Citizens **Information** Service

TECHNICAL REPORT:
The Public Value of Citizens Information Services in Ireland

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Information• Advice• Advocacy
A Free and Confidential Service

Acknowledgements

Find your local Citizens Information Centre:
http://centres.citizensinformation.ie

National phone service:
0761 07 4000

Website:
www.citizensinformation.ie

FOREWORD

Information services for citizens have come a long way since the first Community Information Centres (CICs) were established 40 years or so ago. The CICs provided a service that was free of charge, voluntary and local but which met standards set nationally. To that original model today's Citizen Information Services (CISs) have added professional management along with advice and advocacy services.

This report looks at the overall public value generated by CISs in Ireland. The headline figures are impressive: over 600,000 people are served by the CISs annually and there are 19 million visits to the citizensinformation.ie website. The CISs operate in over 200 locations covering entitlements in areas such as social welfare, employment, education, health, justice and immigration.

The case studies in this report illustrate the value of face-to-face interaction with citizens seeking information and advice on their entitlements. I am impressed also with the recognition of the need to bridge the digital divide and to cater for people who are unable, or do not wish, to use the internet. With so many of our personal, professional and other interactions increasingly made online, this is a reminder of the vital importance of the human connection, a connection that should be the cornerstone of a citizen's engagement with the State.

As European Ombudsman, I am also pleased to see the National Association of CISs has been involved since 2013 in the EU-funded Triple A (Access to information, Advice and Active help) project which aims to spread a Citizens Information & Advice model to the Western Balkans and Turkey.

Emily O'Reilly
European Ombudsman

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Citizens Information Services

The 42 independent Citizens Information Services are:

Ballyfermot	Dún Laoghaire/ Rathdown	Sligo
Blanchardstown	Fingal (North County)	South Kildare
Carlow	Galway	Tallaght
Cavan	Kerry	Tipperary
Clare	Kilkenny	Waterford
Clondalkin	Laois	West Cork County
Cork City North	Leitrim	Westmeath
Cork City South	Limerick	Wexford
Donegal	Longford	Wicklow
Dublin 12 & 6W (Crumlin)	Louth	
Dublin 2,4,6	Mayo	
Dublin 8 and Bluebell	Meath	
Dublin City Centre	Monaghan	
Dublin City North Bay	North & East Cork County	
Dublin North West (Finglas, Cabra and Ballymun)	North Kildare	
	Offaly	
Dublin Northside	Roscommon	

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Using a logic model approach, with public value creation as a central organising idea (Moore 1995, Benington and Moore 2011, O'Connor 2016b), this report demonstrates the total public value created by Citizens Information Services (CISs).

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Public Value

Inputs

With €12.8 million of direct grants from the Citizens Information Board (CIB) in 2016, the 42 independent Citizens Information Services work through 113 Citizens Information Centres and over 100 outreach services.

Activities

The Service provides **comprehensive information on public services and on the social and civil rights and entitlements of citizens** in Ireland. The CIB gathers and sources information from various government departments and agencies, and the CISs, in turn, make sure that people have all the information they need, presented in an easy-to-understand way.

Citizens Information Services provide **confidential, independent and impartial information to all free-of-charge**.

Many clients require more than information, and nearly half of them receive **independent, impartial, confidential and non-judgemental advice and assistance**.

A growing number of clients require in-depth assistance, and Citizens Information Services also play an important role in **providing advocacy with, or on behalf of, those clients who need it**, including people with disabilities.

Citizens Information Services are innovative and creative, and carry out **a wide range of activities and initiatives to enhance their core mission** of providing information, advice and advocacy, including **outreach** to communities and to organisations providing support to people, including people with disabilities. At a local level, Citizens Information Service initiatives address unmet needs and reach out to some of the most vulnerable and marginalised people in Ireland.

Nationally, the **citizensinformation.ie** website is provided, along with specialist websites and the Citizens Information Phone Service, which is also available through a variety of communication channels like text and live chat.

Outputs

In 2016, CISs dealt with 1.01 million queries from over 600,000 individuals. The Citizens Information Phone Service dealt with over 139,000 callers. This meant that the service dealt with the equivalent of one in every six adults in Ireland in one year. Without doubt, the CIS provides a service to an even larger proportion of the population over time.

Not included in the 600,000 callers, the **citizensinformation.ie** website had 19 million visits in 2016, up from 4.3 million in 2008. In the period 2008–2016, Citizens Information Services met over 5.7 million callers and dealt with 8.9 million queries.

Outcomes

Public Trust

- Citizens Information Services are a highly trusted network of organisations

Access to Entitlements

- Citizens Information Services help people to access payments that they are entitled to, including helping them to work through appeals processes

- Citizens Information Services help people to negotiate reasonable agreements, and sometimes reductions based on their due entitlements, in repayment of overpayments

- Citizens Information Services help people to access back payments based on their entitlements and to secure incomes into the future

Access to Redress

- Citizens Information Services help people to get redress from former employers, businesses and landlords, such as redundancy payments or resolution of consumer issues

Connecting People with Public Services and NGOs

- Citizens Information Services act as a signpost and guide, informing and advising people about public services and community and voluntary bodies that can help them

- The Citizens Information Service helps people to receive the services they are entitled to from public authorities

Savings to the State

- Citizens Information Services save public money by reducing the need for costly processes such as appeals, employment hearings and court cases

- Citizens Information Services act as an intermediary that helps public bodies to explain new policies and schemes to the general public

Social Inclusion of Communities with Particular Needs

- Citizens Information Services invest significant resources in reaching out and successfully includes people and communities who experience disadvantage

Social Inclusion of New Communities and Minorities

- Citizens Information Services have played an important role in bringing about the social inclusion of minority groups and migrant communities in Ireland, including refugees and asylum seekers

Research Findings and Social Policy Advocacy

- Citizens Information Services provide unique feedback to the Citizens Information Board and public authorities, by recording social policy problems at local level. They have contributed to CIB commissioned research and have also commissioned and produced policy reports which have been influential at local and national level.

Civic Education

- Citizens Information Services provide presentations and educational material to schools, and their publications foster civic education in the general population and in migrant communities

Developing Citizens' Self-Reliance

- Citizens Information Services provide constantly updated resources that empower citizens to inform themselves and to deal directly with public administration, businesses and landlords on a more confident basis

- The Citizens Information Service also empowers people through a range of user-friendly booklets and other print publications on entitlements

- The Citizens Information Service promotes self-advocacy, supporting clients to advocate on behalf of themselves where they have the ability to do so

Promoting Active Citizenship

- The Citizens Information Service's staffing model is based on a mixture of paid staff, volunteers and employment scheme workers. This model provides added value and keeps services close to the communities they serve

- Citizens Information Services invest in their volunteers and employment scheme workers in terms of training and personal development, and have seen many of them attaining greater opportunities as a result

Alleviation of Stress

- Citizens Information Services often deal with people experiencing crisis or distress, who are under severe pressure and who feel they have nowhere to turn. A great many people report significant relief from their anxieties due to the assistance, care, respect and personal support they receive from the CIS

Impact – Public Value

Public value is created by services that exhibit the characteristics of good public services. Good public services are **ethical**, provide high **quality** service, are financially **efficient** and **effective**, are **responsive** to people's needs, are **accountable** to the taxpayer, are **equitable** in how they treat anyone seeking a service, and are ecologically **sustainable**.

Citizens Information Services have demonstrated a range of activities they undertake which ensures their professional management, good financial controls and constant striving for operational improvement (i.e. quality, efficiency, effectiveness and accountability to the taxpayer).

All 42 Citizens Information Services (CISs) have achieved a gold star award under the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) excellence programme. CISs have provided a wide variety of training to staff and volunteers and have inputted into several reports, commissioned by CIB, to monitor and improve their operations.

The alleviation of stress and achievement of social inclusion that is achieved is only possible because CISs also pays serious attention to delivering their services through the right ethos (i.e. ethical, equitable, sustainable and responsive to individual and local community needs). This ethos is kept strong through the role of volunteer board members and volunteers, as well as the strong commitment to the Citizens Information Service's mission. Likewise at national level, the Citizens Information Board pursues initiatives to provide public value in all its dimensions.

Total public value includes the monetised value of outcomes, termed "economic value", alongside non-monetised societal benefits, termed "social value". Some outcomes achieve a significant amount of both kinds of value.

The combination of economic value and societal value is best expressed as a list or "dashboard" showing the total public value created.

Economic Value

Access to Welfare Payments

Access to Redress

Connecting People with Public Services and NGOs

Savings to the State

Social Value

Public Trust

Research Findings and Social Policy Research

Civic Education

Developing Citizens' Self-Reliance

Economic and Social Value

Social Inclusion of Communities with Particular Needs

Social Inclusion of New Communities and Minorities

Enhancing Client, Volunteer and Employment Scheme Staff Lives

Alleviation of Stress

Citizens Information Services – Public Value

- Tens of millions of euro value to individuals and families annually from receiving their entitlements, including welfare payments and public services like housing, health care or education, and including reduction of overpayment demands;

- Significant monetary value to individuals from getting redress from employers or resolution of consumer issues;

- Significant monetary value to individuals and families from getting access to public services they need;

- Millions of euro of savings to the state, by preventing costly processes such as appeals, employment hearings and court cases, and reducing the need for call centres to accompany policy changes;

- The Citizens Information Service enjoys a high level of public confidence and trust. Providing people with the information, advice and advocacy they need to access their entitlements, improves their access to public services, and thereby fosters confidence in the public sector;

- Social policy feedback, and reports at local and national level, have provided an invaluable resource to policy makers to help them to improve the implementation of policies;

- Students, people from migrant communities and citizens generally have benefited from the civic education resources produced by Citizens Information Services;

- The existence of a reliable and constantly updated national website, as well as national and local publications, underpins the self-reliance and empowerment of citizens, who are better informed and equipped as a result;

- Providing targeted support to people in very vulnerable situations and who are suffering disadvantage has both a tangible economic benefit for those individuals and families and also helps to achieve the national goals of social inclusion and equality of opportunity;

- Providing specialised support to people in minority communities or from migrant backgrounds has both a tangible economic benefit for those individuals and families and also helps to achieve their full participation in society and the economy;

- The enchancement of the lives of volunteers and employment scheme workers has both a tangible benefit for them in terms of training and future employment, but also provides them with a strong sense of personal satisfaction from contributing to the CIS mission. The contribution of volunteers also represents a significant cash saving to the exchequer through the services they provide for free;

- Further tens of millions of euro value – and incalculable personal value – is gained by individuals from the alleviation of stress and reduction in mental health problems such as depression and anxiety.

Looking to the Future

Over the period 2008 to 2016, the absolute number of callers to Citizens Information Centres remained steady, at over 600,000 callers a year. But during the same period, usage of the **citizensinformation.ie** website rose from 4.3 million to 19 million, which represents four and a half times as many visits.

While many people in the population may be becoming more expert at searching for information online, Citizens Information Services have found a steady increase in the complexity of queries that are presented to them. Even seemingly straightforward information requests often involve atypical circumstances or uncertainty about the interpretation of administrative rules. This trend has led CISs to regard advice and advocacy as growing demands.

In addition, not everyone can access information online. Citizens Information Services continue to play a vital role in bridging the digital divide by providing face-to-face information for those who cannot find it themselves, as well as for those who find it challenging to deal with form-filling or official jargon.

Advocacy on behalf of individuals who are disadvantaged in dealing with public administration has been identified as a clear public need, and the Citizens Information Board and CISs have responded by prioritising the development of advocacy services and are currently developing a national advocacy strategy.

As independent, voluntary organisations, the 42 local Citizens Information Services are not part of the public service, but they provide a unique service for the public that would be almost impossible to replicate. The service is constantly striving to improve, to innovate and to serve the wide spectrum of need for information, advice and advocacy in Ireland's population.

Future Research

Future research on the public value of Citizens Information Services – and of any service providing services to the public – could be achieved by the development of a unit cost database similar to what exists in the UK, developed by New Economy and the Treasury. This database, alongside more detailed recording of outcomes by services, allows for more fine-grained calculation of the monetary value of a range of social and health outcomes. It is certainly feasible for such a database to be developed for the Republic of Ireland, but it would require a major, collaborative piece of research across numerous government departments and agencies, not least the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

However, total public value created must always be understood as the multi-faceted totality of monetary value and other ways in which societal value was created that are unquantifiable in monetary terms.

For future consideration, the public value creation framework – see Annex 1 – can facilitate strategic planning based on the achievement of outcomes that are societally valuable but hard to monetise. Assigning a weight to each strategic priority or target outcome allows for comparison between otherwise incommensurate values. Similarly, quantitative targets are required in each case – even if these are labels for qualitative data – so that progress towards each target outcome can be compared for the purposes of decision-making. This is similar to Multi-Criteria Analysis (MCA), which is a common appraisal method.[1]

Essentially, the requirement to list non-monetised societal value alongside quantified economic value implies that cost-benefit analysis and similar tools should ultimately be subordinate to a public value analysis, which would operate similarly to a Multi-Criteria Analysis, with similar requirements for democratic decision-making about prioritising and weighting the outcomes to be achieved by services.

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[1]   See, for example, http://publicspendingcode.per.gov.ie/overview-of-appraisal-methods-and-techniques/

Scope of this Report

The National Development Managers' Network identified the need for a report to enhance the understanding of the wide range of services provided by Citizens Information Services and to raise their profile.

This report is the first to describe and show-case the impact and public value that is created by the wide variety of activities carried out by CISs in Ireland. Previously, there was no single report available to provide a holistic vision nor was there a robust money-value and societal-value analysis of the work done by Citizens Information Services. It is hoped that this report will fill that gap, both in a national context and for an international audience.

The approach taken in this report is descriptive-analytical. A logic model based on public value creation was the central organising set of ideas.

This report was commissioned to produce something equivalent to recent reports by Citizens Advice England and Wales, while also ensuring that this report took account of the unique history and perspective of services in the Republic of Ireland.

A short summary report for a broader audience – **Making an Impact: The Public Value of Citizens Information in Ireland** – was also written as part of this research.

Following a call for submissions by the National Development Managers' Network a range of materials was submitted to the researcher as examples of the work done by services across Ireland. Available evidence was sourced from Development Managers working in services, from the Citizens Information Board and from relevant published reports and websites. This evidence includes the range of specialist services and outreach services provided by Citizens Information Services, publications, case studies, testimonials from clients, customer surveys and social policy work.

A list of the materials examined for this report is given in the References section. In addition, the research looked at statistics on the use of services.

The available evidence has been assembled, firstly, to demonstrate the fit between the activity and outputs of CISs and their overall strategic priorities, and secondly, to show the extent to which positive social outcomes can be attributed to the impact of these activities on Irish society.

Citizens Advice in England and Wales, and the equivalent bodies in Scotland and in Northern Ireland, have all produced reports in recent years demonstrating their economic and holistic public value in different ways. Reflecting the different nature of the service in the Republic of Ireland, as well as the different kinds of information available here, this report does not try to exactly replicate any of the UK reports. Instead, the focus is on presenting the full depth and breadth of the service provided by CISs, and giving a clear indication of its public value.

Some of the value created by Citizens Information Services is monetary value. That is, their work results in a financial benefit to people using the service or else the state or the economy benefits in financial or economic terms from the work of the services.

However, total public value created must be understood as the multi-faceted totality of monetary value and other ways in which societal value was created that are unquantifiable in monetary terms.

Central goals of this report are to demonstrate both the feasibility and the desirability of more thoroughly measuring the full public value created by Citizens Information Services. Suggestions are also made about how to do this more systematically in future. In addition, the public value creation framework should be of interest to any public service, voluntary organisation or business that seeks to measure its full contribution to society.

While the CIB has statutory responsibility for MABS (Money Advice and Budgeting Service), NAS (National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities) and SLIS (Sign Language Interpreting Service), these services are not included in this study, which focuses on core, public-facing Citizens Information Services that provide a wide range of information, advice and advocacy.

Public Value Creation

The concept of public value creation was developed initially by Harvard Professor Mark Moore in 1995, and is at the centre of a wide range of academic and professional writing about how to measure the full value created by public services and not-for-profit organisations.

