unit Strategic Plan, women on low pay, the Mortgage to Rent Scheme and a review of long-term care.

To keep services updated and informed on policy matters, CIB provides training directly to services and publishes a bi-monthly newsletter, Social Policy Update, which provides information on both CIB and national social policy news, activities and resources.



PROVIDING INFORMATION - WEBSITES & PUBLICATIONS

"The Information Officers explained the rules for getting Disability Allowance in such a way that I could fully understand it for the first time."

FEEDBACK FROM CIS CLIENT

Citizensinformation.ie

Our key information website, citizensinformation.ie, provides public service information for Ireland. The public can use the site to find out about their rights and entitlements. The site is also the primary information source for information providers in Citizens Information Services and the Citizens Information Phone Service, as well as providing useful information for officers in the Money Advice and Budgeting Service, and other organisations.

In 2016, citizensinformation.ie recorded more than 19.3m visits, more than 53.5m pageviews and an average of 911,887 unique visitors per month.

Citizensinformation.ie currently carries more than 1,300 documents in English, a similar number of documents in Irish and a range of documents in Polish, Romanian and French.

Some of the busiest pages on citizensinformation.ie in 2016 included:

- Irish citizenship through birth or descent
- Applying for an Irish passport
- Visa requirements for entering Ireland
- Renewing an Irish passport
- State Pension (Contributory)

We work with the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on the technical side of citizensinformation.ie. We also syndicate social welfare information from citizensinformation.ie to the website of the Department of Social Protection, welfare.ie.

Keepingyourhome.ie

Keepingyourhome.ie is a microsite carrying information for people who are worried about mortgage repayments or who are in mortgage arrears. Keepingyourhome.ie also hosts the details of more than 1,300 accountants who can provide advice on mortgage resolution proposals.

In 2016, the site recorded 63,453 visits, 144,541 pageviews and an average of 3,545 unique visitors per month.

The busiest pages on the website in 2016 were:

- Overview for homeowners
- Mortgage Arrears Resolution Process (MARP)
- Selling your home

Assistireland.ie

Assistireland.ie provides information on assistive technology (aids and appliances) for older people and people with disabilities in Ireland. The site includes a large products directory containing details of more than 6,500 products that are designed to help people to live independently. Each product listing includes details of suppliers of that product. More than 200 new products were added to the website in 2016.

Assistireland.ie also has an extensive information section that provides general information on assistive technology. Examples of popular documents in this area include our documents on personal alarms and telecare and on apps for people with disabilities. In 2016, new documents were added in relation to suppliers of footwear products and vehicle adaptations and driving.

In 2016, assistireland.ie recorded 507,730 visits, more than 1.8m pageviews and an average of 29,421 unique visitors per month. The assistireland.ie support service dealt with more than 1,200 queries by telephone, email and SMS.

Some of the busiest sections on assistireland.ie in 2016 included:

- Apps for people with disabilities and older people
- Products for people who are blind or who have low vision
- Products in relation to personal care

Gettingbacktowork.ie

Gettingbacktowork.ie is a microsite that aims to provide information to jobseekers and people who are interested in starting a business. Gettingbacktowork.ie recorded 44,548 visits in 2016, along with 104,411 pageviews and an average of 2,929 unique users per month.

The busiest pages on gettingbacktowork.ie in 2016 included:

- Overview: benefits and work
- Jobseeker's Allowance
- Funding for education and training

Healthcomplaints.ie

During 2016, CIB continued to participate in the cross-organisational Health Complaints initiative chaired by the Office of the Ombudsman, along with the HSE, CORU, the Mental Health Commission, the Medical Council, the Irish Patients Association and a number of other organisations in the health and social services sector.

In December 2016, responsibility for the healthcomplaints.ie website passed from the Citizens Information Board to the Office of the Ombudsman.

Citizensinformationboard.ie

Citizensinformationboard.ie is CIB's 'corporate' website. It aims to set out the work of CIB and its delivery services, and serves as a base for CIB to publish documents under a Freedom of Information publication scheme.

Mabs.ie

In late 2016, CIB rebuilt and redesigned the mabs.ie 'corporate' website. Mabs.ie includes budgeting and self-help tools, as well as a wide range of resources for people experiencing problem debt, including mortgage arrears. The new website is fully responsive to different devices such as smartphones and tablets and features more modern coding with the use of HTML5 and CSS3.

Publications

CIB publishes a range of information leaflets each year. We also publish advocacy, research and social policy reports to highlight and analyse issues identified by our services.

We aim for high levels of accessibility in our publications, including in the use of language, colour contrast, font size, paper coating and alternative formats. Most of the leaflets we produced in 2016 were printed by the Revenue Print Centre.

All our publications are available across the Citizens Information network. They are widely distributed to other service providers and information providers for display in public offices. These include Government departments and statutory agencies, MABS offices, local social welfare offices and health offices, TDs and Senators, the voluntary and community sector and other local networks.

PDF versions of all publications are available on citizensinformationboard.ie – most publications are also available as eBooks. The leaflets themselves are linked through QR codes to regularly updated information on the citizensinformation.ie website (see citizensinformation.ie/guides).

Benefits and Taxes 2016 wallchart and leaflet

The Benefits and Taxes 2016 wallchart and leaflet summarise benefits in 2016 with comprehensive tables of rates and income thresholds.

Information for school leavers 2016

The Information for school leavers leaflet was published in March 2016 and distributed to schools around the country. It covers a range of topics that are relevant to school leavers, including options for education and training, social welfare entitlements, tax and employment law.

Guide to entitlements for over sixties 2016

The Guide to entitlements for over sixties leaflet was published in May 2016 and provides an overview of entitlements for older people.

Guide to entitlements for people with disabilities 2016

The Guide to entitlements for people with disabilities leaflet was published in June 2016 and provides an overview of entitlements for people with disabilities.

Information for those affected by bereavement 2016

Published in July 2016, the Information for those affected by bereavement leaflet provides a guide to the practical and legal matters that may arise following a bereavement and includes information on the financial supports available for those who have recently been bereaved.

Know Your Rights columns

Each month we produce four question-and-answer “Know Your Rights” columns. In 2016, these short, informative pieces included content on part-time work and social welfare payments, Garda vetting, Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance and help for people in mortgage arrears. The columns are published widely in newspapers across the country.

Relate

Relate is our monthly journal covering legislation and developments in the broad social services and social policy areas. During the year, Relate covered a wide range of topics including Irish citizenship and Irish passports, data protection, nullity, separation, divorce and dissolution in Ireland, buying a house, residential tenancies, the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 and fees and supports for third-level education.

CITIZENS INFORMATION SERVICES

*"Only for you,
I wouldn't have won
my appeal."*

FEEDBACK FROM CIS CLIENT

Citizens Information Services (CIS) allow callers to access face-to-face information on public and social services on a drop-in basis. There are Citizens Information Centres right across Ireland, and these are supported by outreach locations and a mobile service.

Each CIS is a limited company with a voluntary board of management made up of representatives from local community and voluntary organisations, representatives of the statutory sector and, in many cases, volunteer information providers.

2016 in Brief

In 2016, CIS helped over 607,000 people and answered over a million queries, representing an increase on 2015 (2% in number of queries). Income support and social welfare remains the dominant query subject, while housing-related queries saw a significant increase on 2015.

Where nationality was recorded, 22% were non-Irish nationals, up from 19% in 2015. This data indicates the continued importance of CIS as an information service for migrants.

CIS continued to play a key part in helping CIB make social policy submissions, making 3,729 social policy returns in 2016, a 22% increase on 2015. Over half of these returns related to social welfare – 55% (2,045). Other categories with a significant number of returns included housing, health, money and tax and moving country.

CIS also rolled out a number of new developments and initiatives. These included an increase in staffing levels for the first time in a number of years following a successful bid by CIB to the Department of Social Protection for additional resources. These included additional information officer posts and advocacy positions as part of the pilot Dedicated Advocacy project.

Key focuses in 2016 included a review of the National Strategy on Volunteers in CIS and the development of a new Advocacy Strategy for the network. New information quality reviews were introduced following on from recommendations in the Eustace Patterson research on information processes and outcomes for clients.

Staffing, Locations & Finance

In 2016, CIB funded and supported 42 Citizens Information Services to provide information, advice and advocacy services throughout Ireland. The operational grants paid to CIS totalled €13.19 million. Citizens Information is delivered to the public from 219 locations nationwide. Fifty of these locations operate on a full-time basis, 63 are part time and 106 are fixed outreaches.

40th anniversary celebrations

A number of Citizens Information Centres celebrated 40 years of service in 2016. These were Athlone CIC, part of Westmeath CIS; Dundrum CIC, which forms part of Dun Laoghaire Rathdown CIS; Naas and Newbridge CICs, which form part of South Kildare CIS; and Skerries CIC, which forms part of Fingal CIS.



Pictured at the 40th anniversary celebrations of Dundrum CIC are, left to right, Laetitia Lefroy, Delores Leavey and Marie Denvir with An Cathaoirleach Cormac Devlin and Gerry Ashe, Chairperson Dun Laoghaire Rathdown CIS.



Pictured at the 40th anniversary celebrations of Skerries CIC are, left to right, Andrew McCann, Development Manager, Brendan Ryan TD, Helen Fullam (founding member), Frances McDonagh (founding member), Cllr Tony Murphy (Deputy Mayor), Mary Conway (Skerries Community Association).

The Mobile Information Unit

The Citizens Information Mobile Information Unit spent 20 weeks on the road in 2016. It travelled the Atlantic seaboard from West Cork to Mayo including stopovers in Kerry and Clare. The purpose of the Mobile Information Unit is to deliver a CIS service to areas of the country that are less populous and more rural. In 2016, its usage focused on the rural parts of West Cork, Clare, Kerry and Mayo but it also paid visits to Dublin North West, Wicklow, Ballyfermot and Carlow.



