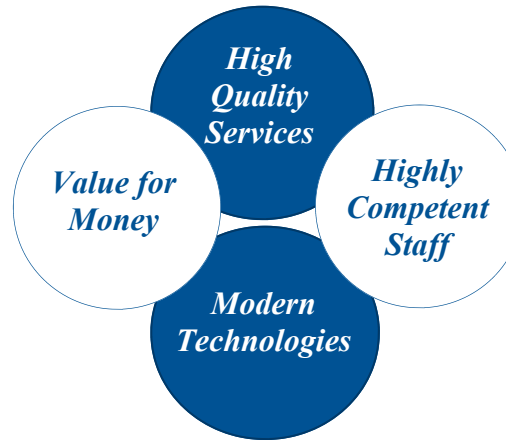




An tSeirbhís Chúirteanna
Courts Service

Strategic Plan 2014 - 2017



The Courts Service - Strategic Plan 2014 - 2017

OUR VISION	OUR MISSION	OUR VALUES
Our vision is to develop a world-class organisation that has as its primary objective, meeting the needs of court users.	To manage the courts, support the judiciary and provide a high quality and professional service to all users of the courts.	Service: customer focus, timely, friendly, competent Integrity: honest, objective fair, ethical, accountable Respect: courteous, impartial, considerate

Foreword by Chief Justice	Introduction by Chief Executive Officer
<p>Over the past six years, during which the country has undergone a severe economic recession, the Courts Service along with all public sector bodies has experienced serious reductions in funding and staffing. Despite the resulting challenges the Courts Service has implemented significant reforms which have ensured that court sittings and key services have not been negatively impacted. In addition we have created a platform for further developments and reform.</p> <p>During the life time of this strategic plan we propose to continue our modernisation programme to enhance the delivery of services to court users and support the administration of justice. To successfully implement this programme, it is critical that the Courts Service is adequately funded and resourced over the life time of this plan, particularly in relation to investment in technology.</p> <p>We have demonstrated our ability to change and streamline our operations. I am confident that we can deliver further improvements in efficiency and service. We will prioritise the support and development of our staff, who have met all the challenges faced in recent years and have never been found wanting in their commitment and dedication.</p> <p>I am confident that this strategic plan will see us take another large step on our journey towards creating a world class organisation.</p> <p>I look forward to working with all stakeholders in implementing this plan and thank all those who worked on its content and shape.</p> <p>Susan Denham Chief Justice and Chairperson of the Board of the Courts Service.</p>	<p>This Strategic Plan follows six years of austerity which have seen severe reductions in funding and staffing for the Courts Service. We have also had to deal with a number of legislative changes that have increased workloads in the courts and court offices. However there are positive signs that the worst of the austerity is over as the economy begins to show signs of recovery. Despite the resource constraints, much has been achieved in the past three years, the most significant being the completion of the Combined Court Office project, which brought together Circuit and District Court offices and rationalised the number of offices around the country.</p> <p>The Plan sets out six key priorities, which seek to build on the progress made in implementing a range of change initiatives over the past three years. We have identified the importance of focusing on three key areas in particular: People, Technology and Processes. These areas offer significant potential for further improvements in service delivery and value for money. In this regard the Plan has been prepared with a clear focus on implementation and maximising the potential of all our resources.</p> <p>We have seen significant rationalisation of our estate of courthouses over the past three years. During the course of this plan we will see the completion of seven new courthouses using the PPP approach. We will also plan for future court accommodation developments.</p> <p>We will continue to ensure that we fulfil our mandates of managing the courts and supporting the judiciary and will continue to work with the judiciary and justice sector stakeholders to further improve the management of cases coming before the courts.</p> <p>Brendan Ryan, Chief Executive Officer</p>

The Courts Service - Strategic Plan 2014 - 2017

KEY PRIORITIES

- **High Quality Service Delivery:** The Courts Service has implemented unprecedented changes to its office structures in the last three years. This has enabled us sustain high levels of support for all court sittings and to maintain key services, which will continue to be our main focus. This plan is about ensuring that we build on this platform. We will determine the services that need to be delivered through local offices and those that can be centralised or outsourced. We will also seek to maximise the use of technology in the provision of our services through the introduction of more e-filing and e-payment options, together with improved online self-service options. We will also build on the good work being done using LEAN process improvement. Taking account of these opportunities to transform the way we deliver our services, we will also assess the impact these changes will have on structures and staffing levels across the organisation.
- **Supporting the Judiciary:** Supporting the judiciary is a statutory function of the Courts Service and significant resources are focussed on fulfilling this remit. Ensuring that all scheduled court sittings are supported and all necessary supports are in place to enable the judiciary administer justice, is of primary importance. Specific areas that will be addressed in this plan include establishing a new judicial research office and supporting the establishment of the Judicial Council. We will continue to develop further our working relationship with the judiciary, with a view to delivering improved management of the courts, including listing and management of cases.
- **Skilled and Engaged Staff:** While staff numbers have reduced by some 16% since 2008, staff costs still account for a large element of the day to day running costs of the Courts Service. **Staff are** our most valuable resource and we must ensure that all staff have the necessary skills to perform at a high level and achieve their potential. This includes equipping court going staff with the requisite technical and legal knowledge to discharge their responsibilities effectively. It also includes supporting and developing our managers and staff in dealing with the wide range of challenges and issues which they face on a daily basis. A coaching programme will be put in place to support our managers and a new unit will also be established to manage and oversee our training programmes generally.
- **Technology:** Investment in technology over a number of years has paid significant dividends across a number of key services, including courtroom technology, online services and e-filing. However there remains significant untapped potential in this area. Unfortunately due to reduced funding and resources over the past six years, it has not been possible to take full advantage of the opportunities that technology offer. With reduced resources and growing workloads, technology (e.g. e-filing, epayments, and online services) offers the best solution to enhancing customer service and delivering improved value for money for the tax payer. The Courts Service will be seeking to maximise the deployment of technology during the course of this plan.
- **Case Management, Collaboration and Reform:** We will continue to explore with County Registrars and the Department, enhanced functions for County Registrars and eligible court officers. Working with the judiciary, the Department and practitioners, we will seek to reduce the time required for case processing. This will include increased use of e-filing and e-courts systems. We will continue to enhance our reporting capacity on case flow and disposal. We will plan for and implement changes to the delivery of Probate services. We will continue to work with all stakeholders to bring about improvements to the operation of the courts and the wider justice system. We will continue to provide input to the development of court rules and primary legislation, as required. During the course of this plan we will support a number of new legislative initiatives, including: The Fines (Payment and Recovery) Act 2014, and the Assisted Decision-Making Capacity Bill.
- **Provide Suitable Court Accommodation:** Following a period, in recent years, when there has been no capital building projects undertaken, it is a welcome development that seven new courthouses will be provided over the next three years at key locations around the country. We will continue to ensure, within available resources, that an effective courthouse maintenance programme is implemented. We will also plan for future court accommodation requirements. We will comply with health and safety and disabled access requirements, and we will continue our commitment to energy-saving practices.

The Courts Service - Strategic Plan 2014 - 2017