All organisations – public, private and voluntary – create "public value" whenever they generate economic, social or environmental benefits, as part of or alongside their core activity. Organisations create ublic value by adhering to the qualities of good public services.

Good public services are **ethical**, provide a high **quality** service, are financially **efficient** and **effective**, are **responsive** to people's needs, are **accountable** to the taxpayer, are **equitable** in how they treat anyone seeking a service, and are ecologically **sustainable**.

When judging an organisation's public value, it is necessary to examine its activities and the end result of those activities (i.e. outcomes). Especially when organisations are funded by public money, the public has a range of expectations about how this money will be used and how services will be delivered – not least about ethical conduct and fairness.

The characteristics of good public services are not just something to be measured when looking at the end result of services, but it is essential that they also are present in the day-to-day processes and operations through which organisations deliver their services.

Public services are typically working towards the achievement of societal goals. It is often not appropriate to measure a financial return on investment, hence public value creation – similar to the idea of social return on investment – provides a more appropriate way to measure the success of an organisation in achieving societal goals.

Some public value can be measured in monetary terms, such as when organisations provide good value for money in delivering a service, when a service prevents the need for public spending and also when they contribute to the economy. Likewise, public value is created when organisations provide benefits for people, such as improving their health or their financial situation. Sometimes these benefits can also be measured in monetary terms or given an estimated economic value.

Public value is equally created when organisations provide benefits for people and for society that cannot be measured in monetary terms. Social value can include improved quality of life, reduced stress, improvements to the environment, protection of heritage, and so on.

The dividing line between economic value and social value – as they are defined here – is simply based on whether or not it is possible to measure the value created in monetary terms. Over time, new methods and estimates make it possible to assign monetary value to some social benefits. However *"Not everything that can be counted counts. Not everything that counts can be counted"*[2]. When considering public value, it is essential to always include a full expression of non-monetised societal benefits alongside the monetary benefits to get the full picture of public value created.

Logic Model Method

In order to demonstrate the public value created by the different aspects of Citizens Information Services, a modification of the logic model approach is used (based on W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2006).

This examines the activities of an organisation in terms of its inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impact. The main difference in this report is that rather than simply look at longer time periods to distinguish outcomes from impact, a further evaluation was done of the public value of outcomes to sort them in terms of monetary and non-monetised value created.

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[2]   William Bruce Cameron, 1963

Inputs

- The human, financial, organisational and community resources directed towards the work.

Activities

- The processes, tools, events, technology and actions that are undertaken.

Outputs

- The direct products of service activities.

Outcomes

- Specific changes in clients' lives (e.g. behaviour, knowledge, skills, status and level of functioning).
- These can be compared with the service's **Objectives**:
  (1) Services leading to positive outcomes in people's lives;
  (2) Positive outcomes for people in vulnerable situations;
  (3) Recommendations leading to policy change;
  (4) Volunteering leading to positive benefits for volunteers.

Public Value

- The fundamental change occurring in organisations, communities or systems as a result of the service's activities.
- The extent to which outcomes achieve the **Fundamental Attributes of Good Public Services**: Ethical, Quality, Efficient, Effective, Responsive, Accountable, Equitable, and Sustainable.
- This is expressed in both monetary and non-monetary terms.

Citizens Information Services

The Citizens Information Service traces its origins back to the 1960s, when voluntary groups established a number of information and advice centres as part of community development. The number of services grew steadily and statutory funding was made available through the National Social Service Board[3] and later through Comhairle, which in turn was renamed the Citizens Information Board (CIB). Comhairle/CIB had an important role in developing the national network.

Funding ultimately comes from the Department of Social Protection.

Who's Who

The **Citizens Information Board (CIB)** is the national, state-sponsored body that funds local services. The CIB plays an important role in providing supports to local services and delivers some services directly.

Citizens Information Services (CISs) is the name for the range of confidential information, advice and advocacy services provided. Services are free-of-charge, open to all, impartial and non-judgemental. There are 42 services which are independent local organisations, led by volunteer boards of management, and which have charitable status. They provide the drop-in, face-to-face facility in every county in Ireland. Citizens Information Services are independent of the Citizens Information Board, but they work closely together.

A **Development Manager, accountable to a voluntary Board of Directors**, heads each of the 42 Citizens Information Services. They are all members of the **National Development Managers' Network**, who commissioned this report.

Each CIS runs one or more **Citizens Information Centres (CICs)**, which are the public offices where face-to-face services are available.

In addition, most CISs also provide **Outreach Services**, which are one-off or regular services provided in a variety of settings, such as hospitals, prisons or community centres.

The **National Association of Citizens Information Services (NACIS)** is the representative organisation for all 42 CISs.

The **Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS)** is an independent organisation, which is also funded and supported by the CIB.

Clients and **Callers** are terms used to describe people availing of Citizens Information Services. They may be Irish citizens, other residents of Ireland or people from another country finding out about Ireland.

*Note – Citizens Advice, formerly Citizens Advice Bureaux, is the name used by similar services in the UK .The Republic of Ireland has Citizens Information Services or CISs.

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3   Previously National Social l Service Council

A Development Manager heads each CIS. Overall responsibility for management of a CIS rests with the volunteer Board of Directors, which is accountable to the Citizens Information Board for the funding provided to the CIS and service standards (Prizeman et al, 2010).

The Citizens Information Service provides free, impartial and confidential information, advice and advocacy. Each Citizens Information Service covers a geographical area, either countywide or part of an urban area, and delivers its services through a network of Citizens Information Centres (CICs).

Forty two Citizens Information Services from over 200 locations provide information, advice and advocacy. These consist of 113 Citizens Information Centres and over 100 outreach services. The Citizens Information Board provides a range of supports to this network as well as funding.

The CIB also funds and supports the separate Citizens Information Phone Service.

The Citizens Information Board directly provides the **citizensinformation.ie** website (and other websites). They gather information from various government departments and agencies and produce comprehensive information on public services and on the entitlements of citizens in Ireland.

The Citizens Information Service provides confidential, independent and impartial information to all, free-of-charge. Many clients require more than information, and nearly half of them receive independent, impartial, confidential and non-judgemental advice and assistance.

A growing number of clients require in-depth assistance, and the CIS also plays an important role in providing advocacy with and on behalf of those clients who need it, including people with disabilities[4] or who have other problems dealing with public administration.

While the CIS deals with a wide variety of queries, four of the most common areas for information, advice and advocacy are social welfare, housing, employment-related issues, and money and taxation.

The Citizens Information Service is innovative and creative, and carries out a wide range of initiatives to enhance its core mission of providing information, advice and advocacy. At a local level, CIS initiatives address unmet needs and reach out to some of the most vulnerable and marginalised people in Ireland.

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4   Not including the cohort of people with more severe disabilities who are served by the specialist National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities (NAS).

Citizens Information Board
(national, state-funded)

€12.8 million
Direct Grants from CIB to CISs

42
Citizens Information Services
(independent local organisations, charities)

15
Board Members

c.**400**
Voluntary (unpaid) board members

74*
Staff

280
Staff

225
Employment scheme staff

1,080
Volunteers

Citizens Information Phone Service

113
Centres

100+
Outreach Services

*wholetime equivalents

Using the Logic Model

| Inputs | Activities | Outputs | Outcomes | Public Value |

As illustrated here, there are five distinct parts to a Logic Model. The first three parts – inputs, activities and outputs – are largely descriptive. They are also easier to measure, as management of any organisation routinely gathers this kind of information.

Outcomes and public value creation are harder to measure, as the required approach changes from routine management to social science.

When it comes to measuring outcomes, we are in effect asking whether a service led to changes in the behaviour, knowledge, skills, status and/or level of functioning of the person who used the service. While this might be as simple as asking whether or not a person received a welfare benefit he or she was entitled to, it could also be as complex as asking whether the service helped a person to overcome significant personal difficulties and to gain education, employment or some other benefit. The outcome of a service can also be intangible – but no less real – such as when a person becomes more self-reliant, confident or has greater knowledge.

Measuring outcomes requires a service or researcher to get back in contact with people sometime after they have used a service, to ask them what – if anything – has changed in their lives.

Measuring impact goes further, and asks whether a service has achieved fundamental change in organisations, communities or systems as a result of the service's activities.

When it comes to claiming outcomes or impact, the world does not stand still. As well as using Citizens Information Services, a person may have had help and support from other sources. Sometimes it can be difficult to claim how much influence one organisation had alongside others. For this reason, researchers will often try to estimate "deadweight", which is the chance that a positive outcome might have happened anyway, even without the service intervention.

Evidence for outcomes and impact can be patchy, unless an organisation invests significant resources in gathering and analysing this kind of information on a regular basis. When evidence is infrequent, it can be tempting to pick the evidence that paints the best possible picture of the service. This produces "optimism bias" – that is, claims for achieving outcomes or impact are optimistic. Researchers can compensate for this by weighting evidence to counteract any such bias.

In the study of Citizens Advice in England and Wales, the researchers compensated for both deadweight and optimism bias, yet their evidence still demonstrated the significant value of positive outcomes attributable to the impact of Citizens Advice. In this research, compared to England and Wales, the same types of evidence were not available. Nonetheless, a conservative approach was taken to the evidence in order to present a case that is robust and replicable by other researchers, and which can be built on over time.

As well as gathering evidence describing outcomes achieved by Citizens Information services, this research compared these outcomes to four strategic objectives that the service had set for itself. When evaluating the impact of CISs in terms of creating public value, the evidence about services was also appraised relative to the eight attributes of good public services.

The Public Value Creation Framework

Any organisation delivering public services must deal with one of the fundamental questions of economics: how to meet infinite demand with a limited supply of resources. Unlike private for-profit enterprises, there is no single "bottom line" for public services or for community and voluntary organisations. Services are expected to balance a number of different demands and constraints, in order to bring about benefits for people and communities.

In recent years, organisations delivering public services have been under greater pressure to measure their success in terms of bringing about positive outcomes in people's lives, not just in terms of the quantity of service they deliver. The shift to measuring outcomes is challenging, and it requires a new way of thinking about how public services are organised and delivered so that maximum value is created for the public.

Moore (1995) reflects on what it means to create value in a public sector context. He argues that public value creation is analogous to value creation in the private sector, but with crucial differences because the "value" created includes many direct and indirect benefits brought about in people's lives.

The idea of public value creation grew out of Moore's engagement with public service managers over a period of years, and the ideas have developed through his teaching of public administration and his continued engagement with public service professionals (Benington and Moore, 2011). As such, the concept of public value creation is very much grounded in professional practice.

As public services are carried out with the authority of the state, which can impose obligations as well as deliver services, they must maintain high ethical standards and operate fairly (Benington and Moore, 2011).

Crucially, given that climate change and r esource depletion poses a worldwide challenge to all of humanity, all public services must contribute to – or at least be compatible with – ecological sustainability (Swilling, 2011).

Public value creation is thus a framework within which to view the outputs and outcomes of public services, and to judge whether or not they represent good public services.

In addition to the high ethical standards of public service and ecological sustainability mentioned above, according to Le Grand (2009: 7), 'there are at least five basic attributes, the possession of which would constitute a good public service. These are that the service should be of high *quality*; that it should be operated and managed *efficiently*; that is should be responsive to the needs and wants of users, while simultaneously being *accountable* to taxpayers; and, last, but not least, that it should be delivered *equitably*.'

Financial *effectiveness* is also often distinguished from efficiency, as it is in the current programme for government; hence it is included as a further attribute of good services.

The greatest amount of public value is therefore created when organisations strike the optimal balance between these eight fundamentals. Good public services should be: ethical, quality, efficient, effective, responsive, accountable, equitable and sustainable.

Yet how can such different requirements be balanced against one another? For example, how much efficiency is it worth to ensure greater accountability? How much – if any – sustainability or high ethical standards can be traded off against responsiveness or efficiency?

O'Connor (2016a) sets out what a public value creation framework might look like when commissioning public services from private or voluntary sector organisations. This framework allows such trade-offs to be calculated in a transparent way to optimise the amount of public value that an organisation creates.

O'Connor (2016b) argues for societal value – or public value – to be paramount when public services are commissioned from the community and voluntary sector.

The May 2016 *Programme for a Partnership Government* (PFAPG) pledges to 'ensure that all commissioning for human, social and community services takes place in a societal value framework (targeted at maximising the value for society)' (PFAPG, 2016 p.131).[5]

Along with the specific goal of demonstrating the public value of Citizens Information Services, this report aims to provide a concrete example of what it means for a public service to be delivered in a societal value framework designed to maximise the value for society.

Public Value Creation by the UK's Citizens Advice Bureaux

Citizens Advice in the UK was established in 1939. Citizens Advice and each Citizens Advice Bureau are reliant on the support of a wide range of funders, including central and local government, charitable trusts, companies and individuals. From 1975, the Scottish Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux became autonomous, and is today called Citizens Advice Scotland. In 1984, Citizens Advice (Northern Ireland) became an independent limited company (Prizeman et al, 2010).

Over recent years, there have been a number of reports dealing with the value created by Citizens Advice in each of the three relevant jurisdictions of the UK.

Williamson Consulting (2016) claims that the economic value of Citizens Advice in Northern Ireland is at least £66 million €€85million). This is on the basis of evidence of how it reduces public service costs associated with stress, mental ill health, social security tribunals and homelessness. Similarly, estimates are given for the economic value of businesses saved from closure by advice and volunteers moving into employment. Financial benefits to households are also counted in terms of benefits recovered and debt burdens eased.

In Scotland, the Fraser of Allander Institute (2014) focus on four areas where Citizens Advice provides financial benefits to the common good, totalling £169 million (€219 million). They estimate cost savings made in health and employment, as well as increased incomes to those using advice services and

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the value of wages paid by Citizens Advice in Scotland.

In England and Wales, Citizens Advice has developed a more sophisticated model to estimate the holistic, public value of their services. An initial version of this, *Making the Case*, was published in 2014. The method used was refined in more recent publications (Whyte et al, 2015a, 2015b). In the most recent analysis, Whyte et al point to fiscal benefits of £361 million (€472 million) due to reduced demand for health services, local authority services and out-of-work benefits. In addition, financial gain to individuals of £2.6 billion (€3.4 billion) was realised through welfare benefits, debt written off and consumer problems resolved. Wider economic and social benefits were monetised at £2.1 billion (€2.7 billion), including improvements in participation and productivity for clients and volunteers. Importantly, Whyte et al provide a list of additional benefits that cannot be monetised but nonetheless represent additional, substantial public value created by Citizens Advice in England and Wales.

The method used by Whyte et al is based on a cost-benefit analysis developed by New Economy, HM Treasury and Public Service Transformation Network (2014). This analysis takes advantage of a unit cost database for over 600 different social outcomes developed by the Treasury, which allows them to estimate the monetary benefit of many social outcomes.[6]

Whyte et al also take account of potential deadweight in their calculations – i.e. outcomes that would have happened anyway – and they also correct their data to counter-act any "optimism bias". As such, their final figures represent conservative estimates of the level of value created by Citizens Advice services in England and Wales, which are nonetheless significant multiples of the public investment in those services of £239 million (€312 million) in 2014/15.

For every £1 invested in Citizens Advice there is a return of £1.51 in fiscal benefits, £10.94 in benefits to individuals and £8.74 in wider economic and societal benefits, plus a range of significant non-monetised social benefits.

This report uses the broad framework of the England and Wales model, with greater emphasis placed on non-monetised societal value creation, as outlined in O'Connor (2016a). However, it is beyond the scope of this report to replicate a cost benefit analysis on a similar scale. This report is limited to available data on the Citizens Information Services in Ireland. There is not the same amount of systematic information available on outcomes for service users compared to what is available for England and Wales. Also, there is no equivalent to the Treasury database of unit costs. Nonetheless, available evidence from CISs has been compiled to estimate their public value in a conservative way that is transparent and can be developed over time into a more comprehensive analysis.

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6   http://neweconomymanchester.com/our-work/research-evaluation-cost-benefit-analysis/cost-benefit-analysis/unit-cost-database

Inputs
What Resources are Available

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Public Value

The chief resource of Citizens Information Services is people, and their knowledge and experience.

As independent local organisations and charities, the 42 Citizens Information Services benefit from the involvement of approximately 400 unpaid board members. These are the volunteers who give the community and voluntary sector its name. Their role is governance and leadership of the CISs.