Pictured: Celia Casey in Killaloe speaking with Paul Ryan, Information Officer, Ennis CIC

Staffing

In 2016, it was possible for the first time in many years to increase the staffing numbers in CIS following a successful application to the DSP for additional funds. Four new Administrator posts and nine new Information Officer posts were created, all on two-year fixed-term contracts. The total number of employees in Citizens Information Services is now 280 (189.5 whole-time equivalent posts). There are 225 Scheme Workers in 124.5 whole-time equivalent posts and 1,079 Volunteers (representing 120 whole-time equivalent posts). The new administrator and Information Officer posts were allocated to services identified as having the most critical staffing needs.

Callers and queries

There were 607,913 callers to CIS during 2016, representing a very slight increase on caller numbers for 2015 (607,286). The demand pattern for CIS has been maintained at over 600,000 callers annually, and over the past three years, services have dealt with the information, advice and advocacy needs of over 1.8 million people.

The total number of queries dealt with by services in 2016 was 1,013,046, representing an increase of 2% compared with 2015. This is the first time the number of queries recorded exceeded the one million figure in the past five years.

Almost four fifths of callers (79%) contacted the CIS in person, 20% by telephone and 1% by email.

Client Profiles

Age

Information was recorded for 73% (443,748) of callers in 2016. Where age was recorded, 47% were in the 26-45 age group; 34% in the 46-65 age group; 14% were 66 years or over and 5% were 25 years or under.

Gender

Callers to CIS were predominately female (57%), with males making up 38% of callers. 5% were couples.

Callers by Nationality

Nationality was recorded for 67% of callers (407,405) during 2016. Where nationality was recorded, 78% (317,347) of callers were Irish and 22% were non-Irish nationals (90,058), up from 19% in 2015. 12% (47,998) of callers were from the EU and 10% (42,060) were from non-EU countries. The number from non-EU countries increased from 35,842 in 2015, an increase of 17%. Callers came from a total of 215 countries, up from 210 the previous year. The usage data indicates the continued importance of CIS as an information service for migrants.

Time Spent with Callers

Services recorded that they responded to 268,325 callers (44%) in 10 minutes and under (down from 46% in 2015). 230,424 (40%) took 11-20 minutes. 86,650 (14%) took 21-40 minutes, 22,128 (4%) took 41-90 minutes and 386 took 90 minutes or more to deal with a query. This was the first year that queries taking 90 minutes or more were recorded separately. Combining those queries that took a longer time to deal with shows both the complex nature of some of the work and the needs of callers presenting to services.

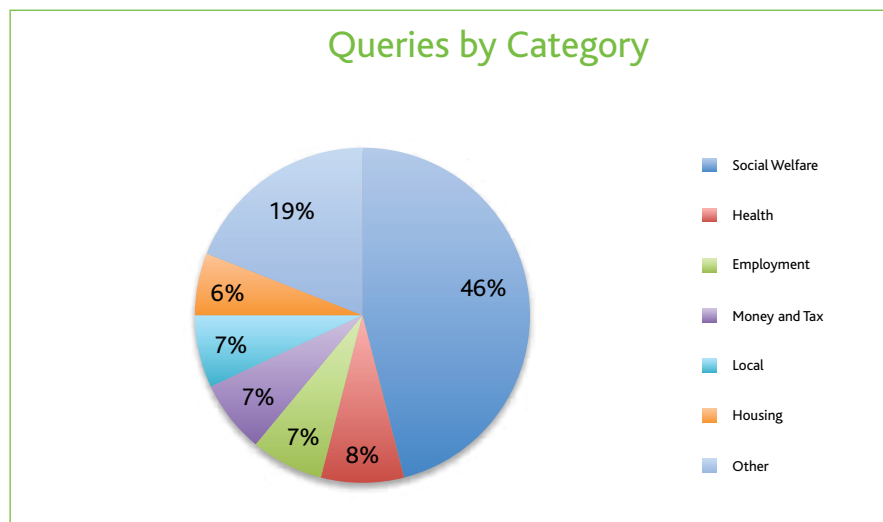
Query Topics and Trends

All queries to CIS are recorded on the Oyster database. The types of queries dealt with by services have remained broadly similar year on year, with the top categories of social welfare, health, housing, employment, and money and tax representing most of the queries from the public, as well as a range of local issues.

Social welfare related queries consistently form the largest category of queries (462,738) and the number of queries increased in 2016.

The next highest query categories were Health (82,290, or 8% of queries), Housing (75,435, or 7% of queries), Employment (71,463, or 7%), Local (69,326, or 7%), Money and Tax (56,802 queries, or 6%).

Other categories in order of query numbers were: justice; travel and recreation; moving country; birth, family and relationships; education and training; consumer affairs; death and bereavement; environment; and government in Ireland.



Single Queries

Medical Cards continue to be the highest single query area that presented to services in 2016. The ten top single payments/schemes are outlined below.

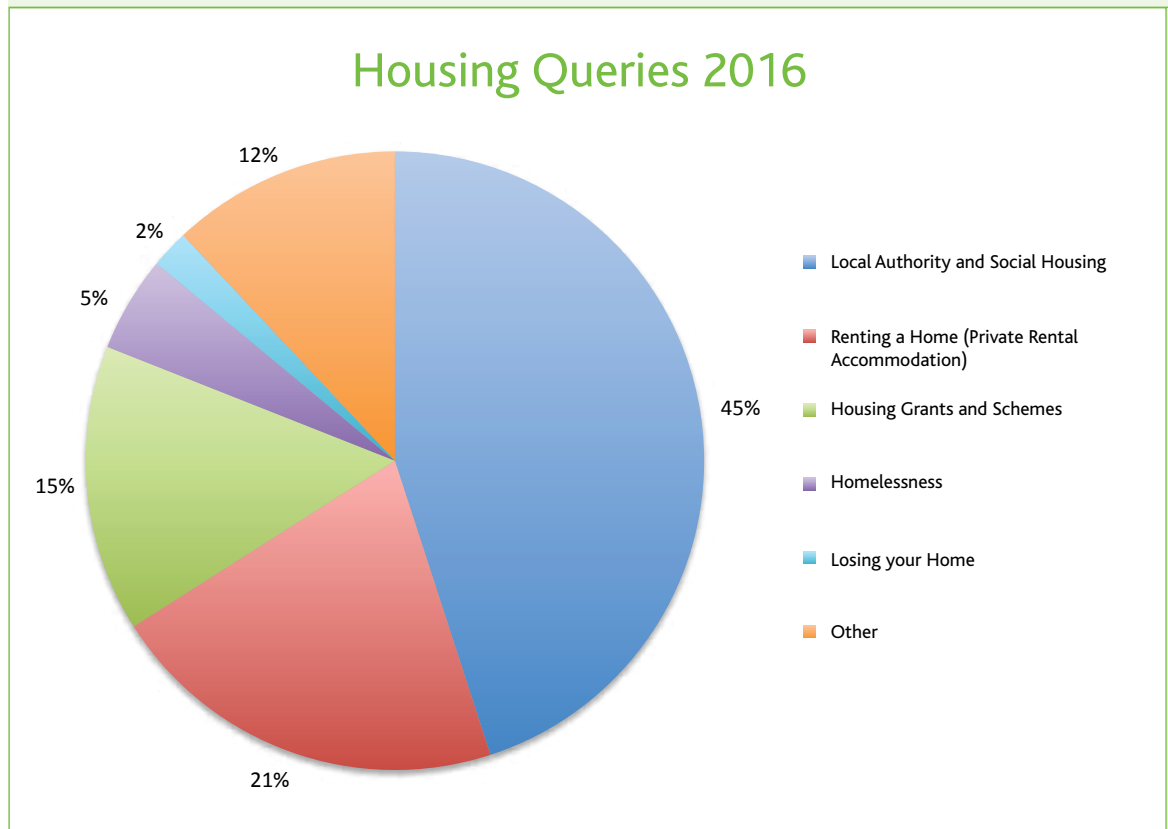
Single Issue or Payment	Query Numbers
Medical cards	54,928
State Contributory Pension	34,756
Jobseeker's Allowance	34,179
Carer's Allowance	30,931
Disability Allowance	29,862
Family Income Supplement	26,865
Household Benefits Package	26,160
Legal Aid and Advice	22,024
Rent Supplement	20,198
Applying for Local Authority/Social Housing	18,388

Illness Benefit, Fuel Allowance, Jobseeker's Benefit, income tax credits and reliefs, State Pension (Non-Contributory), free travel, Supplementary Welfare Allowance, Irish citizenship, passports, Invalidity Pension and One Parent Family Payment all received more than 10,000 queries each.

Key Issue: Housing

Housing queries have increased very significantly, reflecting the ongoing housing crisis in Ireland. There were 75,435 queries about Housing in 2016 (7% of all queries), up from 59,205 queries in 2015 and 54,033 in 2014. This represents a 27% increase on 2015 housing queries. This figure does not include 20,198 queries about Rent Supplement, which are included in the Social Welfare data. The total number of overall queries related to Housing is therefore 95,633, a significant

increase from 84,230 in total in 2015. The breakdown in housing queries can be seen in the table below:



34,210 (45%) of these were in relation to local authority and social housing, significantly up from 23,856 in 2015, which in turn was an increase on 14,792 queries (27%) in 2014. Within the local authority and social housing category, applying for local authority or social housing accounted for over half the queries (18,388), followed by 10,514 in relation to Housing Assistance Payment.

