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

How to manage
Social Policy
in Citizens Information Services

July 2019

These guidelines are for:

Board members

Regional Managers

Development Managers

They may also be of interest to:

Advocacy Support Workers

Information Providers in CISs and CIPS

Contents

1. What is social policy work?

Social policy work is about highlighting the blocks and barriers experienced by people in accessing and using social services. It is concerned with tackling the root causes of the problem, not just dealing with the symptoms. It is essentially about:

- identifying situations where the service delivery system falls short
- collecting and recording evidence of difficulties that individuals meet in their daily lives in accessing and securing services/realising rights
- bringing these issues to the attention of public policy makers

When enough people do this, a body of evidence is built up which indicates areas in which the system is not working.

Administrative difficulties may arise where citizens may find that they are unable to contact the person or department they need to talk to or their queries are dealt with in an unsatisfactory manner. They may be given incomplete or inaccurate information. They may face long and unnecessary delays in getting their entitlements. Fault lines in the system could be caused by a poorly thought out policy that is not being implemented properly or is being applied unfairly.

The evidence that is gathered in social policy work is used to get services improved or the system changed. This can happen at **local, regional** or **national** levels and can be carried out by one organisation working on its own or in co-operation with other organisations and voluntary groups who share a common interest.

2. Social policy work in Citizens Information Services

Citizens Information Services (CISs) provide information, advice and advocacy support throughout Ireiand, through a network of Citizens Information Centres (CICs). More than a million queries per year are dealt with by CICs. As a result, of this direct and regular contact with the public, CISs have an important role in filtering the experiences of citizens as they try to access their rights and entitlements.   They can also identify instances when the system is not working.

The Citizens Information Board is required under legislation to support, promote and develop the provision of information on the effectiveness of current social policy and services and to highlight issues which are of concern to users of those services – see Section 7 (d) of the **Comhairle Act 2000**.

In turn, CiSs and CICs are obliged to be involved in this work. This obligation is written into the service level agreement between CIB and each CIS where it states that the CIS: '*will support CIB in data collection, the gathering of social policy information and evidence and in any research initiated by CIB.*'

Therefore, social policy work should be part of the mainstream work of every CIS and in turn every CIC.

Social policy work happens when the same problem reoccurs often and keeps getting recorded.

It is the skill of the Information Provider that links the individual query to an actual or potential social policy issue.

All can get involved in policy work in the CIC.

No other national organisation has this level of contact with the citizens of this country.

It is a statutory responsibility.

Social policy work is not optional.

The CIS Board of Management has an important oversight role, ensuring that social policy work is taking place both in terms of monitoring the number of Social Policy Returns and also encouraging and monitoring local social policy work. Social policy should be on the Board meeting agenda on a quarterly basis and should include the quantity and quality of Social Policy Returns, ensuring the engagement of all CICs in social policy work, training needs and local social policy work initiatives.

Each of the eight CISs has a Regional Manager who reports to a Board. The role of the Regional Manager is to develop the strategic plan, including social policy work, with the Board, and to drive this plan for their region. Social policy work is incorporated into that plan. CIB staff support Regional Managers to ensure a consistent approach that meets quality standards.

The Regional Manager, on behalf of the Board, should

Read *Social Policy Update* and keep Board informed of relevant developments	✓
Ensure staff are trained to the highest standards in identifying and categorising social policy issues	✓
Monitor quantity and quality of Social Policy Returns on a quarterly basis	✓
Ensure quality and consistency across CICs in region	✓
Discuss social policy with Development Managers on an ongoing basis and as part of performance management	✓
Manage regional social policy initiatives including local or regional applications to CIB's social policy grant scheme	✓
Ensure social policy is on the agenda at board meetings at least once per quarter	✓
Respond to any SP Alert issued by CIB and to request for content for Pre-Budget Submission or other submission	✓

3. Social policy work in Citizens Information Centres

Social policy work should be an integral part of the service and planned accordingly, following a set of guidelines based on good organisational practice (outlined in this document). Social policy work is the responsibility of everyone – staff and volunteers – but it is driven and co-ordinated by the Development Manager who has a responsibility to make sure that:

- it is promoted in the Citizens Information Centre (CIC)
- it happens on an ongoing basis
- it is carried out in accordance with these guidelines on managing social policy in CISs
- training is provided for all who need it
- time is allocated for discussion of social policy work in the CIC
- feedback is given on local, regional and national social policy work
- it is carried out in a consistent manner and meets quality standards

Social policy initiatives are more effective when the policies and procedures underlying them are clear and known to all in the CIC.