Each separate CIS employs a Development Manager and a number of staff. Working alongside the staff are people in community employment positions (and similar schemes) and also a large number of part-time volunteers, who provide a lot of the face-to-face contact with service users.

Based on the CIB Annual Report 2016, staffing of the 42 Citizens Information Services was:

- 280 employees
- 225 employment scheme workers (mainly Community Employment Scheme)
- 1,080 volunteers

In order to employ people, as well as to manage their premises and meet other expenses, the Citizens Information Services received €12.8 million in direct grants from the Citizens Information Board in 2016.

CISs deliver services from 213 locations (113 Centres and over 100 outreach locations), as well as via mobile and one-off services. The CISs have a large stock of written materials, which are constantly being updated and tailored for different communities.

In contrast with the UK, where the national-level Citizens Advice organisations are charitable bodies, the Irish Citizens Information Board is a state-funded statutory body. The CIB is governed by a board of 15 members, and has 74 staff.

The CIB provides training, research and a range of other governance and developmental supports to the 42 CISs.

The Citizens Information Board also has responsibility for the following, which are not included in this report:

- MABS – Money Advice and Budgeting Service
- NAS – National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities
- SLIS – Sign Language Interpreting Service, including the Irish Remote Interpreting Service

Activities
What do Citizens Information Services Do?

Inputs → **Activities** → Outputs → Outcomes → Public Value

Core Provision of Information and Advice

The core work of Citizens Information Services can be summarised as independent, impartial, confidential and non-judgemental information, advice and advocacy.

The following list illustrates the nature of the nearly 1.01 million queries dealt with by CISs in 2016:[7]

- Social welfare (46%)
- Health (8%)
- Housing (7%)
- Employment (7%)
- Money and tax (7%)
- Local issues (7%)
- Justice (4%)
- Moving country (3%)
- Birth, families and relationships (3%)
- Travel and recreation (3%)
- Education and training (3%)
- Consumer affairs (2%)
- Death and bereavement (>1%)
- Environment (>1%)
- Government in Ireland (>1%)

42% of queries were categorised by services as simple, with a continuing increase in the number of queries recorded as complex to over half of all queries (58%), reflecting also more multi-category queries being dealt with by services.[8]

Across the whole of Citizen Information Services' information and advice work, Clarke and Eustace (2015) – in a report commissioned by the CIB – found a discernible trend towards a greater number of queries taking longer to resolve due to complexity, and a reduction in the proportion of simple information requests.

CASE STUDY:

Complexity of Queries

One CIS defined 83 per cent of queries they dealt with in 2015 as "complex", up from 80 per cent in 2014. There is no standard definition of what constitutes a complex case and the national average was 55 per cent "complex". In either case, this suggests that CISs are dealing with issues that many clients would find difficult, if not impossible, to address on their own. The time spent dealing with a query in 2015 was typically 0–10 minutes (30%) or 11–20 minutes (56%), with 14% of queries taking longer than 20 minutes. Eustace (2016) confirms a general view from a survey of all 42 CIS Development Managers that information and advice cases are becoming more complex and resource-intensive to resolve.

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[7]   Figures from the National Summary CIS Activity Report 2016.
[8]   Figures from the National Summary Activity Report 2016.

Core Provision of Advocacy

Advocacy represents a significant – and growing – investment of time by CIS staff. While representing numerically low numbers of clients, many advocacy cases represent days of solid work when all of the hours involved are totalled.

Typical tasks involved include writing letters with or for clients, making phone calls, doing research around atypical issues, following up with various contacts to progress a case, attending appeals with clients, preparing clients for Workplace Relations Commission hearings or other major meetings, and so on.

Clients availing of advocacy are routinely at some sort of major disadvantage when dealing with public authorities, employers or others with whom they have an issue. For example, clients may be disadvantaged due to extreme old age, illness, disability or lack of English language skills. Some clients are also dealing with homelessness, domestic violence, bullying in a former workplace, or other issues that complicate their situation.

Many advocacy cases also represent issues with major impact on clients. The CIS deals with numerous cases of arrears sought by clients, some of which total tens of thousands of euro. Similarly, overpayment claims by the Department of Social Protection have been reduced or cancelled, which also represented tens of thousands of euro in some cases, which were crippling financial liabilities for clients.

Publications

In addition to the wide range of CIB publications produced nationally and disseminated by the CISs, Citizens Information Services also produce a wide range of publications which are tailored for local needs. Based on what was submitted for this research, the following types of publication were in evidence:

- **Directories** of national services
- **Community directories** and directories of local services
- **Booklets** aimed at **specific groups** (e.g. migrants, those leaving prison)
- **Booklets** for **specific life events** (e.g. having a baby, dealing with separation or divorce)
- **Booklets** explaining **community life** and welcoming newcomers
- **Leaflets** addressing **common queries** – some of which were quite technical (e.g. employment permits, invalidity pension, disability allowance)
- **Leaflets** on services for people with **specific needs** (e.g. dementia supports and services in an area, local supports for cancer patients, addiction services)
- **Leaflets** for specific **target groups** (e.g. cross-border workers, migrant workers, young people)
- **Leaflets** in the format of **'know your rights'** frequently asked questions
- **Factsheets** about an area

- **Reports on social policy issues**
  (e.g. the needs of migrant workers
  in a particular area)

- Internal **corporate reports**
  (e.g. the training needs of CISs)

Websites

The Citizens Information Board produces
and manages **citizensinformation.ie,** which
is a comprehensive and constantly updated
source of information about a wide range
of public services and entitlements.

It also provides specialist information
websites, including **gettingbacktowork.ie,**
keepingyourhome.ie and **assistireland.ie**.

Phone Service

The CIB funds and supports the national
Citizens Information Phone Service, which
also provides assistance via email, fax, text/
SMS, videophone and instant chat service
(Live Advisor).

National Level Activities and Initiatives

The Citizens Information Board plays an
active and important role in supporting the
delivery of Citizens Information Services.

It provides overall governance and develop-
mental supports as well as regular training
sessions and training resources for workers
and volunteers in CISs. It also acts as the
hub for information on changes to welfare
schemes, public services and other aspects
of public policy. The CIB also provides ICT
infrastructure, data reporting and standards
setting, including the roll out of the European
Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM)
excellence programme across services.

The CIB periodicals and journals include
Relate, the monthly journal on legal and
public service developments, the quarterly
EU Supplement, and Social Policy Updates.

The CIB also commissions and publishes
research relevant to the strategic objectives
and role of CISs, and to support service
delivery. This includes quarterly social policy
reports that collate the information on
problems and issues arising from the
interaction of CIS advisers and those seeking
assistance, as well as thematic social policy
reports – such as *Hard Times for the Self-
Employed*.

Local Level Activities and Initiatives

The relatively small scale of most of the 42 Citizens Information Services means that they have a high degree of awareness of – and responsiveness to – the needs of people in particular localities and communities.[9] The presence of a volunteer board of directors drawn from the local area reinforces this.

CISs provide outreach services – including one-off services or services on request – in family resource centres, hospitals, prisons, hospices, and other community centres, as well as to smaller towns, villages and outlying areas.

CISs routinely provide access to specialist services, which typically include:

FLAC (free legal advice centres), CAVA (chartered accountants voluntary advice), immigration law, Ombudsman, Women's Aid, CASS (citizenship application support service), translation and interpretation services, tax clinics, free financial advice, family law, and employment law.

CISs have also had an important role engaging with minorities and new communities, including providing services in Irish, Polish and many other languages.

In order to foster awareness of the service, and moreover awareness of rights and entitlements, CISs have made presentations to schools and colleges, and provided them with educational materials.

As independent charities, the CISs also engage in their own research and social policy analysis. A number of reports have been either written or commissioned by them dealing with issues affecting local, regional and national level.

Two examples of reports developed by a local CIS are *Information in Transition: The information, advice and advocacy needs of older people in the technology and information age* and *Centralised Rent Supplement Units: an evaluation of clients' experiences*. As an example of impact, the Minster for Social Protection answered parliamentary questions in relation to the latter report and indicated that a number of its recommendations were being progressed by his Department. The CIB supports research and social policy analysis by CISs.

CISs are also involved in collaborative reports, such as *Person or Number? 2: A second examination of issues faced by immigrants in accessing social protection*, produced in collaboration with CrossCare, Doras Luimní, FLAC and NASC. Co. Wicklow CIS produced *Co. Wicklow Supports and Services for people living with dementia* booklet in association with The Alzheimer Society of Ireland in 2015; as well as the *Step by Step Guide to Applying for the Nursing Homes Support Scheme* in 2014 in conjunction with the HSE and the Co. Wicklow Network for Older People.

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9   This was also one of the conclusions of the CIB commissioned research undertaken by Eustace Patterson researchers (2015)

Outputs
Counting Citizens Information Activity

Inputs — Activities — **Outputs** — Outcomes — Public Value

The basic output statistic for Citizens Information Services is the number of people who used the service in a given year.

In 2016, 1.01 million queries were dealt with, on behalf of over 600,000 unique individuals who were in contact with Citizens Information Services.

The Citizens Information Phone Service answered over 139,000 queries during this period and the **citizensinformation.ie** website was visited over 19 million times.

When these figures are looked at over time, the scale of their interaction with many people in the Irish population is apparent.

In the period 2008–2016, based on CIB annual reports, Citizens Information met over 5.7 million callers and dealt with over 8.9 million queries.

Usage of **citizensinformation.ie** grew from 4.3 million visits in 2008 to 19 million visits in 2016, which is nearly four and a half times the number of visitors as 2008.

Reach into Communities all over Ireland

As a network of centres, outreach services and visiting/one-off services, the Citizens Information Service has exceptional reach into communities all over Ireland. As illustrated in the map overleaf, Citizens Information Centres can be found all over Ireland.

At least three-quarters of all urban areas in Ireland with a population over 4,000 people have a Citizens Information Centre or regular outreach (listed on **centres. citizensinformation.ie**). Additional areas also benefit from outreach services and one-off initiatives to meet need (such as the Citizens Information Service mobile, which is used to bring the service to outlying areas).

Regular outreach services exist in at least eight major hospitals, five prisons and a range of other centres such as family resource centres, Travellers' groups, hospices, and immigrant support groups.

In considering the scale of the reach of the Citizens Information Service, the population of the Republic of Ireland is 4.6 million, of which 3.6 million are adults (aged 15+). The 600,000 people in contact with Citizens Information Services in 2016 are the equivalent of one in six adults in the country. Given that similar numbers of people contact the service every year, and not everyone will use the service every year, over time even greater proportions of the population will avail of the service.

Moreover, a standard feature of social welfare statistics is to distinguish between *recipients* – those in direct contact with the service – and *beneficiaries* – children and adult members of their households who may also benefit from the service. It is highly likely that many more people are beneficiaries of the assistance received by the 600,000 people in direct contact with the CIS.

The figure of 600,000 does not include those who only use the **citizensinformation.ie** website provided by the CIB. Given the large volumes of traffic to that site, it is highly likely that a significant additional proportion of the population also benefitted from Citizens Information Services.

As such, the reach into the Irish population by Citizens Information Services is extremely extensive and probably unparalleled by any other community and voluntary sector organisation. Moreover, a number of CISs reported having to close or reduce services such as outreach due to resource constraints. Arguably, there is further latent demand for Citizens Information Services that is potentially higher than the numbers currently served.

Advertising of Citizens Information Services among the General Public

Representatives from CISs are often asked to contribute to the national and local media, especially radio. A number of CISs mentioned their engagement with local and community radio, which raises awareness of issues and also the existence of the service. For example, several CISs have regular programmes or time slots on community radio.[10]

Kantar Media report that the airtime received by CISs in 2014 totalled 996 minutes of regional radio and 389 minutes of national radio, as well as 16 minutes of national television. This involved 158 separate radio broadcasts and 2 television broadcasts, and it included 331 minutes on RTÉ Radio 1.

If the Citizens Information Service had to purchase equivalent time on air, it would have cost €835,000 (Kantar Media). As such, the free-of-charge participation of representatives from CISs generates a significant financial benefit for the service.

The CIB broadcast MediaBook for the first six months of 2016 provides details of the broadcasters involved and the topics discussed, as an example of type of coverage received by CISs. Topics ranged from very specific – such as services for specific disabilities or illnesses – to relatively general – such as Medical Card services or changes to the State Pension. Similarly, the CIB's Internet coverage MediaBook for the same period provides examples of services providing information to print media – such as local newspapers – as well as to online media.

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[10] Email from CIS Development Managers

Maximising Access to Citizens Information Services

The basic offering of Citizens Information Services is to be as open and inviting as possible. Services are organised on a drop-in basis, with no waiting lists. Services are all free-of-charge for people availing of them.

A range of specialist and tailored services have been developed by CISs to address the needs of specific communities, and to bring the service to people who might not otherwise be able to avail of it.

As an example of how local CISs develop and maintain awareness of and access to their services, Donegal CIS shows an example of service provision across a large catchment area to dispersed locations. As well as seven CI centres, they provide weekly clinics in Killybegs and Ballybofey, and outreach to Arranmore Island subject to demand. Donegal CIS offer their service through the Irish language in Dungloe CIC.[11] In addition, they provide a range of one-off outreach clinics in villages across the county and via stands at events, including information sessions on specific topics of interest to those attending specific events, such as education-related issues at an adult learner event.

Similarly, West Cork CIS uses the mobile unit, which services Bandon, Clonakilty, Skibbereen and Ballineen/Enniskeane as none of these areas have direct bus services to Bantry or Macroom where the CICs are located. Regular outreach services were provided to Bandon and Dunmanway, and occasional outreach services were provided to West Cork Traveller Centre, West Cork Carers Support Group,

the Irish Wheelchair Association and similar groups.

The provision of information in multiple languages and in suitable formats is another example of how the Citizens Information Service makes itself accessible to as many people as possible. For example, information targeted at young people is formatted and written in a style to make it as accessible as possible for this cohort.

Case Study:

One-off Outreach Services

As an example of how CISs make themselves available to the public in a variety of means and venues, one CIS conducted information and advocacy support clinics in nine locations – including local libraries, a hospital and a prison. Presentations were made in 28 separate locations over a 12-month period – including to a Parkinson's Patient Conference, active retirement groups, Spinal Injuries Ireland, cancer support groups, a Polish community group and many others.

In addition to regular in-house services, regular specialist clinics were provided on employment, on complex social welfare issues, on legal advice, on the Ombudsman service and Polish language services.

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11   Email from Donegal CIS Development Manager

Strategic Objectives

The strategic priorities from the CIB strategic plan were taken as broadly representative of the objectives of the 42 independent Citizens Information Services as well as of the national body.

The Citizens Information Board's mission for the period 2015–2018 is 'to enhance citizens' access to consistent and high quality information, advice, money advice, and advocacy to meet their needs, now and in the future,' (CIB, 2015 p.2).

The CIB's six strategic priorities – A to F – are shown in Table 1 (CIB, 2015 p.5). These are essentially focused on activities and outputs to be prioritised by services, which the second column interprets as target outcomes.

Strategic priorities A, B and D are all assumed to be working towards the same target outcome, whereas priorities C, E, and F are identified as representing a different target outcome in each case.

The four strategic objectives, expressed as outcomes, for Citizens Information Services in Ireland are:

1 Services leading to positive outcomes in people's lives

2 Positive outcomes for people in vulnerable situations

3 Recommendations leading to policy change

4 Positive benefits in the lives of volunteers

The target outcomes identified as (1) and (2) obviously align with the delivery of information, advice and advocacy, and also reflect the fundamentals of providing good public services; i.e. quality, efficiency, responsiveness, etc.

Target outcomes (3) and (4) suggest that the CIS has a further vision of its role, specifically to improve public policies generally through feedback to policy makers and administrators as a contribution to the optimum overall functioning of public services, and also, to achieve positive outcomes for its volunteers and employment support staff as well as for service users.