15,669 (21%) of housing queries were dealt with in relation to Renting a Home – private rental accommodation, the majority of which were to do with tenant and landlords' rights and obligations. This is an increase of almost 22% in queries relating to the private rented sector – up from 12,870 queries in 2015.

15% (11,608) of housing queries were in relation to Housing Grants and Schemes. Many of the housing queries dealt with by services were in relation to vulnerable people in need of additional support.

3,377 were specifically about homelessness or the threat of homelessness. A further 442 queries were dealt with regarding emergency accommodation and 1,162 queries were dealt with under the heading Losing Your Home.

Where do callers go from our services?

Referrals were made by CIS to a broad range of agencies. Just over 5% of clients (32,969) were referred to other agencies. Of those referrals, 20% (6,525) were to Free Legal Advice Centres (FLAC), 7% (2,304) to a solicitor, 5% (1,701) to a local support group/service provider and 4% each to the Workplace Relations Commission (1,427), MABS (1,400), Threshold (1,219) and the Legal Aid Board (1,175).

Over half of all referrals (52%) were to a large number of other national and local organisations, showing the extent to which CIS are involved in networking and in supporting callers with specific needs. Other agencies referred to include: Intreo (974), Local Authority (870), Workplace Relations (543), Residential Tenancies Board (600), Chartered Accountants Voluntary Advice (CAVA) (465), Citizen Application Support Service (CASS) (450), Local Employment Service (439), Immigrant Council of Ireland (384), and Treoir (379)².

Social Policy

An important focus in CIS is to support and develop social policy returns. Through interaction with their clients, the staff in the CIS are in a great position to identify and highlight issues that are of concern to the CIS users. When information providers feel that a query has implications for social policy, they complete a social policy return (SPR)³. These indicative cases play a key part in supporting CIB in making submissions, pointing towards topics to be researched and providing evidence on administrative and policy-related concerns on a wide range of issues. SPRs are also used in training Information Providers in developing the case evidence needed to highlight issues of concern to policy makers.

There were 3,729 social policy returns from CIS for January - December 2016, a 22% increase on the 3,056 SPRs received by CIB in 2015. The majority of social policy returns related to social welfare – 55% (2,045). Other categories with a significant number of returns included housing, health, money and tax and moving country.

² Services also made referrals locally to Local Development Companies, County Enterprise Boards and to a range of organisations in relation to housing and homelessness in addition to the ones listed above.

³ When a CIS identifies a policy issue that it is coming across repeatedly and/or that it considers particularly serious in its impact, it sends in a short indicative policy report - focused on brief case study evidence - to CIB. This is known (and referred to in this report) as a social policy return (SPR).

56% of SPRs submitted in 2016 highlighted administrative or operational issues that people had in trying to access a payment or service, and 37% of SPRs were focused on what were perceived to be policy anomalies or gaps in the provision of services. 7% were classified as 'other' – this classification was removed during the year to make reporting more accurate.

Social Policy Returns under the heading of social welfare were concentrated on the following areas: disability and illness; families and children; unemployed people; supplementary welfare schemes; and carers.

As in 2015, housing issues featured significantly throughout the year – Rent Supplement, applying for local authority or social housing, Housing Assistance Payment and the risk of homelessness due to escalating rents. This indicates the continuing difficulties with private rented accommodation, the role of the RS/HAP payments, and the knock-on effect on social housing.

The vast majority of health-related SPRs are focused on medical cards.

Advocacy

Advocacy work continues to grow as a core part of the CIS service offer. In 2016, 10,091 Once Off Advocacy interventions were completed, an increase of almost 9% from 9,267 in 2015 and 8,245 in 2014. From the 10,091 Once Off Advocacy interventions, 1,300 clients had an Advocacy Case opened on advocacycase.ie during 2016. This compares with 1,160 new cases opened in the previous year.

In total, 2,366 Advocacy Cases were dealt with by services in 2016, representing an increase from 2,224 in 2015. 1,036 were cases that were open at the start of 2016. 1,331 cases were closed during the period January – December 2016.

61% of cases open during this period were social welfare-related, similar to 60% in 2015. Consistent with information and advice queries, social welfare cases far outnumber other advocacy case issues. The next highest number of advocacy cases opened in 2016 was employment related (19%), representing a significantly high percentage of advocacy related work in the CIS context. This was followed by housing (8%), and consumer affairs, moving country, and health at 3% each.

Advocacy cases can be very time consuming and can involve many actions over a prolonged period.

Advocacy Pilot Project

The dedicated Advocacy Pilot Project is in operation since October 2016. The aim of the Project is to trial new positions entitled Dedicated Advocacy Officers within the CIS structure over a two-year period and to evaluate whether this delivery model enhances the provision of advocacy services to those who need additional support to access their rights and entitlements.

Five CIS were selected to host these new posts following an open competition. The intention is to increase the CIS delivery of advocacy and in particular to support customers at formal/ complex hearings and appeals processes.



Attendees pictured at the ASW Conference, Dublin, March 2016

Each Dedicated Advocacy Officer will focus their advocacy work on a specialist area, such as housing, social welfare and employment and will also provide advocacy support across the full spectrum of CIS core topics.

The five host CIS – Clondalkin, Cavan, Wicklow, Cork City South and Kerry – will work with the Advocacy Team in CIB to develop standardised procedures for initial assessments, processes for managing waiting lists and will capture metrics in relation to sustainable caseloads.

Advocacy Strategy for CIS

Work on developing an Advocacy Strategy for CIS began in 2016. CIS advocacy provision has increased in services over the last number of years but it varies across the network. The aim of the strategy is to develop a single network-wide strategy to provide clarity

of CIS advocacy remit, service offer, boundaries and direction. Developing the strategy will involve a consultation survey with all CIS and other relevant stakeholders to capture information regarding the scale and nature of current advocacy provision. A Steering Group comprising CIB and CIS personnel has been established to oversee the process.

Advocacy Support Worker Programme

The aim of the Advocacy Support Worker Programme is to enhance the capacity of Citizens Information Services to deliver advocacy as part of an integrated information, advice and advocacy service to the general public and particularly to people with disabilities.

The primary role of the five Advocacy Support Workers employed across the regions is to coach and mentor CIS personnel in the processes and skills of advocacy case work, including case recording, negotiation and representation and preparation for third party complaints/hearings and appeals.

In 2016, the five ASWs provided 357 direct support visits to CIS and attended over 250 case review meetings. Seven regional Case Exchange events were facilitated by the ASW programme and in March the programme hosted an ASW Employment Law seminar supported with attendance from services throughout the network.

The ASWs attended a total of 26 hearings in 2016, these included Employment Appeals Tribunals / Workplace Relations Commission hearings, Social Welfare hearings and Residential Tenancies Board tribunal hearings.

CIS Service Developments

Quality of Information

Following on from recommendations in the Eustace Patterson research on information processes and outcomes for clients, completed in 2016, a new standardised procedure for conducting Quality of Information Reviews was developed and circulated to CIS, along with an accompanying Quality of Information Review Form. Workshops were held with Development Managers in Cork, Carlow, Sligo and Dublin to discuss the implementation of this procedure and to identify any further training needs.

Feedback has been compiled and will assist in developing further resources to support implementation. A new standardised procedure relating to assisting customers with online applications was also circulated to CIS in 2016. There are now 16 standardised procedures, developed by the Quality Team, to support CIS to provide consistent, high-quality services.

Acknowledging the Vital Role Played by CIS Volunteers

While every CIS has paid staff, since the late 1960s, volunteers have played a vital role in CIS. These volunteers ensure a valuable connection exists between each centre and the local community. As well as filling core roles as information providers, receptionists and Board or committee members, many volunteers bring professional experience to CIS too. Some of these specialties include representative advocacy, complex query support in particular areas of expertise, social policy work, PR and marketing, administration, production of newsletters, and the organisation of local events. In addition, many experienced volunteers act as local centre co-ordinators, and recruit, mentor, train, support, and roster voluntary staff.

We believe that our volunteers should be recognised for their hard work and the vital role they place in our services. Volunteers are presented with certificates and crystal bowls for five-year and ten-year voluntary service achievements, and we encourage CIS to recognise their volunteers at local events.

New Strategy for CIS Volunteers

A steering group has been established to review and revise the National Strategy on Volunteers in CIS. Volunteering resources provided by other groups and agencies were also explored. Consultation with CIS services and volunteers is a key component to inform the new strategy and this began with an online survey in October, which received over 300 responses. In December, having analysed all the responses received, plans commenced to move to the 'focus group' phase of consultation.

Training

The CIB training team provided a range of training supports to CIS in 2016, from the provision of induction training material through to Level 7 accredited training for managers. A spring and autumn training calendar were delivered and 607 CIS staff attended 39 events delivered across both calendar periods. eLearning continued to be further developed as a means of training delivery. Two courses were delivered via eLearning: "Responding to Queries on PAYE, PRSI and USC" and "Immigrants' Rights and Entitlements". A new development was the introduction of an online application form for training courses.

A new training programme for recently recruited Information Providers, Essential Training for Information Providers (ETIP), began in April. This blended learning 18-week programme combined online lessons on core information topics with tutorials and virtual classroom sessions. In November, 80 learners received CIB Certificates of Completion. Though not a formally accredited programme, it is recognised as a benchmark of competence in delivering information throughout the CIS network.