All staff should read *How to become involved in Social Policy in your Citizens Information Service* and should attend *Social Policy Returns in Citizens Information Services – A training workshop*.

4. Role of the Development Manager in social policy work

Development Managers are central to the management of efficient and effective social policy work in the CICs. They may devise their own system to ensure that social policy work is carried out effectively and there may be some variation depending on the size of the Centre involved.

Development Managers should:

Read *Social Policy Update*, circulate to staff and discuss at team meetings	✓
Make sure all staff are introduced to social policy from the very start	✓
Check that staff understand the reasons for and benefits of social policy work and the effect it can have on people's lives	✓
Ensure staff are trained to the highest standards in identifying and categorising social policy issues	✓
Ensure that all new staff and volunteers can make a Social Policy Return on Oyster	✓
Provide ongoing support to all staff doing social policy work	✓
Monitor quantity and quality of Social Policy Returns on Oyster and ECMS on a monthly basis, assess the effectiveness of the social policy work of the team	✓
Ensure experienced staff are trained in recording social policy issues on ECMS (Electronic Case Management System)	✓
Discuss relevant issues with staff as a result of the sampling exercise	✓
Set up a social policy feedback system in the service	✓
Network with other organisations and community groups locally	✓
Manage local social policy initiatives: review ongoing policy issues with staff and decide on possible actions such as contacting a local named official, networking with another organisation, applying for a SP grant from CIB to carry out some research or organising an event locally	✓
Set up a buddy system so that new staff can review SPRs with an experienced staff member	✓

5. Organising social policy work in the CIC

Implementing and documenting systems for social policy work will help all staff to understand and value the importance of social policy work in the CIC but should also ensure that the work is carried out to the highest standards. System procedures should include:

- Training and mentoring
- Setting goals
- Monitoring quantity and quality of Social Policy Returns and taking action if necessary
- Responding to Social Policy Alerts from CIB

- Responding to requests for material each year for CIB's Pre-Budget Submission and from time to time for other relevant submissions
- Holding social policy meetings or having social policy on the agenda at staff meetings
- Engaging in local social policy work, either independently or with other stake-holders

5.1 Training and mentoring

All new volunteers and staff should receive training in social policy as part of their induction training in the CIC. The training is delivered in two parts:

1. Each new person is given "*How to become involved in social policy in your Citizens Information Service*" to read. Ideally, informal study groups should be organised in the centre to discuss the contents. It is up to the Development Manager to decide how these are organised.

2. The Development Manager or nominee holds a training workshop (using the PowerPoint presentation *Social Policy Returns in Citizens Information Services: A training workshop*), once "*How to become involved in social policy*" document has been read.

Provide additional support, if possible, by assigning a social policy mentor in the Centre to a group of new staff. Encourage staff, including volunteers, to ask the mentor when they are not sure if an issue has a social policy element or not or to which category it belongs. New staff need to know they have someone to turn to if in doubt.

Some staff have a special interest in and experience of social policy work and are an excellent resource in the CIC.

Some services have a nominated champion or lead person in social policy. They have a major role in supporting social policy work in the Centre, delivering training sessions and mentoring less experienced staff and volunteers as well as taking responsibility for local social policy work.

Refresher training in social policy should be held in the CIC from time to time – for example, if there is a downward trend in Social Policy Returns (SPRs).

As part of the training process, it is important to point out the value of logging Social Policy Returns on the same issue – each Social Policy Return builds up a body of evidence that researchers can use to spot trends and identify problems in the system. Some staff do not see the relevance of making Social Policy Returns on the same issue - explain why this is good practice.

3. The more detailed sections of *Social Policy – A Comprehensive Guide* are available for those who want a more in-depth understanding of social policy, particularly those staff and volunteers attending the accredited training programme.

There are four categories in the drop-down menu in Oyster. Two are administration-related and two are policy-related. New staff should only record SPRs in the administration category and should look for guidance before submitting policy-related SPRs.