Table 1: Citizens Information Services' Strategic Priorities and Outcomes

Strategic Priority (Output)	Outcomes
Provide high quality consistent services to citizens, supported by robust quality assurance mechanisms	**(1)** Services leading to positive outcomes in people's lives (e.g. re access to benefits, health status, etc.)
Revise the structures of CISs and MABS to better serve the citizen by improving management structures and governance, management of resources and the delivery of consistent high quality services; this includes aligning CIB structures accordingly to maximise effective use of resources	*(1) Services leading to positive outcomes in people's lives*
Provide targeted interventions to support the needs of our citizens in very vulnerable situations through specialist services	**(2)** Positive outcomes for people in vulnerable situations
Improve awareness of the range of services provided by CIB and our delivery services particularly with regard to accessibility of services to citizens	*(1) Services leading to positive outcomes in people's lives*
Highlight issues of concern so that policy and administration of public services is continually enhanced	**(3)** Recommendations leading to policy change
Continue to develop our people – staff volunteers, board members – through appropriate supports. A particular emphasis on the key role of volunteering will form part of our ongoing strategy	**(4)** Positive benefits in the lives of volunteers

Outcomes
What Citizens Information Services Achieve

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Public Value

The description and analysis of outcomes in this section is based on the extensive documentation that was provided by CISs and CIB to enable this research. A list of these sources is at the end of the report.

The common characteristic of all outcomes is that they represent some significant change in people's lives in terms of their behaviour, knowledge, skills, status and/or level of functioning. This covers a lot of ground. For example, changes to someone's status might mean a change in their financial situation, but it might equally mean a change in their health status or residency status.

The first reference point for outcomes is obviously the strategic objectives that the Citizens Information Service has set for itself, as outlined above.

When cataloguing the evidence for the achievement of outcomes in Ireland, reference was made to the evidence gathered in England and Wales, which shows diverse outcomes summarised as follows (O'Connor, 2016a and Whyte et al, 2015b):

- Savings to local and national government

- Keeping people in employment or helping them back to work

- Preventing housing evictions and preventing statutory homelessness

- Reducing the demand for mental health services and for GP services

- Improving mental well-being, family relationships and emotional well-being,

and better management of mental health conditions

- From volunteering to paid employment, including skills development

- Increasing confidence/self-esteem, reduced isolation and positive functioning

- Improving community well-being

- Benefit outcomes to individuals

- Debt write-off

- Consumer advice

- Helping clients negotiate local processes

- Averting the detrimental costs associated with unsafe and substandard living conditions

- Debts rescheduled

- Financial gain for individuals from charitable funds, or goods and services in kind, as well as financial outcomes associated with housing, employment, relationships or other problems

- Keeping families together, preventing suicide and working with victims of domestic violence

- Providing advice online

- Reducing energy bills and avoiding fuel poverty

- Avoiding the detriment associated with problem debt

- Research and campaigns work

The categories of outcomes achieved in England and Wales provide a basis for examining whether Citizens Information Services in the Republic of Ireland can demonstrate evidence of achieving similar benefits. It should be noted that unlike the UK Citizens Advice services, MABS (Money Advice and Budgeting Service) has the remit for debt advice in Ireland separate from the general Citizens Information Services, although also under the auspices of the Citizens Information Board.

Clarke and Eustace – in a CIB commissioned report on information processes in CISs – provide an Outcomes Framework to classify the positive outcomes for clients (2015b pp.96–104). These are divided into six clusters:

1 Positive change in client's knowledge and awareness

2 Positive change in terms of a task completed to progress a situation

3 Positive changes in client's sense of well-being (during and after the process)

4 Positive change in client's income/ financial gain

5 Positive change in system/guidelines/ rules (social policy)

6 Positive change in access to services.

According to a census of clients 'the higher frequency immediate outcomes include the client feeling safe and listened to, greater clarity for the client, client satisfaction with the information and service received, client reassurance and the client feeling able (empowered) to take the next step. The medium frequency outcomes relate to increased awareness, knowledge, information and understanding, e.g. about rights and entitlements, about options and choices, about how to navigate the system. Lower frequency outcomes relate to the specifics of a query in terms of the relevance of income maximisation, making referrals, completing forms, receiving an entitlement, making an appeal, etc.' (Clarke and Eustace, 2015b p.103).

Citizens Information Services typically present more evidence in relation to those areas where they address a greater volume of queries, such as social welfare, health, employment, and money and tax issues.

Based on the analysis of the available material, 12 broad categories of outcome were identified. This is not claimed to be an exhaustive typology, as the limited resources available to complete this study did not allow for other methods to be used – such as interviews or surveys – which would be expected to give additional findings and insights.

Some of the categories are quite broad, as the scale of outcomes can vary considerably. For example, access to entitlements might mean a modest weekly payment for one person but years' of back-payment for another.

The following outcomes are the 12 categories that summarise the positive outcomes that Citizens Information achieve in people's lives:

a **Access to Entitlements**

b **Access to Redress**

c **Connecting People with Public Services and NGOs**

d **Savings to the State**

e **Social Inclusion of Communities with Particular Needs**

f **Social Inclusion of New Communities and Minorities**

g **Public Trust**

h **Research Findings and Social Policy Advocacy**

i **Civic Education**

j **Developing Citizens' Self-Reliance**

k **Promoting Active Citizenship**

l **Alleviation of Stress**

m **Supporting Service Development Internationally**

(a) Access to Entitlements

Nearly half of all queries to Citizens Information Services relate to social insurance entitlements and social welfare schemes. It is therefore unsurprising that one of the major outcomes of the CIS is that people gain access to welfare payments.

Included in this outcome are people who either reduced an overpayment demand from Social Protection or who have received an entitlement to a back payment.

By way of comparison, Citizens Advice in England and Wales were able to quantify the benefit to individuals accessing welfare payments with their help at £1.9 billion (circa €2.25 billion). That calculation comes after Citizens Advice significantly reduced the possible total benefit in order to eliminate potential deadweight and optimism bias in the data.

Unlike England and Wales, Ireland does not have systematic follow-up with users of CISs to see what has changed in their lives several months after using the service, although individual services do record outcomes in terms of the immediate result of their interaction with service users and research at national level has included in-depth engagement with clients to gauge the impact of service interventions.

It is not possible to calculate the total financial value for the receipt of benefits through CIS interventions in Ireland. Nonetheless, given that Ireland's population is a twelfth of England and Wales, it is highly plausible that this amounts to tens of millions of euro annually. As such, the economic value of Citizens Information Services from this outcome alone potentially exceeds the total public funding of the service several times over.

Where outcomes data does exist, there are several examples that show how the Citizens Information Service's role was crucial in helping someone either recover back payments worth tens of thousands of euro, or else have over-payment demands of similar size reduced or waived. In many cases these represent major relief for clients. A number of reports indicated the life-changing benefits for clients both from one-off payments and from securing an income into the future.

Some major positive outcomes for clients required a significant investment of time by CISs. In one case, a client had an overpayment claim of over €€0,000 cancelled, but the contribution of the CIS towards achieving this outcome involved over 60 actions and took 46½ hours. Of course, such large-scale outcomes are not guaranteed, but the CISs must nevertheless invest the time on clients' behalf in the attempt to help them.

The CIS Advocacy National Outcomes Report (2016) provides notes on individual cases, with some detail for advocacy cases on the result of the intervention by CISs. Many of these relate to welfare payments, but others relate to compensation from employers, consumer issues, residency issues, and other topics.

The types of monetary benefits to individuals in the CIS Advocacy National Outcomes Report are illustrated by the following examples:

- A client had an 'overpayment' demand from the Department of Social Protection reduced by over €18,000 due to the excessive delay on the Department's side in pursuing the matter;

- A client attained €5,000 in arrears for Carer's Allowance upon reapplication;

- On appeal, an EU national attained a pension and arrears of €21,549.

Dunne (2016) analyses outcomes from advocacy in the period January 2015 to March 2016. Each CIS can provide representative advocacy when instructed by the client and also when the person lacks the capacity to make an informed decision (Dunne, 2016 p.2). Reports on advocacy work are made on the national advocacy Electronic Case Management System (ECMS), which provides for confidential recording of information about cases.

Dunne reports 315 advocacy cases where a monetary outcome was recorded, with a total value to clients of over €2.7 million over a 15-month period. That represents an average value of over €8,700 to each of these clients.

Dunne's research shows that 90 per cent of the 1,800 advocacy cases were recorded as successful – i.e. 1,620 cases with a positive outcome.

The top categories for monetary outcomes were 'appeals' (67 cases, total value €937,370), 'employment rights and conditions' (81 cases, total value €536,580), 'families and children' (16 cases, total value €283,517), 'disability and illness' (25 cases, total value €234,859) and 'unemployment and redundancy' (28 cases, total value €226,762).

In a number of cases, details on file suggest that the client felt unable to achieve an outcome without the assistance received. In one vivid example that illustrates this, a client who received a State Contributory Pension is quoted as follows:

'I felt I had a direct line of communication from the Service, which I could not get from Social Welfare' ... 'I felt for the first time there was a level playing field' ... 'Eventually if you continue to run into a stone wall there comes a time you stop. At the stage I arrived at the Citizens Information Office I felt I wanted to stop, and also because of my memory loss I was no good at keeping records or anything on file, C.I.S. were able to keep records on file.' ... 'Without the service I would have been lost. From my experience I would certainly recommend the service to someone else. I was very happy with the outcome, something happened which I could not manage to get going.'

(b) Access to Redress

Two other areas where the Citizens Information Service routinely assists individuals, and which can involve significant financial value for individuals, is in relation to employment disputes and in relation to consumer rights.

Monetary benefits to individuals in the CIS Advocacy National Outcomes Report include, as illustrative examples:

- A client successfully gained over €2,300 in pay owed from an employer;

- A client successfully gained an award of €10,000 from an employer for unfair dismissal;

- A client successfully gained a €2,200 redundancy payment from an employer.

As noted above, Dunne (2016) found benefits from advocacy work to include 81 cases to do with 'employment rights and conditions' (total value €536,580) and 28 cases to do with 'unemployment and redundancy' (total value €226,762).

South Midlands Advocacy Service (2009) demonstrated how CISs in its area recouped over €144,000 for clients in a 17-month period.

In common with the experience in England and Wales, the total monetary value to service users is likely to be significant; however, data are not available to calculate a total.

(c) Connecting People with Public Services and NGOs

Social welfare is only one, albeit large, category of information that the Citizens Information Service deals with. As illustrated by **citizensinformation.ie**, the service provides information on over 1,300 specific topics under employment, housing, family and relationships, education and training, money and tax, health, death and bereavement, moving country, justice, travel and recreation, consumer affairs, government in Ireland, and the environment.

Many of the 19 million visits to **citizensinformation.ie** were likely to have been sufficiently informative that people could approach public services directly. The front page of the government's own website (**gov.ie**) provides a direct link to **citizensinformation.ie** for citizens seeking information on rights, entitlements and benefits.

In addition to the website, callers to the Citizens Information Centres and outreach services are often guided to public services and non-government organisations that can help them. For example, CISs produce guides explaining all of the agencies involved when a person is having a baby in Ireland. In this way, the CIS is crucial to the government of Ireland's ability to provide an integrated and holistic set of public services.

Case Study:

Local Directories

A number of CISs provided copies of directories and booklets that they produce, which link people to local services and non-government organisations in their area. For example, one CIS produces an annual 130-page directory of activities and services for adults and children. This is available online – with the co-operation of the local authority – and 5,000 print copies are distributed through libraries, bookshops and other outlets.

In many cases the outcome does not involve a direct cash benefit to service users, although gaining access to public services obviously has a cash-equivalent value compared to purchasing the same services privately. Some outcomes have a clear economic value to individuals. Benefits in the CIS Advocacy National Outcomes Report include, as illustrative examples, repairs carried out to a local authority house to resolve an issue of damp, and a grant attained to have both an accessible bathroom and a stair-lift installed.

(d) Savings to the State

As well as providing its own service in an efficient and effective manner, Citizens Information Services can provide savings to the state in a number of ways. The information and advice received from CISs may mean that a person does not need to seek the same information from a public body. This is a saving in staff costs, not least due to the important role that is played by volunteers and scheme employees in Citizens Information Services.

Information and advice can also make it clear to individuals when they do not have an entitlement, and this can save them from engaging in an ultimately fruitless, as well as costly and time-consuming, application to a public authority.

The help of CISs can also be sufficient to reduce the demand for more costly procedures, such as appeals, employment hearings, the courts, etc. For example, South Midlands Advocacy Service (2009) demonstrated how CISs in its area saved the state over €42,000 through cost-savings associated with the former Rights Commissioners or Employment Appeals Tribunal.

Whenever any public body introduces a new scheme, or implements a change in government policy, this may require action to be taken by tens or hundreds of thousands of citizens. The existence of CISs means that public authorities are not under the same pressure to create temporary call centres or other information services to support major initiatives.

For example, in 2012 the government reintroduced a residential tax (the Local Property Tax), which was implemented in 2013. This affected the large majority of dwellings in Ireland, whether the liability fell on homeowners or landlords. Even before its implementation, the Citizens Information Service was dealing with queries from people who were uncertain about how it would affect them. During the months around its implementation, Citizens Information Services dealt with thousands of queries on the topic.

Another example was the large volume of queries handled by CISs from 2012 when the new Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) service suffered serious operational problems at the beginning of its existence.

These examples illustrate the important role of Citizens Information Services. First of all, they act as an intermediary to help explain policy to citizens so that they can understand requirements, complete forms or otherwise comply with their obligations. The rapidity of response of CISs crucially depends on it getting access to information in a timely manner from public bodies, so that it can distribute the relevant information to its advisers (see example below around Local Property Tax).

Secondly, Citizens Information Services reduce pressure on public authorities, which are often not equipped — in terms of staff numbers or training — to handle large volumes of information queries that may arise occasionally. Thirdly, CISs reduce the information asymmetry that inevitably exists whenever citizens — especially those who are disadvantaged or who have literacy/numeracy difficulties — interact with professionals working in public bodies.

Fourthly, examples like the Local Property Tax or SUSI indicate how cohorts of the national population may come into contact with CISs despite never having done so before. The use of Citizens Information Services is clearly not limited to any segment of the population

but is a service that nearly everyone will use at some point in their lives. CISs provide a national infrastructure that plays a vital role in smoothing out the implementation of new policies.

Throughout the course of life, a person will inevitably interact with public bureaucracies for a number of different reasons: registration of birth, marriage and death; social security; education; employment; car ownership; health services; emergency services; criminal justice; jury service; etc. A strong case can be made that Citizens Information Services, as a general information and advice service, create administrative savings across all of the relevant public authorities.

Case Study:

Integrated Response to the Introduction of Local Property Tax

A new Local Property Tax (LPT) was introduced in 2013. During the year the Revenue Commissioners issued notifications to almost 2 million households about their LPT obligations. A close working relationship was developed with Revenue during and following the rollout of the new tax. In particular CIB liaised with Revenue to publish information on LPT on citizensinformation.ie. Subsequently information on Citizens Information Services and the Citizens Information Phone Service number was printed on all Revenue's information materials, letters and notifications. Training on the Local Property Tax was given by Revenue staff to 205 CIS, MABS and CIPS staff as part of the CIB training calendar. This training enabled CIS personnel to give comprehensive information to clients on the new tax.

During the month of April CIPS answered the highest number of calls on record (17,291). CISs also noted that Local Property Tax queries were particularly high during the second and fourth quarters of 2013, following Revenue communications with householders on the tax. During and after the introduction of the tax a substantial amount of social policy returns on this issue were logged (19% of the total). Apart from social welfare-related topics, no other individual issue has featured so highly in social policy returns. This indicates that Citizens Information Services and CIPS played an important role in assisting the citizen to deal with their concerns around the assessment and payment of the tax. In addition CIB made a submission on the introduction of the LPT to the Revenue Commissioners and to the Department of Finance.

(*Excerpt from Citizens Information Board Annual Report 2013, p.11*)

(e) Social Inclusion of Communities with Particular Needs

Given Citizens Information Services' strategic priority to address the needs of people in very vulnerable situations, it is important to know how many CIS clients were in one or more of the situations of vulnerability.

As a starting point, the definition of someone 'in a very vulnerable situation' is understood in this report to mean someone who would find it difficult or impossible to meet all of his or her basic needs, either directly through his/her own means or through accessing public services/other assistance to do so. A person's needs were understood as those necessities (not wants) that allow a person to meet his/her physical, psychological and social needs. This minimum level is understood by the Insolvency Service of Ireland (2015) to represent a 'reasonable standard of living'. Importantly, a person may be understood as unable to meet these needs due to a range of factors including lack of material resources (poverty), disability or exclusion by others (discrimination), but also due to lack of information or knowledge about how to access the relevant resources or services.