A group of learners from the Dublin centre are pictured with their 'CIB Certificates of Completion' for ETIP together with CIB and CIS staff members

Accredited Training

The final QQI Advanced Certificate in Information, Advice and Advocacy was completed in 2016 and 56 learners received a QQI Level 6 certificate and an additional four learners received a QQI Component Certificate. The IAAP is being replaced by the Higher Certificate in Information Provision and Advocacy Practice (IPAP). Delivery of IPAP is being outsourced to the Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown (ITB) following a tendering process. IPAP is designed to meet the needs of Information Providers in CIS who are required or wish to complete an accredited award. IPAP, which began in September, is a two-year programme recognised at Level 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

Practical Management Skills Training for Managers

Another new training development in 2016 was the provision of accredited training to managers who manage CIB-funded services. IBEC, on behalf of CIB, delivered a Dublin Institute of Technology accredited training programme to 39 participants comprising: 19 Development Managers, 13 MABS Money Advice Co-ordinators, 2 NAS Managers and 2 NAS Senior Advocates. This programme was run over four days with one programme delivered.

Research Report: Making an Impact – The Public Value of Citizens Information Services in Ireland

Research was commissioned by the CIS Development Managers' Network on evaluating the impact CIS have using a public service value framework. It is due to be published in 2017. It documents the wide range of services provided by CIS and the economic and social value of this work to the public. It also shows the importance of CIS in dealing with people who can't access online information or who need a face-to-face service offering advice and advocacy in relation to increasingly complex issues.

Information sessions to people with status in direct provision services

Information sessions to people living in Reception and Integration accommodation centres, who have been granted status to remain in Ireland, were held across the country in 2016. These information sessions were designed

to prepare people to make the move from direct provision accommodation to independent living. CIS took the lead role in organising them, inviting relevant voluntary and statutory bodies to participate. MABS, the Department of Social Protection, Local Authorities, Education and Training Boards, HSE and Threshold were among the presenters included. The residents who attended gave very positive feedback.

Specialist Services

All CIS provide specialist services to clients – some directly funded by CIB. Generally the CIS hosts clinics in their offices and organise referrals and appointments for clients. Specialist services provided include Free Legal Advice Centres (FLAC), Family Mediation, Threshold, Immigration advice, Focus Ireland, Citizen Application Support Service (CASS), Chartered Accountants Voluntary Advice (CAVA), Women's Aid, Ombudsman and addiction services. These services reflect the increasing complexity of queries coming into services as well as the increasing diversity of Irish society.

Louth CIS - Mental Health Publication

As part of Mental Health Awareness, Co. Louth CIS produced a booklet listing the support groups and agencies available to help people experiencing mental health issues in Co. Louth.

People Facing Homelessness

Noting the significant issue of homelessness and the increase in queries regarding housing options, Kerry CIS worked collaboratively with Kerry County Council, MABS and the Department of Social Protection to produce an information leaflet on support and advice regarding housing issues. Clare CIS, in collaboration with Clare MABS, jointly produced a similar information leaflet signposting people to agencies offering support to people at risk of losing their homes or homelessness in Co. Clare.

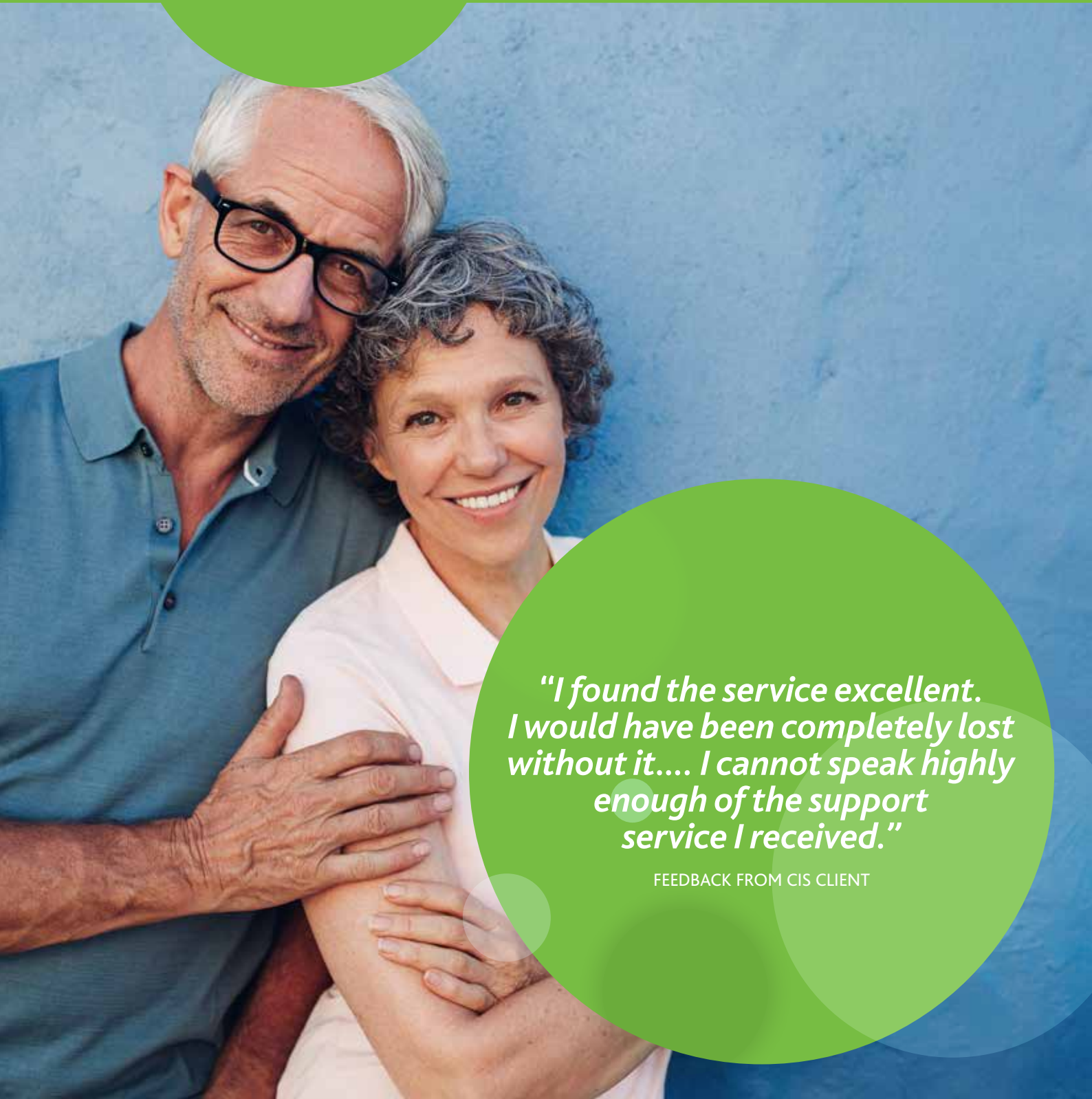
Raising Awareness of Financial Support for Students

Both West Cork CIS and Roscommon CIS held special events to raise awareness of financial supports for students. Events were held in Bantry and Macroom and contributors include the DSP, Cork Education and Training Board, Credit Unions and SUSI on Student Grants. In Roscommon, the CIS organised information sessions in secondary schools, with students and parents invited to attend. The presentation included a demonstration of the SUSI website.





CITIZENS INFORMATION PHONE SERVICE



"I found the service excellent. I would have been completely lost without it.... I cannot speak highly enough of the support service I received."

FEEDBACK FROM CIS CLIENT

The Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS) is the national Citizens Information helpline, and provides a comprehensive and confidential information service. Based in Cork, the service operates Monday to Friday from 9am to 8pm. CIPS also offers 'Live Advisor', an instant web chat service open from 9am to 5pm on weekdays, which is aimed towards people with hearing and speech difficulties.

CIPS is funded by CIB. It received a grant of just over €1.01 million in 2016.

CIPS 2016 Statistics

In 2016, CIPS information officers dealt with 139,426 telephone enquiries and responded to 1,164 Live Advisor enquiries. This compared with 153,136 telephone enquiries and 710 Live Advisor enquiries in 2015.

CIPS also responded to 737 emails in 2016, a significant increase on 2015's figure of 595 emails. However, this service will not be continued in 2017 as it impacts negatively on capacity to respond to telephone and Live Advisor enquiries. Overall, the average call wait time during 2016 was 2 minutes and 19 seconds, with a dropped call rate of 22%.

Social Welfare continues to be the main query category, accounting for 48% of total calls answered (compared with 46% in 2015). The second highest query category during 2016 was Employment (14%), followed by Money and Tax (6%) and Housing (6%).

Staff Development & Training

Quality Assurance

CIPS management ensures the quality of all its interactions with the public and with Citizens Information peers through a number of mechanisms. These include:

- A strong induction programme, and ongoing and refresher training
- In-house complex-query support
- Bi-monthly one-to-one coaching
- Call recording with assessment by Team Supervisors
- Dedicated 'non-contact' time for Information Officers for the purpose of research/learning

Peer Support Pilot

In 2016, CIPS established a pilot 'Peer Support Line'. The main function of the Peer Support Line is to provide back-up query support to volunteer information providers working in small centres who may not have an experienced Information Officer or Manager available.

The pilot began regionally in February 2016 and expanded into a national service in May 2016. By end of 2016, CIPS Information Officers had dealt with 810 peer support calls via a dedicated phone number.





THE MONEY ADVICE & BUDGETING SERVICE



*"MABS is the one service
where I felt I was given the
time and listened to without
being judged."*

FROM FROM MABS CLIENT

The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) provides a free, confidential, non-judgemental and independent service throughout the country for people with debt issues. MABS' aim is to provide people, particularly people on low incomes, with practical advice on dealing with budgetary and debt issues. MABS also provides local communities with education on budgeting and money management.

In addition to 51 local companies, MABS includes two national companies:

- MABS National Development Limited (MABSndl) is a central support service that provides technical support for case work, money management education and training to MABS companies⁴. MABSndl is responsible for the MABS national helpline.
- National Traveller MABS was established in 2005. It advocates for the financial inclusion of Travellers (and other marginalised groups) to help them access legal and affordable savings and credit.