5.2 Setting goals

One of the social policy training workshop learning outcomes is goal-setting for each staff member. For example, encourage each paid staff member to complete one administration-related Social Policy Return per day and one policy-related Social Policy Return per week on Oyster, the software package used to record caller and query data in

Citizens Information Services. More experienced staff should record more numerous and more complex Social Policy Returns, including some on ECMS. Those who are volunteering on a weekly basis would not be expected to reach these targets but should also be actively involved in social policy work. Reception staff can be involved in logging Social Policy Returns, particularly in relation to administration issues.

Review goals that are set with paid staff as part of the Performance Management Development System (PMDS). If goals are not being met, explore the reasons why this is happening. If it is a training issue, then more training should be provided. If it is a time issue, then a discussion needs to take place to see how social policy work can be fitted in to the overall responsibilities of the job.

Encourage volunteer Information Providers to do social policy work. They should be told that it is a routine part of the process of dealing with clients and answering their queries.

5.3 Monitoring Social Policy Returns

It is up to the Development Manager or nominee (staff member who has specific responsibility for social policy co-ordination) to check monthly Social Policy Returns on both Oyster and ECMS for quantity and quality. This person should investigate reasons for any downward trend in numbers recorded.

In relation to quality and consistency, Social Policy Returns should be reviewed to ensure they are categorised correctly and that the description of the issue is clear.   Action should be taken if quality standards are not being met. Staff should be encouraged to read *How to become involved in Social Policy in your Citizens Information Service*. It might also be useful to deliver *Social Policy Returns in Citizens Information Services – A training workshop* to staff. If you have delivered the workshop before, you could pick some of the material from it for a refresher and include recent local case studies and examples of local social policy work and local networking.

5.4 Giving feedback

Social policy work takes time and it can be frustrating for staff who do not see an immediate outcome when they log Social Policy Returns. Results or changes to the system may take some time to come about. Staff can become demotivated and make fewer Social Policy Returns.

Therefore, it is very important to give as much feedback as possible to those working in the CISs. Feedback at **local level** should focus on the quantity and quality of Social Policy Returns or on any local social policy initiative.

Social Policy Returns are reviewed by the Social Policy and Research team and key issues identified – this analysis takes time. Submissions, briefing papers and reports take these issues into account. The response from policy-makers takes time as well.

Feedback at **national level** on submissions, research reports, briefings or policy changes is communicated to services via the *Social Policy Update* and this in turn is communicated to staff in the CISs. It is useful to ensure that staff have access to this e-bulletin and are encouraged to read it. It is also useful to review the CIB Pre-Budget Submission after the

Social policy work and changes in policy take time.

Social Policy Update is issued every two months. It has information on recent social policy work.

budget to see what recommendations were implemented. Note that many other voluntary and community groups make pre-budget submissions.

5.5 Recording Social Policy Returns on ECMS

Advocacy Support Workers (ASWs) support Information Providers to do advocacy work at regional and local level. Advocacy casework is recorded on the Electronic Case Management System (ECMS).

There is a social policy tab on ECMS which allows Information Providers engaged in advocacy case work to add multiple Social Policy Returns at any time during a case. Because advocacy work is complex and cases can take considerable time to resolve, several social policy issues can arise while the case is ongoing.

Citizens Information Board Social Policy and Research staff can access Social Policy Returns from ECMS as well as Oyster.

5.6 Social policy meetings

Meetings provide an opportunity to give feedback on social policy initiatives at local and national level and allow staff to discuss issues that have arisen from the Social Policy Returns. Training needs can be analysed. Case studies can be discussed and social policy issues identified. The latest edition of *Social Policy Update* can be discussed. Meetings also provide a forum to identify possible future local policy work. Some CICs hold meetings dedicated to social policy. Others put it on the agenda at general meetings.

Social policy should be on the agenda at every CIC staffmeeting. It should also be included on the agenda of CIS Board meetings at regular intervals, ideally every quarter.

6. Organising social policy work: local initiatives

Local submissions can be made by individual CICs or CISs relating to specific local social policy issues. This can involve:

- providing direct feedback to the relevant statutory authority locally, regionally or nationally
- channelling information through CIB or other national organisations, either statutory or voluntary/community
- becoming involved in local projects or initiatives

Getting involved with local issues does not always mean taking the lead. It can be as effective to play a supporting role.