In addition, a 'vulnerable situation' was understood to mean a context where a person's health and wellbeing are under constant or regular threat, or where the person is already experiencing negative health and wellbeing.

A summary of vulnerable situations is as follows:

- Chronic poverty
- Health issues or disability
- Legal issues*
- Abuse/exploitation
- Discrimination
- Social isolation
- Poor comprehension of English*

Those marked with an asterisk (*) are dealt with in the next section.

This summary is derived from the following list – based on O'Connor and Staunton (2015 – which identifies categories of people who might be deemed to be in 'vulnerable situations'.

- People living in continual poverty and deprivation
- People who are homeless, including people in domestic violence refuges
- People currently experiencing domestic abuse or attempting to flee a situation of abuse
- People experiencing persistent discrimination related to one or more of the nine grounds listed in the Equal Status Acts 2000–2012: gender; marital status; family status; sexual orientation; religion; age; disability; race; membership of the Traveller Community
- People suffering from mental illness, including addiction (alcohol, drugs)
- People facing significant physical or intellectual disability

- People with low educational attainment, especially those who have difficulties with literacy and/or numeracy, or who do not have a good command of English

- People recovering from injury or trauma (including victims of crime)

- People with terminal illness or life-long serious illness (e.g. cancer, heart disease, diabetes, AIDS)

- People leaving state care or hospital

- People leaving prison or other detention

- People with precarious work and/or suffering exploitation at work

- People parenting alone or with shared parenting responsibilities

- People with significant care responsibilities

- Young people not in education, training or employment

- Children and young people in state care or foster care

- Migrants, including recent immigrants, emigrants moving back to Ireland, and people working in another EU state, such as those working in Northern Ireland but living in the Republic of Ireland

- People seeking asylum who are residing in Direct Provision accommodation or who are recently granted asylum/ residency

- Older people, especially those living alone without regular assistance from family or neighbours

Not everyone in each category will necessarily be unable to meet his/her needs. Rather, each category or group indicates people who have a higher than average level of risk or vulnerability, and many will therefore struggle to meet all of their needs without assistance. Obviously, some people may fit in two or more of these categories. Different people have different level of personal resilience and/or social networks to help them cope in situations of stress or difficulty.

All things considered, the information, advice and advocacy provided by the CISs are likely to be more important to people who are more vulnerable or less resilient. But giving information, advice or other support to people who are in a vulnerable situation may be more resource-intensive than average, which is a trade-off that needs to be integrated into any quantitative analysis of Citizens Information Services.

Direct Evidence of Positive Outcomes for People in Vulnerable Situations

The CISs provided a range of information indicating how they provide services to people affected by these situations of vulnerability.

The CIS Advocacy National Outcomes Report provides enough details on cases to make it clear how they sometimes negotiate complex circumstances for clients. Examples include:

- Assisting people who were homeless, and in some cases sleeping rough;

- Complex health issues resulting in lengthy appeals for clients seeking illness or disability welfare payments;

- Complex cases of overpayment by the Department of Social Protection requiring a negotiated settlement so that clients can afford to repay them over time;

- Clients presenting with psychological or mental health difficulties, which made it much more difficult for them to engage with authorities about welfare payments or other entitlements;

- Detailed submissions being made to the Department of Social Protection with regard to clients' suitability to work, often including detail on their medical history.

It should be noted that the CIS Advocacy National Outcomes Report (2016) also shows cases where clients were not entitled to welfare payments or where appeals were unsuccessful or were withdrawn, or where clients failed to engage further with a CIS after a certain point in time.

In some cases the outcomes report does not indicate the end result of a case, notably when a client was on a waiting list for a court hearing, but also where clients do not inform the CIS of the final outcome.

Based on the Advocacy Outcomes Report as well as individual case reports, the following direct outcomes were identified:

- Large numbers of people in distress or suffering from stress/anxiety about their circumstances were given support;

- Families and individuals at risk of homelessness were assisted;

- Families and individuals fleeing domestic violence were assisted;

- Individuals suffering from mental health difficulties were assisted;

- Individuals were assisted who had received very large demands for return of social welfare overpayments – typically tens of thousands of euro;

- Individuals with no income were assisted;

- Returned emigrants were assisted to regain their entitlements to services or welfare payments, as were migrant workers and people with refugee status;

- People with disabilities were assisted to access services.

Specialist services and initiatives for people in vulnerable situations

CISs provided a wide range of examples of services, initiatives and one-off presentations that aimed to benefit people in vulnerable situations.

These are examined under the following headings: chronic poverty; health issues or disability; abuse/exploitation; discrimination; and social isolation.

Chronic Poverty

The largest category of queries to CISs – typically representing 40 per cent or more of queries – is cash welfare benefits, which includes payments related to disability, illness, carers, jobseekers and old-age pensions. Not everyone reliant on a welfare income is in chronic poverty, as other relevant factors include their household income, housing status and savings. However, some of the advocacy case studies illustrate people in dire poverty, with examples of people with no visible means of support or who face imminent homelessness due to lack of resources. As such, the intervention of the CISs does address the needs of some people in chronic poverty.

Health Issues/Disability

A number of CISs provided evidence of how they provide outreach or one-off presentations to organisations dealing with health and

disability issues, including hospitals and nursing homes. In addition, the annual reports of numerous CISs included reference to one-off presentations in various disability organisations as well as at active retirement clubs.

Abuse/Exploitation

One issue that emerges from many CIS social policy reports is the need for urgent responses to people in dire situations such as people experiencing domestic violence and people at risk of homelessness. Many social policy reports identify administrative delays as a significant problem for people in emergencies, who could be left without money or shelter for a period of days, although charities such as the St Vincent de Paul were identified as being able to step in to provide assistance in some of these cases.

The reports make it clear that CIS connections to community and voluntary organisations are an important part of their work, not just through listing these organisations in their directories but through having working relationships with them and the ability to seek a rapid reaction that is sometimes not forth-coming from statutory agencies due to the time required to formally process applications.

Discrimination

Anti-discrimination legislation identifies nine grounds under which it is illegal to discriminate: gender; marital status; family status; sexual orientation; religion; age; disability; race; and membership of the Traveller Community.

The directories and annual reports of the CISs examined for this research show the many links that CISs have with both statutory bodies and community and voluntary organisations working with people facing discrimination.

In this regard, the CIS role is more evident as a signpost directing people to organisations that can help them to deal with discrimination, although some of the advocacy case studies show examples of the CISs directly working with someone who is seeking redress – for example, seeking redress from an employer or landlord in relation to discrimination or unfair treatment.

Social Isolation

A number of CISs provide services to prison inmates. For example, one CIS delivers a full day's prison in-reach service every week, which addresses problems inmates may have except for internal prison matters. Follow up work is then done from the CIC office. Regular pre-release classes are conducted and they have created a booklet for people leaving prison (*The Road Back*).[12]

Other CISs showed evidence of their role in actively reaching out to build connections with socially excluded communities, such as people seeking political asylum who live in Direct Provision accommodation.

Coverage of specialist services compared to numbers in vulnerable situations

The annual reports of various CISs indicate that their typical callers are more disadvantaged than average, although a wide spectrum of people use their services. For example, people reliant on welfare incomes, as well as members of the Traveller Community, and migrants and people from ethnic minorities are disproportionately likely to use Citizens Information Services.

Clarke and Eustace describe the socio-economic profile of clients:

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[12]   Email from CIS Development Manager

- 'the majority (90%) of clients were Irish or from other EU countries. A small and yet significant percentage were members of the Traveller community – at 2% proportionately higher than national census data. Most clients (89%) were in receipt of a social welfare payment, ranging from employment supports to income supports, housing supports, pensions, etc.

- Two-thirds had leaving certificate or higher levels of education. Forty-two per cent were unemployed. Over one-third live in private rented accommodation, 18% live in local authority or social housing and 39% own their own houses.

- Close to one quarter (23%) of clients were experiencing particular life challenges/ situations. These include literacy (26%), language difficulties (46%), disability (14%) or poor mental health (13%)' (2015b pp.89–95).

This profile suggests that people experiencing disadvantage or who are in a vulnerable situation are likely to be significantly represented among the overall cohort of CIS clients.

For example, one CIS met 96 per cent of clients in its main centre, and only 4 per cent from outreach work. Nonetheless, over 800 clients were met through outreach in 2014, some of whom may not otherwise have accessed the service.

(f) Social Inclusion of New Communities and Minorities

A theme that emerged from many of the documents and reports provided by Citizens Information Services indicate the important role of the centres in giving minorities and migrants access to information about how social services and other public agencies operate in Ireland.

Most local CISs provide some information in several languages other than English, including Irish language services and publications provided in Gaeltacht areas as well as Polish, French, etc. Likewise, **citizensinformation.ie** includes documents in other languages.

The CIS Advocacy Outcomes Report gives examples of some of the additional difficulties that migrant communities can face:

- Habitual residency and welfare entitlement status for non-Irish nationals sometimes resulted in complex appeals processes before a decision was reached, with language acting as a further barrier in some cases;

- Attaining a welfare payment in a non-Irish national's name as her husband, who was suffering from alcoholism, refused her any money for food.

Case Study:

Working with Refugees

One CIS supports new beginnings for Iranian and Syrian families through the UNHRC Refugee Resettlement Programme. The chosen location for resettlement in Ireland is rotated by county for each programme. The local County Council leads the programme and

the CIS is part of an inter-agency group to manage the process.

The CIS has been active in meeting the families and explaining how Citizens Information Services can assist them. Interpretation services have been provided where funding allows for this. The CISs are focused on helping the families to secure housing, education and employment.

Legal Issues

Residency status and the Habitual Residency Condition – the need to demonstrate residency in Ireland for certain assistance, notably social housing – were frequently mentioned issues in CIS reports.

Complex legal issues also arose in relation to welfare entitlements for cross-border workers and their families, as well as for workers whose families live in another country.

In a number of cases, CISs worked closely with services like FLAC – the Free Legal Advice Centres – to provide their callers with the specialist information and advice they needed for these issues.

Case Study:

Direct Provision

One CIS engaged with the adjacent Direct Provision Centre, which 'enabled an exploration of the systems that the residents engage with, versus the systems citizens engage with. It was very worthwhile and since then residents come in droves to make inquiries. We are the first port of call now when a person is granted leave to remain, and for education and health queries whilst waiting.'[13]

Poor Comprehension of English

Given the high level of functional illiteracy in Ireland – one in six adults have difficulty with text and one in four find mathematics difficult[14] – it is unsurprising that the Citizens Information Service plays a vital role in helping many people to navigate the administrative steps required to access welfare benefits and public services. Moreover, as over two-fifths of Irish adults find it hard to solve problems in technology-rich environments, it is unsurprising that the face-to-face CIS service remains highly relevant, while it might be assumed that people with higher literacy skills find it easier to use the **citizensinformation.ie** website and other online resources.

The National Activity Report for 2016 reported the nationality of callers to CISs was non-Irish in 22 per cent of cases. Out of all callers, 8 per cent were recorded as having access difficulties, with language accounting for 40 per cent of these cases.

A number of CISs produce leaflets and booklets in the native languages of Ireland's new communities. Languages reported as part of this research included Polish, Russian, Czech, Romanian, Bulgarian, French and Italian. One CIS piloted a community interpreting service, but this was discontinued due to lack of funds.[15] However, interpretation services are provided by a few CISs.

A small-scale survey by Blanchardstown CIS (Lawlor, 2015) found that over half (54%) of those interviewed did not have English as their first language. Additionally, 18 per cent had difficulty with oral communication and 16 per cent had difficulty with written communication.

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13 Email from CIS Development Manager
14 https://www.nala.ie/literacy/literacy-in-ireland
15 Email from CIS Development Manager

This is likely to be particular to that locality, plus the sample size (57 clients out of 76 invited to participate) is too small for the findings to be statistically representative of the wider population of CIS clients. Nonetheless, it is a reminder of how CISs may provide a vital resource for migrant workers and members of Ireland's new communities.

While the large majority of callers in many CISs are Irish nationals, there is a significant cohort of foreign nationals using CISs. Callers came from a total of 215 countries in 2016, up from 210 the previous year. The usage data indicates the continued importance of CISs as an information service for migrants.

The International Role of the National Association of CISs

'*No service like this in my country*'
– comment by CIS client

The role of Ireland's National Association of CISs includes networking with similar services around the world, in order to identify best practice in the delivery of these services and to help develop them in other countries. For example, the National Association of CISs is involved in supporting the development of services in the Western Balkans and Turkey.[16]

(g) Public Trust

Evidence from Clarke and Eustace (2015b) shows that managers and boards of CISs are confident in the information they provide to the general public.

In turn, evidence from services – verified by Clarke and Eustace – shows a high level of public satisfaction with the service received and with the accuracy of information. Moreover, various CIS annual reports give examples of the positive comments and feedback they have received from people, who acknowledge the personal support and caring nature of the attention they received from Citizens Information Services.

Given that general public trust in government is low (32% in 2016 according to Edelman's Trust Barometer), the ability of an organisation like Citizens Information Services to foster trust and confidence is an important outcome.

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16   http://tripleacitizens.eu

(h) Research Findings and Social Policy Advocacy

Under its strategy, the CIB is committed to producing relevant and timely social policy reports and submissions reflecting policy concerns being raised by citizens, which input to policy debate and decision making. Likewise it seeks to engage with public service agencies as appropriate to provide feedback on public services based on evidence from clients.

CISs have a system for sending social policy feedback to government departments and public agencies. This system is probably unique in Ireland, as few other organisations have the extent of contact with the general public about issues to do with social policy.

At any point in time when a person is interacting with the CIS, this interaction may highlight an issue or problem, including technical issues, potential gaps or contradictions in administrative rules, or some injustice or unfairness emerging from the interaction of different rules. These issues are recorded by Citizens Information Service advisers in the form of "social policy returns", which are collated and sent to the Citizens Information Board. The CIB in turn produces quarterly reports summarising this information. Many of the issues are relevant for the Department of Social Protection, but they can also be important for other departments and public agencies.

Measuring any influence on public policy is hard to prove definitively, whether that influence comes from academic research, lobbying or administrative information such as that generated by the CISs.

In the first instance, senior public officials, politicians and advisers may be reluctant to identify the source of information that led to policy change. In other cases, major issues may be communicated to policy makers through multiple channels – including the mass media, constituency clinics, lobbying and direct communication to government departments – and it can be impossible to determine how influential the communication from the CISs was compared to other sources.

Nonetheless, Clarke and Eustace's research found that nearly two-thirds of CIS Development Managers could give 'examples of how social policy work has had an impact at local and national levels in recent times....These examples are encouraging and relate to improvements in systems, forms, customer focus and ways of working with the DSP and HSE in particular' (2015b p.63).

Number and Range of Social Policy Reports Being Submitted

Staff working in CISs can enter examples of social policy issues into a shared database – Oyster – from which quarterly social policy reports are written by the CIB and conveyed to the relevant Government Departments. In 2016, over 3,700 social policy returns were submitted (National Summary CIS Activity Report 2016).

In addition to reports written by the CIB, individual CISs have produced reports about policy issues.

Examples of social policy issues raised include:

- Numerous reports detailing the length of time (in months or years) for welfare appeals or claims against employers to be resolved – 'justice delayed is justice denied';

- Departments not adhering to their own guidelines, such as giving decisions to people in writing which can dissuade them from making appeals;

- Delays in processing the claims for people in very vulnerable situations – such as people fleeing domestic violence or facing homelessness.

Some examples of full reports on social policy produced by CISs include:

- Irwin, A (2013) Centralised Rent Supplement Units: an evaluation of clients' experiences. Citizens Information Services (Blanchardstown/D15, Co. Wicklow, North Co. Kildare and South Co. Kildare).

- Co. Wicklow CIS (2013) Information in Transition: the Information, Advice and Advocacy Needs of Older People in the Technology and Information Age.

- Co. Tipperary Information Service (March 2008) Review of Services for Older People in South Tipperary. Commissioned by Community Consultants Ltd as part of the Social Audit for South Tipperary.