How MABS Helps

The money advisors at MABS help clients with a wide range of personal debts and budgeting issues. Many clients have more than one sort of debt; MABS advisers take each client's case as a whole and try to find the right solution for their particular situation.

Common issues dealt with by MABS advisors include:

- Mortgage arrears
- Personal loans
- Utilities arrears
- Credit card debt
- Hire purchases
- Rent arrears
- Court fines
- Catalogue debts
- Sub-prime loans
- Legal moneylenders

⁴ The Citizen Information Board has operational responsibility for policy, executive decision making and governance.

2016 in Brief

Throughout 2016, MABS continued to engage with many people experiencing long-term mortgage arrears difficulties. The service has provided ongoing support to a number of Government initiatives to address these issues.

A significant focus was the roll-out of the Abhaile scheme from August 2016 onwards by MABSndI, the MABS Helpline and the MABS services. This scheme arranges free mortgage arrears support by providing vouchers for professional advice. There has been a high take-up of the scheme, with 3,537 vouchers issued by year end (by May 2017, more than 6,000 vouchers had been issued).

The Dedicated Mortgage Arrears Service continues to develop, with 37.5 whole time equivalent staff resources added to the MABS network over the past two years.

The policy and research area of MABS was also a priority in 2016. Two pieces of research were produced in 2016 by Waterford MABS and South Mayo MABS on Public Personal Insolvency Practitioners and the spatial dimensions of the mortgage arrears problem.

MABS dealt with 17,366 new clients in 2016, and a further 2,500 information clients. The MABS helpline had 20,832 calls.

Staffing & Finance

The MABS companies are staffed by 44.66 Money Advice Coordinators, 60.6 Administrators, 103.86 Money Advisors and 7 Relief Money Advisors – these figures are for Whole Time Equivalents.

Under the Dedicated Mortgage Arrears programme there are 26 Dedicated Mortgage Arrears Advisors and 4 Dedicated Mortgage Arrears Relief Advisors as well as a further 7.5 Money Advisors. There are an additional 16 WTE staff resources in MABS nationally compared to December 2015.

The operational grant for the 51 local MABS companies in 2016 was €16.79 million.

MABS Statistics for 2016

Client profile

In 2016, MABS saw 17,366 new clients – a similar figure to 2015 (17,302). A further 2,500 sought information about budgeting and money management from the local services.

The total active client caseload at the close of 2016 was 17,968 – an increase of 1% on the previous year.

56% of new clients were in the 41-65 age group, with 36% between 26-40. 53% were female.

22% of new clients are married with children, 19% are single and 11% are single with children. A total of 26% are separated, divorced or widowed.

52% of new clients are reliant on social welfare payments and 43% of these are in receipt of Jobseeker's payments. 26% are in receipt of disability payments and 12% in receipt of the One Parent Family Payment (OPFP). A further 31% of clients are in receipt of a wage and 5.5% are self-employed. 37% had no second income coming into the household.

The average level of recorded debt for new clients is €65,900 – a significant increase on the 2015 average (€46,700). The total amount owed by new clients to creditors at the end of 2016 (based on the debt they had when they first came to MABS) amounted to €1.14 billion with 80% owned by banks/financial institutions. Of the debt types presented to MABS, personal loans accounted for 27.7%, mortgage debts 25.8%, credit card debts 15.5% and utilities debts 14.5%. These represent over two thirds of the debt types presented to the service. Other debt types included debts to money lenders 4.4%, overdrafts 3.26%, and rent arrears 2.7%. Almost half of clients have mortgages (47%).

A further 606 clients (Approved Intermediaries (AIs) appointment system figures) met with MABS AIs in relation to a Debt Relief Notice Insolvency Solution and of these, 357 proceeded to application and approval by the courts.

Waiting Times

The average waiting time between first contact with the service and a first appointment with an advisor at the end of 2016 was 2.35 weeks, a slight decrease on the 2015 figure of 2.74 weeks. There were 371 clients nationally on the waiting list for a first appointment with a money advisor at the end of December 2016.

In 2016, MABS dealt with 2,965 emergency clients (who were seen without a waiting period), compared with 3,240 in 2015.

The MABS Helpline – 0761 07 2000

MABS Helpline advisers give advice and support on many money management and debt issues as well as providing MABS self-help materials. The Helpline received 20,832 calls in 2016, which was an increase of 8.6% on 2015. Helpline calls increased particularly in the August to November period, which is probably reflective of enquiries relating to the roll out of the Abhaile – Free Mortgage Arrears Support scheme.

Strategic Development in MABS 2016

Abhaile: Free Mortgage Arrears Support

Abhaile, which provides free mortgage arrears support, was officially launched in October 2016. The aims of the scheme are to help mortgage holders in arrears to find the best solution for them and to keep them, wherever possible, in their own homes. The scheme provides borrowers in mortgage arrears on their home with a voucher so they can avail of free advice from three different kinds of expert:

1. Personal Insolvency Practitioners (PIPs), through a panel established by the Insolvency Service of Ireland
2. Solicitors, through a panel established by the Legal Aid Board
3. Accountants, through a panel to be established by the Citizens Information Board

In order to access the scheme, the borrower must:

1. Be in mortgage arrears on their home (principal private residence)
2. Be insolvent, as defined in the Personal Insolvency Act 2012
3. Be at risk of losing their home under arrears
4. Be 'reasonably accommodated' in their home – so the costs of staying in their home are not disproportionately expensive, bearing in mind reasonable accommodation costs of the person and his/her dependents

Borrowers can access the scheme either through MABS or through a PIP, and the voucher is then valid for 90 days. MABS will prepare a Mortgage Arrears Resolution Process Standard Financial Statement (MARP SFS), or a PIP will prepare the Prescribed Financial Statement (PFS) as specified by the Insolvency Service of Ireland. One of these is required for the accountants' advice or legal advice. The scheme can also be used by PIPs to seek a court review known as section 115A appeal under the Personal insolvency Act where a proposal on the principal private residence debt has already been rejected by the creditors. The legal aid service also involves an on-duty solicitor at Circuit Court repossession proceedings.

There has been great interest in the scheme since its inception. By the end of 2016, a total of 3,537 vouchers had been issued in respect of 2,353 Principal Private Residences (with different vouchers on some residences). More than 6,000 vouchers have issued to date (May 2017).



Pictured at the launch of the Mortgage Arrears Resolution Service (Abhaile) are: Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality, Frances Fitzgerald TD; Angela Black, Chief Executive, CIB; and Minister for Social Protection, Leo Varadkar TD.

Dedicated Mortgage Arrears Service

The Dedicated Mortgage Arrears Service has continued to develop in 2016. There are now 26 Dedicated Mortgage Arrears Advisors (DMAs) throughout the country and four relief DMAs. Plus, 7.5 Money Advisor posts have been allocated to support the DMAs.

A total of 2,872 cases were handled by DMAs during 2016, with 922 discharged by year end. Of the discharged cases, 173 clients have had long-term Alternative Repayment Arrangements (ARAs) put in place; 64 have temporary short-term ARAs in place; five have secured mortgage to rent; eight have a lump sum settlement; 22 resumed paying the contractual amount; and 65 clients proceeded to repossession or voluntary sale or trade down. Of concern is the level of non-engagement by borrowers, with 255 discharged due to non-engagement.

Court Mentoring Service

The MABS Court Mentoring Service has been in place since mid-2015, but was bolstered in the second half of 2016 by the on-duty solicitor provided by the Abhaile scheme. As both services complement each other, good working relationships are being established between the court mentor and the on-duty solicitor.

Approved Intermediary Service

All 51 MABS services are registered as Approved Intermediaries for the purpose of processing Debt Relief Notices (DRN) under the Personal Insolvency Act 2012. Demand for DRN services in 2016 was similar to 2015; in total, 606 attended MABS for a pre-statutory meeting to examine their Debt Relief Notice option, and of these, 345 moved forward to application and the granting of the DRN by the courts.

The ISI and MABSndI are continuing to work on proposals to simplify the DRN process and on suggestions in relation to legislative change including reducing the post DRN supervision period from three years to one, in line with bankruptcy laws.

MABSndI Training Development in 2016

In 2016, the Training and Development Unit in MABSndI concentrated on supporting the implementation of several key services with MABS, including DMA Communities

of Practice sessions and information sessions for the Abhaile scheme. Training was also delivered in the area of Personal Insolvency, with 13 staff members completing the Ulster University Accredited ROI Insolvency module. In addition, 26 people on Cohort 3 completed the Advanced Diploma in Money Advice Practice (Ulster University).

In December 2016, CIB and MABSndI agreed to set up MABS eLearning Modules, with actions planned for the first quarter of 2017 to make changes to the system to allow for eLearning. The strategic priority for MABSndI over the next number of years will be to build a series of online learning modules, so MABS learning activities move away from reliance on face-to-face training into a blended learning approach for all staff.

MABS Policy & Research

Personal Microcredit Project – It Makes Sense Loan

In late 2013, CIB submitted a proposal to the Minister for Social Protection on the need to develop a scheme to help people on low incomes who are unable to access low cost credit and who, increasingly, are availing of money lenders. A pilot scheme was subsequently launched in November 2015. The scheme aims to move people away from the use of high cost moneylenders by giving easy access to low cost personal loans. It also aims to target groups traditionally excluded from mainstream credit and give these people the opportunity to become full credit union members.

The affordable Personal Microcredit Project – It Makes Sense Loan scheme has now been mainstreamed and was available in 78 credit unions nationwide at the end of 2016. It has since been rolled out to 105 credit unions, representing 225 sites around the country. A new website and Facebook page has been set up by the Irish League of Credit Unions to promote the scheme, www.itmakessenseloan.ie.