Many CICs carry out very effective work in this area and have been very successful in bringing about changes at a local level, either alone or in co-operation with others. Choosing an issue that can be progressed will be determined by the nature of the issue and the resources available. Examples of local policy initiatives include:

- Identifying gaps in local provision and proposing solutions
- Negotiating with local public service officials, for example local authorities, local HSE personnel, the local DEASP office
- Co-operating with other local organisations
- Campaigning around particular problems or perceived needs

- Liaising with CIB and other organisations
- Producing information leaflets if there is an information gap

Ideas for local social policy work may come from the staff in the Centre, the Development Manager, the Regional Manager or the Board of the CIS. Responsibility for progressing local policy initiatives may be delegated to a staff member (or a sub-group) with an interest in and a specific brief for developing social policy.

The Development Manager must provide a plan or strategy for the project and outline the procedures and resources to make it happen. Undertaking social policy initiatives requires the investment of resources if it is to be an effective process. The ability to research, write reports, liaise or negotiate with other bodies and to engage in publicity are all skills that are important in social policy work.

Often the most important resource is the allocation of sufficient time.

Sometimes, it might be necessary to identify individuals outside the organisation who could provide these skills either in a voluntary or in a paid capacity. It may also be possible to secure funds for specific projects from local or national organisations.

CIB has a social policy grant scheme which can provide grants to services that wish to work on a specific issue, either alone or in collaboration with a local organisation. (See CIB social policy grants sub-section below.)

6.1 Networking

Effective networking can be very important in undertaking local social policy work. Networking involves identifying, making contact and co-operating with other relevant organisations and public bodies, locally, regionally and nationally. Networking can:

Networking enhances social policy work.

- facilitate focused information exchange
- promote dialogue
- make effective use of scarce resources
- allow for a collaborative approach on issues of mutual interest

It can be ongoing or short term, structured or informal, occur around a single issue or focus on a specific area of interest. It may also include regular contact on a wide range of topics of mutual concern with local or national voluntary and community organisations and statutory bodies.

6.2 Identifying the relevant authority

Social policy initiatives must be directed to the appropriate authorities. CICs need a good working knowledge of the local administrative services and the structures through which public services are delivered.

Ensuring the social policy initiative reaches the most appropriate destination will enhance its chance of success.

6.3 Making submissions

Normally services would submit their feedback on issues to CIB via the Social Policy Returns and any submissions would be made by CIBB. In some instances, a service may wish to engage with a local service provider by making a submission setting out their experience of a particular issue.

The nature of any submission will be determined partly by the organisation it is directed to and partly by the subject matter. There are four steps in preparing a written submission:

Step 1:   Identify the problem
Step 2:   Identify where to send the submission
Step 3:   Gather the evidence to support the case
Step 4:   Write up all relevant material clearly and accurately in a suitable format, as briefly as possible

Any attempt to bring about change or influence policy must be based on an accurate and concise account of the existing situation, a description of the perceived problem and reasons given for any proposals or solutions outlined in the submission. The description of the issue/s must be clear and concise. Those carrying out the research should:

- state the problem clearly
- state accurately any relevant rules, procedures or legislation
- gather and set out clearly all relevant data/evidence
- review relevant research
- use case studies where appropriate, but protect the anonymity of individuals

Getting the facts right is essential for effective and credible social policy work.

Use plain English and be as brief as possible.

A submission is more effective if it includes a solution to the problem.

Some local policy work may involve discussion in a face-to-face meeting or attending a meeting where you give a presentation on the issue. See checklist at end of this document.

6.4 Assessing and communicating results of local policy work

Some local policy work is successful, some is partially successful and some fails to have any effect. Regardless of the success of the initiative, the results must be assessed and the outcomes communicated to the staff involved. In giving feedback, lessons are learned and staff are motivated to continue in social policy work. Sometimes the issue can be revisited at a later date with more success.

6.5 Benefits of local policy work

Even if results take time or it seems like the initiative had no effect, there are advantages for the CIC becoming involved in local policy work. For example:

Results may be slow, so patience is required.