(i) Civic Education

A number of CISs reported initiatives to engage in awareness raising in secondary schools and colleges, where they made presentations and provided educational materials.

Given the recent emphasis on developing civic, social and political education at secondary education, the CIS is well placed to support this by providing easy-to-read material on a wide range of public services and supports.

Case Study:

Outreach to Secondary Schools

As an example of raising awareness of the CISs among young people, the 40th year anniversary of one CIS involved presentations to Transition Year students in secondary schools and an essay competition. Similarly for another CIS's 40th anniversary, where 800 school students heard presentations and had the opportunity to take part in an essay competition.[17]

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17   Email from CIS Development Manager

(j) Developing Citizens' Self-Reliance

Data is not available to distinguish between people who use CISs on a regular basis versus those who do so once[18]. However, the fact that Citizens Information Services helped over 600,000 individuals in 2016, with an average of roughly 1.7 queries per person, suggests that most people who use the service do so once a year or less frequently. The examples of Local Property Tax and SUSI, among others, indicate the likelihood of people coming into contact with CISs due to one specific issue as opposed to any sort of dependency on the service.

As such, the core information and advice services would appear to support self-reliance among citizens.

This is not to discount the important role of Citizens Information Services in assisting those who do require extra assistance, not least due to disability, educational disadvantage or other vulnerability. Complex advice queries and advocacy have both been identified as growing concerns for the CIS.

(k) Promoting Active Citizenship

A total of 1,080 volunteers worked in the CISs in 2016. Most volunteers are part-time, in contrast with paid staff who are generally full-time. The National Activity report for 2015 found that volunteers provided the equivalent of 120 whole-time equivalents, which suggests that volunteers contribute roughly three days per month each on average.

Prizeman et al (2010) found that CIS volunteers showed deep commitment to the provision of a quality service, and that they were strongly valued by staff working in CISs, with a generally good relationship existing between volunteers and paid staff. There was a perception that volunteers brought added value to the service provided by CISs such as their local knowledge and connection to the local area, and there was a widespread view that the mixed model of providing a service with both volunteers and paid staff was particularly effective.

TMA (2013) studied the role of Community Employment workers in Citizens Information Services. Major conclusions from this research included the good fit between the goals of CISs and Employment Support Schemes, with participants benefitting from the work experience and training, and the CISs benefiting from the boost to their staff numbers. TMA report high progression results for those working in CISs, ranking among the top employment scheme performances.

Similarly, to Prizeman et al, the mix of paid, volunteer and scheme participants was found to be a robust staffing model, offering a rich blend in backgrounds and perspectives. One risk that was identified was an over-dependence on volunteers and employment support scheme workers by CISs.

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[18]   There is limited data available on people who return to a service on the same query

The TMA research shows that both CIS staff and scheme participants acknowledge the high quality of training provided, both in-house and external FETAC-accredited training.

In England and Wales, Citizen Advice also report higher wellbeing and improved mental health among their volunteer cohort, and also report improved employment prospects.

Supports being provided to people working in CISs, including volunteers

As well as enhancing the quality of services, training is also an asset to staff and volunteers, in building their competencies and – for volunteers and scheme employees – their employability.

Phillips (2012) reports on a training needs analysis for some 1,500 personnel engaged in the work of the CISs. Survey evidence showed that 49% of people working in the CISs – including volunteers and scheme participants – had completed the FETAC accredited Information Providers Programme, 9.7% had completed the Advocacy Practice Programme and 7.3% the Higher Certificate in Advocacy. The survey found a high level of willingness (81–88%) to engage in e-learning, accredited and unaccredited training, coaching and group learning/peer support.

As an example of a supportive event, one CIS (2014) reported on holding a reflective event to celebrate its fortieth anniversary, where volunteers, staff and board members reviewed Citizens Information Services in the county.

(l) Alleviation of Stress

'*I had many sleepless nights worrying over my problems but the staff sorted all for me. Thank you.*'
– CIS client

CISs report a great many examples of how their service helps to alleviate stress and other psychological hardship caused by people's circumstances and their frustration or anxiety about finding help.

The England and Wales study demonstrates that this is a major issue. In the unit cost database agreed with the Treasury they identify a range of costs associated with stress, anxiety and mental ill health, which are prevented or alleviated through the information and support provided by Citizens Advice.

For example, their conservative estimate for England and Wales includes £210 million for the reduction in demand for mental health services, £1.2 billion from improved mental well-being, £202 million for improved family relationships, £20 million from increased confidence/self-esteem, £8 million from reduced isolation, £22 million from positive functioning and £7 million from improved emotional well-being. This totals £1,459 million (€1,732 million). This total is already reduced significantly to take account of potential deadweight and to reduce any optimism bias in the data.

Given that Ireland's population is a twelfth of England and Wales, it is highly plausible that the work of Citizens Information Services to reduce stress amounts to tens of millions of euro annually, and potentially over €100 million. As with welfare benefits, this value alone is several times the level of public investment in the service.
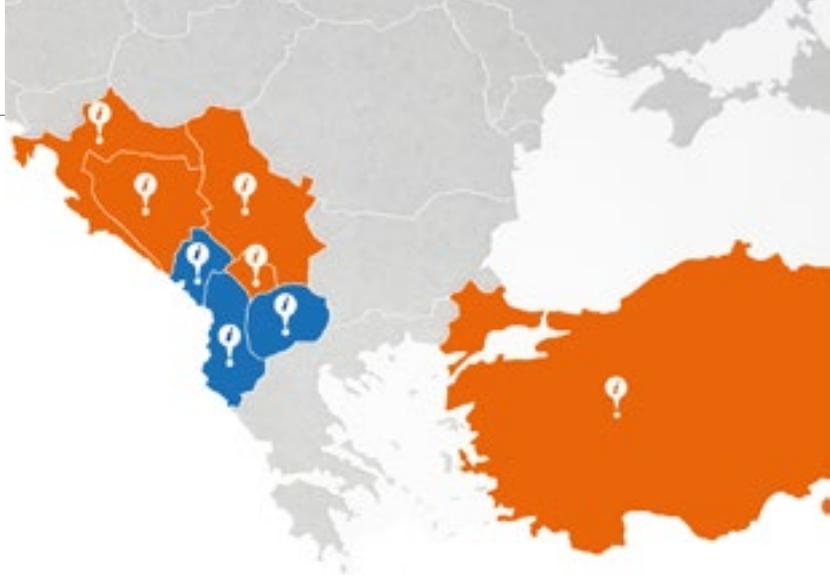
(m) Supporting the Development of Services Internationally

Citizens Information Services are part of a wider network of Citizens Advice Services Internationally and Ireland is a member of Citizens Advice International, which represents the interests of Information and Advice services in different countries. The original concept of Citizens Advice comes from the UK where the first Bureaux were set up in 1939. There are currently Citizens Advice Services in many countries including England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, New Zealand and Gibraltar. The model has also been successfully applied in other former socialist states such as the Czech Republic, Poland and Romania and in recent years Citizens Advice Services have been set up in Malawi Ethiopia and Afghanistan.

The **National Association of Citizens Information Services (NACIS)** in Ireland is involved in supporting the development of similar services in other countries and has been a partner in the **Triple A** project since 2013. This EU Funded project led by the European Citizens Action Service in Brussels aims to support **Access to information, Advice and Active help** for citizens in the Western Balkans and Turkey and seeks to promote the role of civil society in giving citizens a voice and influencing government policy on key reforms and their implementation. This project is funded under the European Commission Framework Partnership Programme for Civil Society Organisations – Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA) states, which recognises the challenges faced in the process of transition from former socialist rule to full democratic governance. The CSF aims to contribute to anchoring democratic values and structures, human rights, social

inclusion and the rule of law, thereby strengthening the EU Integration process.

The immediate objective in the first phase of the project was to spread the citizens' advice concept to Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, Kosovo and Turkey. Organisations from each of these countries received grant aid to set up pilot Information, Advice and Active help services. The main Objectives of Triple A include

- Supporting Pilot Projects

- Providing Direct Assistance to Citizens

- Mapping Information & Assistance Services

- Strengthening the Role of Civil Society

- Advocating for Changes in Law & Policy

- Creating a Regional Network of Citizens Advice Services

During the first phase of implementation fourteen Information, Advice and Active help pilot projects were set up in five countries in 2013. Two projects were established in each of the following countries; Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo and Turkey and an additional four projects were established in Croatia as further funding was obtained from another source. As only ten projects were initially planned, the development of supplementary projects according to the same guidelines enabled the Triple A project to have a wider reach than originally anticipated. The situation

in this region is particularly challenging due to legacy issues from the conflict, which followed the break-up of the former Yugoslavia and the citizens are still dealing with its effects, particularly in Bosnia Herzegovina and the more recent conflict in Kosovo.

The principal role of the National Association represented by a Development Manager has included organising Study Visits for pilot projects and providing mentoring support. As well as transferring knowledge on the Irish systems and presenting and facilitating various workshops the National Association has also had input into the Triple A Guidelines and Strategy, Calls for Proposals, Quality Standards, Selection of pilot projects, Creation of work-plan templates and mentoring documents and has participated in Steering Group Meetings with Triple A Partners.

Regional Partners

- Association for Democratic Initiatives – Bosnia & Herzegovina

- Lawyers Committee for Human Rights – Serbia

- National Foundation for Civil Society Development – Croatia (until 2013)

- Civil Rights Programme – Kosovo

- Civil Society Development Centre – Turkey

- Open Society Foundation – Albania

- Centre for Monitoring and Research – Montenegro

- Macedonian Young Lawyers Association – FYROM

EU Partners

- Law Centres Network – UK

- Romanian National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux

- National Association of Citizens Information Services (Ireland)

In order to build capacity representatives of each pilot project attended Study Visits in each of the EU Partner countries. NACIS hosted two Study Visits for participants in each phase of the project, which included opportunities for participants to observe the Information and Advice process in action in addition to presentations from relevant organisations including FLAC, The Bar Council, The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, MABS, Community Law Centres and Citizens Information Services. Feedback from the delegates indicates that they found the Study Visits very useful and they left with new ideas about providing information, advice and advocacy , which they could apply back home.

'I have taken a lot of information and get lots of messages to take back home. I am returning home with many new ideas.'[19]

In the first year of activity the fourteen pilot projects provided free legal advice and information to more than 8,000 citizens, launched two websites and distributed more than 14,000 copies of information material regarding free legal aid, advice and active help in the Western Balkans and Turkey.

Ireland was twinned with Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIH) in the first phase of this project and the NACIS International Representative provided mentoring support to the two pilot projects there. Although BIH

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[19]   Study Visitor from Western Balkans

has made significant progress since the conflict in the mid 1990's, it still faces significant challenges such as very high levels of un-employment and an under-resourced and inefficient social welfare system. The Dayton Peace Agreement of 1995 stipulated the articles of the Bosnian Constitution and according to the resulting political system; Bosnia is composed of 2 political entities – Republic Srpska (49% of territory) & the Bosniak-Croat Federation (51%) of the territory in addition to the independent district of Brcko. The Federation of BIH is divided into 10 Cantonal units and different rules and regulations in different cantons and different entities in the country make the situation extremely complicated and inefficient. It is therefore not surprising that many citizens remain uninformed about their rights and the large number of unresolved legal disputes in relation to returnees and property issues as well as the backlog of war crimes' cases hinders the efficient functioning of the courts and makes it very difficult for citizens to access their rights.

The mentoring visits provided a great opportunity to see first-hand the enormous volume of work which had been accomplished by the pilot projects and the strength and commitment of the organisations involved. For the Foundation for Local Democracy in Bosnia funding from the Triple A project ensured the provision of information, advice and active help / representation in court for many marginalised women, particularly victims of domestic violence, lone parents and victims of war. Their production of a guide on Social Welfare rights, Family Law Procedures and Free Legal Aid providers in the Canton of Sarajevo has also assisted many vulnerable women in accessing their rights. Through the

Triple A Project 'Vasa Prava' (Your Rights) has provided information, advice and assistance and legal representation to many refugees, displaced people and returnees and other vulnerable individuals. 'Vasa Prava' has also been very involved in monitoring and reporting on the Justice Sector Reform Strategy and has been very active in advocating for the adoption of the long awaited law on Free Legal Aid in BIH in conjunction with other NGOs including FLD.

The findings of the External EU Evaluation of the first phase of the project were very positive *'The actions of the selected sub-grantees has meant that the partnership is strengthening the capacity of Bosnian civil society to respond to the Triple A needs of citizens in areas that were previously weak. For example one of the selected sub-grantees is not only improving the advice and support services it can provide to a specific target group, victims of domestic violence but is raising awareness of the issue, which both assists citizens to access information and ensures that local authorities incorporate the issue into their social welfare policies'.* [20] As the first phase of the project was considered to be successful, it was subsequently extended to include Albania, Macedonia & Montenegro and further grant aid was made available from the European Commission to set up pilot projects in these countries, therefore six additional pilot projects were selected to receive grant aid. The focus in the second phase was on strengthening the advocacy component of the work and Ireland was twinned with Albania in this phase. A mentoring visit to Tirana in July 2016 high-lighted the difference which the projects are making on the ground. Tirana Legal Aid Society provides support to vulnerable individuals and stateless children in particular and ensures

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[20] Mid-Term Review of Partnership Programmes for Civil Society Organisations (2014)

that they are registered to enable them to access services. Many of the beneficiaries are extremely poor and belong to the Roma community and they are being supported in protecting their fundamental rights by gaining access to the justice system. TLAS is also very active in a coalition of NGOs to prevent Child Trafficking. 'Res Publica' is a public interest law organisation and is involved in strategic litigation, advocacy, human rights education, and research and policy development. Through the Triple A Project their work includes providing legal advice, assistance and representation to citizens to obtain exemption from Court Fees and they are carrying out a wider campaign to ensure that Albanian courts grant such exemptions on a routine basis, as the current situation is preventing many individuals from accessing the justice system. 'Res Publica' has produced a publication which has been circulated widely to promote awareness among citizens of their rights to seek exemptions from court fees and also ensure that judges exercise their power in this regard.

The Triple A Pilot Projects have a huge potential to make a difference in the Western Balkans and Turkey where the environment is very challenging. Some of the projects in Serbia, Macedonia and Turkey have also been supporting and advising migrants who have been travelling through the region en route from Syria to Europe. Two additional projects were set up in Turkey in 2016, as it is recognised that Turkey is in need of particular support. By creating greater awareness of rights and entitlements and enabling access to justice the projects are supporting multiple beneficiaries in the region.[21] For further information see http://tripleacitizens.eu/

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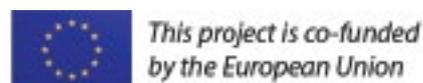
[21]   'Supporting Services Internationally' (2016) International Representative NACIS/ Development Manager Dublin City Centre CIS

Impact
Creating Public Value

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Public Value
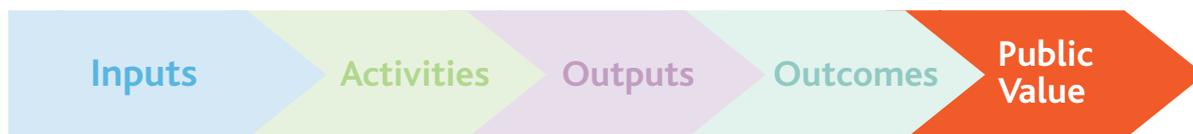
In order for impact to be public value creation, it must satisfy the eight characteristics of good public services. This section examines the extent to which Citizens Information Services demonstrate these features.

Ethical and Equitable

While contracts for commissioned services may specify quality standards to an extent, public value creation goes further in explicitly requiring services to abide by the ethical standards expected in public life. In the UK there is an official set of seven principles of public life – the 'Nolan principles': selflessness; integrity; objectivity; accountability; openness; honesty; and leadership.[22] It is not unusual to see reference to these principles made as part of tenders or contracts.

In the Republic of Ireland, there is no equivalent statement of public service ethics, but 'official and secondary publications on Irish public administration document a range of values associated with the service, including efficiency, impartiality, honesty, loyalty, risk-aversion, equity, hierarchy, integrity, account-ability and fairness,' (MacCarthaigh 2008).

