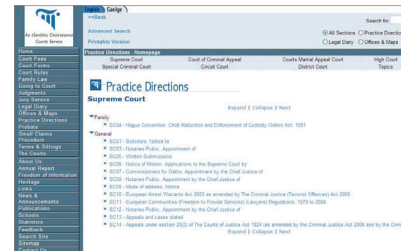




An tSeirbhís Chúirteanna
Courts Service

Strategic Plan 2011-2014

Delivering Service, Transformation and Value



CUR 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

: creworX	Introduction
<p>In times of great demand on services across the entire public sphere - an experience shared by the Courts Service - we are all asked to focus our efforts on maintaining and developing suitable responses and solutions. We do so with less resources and flexibility than previously. We do so not knowing what future resources may be ours to invest in the Courts Service.</p> <p>The process of strategic planning in itself is one which aids an organisation evolve; communicate with its stakeholders; assess potential for change and opportunities to improve; and analyse where, how, and when it should target various efforts. It is a process of concentration which focuses an organisation for its next chapter of work, its new aims, goals and upcoming challenges.</p> <p>I am confident that despite all the limitations which the current economic climate imposes on us as providers of public services, that this strategic approach to future services poses the best possible means of achieving what the public expects of the Courts Service: that is a functional, efficient and responsive management of the courts so that justice may be administered and expedited on behalf of all who seek redress.</p> <p>I look forward to working with all court user groups in implementing the plans laid out in this strategic plan and thank all those who informed its content and shape.</p> <p>Susan Denham Chief Justice and Chairperson of the Board of the Courts Service</p>	<p>This Strategic Plan builds on the previous strategic plan, which set out a long term vision for the Service. While much has changed in the past three years, the key objectives and priorities identified in that strategic plan remain valid. This Plan has been prepared following consultation with a wide range of stakeholders and I am very grateful to all those who responded. I look forward to working in collaboration with all stakeholders in implementing the strategies outlined.</p> <p>The Plan focuses on both our operational priorities and on a transformation programme which envisages major changes to our structures, processes and procedures. It places great emphasis on value for money and aims to make the best possible use of all resources available to us by improving process efficiency, maximising the opportunity offered by technology, making better use of our renovated stock of buildings, developing our staff and working with other agencies in the Justice sector to support the administration of justice.</p> <p>We will continue to ensure that we fulfil our mandates of managing the courts and supporting the judiciary, in what are very difficult and challenging economic circumstances. This plan takes account of the recommendations from our own TASC report and also takes full account of the Public Service Agreement and the Programme for Government. Due to the economic challenges and the uncertainties which we will face the Plan will have to be kept under review over the next three years and adapted to meet changing circumstances.</p> <p>The Courts Service has a strong record, since establishment, in delivering change and service improvement and I am confident that despite the challenges we face we can succeed and emerge as a stronger, more robust organisation.</p> <p>Brendan Ryan Chief Executive Officer</p>

KEY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

This Strategic Plan has been prepared at a time of unprecedented uncertainty for the country, the public sector and the Courts Service. The Plan has been prepared on the basis that full funding to meet salary costs for approved staff numbers under the Employment Control Framework will be provided. At this time it is not known what level of resources will be available to the Courts Service over the next three years to manage the courts and implement this Strategic Plan. Further reductions in staffing and funding will present serious challenges in seeking to maintain service levels and will result in a situation, where a reduction in services, including court sittings, will have to be considered. The incoming Board may be required to review the Plan and revise it as appropriate.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing Staff Numbers: Staffing levels will have reduced by 181 (17%) from the 2008 level by the end of 2014, per the Employment Control Framework. This combined with the loss of knowledge and expertise, as staff leave, will pose serious challenges in ensuring that court sittings operate effectively and service levels are maintained. Low staff morale due to pay cuts and increased workloads could also impact on performance. • Reducing Funding: Non-pay and capital funding has been very significantly reduced since 2008. With further reductions projected this poses a serious threat to the operation of the courts. Consistent with reducing the cost to the Exchequer of operating the courts and the Service we will seek to maximise the revenue generated from court fees and other sources. • Increased Workload: The economic recession has generated additional work for the courts across a range of areas, including; bankruptcy, family law and crime. The introduction of new legislation also increases the work of the Courts Service. The Fines Act 2010 being a case in point. We have also experienced an increase in self-represented litigants, who take up a considerable amount of time for staff in court offices. • Transforming Service Delivery and Structures: The Service has a highly dispersed geographic network of offices and court venues, which have changed little since the foundation of the State. The Service has commenced a major transformation programme aimed at rationalising its office network, court venues and support structures. • Skills and capacity: The work of the courts requires significant technical knowledge. The Service must ensure that staff at all levels, have the necessary skills, competencies and expertise to carry out their duties. It must also achieve optimal flexibility & mobility in their deployment. • Performance Management: Using agreed key performance indicators, and through the more effective use of the performance management system (PMDS), move to a more performance oriented approach to managing performance and resource allocation. • Enhanced Role for County Registrars: Working with the Department of Justice and Equality, the Service will seek to expand the adjudicative role of County Registrars to capitalise on their specialist legal skills, qualifications and knowledge, by extending the areas in which they may exercise adjudicative functions. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working Relationship with the Judiciary: The Service has a statutory mandate to provide support services to the judiciary. In seeking to operate the courts and support the judiciary in a climate of reducing resources the Service will continue to work constructively with the judiciary to address issues that impact on the effective operation of the courts. A close working relationship with the judiciary will be necessary to ensure the operation of the courts is not negatively impacted by the constraint on resources. • Collaboration with Justice Sector Agencies: The effective operation of the criminal justice system is contingent on a number of agencies and stakeholders working effectively together. There are a number of opportunities where the system could be improved and made more efficient. The Service will work in partnership with all stakeholders involved in the criminal justice system to help bring about improvement to the operation of the courts. • Processes: Over a number of years many instances of local practices and processes have built up in court offices. There is an urgent need to standardise and streamline practices and processes in all court offices. Solving this issue will bring about a number of benefits, including; the elimination of inefficient processes, better return from training investment and more consistent customer service. A number of processes and functions could also be centralised. • Technology: The Service will seek to maximise the potential of existing information technology and our website. As funding permits, the Service will invest further in the deployment of technology to improve service to court users and maximise performance. • Programme for Government (PFG) and the Public Service Agreement (PSA): The PFG makes reference to a number of initiatives that will impact on the Service. These include; the Fines Act 2010, the Judicial Council and the Civil Court of Appeal. These will have resource implications for the Service and we will respond positively in supporting these initiatives within available resources. The PSA identifies a number of major reforms in the public sector. The Courts Service's Action Plan demonstrates a willingness and commitment to be at the forefront of transforming public services. |
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Goal 1: Deliver High Quality Services by Transforming Administrative Structures and Processes	
STRATEGY: Transform administrative structures to ensure that management and support structures are fit for purpose. Review and standardise levels of customer service provided to ensure consistency of service delivery. Continue to implement process improvement, including the centralisation of certain processes, to ensure maximum efficiency and value for money.	
Actions	Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Complete roll-out of combined court office model to a single identified location in each county (primarily county towns) ○ Review the senior management structure including Directorate and regional functions and implement recommendations ○ Review service delivery across jurisdictions in the greater Dublin area and implement recommendations ○ Review and agree standards of customer service and prioritisation of services in the light of available resources ○ Design and implement standard operating procedures and more efficient processes within and across court jurisdictions ○ Centralise agreed functions and processes ○ Examine and implement alternative service delivery options where appropriate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Maximise the utilisation of available resources, while maintaining acceptable levels of service ○ Improved performance and value for money ○ Consistent levels of services to court user ○ Better use of limited resources ○ Centralisation of selected services.