“The It Makes Sense loan fits very nicely with the credit union ethos. It has enabled us to reach out to members who have found themselves financially excluded and forgotten in the recent financial crisis. These loans have performed exceptionally well and have provided a path for these members to become active members of their credit union. I would encourage all credit unions to sign up and offer the initiative.”

Sean Hosford, Manager, HSSCU

“Tralee Credit Union has always been at the fore in seeking to combat moneylenders and offer financial inclusion to those in the communities we serve. The Personal Micro Credit initiative gives us the opportunity to reach those currently excluded. It gives us access to another repayment method - the household budget scheme - and for us it is part of business as usual. It is a further message that credit unions are open for business. We would encourage credit unions not yet signed up to come on board.”

Fintan Ryan, CEO, Tralee Credit Union

Waterford MABS: Research on Public PIP

Waterford MABS published their research report on a Public Personal Insolvency Practitioner (PIP) service in September 2016. In the research, the Waterford MABS PIP met with 122 MABS clients, 93 of whom continued with the research project. Of these, 66 cases progressed to application for a Debt Settlement Arrangement or Personal Insolvency Arrangement. Subsequently, 38 DSA arrangements (unsecured debts) were approved by the creditors and 16 rejected. In total, €24.4 million of debt was owed by the 122 clients who began in the project (€15.1 million secured and €9.3 million unsecured). Of the statutory and non-statutory arrangements, a total of €3,198,097 of debt write-down was achieved for 38 clients, representing an aggregate percentage write-down in these cases of almost 96%.

The report concluded that having a PIP service freely available through MABS can achieve significant results for clients. It provides leverage in creditor negotiation and client interaction for MABS generally, and complements the suite of services already provided by MABS.

South Mayo MABS: Research on Spatial Dimension of the Mortgage Arrears Crisis

With the assistance of Dr. Stuart Stamp of NUI Maynooth, South Mayo MABS conducted research on the spatial dimension to the mortgage arrears crisis. The study examined borrower demographic and socio-economic profiles, details of the properties purchased and the mortgages drawn down. It also investigated how the arrears occurred and how these have been addressed within the policy framework set out by the State.

The emerging themes strongly suggest that there is a spatial dimension to mortgage arrears, especially in terms of borrower age, household composition, property characteristics, lender profiles, mortgage drawdown, arrears persistence, housing stress and shelter poverty. The study further suggests that emerging policy developments, such as those in the Programme for a Partnership Government and Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness, need to factor in a spatial dimension and radically address affordability, power imbalance and questionable lending issues from a household perspective.

The findings suggest that reform is needed on two key policy instruments – the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (and the Mortgage Arrears Resolution Process contained within it), and the Mortgage to Rent Scheme – to make these more useful to distressed mortgage borrowers in rural areas. The establishment of publicly available supports to assist owner occupiers experiencing chronic debt in accessing bankruptcy and personal insolvency options should also be considered.

Finglas/Cabra MABS: Study on Access to Banking Facilities

A study undertaken by Finglas/Cabra MABS involving a sample of MABS clients as part of an MSc thesis examined the causes and effects of living without a current account. The findings revealed common themes in MABS clients' experiences including forced closure of accounts, penalties for cash-preferring customers, and exclusions from products and/or services. The study considered consumer protection measures, codes and legislation, and their effectiveness in addressing this particular form of financial and social exclusion.

Anniversary Celebrations

South Galway MABS celebrated its 21st Anniversary in September 2016. South Galway is a large service with its main office in Galway City and two sub-offices in Loughrea and Carraroe (supporting the Gaeltacht and the islands). It provides the complete suite of MABS services. The keynote speaker was the Minister for Social Protection, Leo Varadkar TD and CIB was represented by Fiona Coyne, Senior Manager Regional Services.

Sligo MABS celebrated its 20th Anniversary in November 2016. The event focused on the history of the service from its beginnings in 1996 to the current service offer, including the new insolvency options such as Debt Relief Notices. Speakers at the event included Tommie Gorman (RTE political correspondent and a native of Sligo), Angela Black (CEO of CIB) and a client who told her very moving story of becoming debt free with the support of Sligo MABS.




At the celebration event in Sligo MABS: Board and staff cutting the Celebration Cake for 20 year of service in the community.



Pictured from left to right at the South Galway MABS celebration: Annamarie Hume, Martin O'Brien, Nigel Hugo, Jackie O'Sullivan, Minister Leo Varadkar TD, Marie Mc Leron, Rosaleen Shaw, Clodagh Naughton and Ian Courtney.

NATIONAL TRAVELLER MABS



*"Keep up the good work
and don't stop listening and
caring when I know you
must be so busy in the job.
MABS gave me HOPE when I
thought I had lost it."*

FEEDBACK FROM MABS CLIENT

National Traveller MABS (NTMABS) highlights issues of over-indebtedness and exclusion from financial institutions among Irish Travellers and makes appropriate responses through its research and policy work. NTMABS works to establish ways for the Traveller community to access legal and affordable savings and credit, and builds capacity within the community through its education work. NTMABS acts as a support to both MABS and the Traveller community to ensure ease of access for Travellers to the service.

Key developments in 2016

Together with the Irish Traveller movement, NTMABS hosted a seminar in December 2016 to explore ways of engaging Traveller men in adult learning. A publication, "It's All About Education Work for Traveller Men", researched by Dermot Sreenan, was launched at the event. The recommendations in the report will inform actions to be taken in 2017 around community education and networking with Traveller men.

The Key Worker Programme was developed following recognition by National Traveller MABS that fear of unfamiliar institutions and organisations existed among many members of the Traveller community. The importance of word of mouth within the community was identified as a powerful means of breaking this fear. The National Traveller MABS Key Worker Evaluation report was issued in early 2016; subsequently, 72 Traveller Health Care Workers and a number of Traveller organisations have met to plan the future of the programme. A report for CIB is nearing completion.

In 2016, NTMABS also organised financial training programmes with prisoners in two locations through their participation in the Traveller Prison Initiative Steering Group.

Meetings were held during the year with the Housing Agency and Minister Simon Coveney with regard to reviewing funding for Traveller specific accommodation. The Housing Agency have committed to undertaking an internal review of the Local Authority Caravan Loan scheme.

THE NATIONAL ADVOCACY SERVICE



The National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities (NAS) is an issues-based advocacy service that is independent, confidential and free. NAS recognises the capacity of persons with disabilities to make their own decisions with the support of an independent advocate. The service works with people who are isolated, have communication differences, are inappropriately accommodated and have limited supports. NAS empowers and is directed by the people who use it.

Staff & Finances

The budget allocation for NAS in 2016 was €3,103,045. Approximately 80% of this budget was allocated to salaries. NAS operates with 1 National Manager, 4 Regional Managers, 5 Administrators, 7 Senior Advocates and 28 Advocates. A recruitment process for the contract post of Corporate Services Manager was under way at the end of 2016.

NAS operates from 31 locations nationwide and shares premises with Citizen Information Services (13), Money Advice & Budgeting Services (1), CIB (4) and others (13).

NAS can be accessed in a number of different ways:

- Direct face-to-face contact with an advocate
- Through the NAS National Number, which operates Monday to Friday 10am to 4pm
- By email, letter or other phone access (eg staff mobile phones)

NAS 2016 Statistics

NAS provided casework to 1,000 people in 2016 and provided one-off information, advice and advocacy to 1,152 people. There were circa 2,000 calls to the national line in 2016.

In 2016, 51% of referrals to NAS came from service providers and health professionals combined. Family members accounted for 16% of referrals and 11% of clients were self-referred.

NAS Statistics	2013	2014	2015	2016
People at start of Period	667	671	592	597
Total Client Numbers	1063	1013	959	921
New Cases Open in the Year	397	342	367	324
Cases closed in the year	399	423	369	380
Initial Enquiries	861	809	1288	3147
No. On Waiting List	n/a	n/a	154	141

National Enquiry Line Calls	2014	2015	2016
Calls received	1787	2153	2071
Total hours	128.35	164.47	155.96

There was an increase of 244% in 2016 on the number of initial enquires recorded. This was due to more systematic and consistent recording across the country.

In 2016, the people who accessed NAS had the following types of disability:

People with:	Cases
Intellectual disability	31.03%
Physical disability	21.54%
Mental Health difficulties	17.95%
Learning disability	13.25%
Autistic spectrum	8.89%
Sensory disability	7.35%

42% of people contacting the Service had one key issue of concern, 52% identified two to seven issues and 6% had in excess of eight. The most frequent specific issues were housing (31%), health (19%), childcare-related court cases (10%) and justice (10%). Other issues included family & relationships, social welfare, money, tax and employment.

NAS Impact

A key aim of NAS is to empower its users – in 2016, NAS supported people to become empowered in the following areas:

- 15% explored lifestyle options
- 13% supported to self-advocate
- 10% deal with being excluded from decisions
- 10% become more independent
- 8% family relationships
- 7% to develop social connections
- 5% lack of access to own money
- 5% support with self confidence
- 4% supported to improve communications
- 3% fear of complaining

NAS Access Review and Policy Development

Independent research was commissioned by CIB to identify and recommend standardised processes for use by NAS to ensure effective and timely services. The resulting report, "Access Review of NAS" by Eustace Patterson, was completed and recommended that NAS continue existing processes and made recommendations for improvements including:

- The need for a clear description of NAS that can be converted into a strong communication base document to convey consistent and accurate messages to all stakeholders along with a strong web presence.
- A modern IT system to support case work and to allow access to NAS for people with disabilities.
- Continued development and careful monitoring of work practices, including establishing methodologies to monitor and manage the growing demand for NAS.