- Staff can readily connect with issues that are local
- It builds up relationships with local organisations and statutory bodies
- It enhances the profile of the CIS locally
- Change at local level can be more immediate than nationally
- Staff in the CIS develop skills in analysis and communication

6.6 CIB social policy grants

The CIB social policy grant scheme provides small-scale support for social policy initiatives undertaken at local level by CICs working on their own or in conjunction with other CICs or local organisations. The application process is simple, and details can be

found in *Social Policy - A Comprehensive Guide* or contact the Social Policy and Research team in CIB.

The grants payable under the scheme usually average between €1,500 and €3,000 and are awarded to assist in areas such as:

- Analysis of social policy issues identified by the service and the preparation of a short report
- Networking between a number of local agencies in order to identify common social policy issues
- Seminar/workshop for Information Providers at local level to explore issues around social policy work
- Discussion forum between Information Providers from a range of organisations to consider policy issues and how they might be addressed

Here are some examples of how CIB Social Policy Grants' payments have been spent:

- Ballyfermot CIS - as part of a locally-based initiative (with Ballyfermot/ Chapelizod Homeless Forum) to develop a strategy for an integrated local response to homelessness. The grant assisted with the production of a leaflet highlighting local options and pathways for people looking for housing information, advice and advocacy supports.

- Co Wicklow CIS – to assist with the provision of a comprehensive, collaborative support service (with interagency co-operation) to ensure that the Somali community can access the full range of social rights and entitlements to enable them to engage fully in civil society.

- National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities (NAS) – to host a workshop event to examine the experience of homelessness by people with intellectual disabilities/autism, with voluntary and statutory service providers in attendance.

7. Social Policy Alerts

Social Policy Alerts may be issued to CISs, CICs and CIPS when the Social Policy and Research team is preparing a written submission or has commissioned external research, requesting feedback on a specific issue within a short time-frame.

The Social Policy Alert will detail the focus of the forthcoming report/submission, and will usually ask services to:
- keep an eye out for queries relating to the policy report/submission being written, submitting as much as possible where relevant policy issues are spotted
- gather and submit any particularly rich/relevant case study material on the topic in question

Once a Social Policy Alert has been received by the Development Manager, he/she alerts all information staff to be on the lookout for relevant material. The Development Manager might also delegate the task of compiling case study material to a staff member.

CIB asks services to submit material annually for its Pre-Budget Submission. It asks them from time to time for material for other relevant submissions.

8. Checklists for Development Managers

Checklist for managing Social Policy in the CIC

Insert ✓ where appropriate

Is social policy part of the induction for all staff?	
Are all staff trained to the highest standard to identify, categorise and log Social Policy Returns (SPRs) on Oyster?	
Are experienced staff trained in recording social policy issues on ECMS (Electronic Case Management System)?	
Do all staff understand the reasons for and benefits of social policy work and the effect it can have on people's lives?	
Have I set up a buddy system so that new staff can review SPRs with an experienced staff member?	
Are SPRs checked before sign-off each month?	
Have I checked that the SPRs are complete?	
Are the identities of clients or service providers protected?	
Do the SPRs suggest gaps in knowledge among staff?	
Have I identified issues that need to be followed up at local level?	
Have I recorded the reference number of cases for follow-up?	
Has the latest edition of *Social Policy Update* been circulated to all staff?	
Are social policy issues discussed at team meetings? (It is useful to discuss Social Policy Update at meetings.)	
Is there additional information that could be added to the SPRs, particularly in terms of action taken?	
If local social policy work has had a successful outcome, have the Regional Manager and the CIB Social Policy and Research team been informed? Note: it should also be logged in the Activity Report for the Service.	
Have I responded to Social Policy Alerts issued by CIB?	
Have I sent feedback in response to request re Pre-Budget Submission?	
Is there an issue the service could do policy work on at a local level? If so, do I have a plan in place such as contacting a local names official, networking with another organisation, applying for a SP grant from CIB to carry out some research or organise an event locally?	

Checklist for local initiatives

Insert ✓ where appropriate

If a client has identified an issue with a local service provider, approach that provider to make them aware of the issue and seek a response. It is important to make a link with a named individual if possible.	
If the response is unsatisfactory, raise the issue with the manager or supervisor of the service.	
Approach other organisations to check if they have had similar experiences.	
Research the background to the issue and find out whether similar issues have been dealt with in other CICs or other local services/organisations.	
Communicate any possible initiatives to Regional Manager.	
Consider contacting local media to highlight the issue.	
Organise a discussion forum on the issue with other interested parties.	
Work with other organisations to come up with solutions to the problems identified.	
If the initiative involves a written submission, any details of cases that are included need to be anonymised.	