MacCarthaigh (2008) discusses the importance of values in the public service: 'Values are essential components of organisational culture and instrumental in determining, guiding and informing behaviour. For bureaucracies, adherence to high-level public service values can generate substantial public trust and confidence. Conversely, weak application of

values or promotion of inappropriate values can lead to reductions in these essential elements of democratic governance, as well as to ethical and decision-making dilemmas.'

In discussing public value creation, Benington and Moore (2011) emphasise the processes through which people receive public services. It is not enough to judge the end-result of public services, but people must feel that their dignity is respected and that they are treated fairly by services.

The public service ethos of Citizens Information Services at local and national level is clearly evident in their annual reports and other documentation. A strong ethos and respect for people permeates their work. Clarke and Eustace (2015b) note the courtesy extended by staff and volunteers to people using the service, and they note the importance to people of the simple act of being given the time to explain their circumstances. The importance of this listening and the supportive role of CISs on a human level should not be underestimated.

Alongside adherence to traditional standards of public service ethics, particular emphasis can be laid on the importance of equity. Le Grand (2009) names equity or fairness as a central characteristic of good public services.

This is particularly salient to many of the issues reported by Citizens Information Services, where they have worked with people who feel that some public authority had treated them unfairly. Clarke and Eustace

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[22] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life

(2015b) report the high level of satisfaction that services users report with Citizens Information Services, not least the feeling that they were treated fairly and with respect.

Quality

Clarke and Eustace (2015a, 2015b) is a major research report into the operation of the CISs. Its main conclusion was that 'the CISs are responsive to client needs and respond to specific needs of their local community particularly in terms of social inclusion and vulnerability' (2015a p.5). While recognising the high quality of service provision that exists, the report makes recommendations to strengthen quality and the consistency of quality across all CISs.

Clarke and Eustace (2015b) notes that the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) gold star service excellence programme was the quality assurance system selected by the CIB following a public procurement process during 2012. The EFQM has been rolled out to CISs and MABS. As of June 2015 all 42 CISs had achieved the gold star EFQM award. Some services also availed of the opportunity to achieve Role Model status as the next step beyond EFQM.

According to Clarke and Eustace, most CISs welcomed EFQM as an external validation of their quality of service, and many reported that the exercise was a motivational team building and morale boosting exercise.

Clarke and Eustace noted a wide range of good practice during their research, including debriefing/reflection, seeking complex query support if required, completing database entries promptly, completing follow-up research and contacts, assessing whether any social policy issues were identified and seeking feedback from a client when a case was closed (2015b p.36). They also noted a list of good practices when making referrals (p.43).

When it came to strengthening accuracy, appropriateness and comprehensiveness of information being offered by CISs, Clarke and Eustace noted a significant number of systems and processes used by Development Managers under the headings of Induction and Ongoing Training; Staff Support, Mentoring and Supervision, and Quality Checking Mechanisms (2015b, p.52).

Burmanje and Fogarty (2014) was an independent report into quality of service provided in one of the Dublin based CISs. Their survey sample of 152 clients represented a quarter of service users during the study period. The 'overwhelming majority of respondents' (91%) were very happy with their experience. Likewise, the vast majority of comments by service users were positive about the very high standards of the service.

Solution Enable (2009) was a CIB commissioned report into services delivery that recognised the strong commitment within CISs to provide the best quality service, and also made recommendations to strengthen service delivery.

Various CISs pointed to examples of quality assurance/ improvement being undertaken. As an example of quality standards that are in place for CIS staff and volunteers, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) validate a CIB sponsored FETAC level 6 accredited Information Advice and Advocacy Programme (IAAP).[23]

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[23]   http://docs.qqi.ie/AwardsLibraryPdf/6M3115_AwardSpecifications_English.pdf

In addition to promoting national training awards for CIS staff, CIB provides a yearly national Training Calendar of subject matter and skills based programmes. CISs provided records of training seminars they held that were open to CIS staff nationally, which reported high levels of satisfaction from staff attending them. For example, one CIS reported providing 178 training places in 2014, with 19 training sessions organised internally and four CIB training courses attended.

Typical training and quality improvement included training staff and volunteers on changes to legislation, welfare schemes or policies.

One of the core services of CISs is to signpost people to other relevant public services or community and voluntary services. A number of CISs provided lists of the local bodies that they engaged with on a regular basis as part of their work. Some CISs stressed their local ethos and links to the local community.

Case Study:

Working with Other Groups

Many CICs engage with other organisations on a regular and ongoing basis. An indication of some of those worked with by one CIS in 2014 includes:

- HSE
- County Council
- Library Services
- LEADER/ Partnership
- Credit Union
- Department of Social Protection
- National Advocacy Service
- MABS
- Family Resource Centres
- Homeless Action Team

Case Study:

Public Services Centres

Strong linkages between a CIS, public services and services delivered by community and voluntary organisations are likely to indicate a greater capacity to point people to the services they need.

Donegal CIS is an example of integration of information services with other public service provision, with five of its seven CI centres co-located in one-stop-shop "Public Services Centres", which are unique to Donegal. According to the Donegal CIS DM:

'*As a result our staff have excellent relation-ships with public service organisations and other organisations facilitating co-operation in securing positive outcomes for clients and facilitating client referrals where appropriate. The make-up of organisations is not the same in each public services centre but includes: the local authority, Library, Intreo/DSP, HSE Early Child Intervention Department, Revenue, National Advocacy Service, MABS, National Roads Authority, Donegal Local Development Company and Inishowen Tourism.*'[24]

A number of CIS annual reports give evidence of clients' perceptions of the quality of service that they received.

One CIS reports that 97 per cent of clients were satisfied with the service and 96 per cent reported that they received the information that they needed. This was based on 118 comment cards submitted over a nine-month period in 2014. Similarly, another CIS reported 98 per cent of comment cards rating information given as 'excellent' (out of 120 cards completed in 2015).

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[24] Email from Donegal CIS Development Manager

The quantitative results are typically based on small samples, with an element of self-selection – i.e. people using the service chose whether or not to fill in a survey or comment card. However, comment cards – especially when placed anonymously into a box – do provide people with an opportunity to express negative comment or criticism, and the low level of criticism in the feedback is a good sign of the quality of service provided.

As well as the overall satisfaction level indicated by clients ticking a box, a number of CISs provided commentary by clients.

Case Study:

CIS Comments Cards

The following comments were made on comment cards in one CIS:

'I needed numerous visits with complicated affairs. I could not have afforded to pay for such professional advice. For me the confidential aspect was vital as my private life became dysfunctional and therefore chaotic! … There-fore, C.I. and the service is vital to people like me & others. Very many thanks.'

'I.O. [information officer] *is full of expertise and advised us so well and helped us so much during a very tough time.'*

'I.O. went above and beyond her duty'

'Staff member gave great advice and clearly knows her stuff. She was engaging and was someone who'll listen & be patient with your request.'

Efficient and Effective

There are two things to be considered here. Firstly, optimisation of human resources, management, organisational processes, etc. Secondly, fiscal and economic benefits beyond organisational cost-effectiveness; that is, other ways for organisations to "pay for themselves".

On the first point, the section on quality already addressed how CISs manage their resources efficiently and effectively to deliver high quality services.

Phillips (2012) includes a survey of 39 out of 42 CIS Development Managers, who self-rated their competency in financial management in the context of an exploration of training needs across the CISs. The large majority of Development Managers reported their competency was more than adequate for the role (46%) or adequate for the role (36%). Only three reported that they would need 'advanced input' to improve their competency in this role.

Clarke and Eustace (2015b) also present some evidence of CISs managing their resources as efficiently and effectively as possible. Further research on financial management, cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness by CISs is beyond the scope of this report.

On the second point, economic benefits occur when information and advice lead to people keeping their jobs or finding employment. They also occur when businesses are saved from closure. Similarly, avoidance of the need for more intensive public service interventions or more formal administrative processes prevents needless expenditure in the economy to resolve a problem.

Individual benefits are most apparent when a person gains cash on foot of information and advice, for example an increase in welfare benefits or payment of arrears. Equally, information and advice might help someone recover a deposit from a landlord, receive compensation from a landlord or get resolution from a business in relation to consumer issues.

Responsive

As one of the attributes of good public services, responsiveness implies that services meet people halfway, and are responsive to their context and needs, as opposed to expecting service users to "take or leave" generic services that may be inappropriate or inaccessible to them.

The annual reports and other documents of the CISs make it clear that their connection to a locality and to local communities is a central facet of what they do.

The wide range of local and tailored services and publications demonstrate a commitment to providing information and advice at the right level, tailored to the needs of an area and linking people to the public and non-governmental services that exist in that area.

Accountable

Good public services must be accountable to the taxpayer. The Citizens Information Service achieves this through the individual annual reports and also through the annual report, financial report and statistics produced by the Citizens Information Board.

As charities, the CISs are subject to the regulations of the Charities Regulator, and must comply with its rules on governance and other matters.

In this regard, Citizens Information Services are compliant with regulations and demonstrate good practice in reporting their activities.

Sustainable

The least obvious link to Citizens Information Services' strategic priorities is ecological sustainability. It is perhaps unsurprising that the CISs provide less evidence of attaining this outcome. Fewer than one per cent of queries to CISs related to the environment in 2014 – although important aspects of public information relate to the environment, such as the Aarhus Convention and the European Communities (Access to Information on the Environment) Regulations.

Nonetheless, there is an onus on all public services to reduce their impact on the environment and to promote sustainability, and the CISs provide evidence of that through their use of electronic resources.

The CISs also support the e-government agenda, which includes the wholesale movement of public agencies to online platforms, by supporting those people who find this transition the most challenging. For example, one CIS report on the needs of older citizens in the information age is focused on ensuring digital inclusion during the transition to online resources replacing traditional media.

Calculating Total Public Value

This report represents an important first step towards a more comprehensive account of the public value of CISs. The report develops the public value creation framework, which is applicable to any publicly funded service that is judged on the basis of the socio-economic outcomes to which it contributes.

The report has described the wide variety of activities carried out by Citizens Information Services as well as evidence of the positive outcomes they achieve; not least those serving marginalised and deprived communities.

Measuring impact asks whether a service has achieved fundamental change in organisations, communities or systems as a result of the service's activities. In other words, has the service managed to achieve a sustained change in society? Such systemic change takes longer, and is in addition to delivering positive outcomes for individuals and families.

For Citizens Information Services, the type of change being sought is likely to include sustainable increases in public knowledge about their rights and entitlements, and greater self-reliance to approach public service providers directly. In addition, the social policy work of CISs is aimed towards changes in public policy, change in how policies are implemented by public agencies, changes in the conduct of employers and businesses, and changes in how communities address the challenges they face.

Unlike the reports for the UK Citizens Advice Bureaux jurisdictions, this report is focused on achieving a comprehensive framework for understanding the many valuable contributions of the CISs rather than focusing on monetary value. Nonetheless, the report

provides a framework that could be used in future if the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform developed a unit cost database, and if systematic large-scale surveys of outcomes were carried out.

In some cases, monetary values can be estimated for outcomes achieved by Citizens Information Services, but in other cases the value is something that either cannot be monetised due to lack of data or represents a form of value that it would be inappropriate to monetise – such as the value of keeping a family together.

In this report, outcomes that can be attributed a financial or monetary value are termed "economic value", whereas outcomes that have non-monetary valuation are termed "social value". These terms are not rigid, as new data or estimates might permit some social outcomes to be quantified and given a monetary value at some future point. However, total public value will permanently require a twin expression of value at a minimum – and more realistically a dashboard or listing of different types of public value created – as there are always aspects of social benefit that can never be fully quantified or monetised.

Monetising Outcomes

The various UK reports demonstrate that information and advice services can achieve wider fiscal and economic benefits. The England and Wales report (Whyte et al, 2015a, 2015b) divides this impact into three categories: fiscal benefits, economic benefits, and individual benefits. All of these benefits can be expressed in monetary terms, although not necessarily added together.

In the Irish context, it is not possible to fully monetise outcomes. It is also not possible to gauge their "cash ability" – i.e. to estimate how much money would be saved for the state and released for other purposes from the work of Citizens Information Services to prevent other public service interventions. However, the New Economy database in the UK, developed with the Treasury, gives monetary estimates that are illustrative in the Irish case, although not directly applicable due to the many differences between the UK and Irish contexts.

Examples from the New Economy database, in this case most relevant to people in vulnerable situations, include the following:[25]

- Domestic violence costs £2,836 per incident

- Imprisonment costs £34,840 per prisoner per year

- Permanent exclusion from school costs £11,473 per person per year

- Some unemployed entering work is a saving of £7,972 per year

- An executive officer working with troubled families costs £32,148 per year

- The average cost to the NHS of someone suffering from depression or anxiety disorders is £977 per year

- Mental health community provision costs £167 per contact

- A complex eviction costs local authorities £7,276

It is certainly feasible for such a database to be developed for the Republic of Ireland, but it would require a major, collaborative piece of research across numerous government departments and agencies, not least the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Given the monetary values attributed to the fiscal and economic costs of social problems, the prevention of those problems saves some or all of the associated costs. And of course, there are unquantifiable personal benefits for the people involved, in addition to any monetary benefit.

Fiscal benefits occur when the work of the Citizens Advice England and Wales leads to either an increase in tax revenue or, more frequently, to cost savings. New Economy (2015) provides further explanation of the "cashability" of reduced demand for public services – i.e. the extent to which a reduction in demand for public services that can be converted into a genuine saving for the public purse.

It is important to note that not all expressions of monetary value can be summed. Citizens Advice England and Wales separate out the fiscal benefit, the economic value to individuals and the broader economic value to society of their work as it is not possible to simply add these together into one total as some of the benefits to individuals refer to distribution rather than net gain.

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[25] http://neweconomymanchester.com/our-work/research-evaluation-cost-benefit-analysis/cost-benefit-analysis/unit-cost-database

Economic Value (Monetised)

As discussed earlier in the section on outcomes, the following approximations of total economic value are highly plausible:

- Access to entitlements probably achieves tens of millions of euro per annum of benefit to individuals and families. The CIS role includes helping people to reduce overpayment demands and to recover back payments, as well as securing their entitlements to welfare benefits;

- Access to redress achieves tangible benefits to individuals who receive compensation from employers or who receive redress for consumer issues;

- Connecting people with public services and NGOs provides tangible benefits to individuals and families that have a significant cash-equivalent benefit to them. Not least, there are large benefits to those who are assisted to access specialist services to assist them with homelessness, domestic violence or other emergencies;

- Savings to the state from CIS interventions are likely to be significant, from a wide variety of sources including: reduced need for call centres to be established to support new policies; reduced use of courts, WRC hearings and other redress institutions; reduced demand for public services; people moving from welfare into training and employment etc.

- Social inclusion of communities with particular needs has economic value. This includes the specialist services and targeted initiatives designed to deliver assistance to people in highly vulnerable situations, with the benefit to individuals coming in the form of welfare benefits and access to public services, and ultimately to greater life chances;

- Social inclusion of new communities and minorities has an economic value component, mostly benefits to individuals coming in the form of welfare benefits and access to public services, and ultimately to greater life chances – not least from achieving residency status;

- Enhancing volunteers' and Employment Scheme staff lives has a significant economic value, based on evidence from services that volunteering and participation on employment schemes often leads to paid employment or other improved life chances;

- Alleviation of stress has a very large economic value alongside the personal benefit to individuals and their families. Based on the empirical work of New Economy and the UK Treasury that showed an extremely large financial benefit from relief of mental distress and mental health problems, it is highly plausible that Citizens Information Services achieve a similar benefit in Ireland, which is likely to be at least tens of millions of euro.

It is not possible to provide exact figures on total economic value. However, the most conservative estimate would still conclude the Citizens Information Service is likely to produce economic value – including fiscal benefits, financial gain for individuals and wider economic benefits – several times larger than the funding it receives from the public purse.