As a result of the recommendations and in response to the constantly changing environment in which the service operates, NAS have published a tender for consultancy services for the drafting of a strategic plan. This will proceed in 2017.

The European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Quality Mark with a specific focus on customer feedback was completed and will be validated in 2017. The EFQM helps organisations to improve customer-facing services and validates existing customer service processes against a European benchmark.

NAS completed and approved a suite of new policies in 2016, including policies for Case Review, Advocacy Planning and Policy in Disclosures, Suspicions and Observations of Abuse. The NAS staff are now equipped with policies that will drive a consistent, high-quality advocacy service.



SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETING SERVICE (SLIS)



The Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS) aims to support quality interpretation services in Ireland to ensure Deaf people can access public and social services and participate as full and equal citizens.

SLIS is a limited company with charitable status, and is managed by a Board of Directors comprising representatives from key national stakeholders such as CIB, the Department of Social Protection and the Deaf community. CIB is the main funder of SLIS, with some funding coming from public and private sector organisations for interpreting services including the Irish Remote Interpreting Service (IRIS).

The Board continued implementing its key objectives during 2016:

- Promoting and advocating for the right to quality sign language interpreting services
- Development of quality standards for interpreters
- Meeting social interpreting needs
- Developing IRIS to cater for the needs of the Deaf community
- Working with HSE and health services to enhance availability of interpreting for GP and primary care appointments

Staffing & Finance 2016

At the end of 2016, SLIS had 1 manager post, 2 administration posts and 1 Whole Time Equivalent interpreter. A request was made during 2016 for an additional half-time interpreter post and this post was filled in April 2017. The SLIS grant for 2016 was €275,000.

Referral and Access Service

SLIS provides a referral service by putting booking clients (mainly public service providers) in touch with suitably qualified interpreters. In 2016, SLIS responded to 1,355 requests for support in finding interpreters. This is a 10% increase on 2015, and the highest numbers since 2011. 70% of support calls were for: health settings (37%), education (9%), and other public services (24%).

Included in the 1,355 calls are Access Referrals, where additional supports are required to persuade services to allow or book interpreters, for example for health appointments or job interviews. This figure is up 10% on 2015. In 2016, SLIS responded to 358 Access or Emergency requests from Deaf citizens.

The Irish Remote Interpreting Service (IRIS)

SLIS developed IRIS as a service to improve access to information, entitlements and rights by providing remote access to an interpreter via video link from the SLIS office. In 2016, IRIS' capacity increased by 20%, and in 2016 provided a year-round service five days a week, from 10am-4pm. A total of 3,127 interpreting assignments were carried out – an increase of over 250% on 2015's 1,223 assignments. Averaging one use a month, 293 individual Deaf people used IRIS in 2016, 46 of whom were using the service for the first time. Another 121 requests for IRIS were not filled due to the service being at full capacity. CIB allocated funding for further expansion in 2017.

In 2016, five subscribers paid for unlimited use of IRIS. Clarity on data protection remains a barrier to using IRIS for some companies.

In 2016, there were 61 IRIS appointments involving CIB delivery partners (15 CICs and 2 MABS). Six Intreo offices used IRIS in 2016. The DSP agreed to extend IRIS to 9 offices in 2016 and to all 60 offices in 2017.

An evaluation report of IRIS was published in June and launched by the Minister for Social Protection Leo Varadkar in the Deaf Village in November 2016.



Pictured discussing the IRIS evaluation report are from left: Anne Coogan, SLIS Chairperson, Minister Leo Varadkar TD and John Stewart, Manager, SLIS

The Recognition of Irish Sign Language (ISL) for the Deaf Community Bill 2016

The Recognition of Irish Sign Language (ISL) for the Deaf Community Bill 2016 proposes recognition of ISL and statutory entitlement to ISL interpreting. The Bill aims to guide public bodies in relation to ISL and sign language interpreting, provide statutory requirements for registered practitioners and continuing professional development, and regulate the provision of interpreting for individuals in addition to interpretation in different contexts (education, medical and legal).

To respond to this policy and legislation, SLIS has prepared position papers on the Bill and related issues to inform this potentially highly significant development in the sector.



APPENDIX 1: CUSTOMER SERVICE CHARTER

The Citizens Information Board provides independent information, advice and advocacy on public and social services through citizensinformation.ie, the Citizens Information Phone Service (0761 07 4000) and the network of Citizens Information Services. We are responsible for the Money Advice and Budgeting Service and provide the National Advocacy Service for people with disabilities. We put the citizen at the centre of everything we do and this Charter sets out the principles that underpin our services. You can find our Customer Service Action Plan on our website, citizensinformationboard.ie.

We are committed to...

1. Clear, comprehensive and accurate information

We will provide clear and detailed information about public and social services to help you identify your needs and access your entitlements.

2. Prompt, courteous and efficient responses

We will be responsive to your needs and we will deliver our services sensitively and efficiently.

3. Equality and diversity

We will respect diversity and ensure your right to equal treatment.

4. Choice

We will plan and deliver our services so you can access them in the way that suits you best.

5. Access

We will ensure that all our services and offices are fully accessible. Contact our Access officer at accessofficer@ciboard.ie.

6. Official languages

We will provide our services through Irish and/or bilingually where required.

7. Consultation and evaluation

We will consult with you to establish your needs when developing, delivering and evaluating our services.

8. Internal customers

We will support our staff to ensure that they provide an excellent service to one another and to you.

9. Co-ordination

We will work closely with other organisations to deliver citizen-focused public services.

10. Appeals

We will maintain an accessible and transparent appeal and review system where appropriate.

11. Comments and complaints

We want to provide the best service possible to you and welcome all comments on our services. Contact our Customer Services Officer on commentsandcomplaints@ciboard.ie.

APPENDIX 2: BOARD MEMBERS 2016

The following people served on the Board in 2016:

- Noeline Blackwell
- James Clarke
- Tim Duggan
- Josephine Henry
- Mary Higgins
- Tina Leonard
- Ita Mangan (Chair)
- Joanne McCarthy
- Eugene McErlean
- Niall Mulligan
- Cearbhall O Meadhra
- Ian Power
- John Saunders
- Sean Sheridan
- David Stratton

A list of current Board members can be found on the CIB website, citizensinformationboard.ie.

APPENDIX 3: SERVICE TEAMS & STRUCTURE, 2016

To carry out its functions, the Citizens Information Board (CIB) had the following service teams in 2016:

- Advocacy
- Finance and Administration
- HR and Governance
- ICT and Project Management Office
- Information Resources
- Service Delivery
- Social Policy and Research
- Training

The Advocacy team leads the development of best practice in CIS advocacy by developing advocacy resources and by promoting the use of those resources through the training, mentoring and support of the regionally-based Advocacy Support Workers. The Advocacy team is now part of the Citizens Information and Advocacy pillar in CIB.

The Finance and Administration team is responsible for finance matters and procedures for delivery services. CIB ensures that proper financial controls and reporting procedures are followed by delivery services – which ensures that value for money is delivered to the tax payer.

The Finance team will become part of the Corporate Services pillar in CIB.

The HR and Governance team supports the staff of CIB and is responsible for governance within CIB, including support of the Board, data protection, Freedom of Information and customer complaints. The team is also responsible for supporting delivery service companies on HR and governance matters including advice on company law and on good practice for Boards of Management.

Both HR and Governance will become part of the Corporate Services pillar in CIB.

The Information and Communications Technology team manages and supports the day-to-day operational needs of CIB and the network of CIB's delivery services. The ICT Service manages the complete ICT infrastructure on behalf of the Board and the delivery services, which is a large enterprise of over 200 locations, 1,800 staff, and 1,300 workstations. This includes a network spanning the country, hardware procurement, software development, data centre server resources and applications, disaster recovery, backups and a dedicated helpdesk. The helpdesk successfully resolved over 4,000 issues submitted in 2016 by the delivery services. The team also manages the Project Management Office (PMO), which supports project working within CIB.

Both ICT and the PMO will become part of the Corporate Services pillar in CIB.

The Information Resources team is responsible for CIB publications and for the websites, citizensinformation.ie, assistireland.ie, keepingyourhome.ie and gettingbacktowork.ie, along with CIB's information publications and library.

The Information Resources team is now part of the Information, Research and Policy pillar in CIB.

The Quality team ensured in 2016 that our service users receive consistently high-quality services that meet their individual needs and requirements. The Quality team developed and implemented CIB's quality strategy and oversaw the EFQM Gold Star process.

Quality is now a mainstreamed function of the Citizens Information and Advocacy and the Money Advice pillars in CIB.

The Social Policy and Research team is responsible for developing CIB's social policy feedback role and undertaking research on models of information, advice and advocacy provision. The team collects and analyses information and data on social policy matters from delivery services, develops information on the effectiveness of current social policy and services, highlights issues that are of concern to users of those services to policy makers, develops social policy feedback and prepares (evidence-based) reports and submissions in this area.

The Social Policy and Research team is now part of the Information, Research and Policy pillar in CIB.

The Service Delivery team supported all our locally based delivery services – CIS and MABS – as well as our national delivery services, CIPS, NAS and SLIS, in 2016. The primary role and aim of the Service Delivery team was to support and monitor delivery services' capacity development so that the range and quality of services offered to the public is continually improving.