Checklist for making a social policy submission

Insert ✓ where appropriate

Am I clear who I am addressing in the submission?	
Is my case clear and precise, free from jargon and opinion?	
Have I checked all my facts?	
Have I included all the relevant evidence and supported it with reference to official publications or other relevant documents?	
Are my arguments based on the evidence presented?	
Are my proposed solutions reasonable, timely and cost effective?	
Are the benefits of taking action evident?	
Have I addressed the concerns of those who may have a different point of view?	
Have I considered whether this is an appropriate time to make a submission?	

Checklist for networking

Insert ✓ where appropriate

Identify what issues would be resolved more successfully if other parties were involved in the local policy work. Who has an interest in the issues identified, either as a direct provider of a service or as a support to clients facing the problems highlighted in the Social Policy Returns?	
Identify the most relevant organisation/s to work with on the issue and make initial contact, suggesting a meeting.	
Work collectively with other like-minded individuals or organisations	
Use anonymised case material as basis for discussion and clarify organisational responsibilities and capacity to address the issues – it is important not to let clients to be identified locally.	
Agree actions for immediate response and identify what research may be required to expand knowledge of the issues.	
Agree further actions at local level and identify what actions require a regional or national response.	
Assign responsibility for follow-up at national level, either through a joint submission or through a national representative body.	
Evaluate benefits of networking to see if any improvements can be made.	

10. Resources

This section gives you suggestions of further reading which will deepen your knowledge of social policy work.

10.1 CIB Social Policy and Research team publications and resources

Social Policy Resources (2019):

- *Social Policy Returns in Citizens Information Services – A Training Workshop* (PowerPoint presentation)
- *How to become involved in Social Policy in your Citizens Information Service* (an introduction to social policy for all staff)
- *How to manage Social Policy in Citizens Information Services* (guidelines for CIS and CIC managers)
- *Social Policy – A Comprehensive Guide for Citizens Information Services* (a detailed guide which staff can refer to as needed)

Social Policy Update - a bi-monthly e-bulletin which gives information on the social policy work of CIB and its delivery services and on national social policy news and activity (including the social policy work of other organisations). It provides an analysis of recent social policy feedback submitted by services throughout the country. If you would like to be added to the circulation list, please email socialpolicy@ciboard.ie

See *Social Policy – A Comprehensive Guide for Citizens Information Services* for relevant internal resources:

- CIB Social Policy Grants – Guidelines
- Data sources for Social Policy and Research
- Caller and query guidelines for Oyster Data Collection Module
- Social Policy Returns by CIS, 2018
- Writing an effective Social Policy Return
- Guidelines for Oyster Data Recording

10.2 CIB reports and publications

Reports and submissions can be found in the Social Policy and Research section of the Citizens Information Board website under Publications. Recent submissions are described on a regular basis in *Social Policy Update*.

CIB policy submissions prepared by Social Policy and Research team on a range of topics.

CIB Pre-Budget Submission - it is recommended that everyone looks at this submission as it highlights most of the policy issues experienced in CICs

CIB publishes a range of social policy and research reports. Some which may be of interest include:

- Information provision and access to public and social services for the Deaf Community (2018)
- Housing Assistance Payment (HAP): The experience of Citizens Information Services (2017)
- Making an Impact – the Public Value of Citizens Information Services in Ireland (2017)

Materials on Oyster:

- **Making a Social Policy Return on Oyster** can be accessed on Infonet in the <u>Social Policy and Research</u> section.
- **Caller and Query Guidelines for Oyster Data Collection Module**: This guide is intended to help you use the Oyster data collection system and to understand how the data you enter is used (available in the User Manuals section on the <u>Oyster homepage).</u>
- **Oyster Data Collection Module Guidelines** provide a step by step guide on how you add a query to Oyster (available in the User Manuals section on the <u>Oyster homepage).</u>

<u>Relate</u>, produced bi-monthly by CIB, outlines in straightforward terms recent developments in social services, policy and legislation in Ireland. It can also be downloaded at: http://www.citizensinformationboard.ie/publications/relate/

<u>CIS Advocacy Annual Report 2018 –</u> the purpose of this report is to present and recognise the advocacy work that takes place on a daily basis in CISs across the country and to share learning across the network.