Social Value (Not Monetised)

The following summarises the social (non-monetised) value of outcomes achieved by Citizens Information:

- Public trust in government is low in recent polls. The Citizens Information Service not only enjoys relatively high trust in the service it provides, but it also helps people to understand the state and public agencies, which is likely to contribute towards increasing people's confidence in the public sector;

- Research findings and social policy advocacy may provide economic value, but their primary thrust is often to simplify or improve administrative procedures so that they are fairer and less onerous on members of the public. These reports also act as "eyes and ears" for central government on issues that are arising in society, not least when members of the public interact with public agencies. In an era where public service reform is never off the agenda, and new modes of public management and governance are constantly being explored, the CIS role provides a routinised and timely feedback mechanism that undoubtedly helps improve public policy;

- Civic education is another role of Citizens Information Services. Given the complexity of modern public administration and the push for civil and social education at school level, the service plays a useful role in ensuring that citizens have the knowledge and competencies they need to avail of the variety of public services that exist. Not least, CISs empower people with particular information needs such as those with specific disabilities;

- Social inclusion of communities with particular needs has a non-monetary dimension. The benefits of social inclusion – and the strain of exclusion and marginalisation – have to be measured in more than any monetary effect on individuals and families. Citizens Information Services contribute towards achieving social inclusion and equality of opportunity, which have been goals of successive programmes for government;

- Social inclusion of new communities and minorities is a particular role that CISs have adopted, with publications and services provided in multiple languages and targeting minority groups. Beyond monetary value, CIS work in support of inclusion helps to break down barriers to full participation in social and economic life in Ireland. Their assistance to people in achieving residency or Irish citizenship also includes the value that people attribute to belonging to a state and having peace of mind about their entitlements and their children's opportunities;

- Enhancing volunteers' lives is reflected in the high level of satisfaction expressed by volunteers in Citizens Information Services and the collegiality they feel from contributing to CIS mission, as well as through the training and professional development that CISs provide. CISs can point to skills gained and repeat examples of volunteers moving to employment or other opportunities;

- Employment Support Staff benefit from their work experience and training in CISs with high progression rates into paid employment for participants.

- Alleviation of stress has a very large non-monetary dimension alongside its economic value. CISs reports point to countless examples of people who experienced a reduction in stress and anxiety that had damaged their quality of life. The personal benefits to individuals from any lessening of stress and other causes of mental health problems has to be understood as valuable in human terms beyond any monetary benefit. These benefits include the empowerment and increased confidence people gain to deal with complex public administration or challenging situations like appeals or Workplace Relations Commission hearings.

Good Public Services

The network of Citizens Information Services is only able to achieve the full range of public value that it does achieve because it manifests the characteristics of good public services.

This includes professional management, good financial controls and constant striving for operational improvement (i.e. quality, efficiency, effectiveness and accountability to the tax-payer). The alleviation of stress and achievement of social inclusion that is achieved is only possible because services are delivered through the right ethos (i.e. ethical, equitable, sustainable and responsive to individual and local community needs).

Total Public Value

The figure overleaf illustrates the public value created by Citizens Information Services under the headings of economic and social value.

This is of necessity a crude exercise. One could find some example of monetary benefit under each heading. Likewise, one could point to societal gains and intangible psychological benefits in each case. The purpose of the exercise is to indicate whether the main benefit under each heading is economic or social. In some cases, there is evidence of both a significant level of economic and social benefit under the same heading.

Annex 1 gives a summary of the findings by Citizens Advice in England and Wales, as an example of a finer grained analysis of outcomes and their public benefit.

The full value – and in some cases the unquantifiable and immeasurable non-monetary benefits – of Citizens Information Services can only be understood by reference to how the services have transformed people's lives. The case studies and quotations from service users included in this report provide a flavour of this, but further in-depth research on the wellbeing of people who benefit is also needed.

Economic Value

- Access to Entitlements
- Access to Redress
- Connecting People with Public Services and NGOs
- Savings to the State

Social Value

- Public Trust
- Developing Citizens' Self-Reliance
- Civic Education
- Research Findings and Social Policy Research

Economic and Social Value

- Social Inclusion of Communities with Particular Needs
- Social Inclusion of New Communities and Minorities
- Enhancing Client Volunteer and Employment Scheme Staff Lives
- Alleviation of Stress

Looking to the Future

Over the period 2008 to 2016, the absolute number of callers to Citizens Information Centres remained steady. But during the same period, usage of the **citizensinformation.ie** website rose from 4.3 million to nearly 19 million, which represents nearly four and a half times as many visits.

While many people in the population may be becoming more expert at searching for information online, Citizens Information Services have found a steady increase in the complexity of queries that they deal with. Even seemingly straightforward information requests are often focused on atypical circumstances or uncertainty about the interpretation of administrative rules. This trend has led CISs to regard advice and advocacy as growing demands.

In addition, not everyone can access information online. Citizens Information Services continue to play a vital role in bridging the digital divide by providing information for those who cannot find it themselves, as well as for those who find it challenging to deal with form-filling or official jargon.

Advocacy on behalf of individuals who are disadvantaged in dealing with public admin-istration has been identified as a clear public need, and CIB has responded by prioritising the development of advocacy services and is currently developing a national advocacy strategy for CISs.

As independent, voluntary organisations, the 42 local Citizens Information Services are not part of the public service, but they provide a unique service for the public that would be almost impossible to replicate. The service is constantly striving to improve, to innovate and to serve the wide spectrum of need for information, advice and advocacy in Ireland's population.

Further Development of this Approach

Available data for the report was mostly in the form of evidence of a wide range of activities in support of the aims of the CISs. While these activities are very likely to have led to positive benefits for clients in many cases, they are nonetheless evidence of service *outputs* as opposed to being firm evidence of *outcomes*.

Some evidence on outcomes was available, for example related to the clients who availed of the CISs' advocacy service. Likewise, individual services have conducted surveys and have recorded short-term outcomes achieved for clients, such as monetary benefits from welfare appeals or in settling a dispute with a former employer. Research commissioned by CIB has also identified an outcomes framework for CISs.

However, estimates of monetary value were difficult or impossible to make in many cases due to the absence of an agreed unit costs database such as exists in the UK. Such a database provides a way to represent the savings for public services or to put a value on the wider economic and societal benefits associated with information and advice (and other interventions). Compiling such a database for the Republic of Ireland would be a major investment, but such a resource would have relevance across all public services – including commissioned services – that generate social outcomes, and would be a valuable tool for outcomes-based approaches to public service evaluation.

In order to develop the analysis of CIS achievement of outcomes for clients, the most obvious tool would be a survey of a large representative sample of clients sometime after they had received information, advice or advocacy in order to discover whether their circumstances had improved after they received assistance. Of necessity, this would have to be a large-scale survey, given the likelihood of a high level of non-response. This would also require more administrative requirements, such as taking the contact details of those using information and advice services, whereas this is currently only done for advocacy work (although it is more systematically done in the UK). A large sample size would also be necessary to allow statistically robust analysis of sub-groups and specific themes in the data. Ideally, this type of investment would be made annually, to allow the development of time series data on the outcomes achieved. In common with the report for England and Wales (Whyte et al 2015a, 2015b), a method would need to be developed to take account of potential deadweight and optimism bias in the data.

Monetary outcomes achieved by Citizens Advice in England and Wales were all reduced by 50 per cent across the board in order to compensate for "deadweight" – the possibility that the beneficial outcome might have occurred anyway, without the person receiving information or advice, even though fewer than 20 per cent of clients believed they would have resolved their problems without Citizens Advice's assistance (Whyte et al, 2015b).

Whyte et al also systematically reduced the monetary value of outcomes where their available evidence was likely to represent

"optimism bias" – that is, where the available evidence is likely to put the best possible gloss on outcomes.

Public Value Creation Framework

For future consideration, the public value creation framework – see Annex 1 – can facilitate strategic planning based on the achievement of outcomes that are societally valuable but hard to monetise. Assigning a weight to each strategic priority or target outcome allows for comparison between otherwise incommensurate values. Similarly, quantitative targets are required in each case – even if these are labels for qualitative data – so that progress towards each target outcome can be compared for the purposes of decision-making. This is similar to Multi-Criteria Analysis (MCA), which is a common appraisal method.[26]

Essentially, the requirement to list non-monetised societal value alongside quantified economic value implies that cost-benefit analysis and similar tools should ultimately be subordinate to a public value analysis, which would operate similarly to a Multi-Criteria Analysis, with similar requirements for democratic decision-making about prioritising and weighting the outcomes to be achieved by services.

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[26] See, for example, http://publicspendingcode.per.gov.ie/overview-of-appraisal-methods-and-techniques/

Annex 1:
Public Value Created in England and Wales

| Economic Value (monetised)	Social Value (non-monetised)
Savings to local and national government **£361m**	Benefits to local government of helping clients negotiate local processes
Keeping people in jobs or help back to work **£249m**	Maximising clients' income, spill over effects
Preventing housing evictions **£100m**	Averting the detrimental costs associated with the impact on health of unsafe and substandard living conditions.
Preventing statutory homelessness **£43m**	
Reducing the demand for mental health services **£210m**	**£464** million of debts rescheduled
Reducing the demand for GP services **£10m**	Financial gain for individuals from charitable funds, or goods and services in kind, as well as financial outcomes associated with housing, employment relationships or other problems
Improved mental well-being **£1.2bn**	
Improved family relationships **£202m**	
From volunteering to paid employment **£5m**	Keeping families together, preventing suicide and working with victims of domestic violence
Skills developed leading to better job prospects **£228k**	
Better manage mental health conditions **£808k**	Advice online to **20.7** million visitors.
Increased confidence/self-esteem **£20m**	Reduced energy bills
Reduced isolation **£8m**	Avoiding the detriment associated with problem debt
Positive functioning **£22m**	
Improved emotional well-being **£7m**	Citizens Advice Bureaux research and campaigns work
Improved community well-being **£38m**	
Benefit outcomes to individuals **£1.9bn**	
Debt write-off **£577m**	
Consumer advice **£109m**	

See: O'Connor, 2016a and Whyte et al, 2015b

Annex 2:
Six-Step Public Value Creation Framework

Public value creation is an overarching framework, which can equally inform the design, commissioning, funding, performance management, regulation or evaluation of public services.

O'Connor (2016a) identifies a six-step process for this, illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Six Step Public Value Creation Framework

Step 1: Engage with stakeholders with respect to outcomes

Step 2: Specify the outcomes to be achieved, including minimum standards

Step 3: Determine metrics to be used to measure outcomes

Step 4: Standardise and normalise data.

Step 5: Regularly review the total public value created, and review minimum equirements and weighted outcomes.

Step 6: Evaluate and adjust the targets (if required).
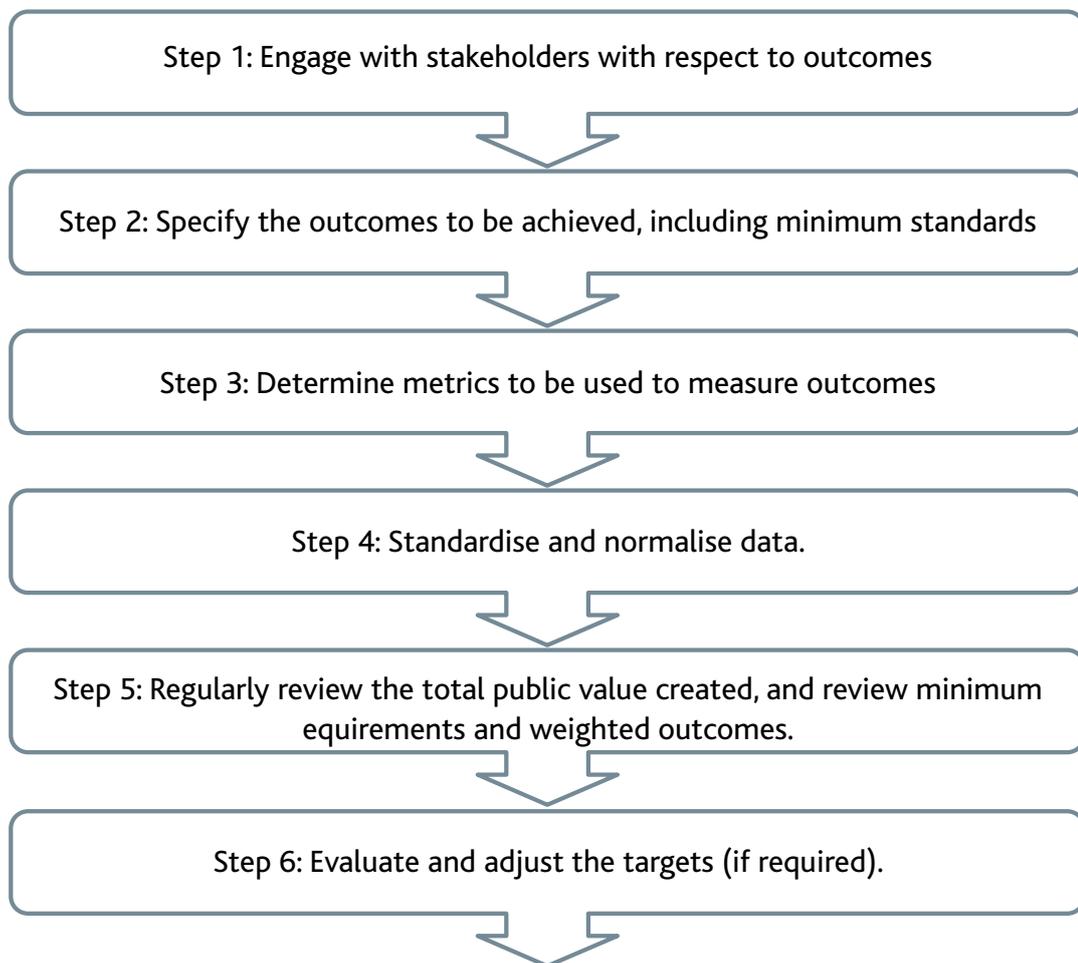
While it is not the purpose of this report to fully implement this framework, as targets have not been set for measurable outcomes, the framework provides a coherent and robust structure within which to examine the public value created by Citizens Information Services.

Step 1:
Engage with stakeholders with respect to outcomes

The Citizens Information Board (CIB) is the body with statutory responsibility for the full range of citizens information services. Its strategic plan is the result of extensive consultation with individual Citizens Information Services and other stakeholders. As such, the high level

strategic priorities identified in the CIB strategic plan are taken to represent the target outcomes for the family of information, advice and advocacy services under its remit.

These strategic priorities leave plenty of scope for individual services to identify and to respond to the specific mixture of needs in their own localities.

Step 2:
Specify the outcomes to be achieved, including minimum standards

The next step is to identify and weight target outcomes, and identify any minimum requirements or "red lines" that must be achieved, while ensuring that these requirements include the eight attributes of good public service, which are: ethical, quality, efficient, effective, responsive, accountable, equitable and sustainable.

Step 3:
Determine metrics to be used to measure outcomes

This step involves the identification of metrics and links between service outputs and societal outcomes (where possible), including the use of financial, economic and cost analyses where appropriate.

When it comes to measuring an organisation's impact, best practice is to seek evidence of *outcomes* for people using services rather than just measure what services do, their *outputs*[27]. Nonetheless, outputs are easier to measure consistently over time, and provide a baseline from which to examine evidence on outcomes – i.e. to seek evidence that the activity of services is bringing about positive change in people's lives. Surveys, interviews and other tools of social science are typically needed to gather evidence of outcomes achieved.

Step 4:
Standardise and normalise data

Standardisation of data is done to ensure like-with-like comparison over time. For example, by measuring service users as a proportion of the population, this accurately shows whether service use has grown or shrunk regardless of whether or not the population itself has grown or shrunk.

Normalisation of data is done to all comparison between different metrics. Converting measurements to a percentage or score out of 100 is a typical method to achieve this.

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[27]   CIB commissioned research by Eustace Patterson (2015) on CIS Client Processes and Outcomes included a proposed outcomes framework

Step 5:
Regularly review the total public value created, and review minimum requirements and weighted outcomes

This report provides a baseline analysis of public value created by Citizens Information Services, and reviews the minimum requirements.

The combination of evidence on outcomes provides a picture of the total public value created. Crucially, there must always be at least two expressions of total public value, an economic value for those outcomes that *can* be given an actual or estimated cash values, and a list of societal outcomes that are also contributing public value, the value of which cannot be monetised.

Step 6:
Evaluate and adjust the targets if required

The final step of the public value creation framework involves reviewing the total value proposition of an organisation and making adjustments to strategic priorities over time, in consultation with stakeholders.

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