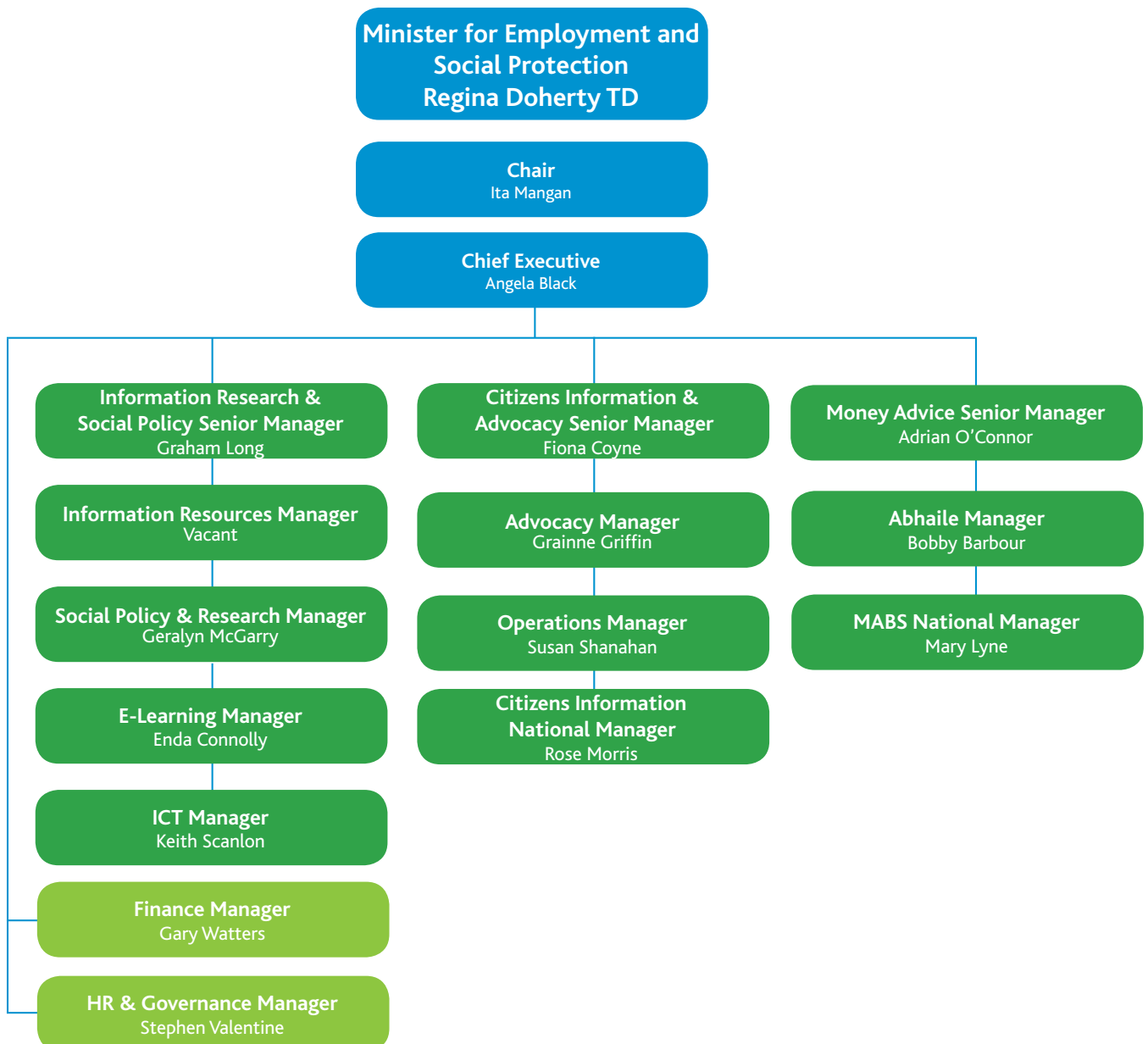
The Service Delivery team now spans three different teams: Citizens Information and Advocacy, Money Advice, and Operations.

The Training Services team organised and facilitated the delivery of a wide range of accredited and non-accredited training for staff, Board members and volunteers of delivery services in 2016. The team also worked closely with MABSndI to co-ordinate the delivery of courses of joint interest to Board members and managers. Training Services also developed resources and materials for use by delivery services in organising and planned their own training locally, for example, Induction materials for new information providers.

Functions of the Training team are now part of the Citizens Information and Advocacy and eLearning teams.

A PR and Promotions Executive supports the Citizens Information and MABS brands. PR will become part of the Corporate Services pillar in CIB.

APPENDIX 4: ORGANISATION CHART



APPENDIX 5: ENERGY USAGE IN 2016

Under S.I. 542 of 2009, public sector organisations are required to report annually on their energy usage and actions they propose to take to reduce consumption. In 2016, CIB consumed 288,066 kWh of electricity and 168,152 kWh of gas. CO₂ emissions were 174,158 kgCO₂.

Overall CIB's energy savings are 19.5% better than its baseline of 2009.

CIB improved its energy performance in 2016 by:

- Improving its energy management practices
- Implementing energy awareness programme(s)

APPENDIX 6: PROTECTED DISCLOSURES ACT 2014

CIB is committed to fostering an appropriate environment for addressing concerns relating to potential irregularities and or wrongdoing with respect to financial reporting and other matters in the workplace. CIB are also committed to providing the necessary support and assurances for staff that raise genuine concerns. The Act requires public bodies to establish and maintain procedures for dealing with protected disclosures. CIB has a robust procedure in place in line with the provisions of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014.

No submissions were made to CIB under the Protected Disclosures Act during 2016.

APPENDIX 7: CITIZENS INFORMATION BOARD MAIN OFFICES

<p>George's Quay House 43 Townsend Street Dublin 2 D02 VK65 Telephone: 0761 07 9000</p>	<p>6th Floor River Court Business Centre Cornmarket Square Limerick V94 FVH4</p>
<p>101 North Main Street Cork T12 AKA6</p>	<p>4th Floor Dockgate Merchants Road Galway H91 EY10</p>
<p>4 The Parade Kilkenny R95 VO52</p>	

APPENDIX 8: GRANTS IN 2016

Grants in 2016 Citizen Information Services

REGION 1 CIS	€
Ballyfermot	254,660
Blanchardstown	248,500
Clondalkin	385,713
Dublin 12 & 6W (Crumlin)	252,000
Dublin 2,4,6	246,600
Dublin 8 & Bluebell	273,750
Dublin City Centre	593,987
Dublin City North Bay (KARE)	128,900
Dublin North West (Finglas)	372,609
Dublin Northside	258,100
Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown	248,741
Fingal (North County)	301,491
Louth	417,712
Monaghan	250,000
Tallaght	285,000
TOTAL	4,517,763

REGION 2 CIS	€
Cavan	228,000
Donegal	685,260
Galway	416,550
Leitrim	235,900
Longford	327,442
Mayo	381,630
Roscommon	265,000
Sligo	267,300
Westmeath	354,120
TOTAL	3,161,202

REGION 3 CIS	€
Carlow	195,819
Kilkenny	184,800
Laois	225,305
Meath	372,718
North Kildare	221,390
Offaly	343,352
South Kildare	238,300
Wexford	321,500
Wicklow	305,159
TOTAL	2,408,343

REGION 4 CIS	€
Clare	360,672
Cork City North	189,163
Cork City South	352,245
Kerry	371,750
Limerick	349,389
North & East Cork County	326,830
Tipperary	504,340
Waterford	312,128
West Cork County	339,188
TOTAL	3,105,704

TOTAL FOR CITIZENS INFORMATION SERVICES	€
	13,193,013

TOTAL FOR CITIZENS INFORMATION PHONE SERVICE	€
	1,105,750

The Money Advice and Budgeting Services (MABS)

REGION 1 MABS	€
Ballymun	367,180
Blanchardstown	336,320
Clondalkin	377,230
Drogheda	235,088
Dublin 10 & 20	374,848
Dublin 12 Area	274,310
Dublin North City	286,800
Dublin North City East	270,000
Dublin South East	306,600
Dun Laoghaire	283,500
Dundalk/ Oriel	187,000
Dundrum/Rathfarnham	382,611
Fingal North County	386,374
Finglas/Cabra	384,474
Liffey South West	390,462
Monaghan	263,104
National Traveller MABS	309,680
Tallaght	415,901
TOTAL	5,831,482

REGION 2 MABS	€
Athlone	158,820
Cavan	294,090
Leitrim	274,003
Longford	204,155
Mullingar	184,630
North Donegal	442,650
North Galway	282,576
North Mayo	215,250
Rocommon	244,860
Sligo	317,860
South Donegal	150,800
South Galway	574,198
South Mayo	355,233
West Donegal	129,700
TOTAL	3,828,826

REGION 3 MABS	€
Arklow	296,771
Bray	371,310
Carlow	361,849
Kildare	487,456
Kilkenny	282,380
Laois	218,959
Meath	390,394
Offaly	182,600
Wexford	324,900
TOTAL	2,916,619

REGION 4 MABS	€
Charleville	207,755
Clare	312,422
Cork	572,296
Kerry	570,958
Limerick	430,782
North Cork	310,000
North Tipperary	326,800
South Tipperary	416,983
Waterford	603,103
West Waterford	183,260
West Cork	278,750
TOTAL	4,213,110
Total MABS Companies	16,790,037

MABS NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT LIMITED (NDL)	€
	2,578,477

NATIONAL ADVOCACY SERVICE	€
	3,103,045

SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETING SERVICE	€
	275,000

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CITIZENS INFORMATION SERVICES (NACIS)	€
	48,500

SUPPORTS	€
Threshold	47,000
Free Legal Advice (FLAC)	112,300
Treoir	34,400
Immigrant Council of Ireland	68,021
Access & Advocacy Support – Inclusion Ireland	29,100
TOTAL	290,821

TOTAL OF GRANTS	€
	37,384,642



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

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

Head Office

Ground Floor
George's Quay House
43 Townsend Street
Dublin 2, D02 VK65

t 0761 07 9000

f 01 605 9099

e info@ciboard.ie

w citizensinformationboard.ie