<u>National Advocacy Service Annual Report 2017</u> – contains many case studies.

10.3 Government websites and other official sites of relevance to social policy work in delivery services

The **Central Statistics Office** publishes census statistics and also a range of thematic reports drawn from the Census - <u>www.cso.ie</u>

Government of Ireland website: For an overview of government departments, consultations, publications and policies, go to <u>www.gov.ie.</u>

The websites of **Government Departments** contain information about policy developments. Key ones to look at include:

Department of Health (DoH) - <u>https://health.gov.ie/</u>

Department of Education and Skills (DES) - <u>www.education.ie/en/</u>

Department of Justice and Equality (DJE) - <u>www.justice.ie</u>

Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DECLG) - <u>www.housing.gov.ie</u>

Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) - <u>www.welfare.ie; see also:</u>

- Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) in DEASP supports the Minister and Government in developing and implementing Government strategies for preventing, reducing and ultimately eliminating poverty and social exclusion and in promoting greater social inclusion and social cohesion in collaboration with other stakeholders, including in particular people experiencing poverty - <u>www.socialinclusion.ie</u>
- The Social Welfare Appeals Office operates independently of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. It aims to provide an independent, accessible and fair appeals service with regard to entitlement to social welfare payments and to deliver that service in a prompt and courteous manner: <u>www.socialwelfareappeals.ie</u>
- Social Impact Assessment (SIA) is an evidence based methodology which estimates the likely distributive effects of policies on household incomes, families, poverty and assess to

employment. It is found on the website of the DEASP.
https://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Social-Impact-Assessment.aspx

Houses of the Oireachtas – A brief guide to how your Parliament works:
www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/media/Oireachtas-A-Brief-Guide-To-How-Your-Parliament-Works-2017.pdf

Houses of the Oireachtas – How laws are made:
www.oireachtas.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=/documents/bills28/guide.htm

KildareStreet.com is a website which provides a searchable copy of the official parliamentary record. You can sign up for email alerts every time a particular person speaks, or when a particular phrase or keyword appears. You can also combine both types of criteria to be alerted only when a particular person uses the keywords you have chosen.

Oireachtas.ie is the official website of the parliament or Houses of the Oireachtas. It contains the official parliamentary record – what was said in the Dáil, Seanad and Oireachtas Committees, as well as answers to written questions.

You can sign up to receive weekly email alerts with the schedule of business in the Dáil, Seanad and parliamentary committees. These are circulated on Friday afternoons for the following parliamentary week, which begins on Tuesday.

The Ombudsman's Casebook provides summaries of complaints the Ombudsman has dealt with over the previous months: www.ombudsman.ie/publications/ombudsmans-casebook

StatCentral.ie is maintained by the CSO and is the portal to Ireland's Official Statistics. It provides information about statistics produced by government departments and state organisations - www.statcentral.ie

Whodoeswhat.gov.ie is a government website which has the names and contact details of senior civil servants in government departments.

WhoIsMyTD is a website that allows users to insert their postal address and identify their TDs, MEPs and local councillors.

National Economic and Social Council (NESC) analyses and reports to the Taoiseach and Government on strategic issues relating to sustainable economic, social and environment development in Ireland and publishes frequent reports that are of interest to those engaged in social policy work. For example, NESC produced a report in June 2018 on Moving from Welfare to Work: Low Work Intensity Households and the Quality of Supportive Services.

The **Economic and Social Research Institute** (**ESRI**) produces research that contributes to understanding economic and social change in the new international context and that informs public policy-making and civil society in Ireland. For example, a study by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection examines who is most likely to have unmet needs for formal childcare and professional homecare services.

Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission: www.ihrec.ie This is Ireland's national human rights and equality institution. Its purpose is to protect and promote human rights and equality in

Ireland and build a culture of respect for human rights, equality and intercultural understanding in the State. The Commission distributes a newsletter free of **charge**.

Ireland – A Directory, published annually by the Institute of Public Administration, is a comprehensive database of 'who's who' in the Irish public sector as well as a selection of major business and non-governmental organisations. It contains the names and contact details of key personnel in central and local government, the public sector and private business.

10.4 Community and voluntary sector organisations' websites

The **websites and publications of many community and voluntary sector organisations** include useful commentaries and submissions on social policy. Some of these organisations work with and on behalf of specific sections of the community (for example older people; people with disabilities; lone parents; children; unemployed people) or on particular issues (housing; mental health). Others have a broader social inclusion or anti-poverty focus.

Age Action provides services including Care and Repair, computer training and information, and also campaigns for older people at a national level: www.ageaction.ie

Care Alliance Ireland is the National Network of Voluntary Organisations supporting Family Carers. www.carealliceireland.ie

Citizens Advice Policy Research: www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/policy/

Citizens Advice Scotland works for a fairer Scotland where people are empowered and their rights respected. www.cas.org.uk

Community Law and Mediation formerly Northside Community Law Centre, is an independent, community-based organisation that works to empower individuals experiencing disadvantage by providing free legal information, free legal advice, education and mediation services: www.communitylawandmediation.ie

Disability Federation Ireland advocates for the full and equal inclusion of people with disabilities and disabling conditions in all aspects of their lives: www.disability-federation.ie

FLAC (Free Legal Advice Centres) is an independent human rights organisation dedicated to the realisation of equal access to justice for all: www.flac.ie

Immigrant Council of Ireland is a national, independent non-governmental organisation that promotes the rights of migrants www.immigrantcouncil.ie

Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOU) works at local and national levels on issues affecting unemployed people: www.inou.ie

Mental Health Reform is Ireland's leading national coalition of organisations campaigning to transform mental health and well-being supports in Ireland: www.mentalhealthreform.ie

New Communities Partnership aims to empower and represent ethnic minorities and their representative organisations in Ireland: www.newcommunities.ie

Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre is dedicated to the realisation of human rights for Travellers and Roma: www.paveepoint.ie

Social Justice Ireland is an independent think tank and justice advocacy organisation that seeks to build a just society: www.socialjustice.ie

St Vincent de Paul Society is the largest voluntary charitable organisation in Ireland. In addition to providing direct assistance to those in need, caring for the homeless, providing social housing, operating holiday homes and other social support activities, the Society promotes community self-sufficiency, enabling people to help themselves. It produced a short film on poverty and its causes. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qi2radZxPpw

Threshold aims to secure a right to housing, particularly for households experiencing the problems of poverty and exclusion: www.threshold.ie

Treoir - the national federation of services for unmarried parents and their children: www.treoir.ie

10.5 Policy work in Ireland

Think-tank for Action on Social Change (TASC) is an independent progressive think-tank whose core focus is addressing inequality and sustaining democracy. As a public-education charity, TASC seeks to raise the level of public knowledge about public policy, politics, economics, culture, the environment and related fields, to encourage a more equal, democratic and inclusive society.

The Policy-Making section of TASC's Open Government Toolkit (2016) provides information, tips and resources on how Government works, where to get information, how to get your voice heard. It contains ten separate guides covering three broad themes, the most relevant for CIS staff being Public Decision Making which covers policy-making, public spending, law-making and the European Union. This is an excellent resource and is highly recommended for all staff.

Social Justice Ireland Weekly Digest - this comes in the form of a weekly email. You can subscribe (free of charge) on https://www.socialjustice.ie

Casebase, a publicly accessible online database of social welfare appeals reports is produced by Community Law and Mediation. Look it up on: www.communitylawandmediation.ie

10.6 Report writing

How to plan, write and communicate an effective policy brief (Laura ffrench Constant: *Research to Action: The Global Guide to Research Action) 2018*

Research to Action (R2A) is a website catering for the strategic and practical needs of people trying to improve the uptake of development research

Producing a local social policy report - produced by Advice Services Alliance, the umbrella body for independent advice services in the UK. It looks at timing and planning; format and layout; consulting with specialists; editing; printing, distribution and launching the report.

10.7 Overview of Irish social policy

Irish Social Policy – A Critical Introduction, Fiona Dukelow & Mairéad Considine, second edition (2017). This book provides an in-depth analysis of social policy in Ireland. It looks at the development of Irish social policy, explains international concepts of social policy, looks at key services in the Irish context and examines how policy affects different social groups.