Goal 2: Support the Judiciary	
STRATEGY: Provide the support required by the judiciary to enable them perform their judicial functions.	
Actions	Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provide necessary supports (research, secretarial and technical) to enable judges discharge their judicial functions ○ Build on our working relationships with the judiciary to ensure the maintenance of a fair, equitable and efficient justice system in a challenging economic environment ○ In consultation with the judiciary seek to maximise the use of modern ICT tools in the administration of justice ○ Process orders of the court professionally and expeditiously. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Court sittings proceed as scheduled ○ Use of courtroom technology maximized to support effective and efficient administration of justice ○ Court orders are prepared and dispatched within agreed performance parameters.

Goal 3: Support our People

STRATEGY: Maximise the potential and performance of all our staff.

Actions

- Implement learning & development programmes, including technical support, for managers and staff
- Make PMDS more effective and responsive to business needs
- Implement human resource management initiatives, including succession planning, knowledge management and resource allocation
- Achieve more flexibility and mobility in the deployment of staff, including court registrars
- Implement improved communications
- Implement a non-monetary award scheme to recognise exceptional performance.

Outputs

- Improved performance
- Improved technical knowledge
- More competent staff
- Improved customer service
- Improved communication, engagement and staff morale
- Greater staff mobility and flexibility
- Recognition for exceptional performance.

Goal 4: Support Case Management and Listing

STRATEGY: Support the judiciary in maximising the potential for the efficient listing and management of court business and sittings. This will include maximizing the use of the specialist legal skills, qualifications, knowledge and experience of County Registrars.

Actions

- Develop proposals for and provide input into the development of legislation and court rules aimed at improving the administration of justice and the operation of the courts
- Working in partnership with the judiciary develop and implement proposals to support the judiciary in reducing waiting times for trials and case disposal timescales
- Proposals for enhanced adjudicative functions for County Registrars are identified, promoted and implemented, subject to the consent of the Minister, through appropriate legislation
- In collaboration with justice sector agencies develop proposals contributing to the effective management of court sittings
- Continue to identify proposals for rationalisation and simplification of court procedure and reduction of costs of litigation.

Outputs

- Reduction in court waiting times
- Reduction in volume of pre-trial applications coming before judges of all jurisdictions
- Maximise time available to judges for trial work
- Reduction in waiting times for disposal of pre-trial applications
- Content of Heads of Bill prepared for prospective Courts Bill in timely fashion
- Proposals for court rules amendments presented to respective rules committees in timely fashion.

; cal 5: Maximise the use of all accommodation and information and communications technology

STRATEGY: Ensure court business be transacted in locations which provide appropriate facilities for all court users. Rationalise the number of court venues to ensure that courts sit in venues with appropriate facilities and achieve best value for money. Maximise the potential of existing information and communications technology and, as resources permit, invest further in the deployment of technology to improve service to court users and value for money.

Actions	Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Rationalise the number of court venues and offices ○ Ensure court venues and offices comply with disability and health & safety requirements. ○ Ensure court buildings are maintained to an acceptable standard consistent with availability of resources ○ Implement capital building programme with priority focus on county town locations ○ Continue commitment to energy-saving/environmentally friendly energy usage ○ Implement changes to ICT systems to support operation of the Fines Act ○ Increase the number of services available online ○ Increase the exchange of data electronically with agencies interacting with the Courts Service ○ Maximise the use of existing information & communications technology, including courtroom technology and telephony ○ Maximise the potential of website and intranet platforms ○ Maximise the opportunities afforded by mobile technology and social media. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Better utilisation of court venues and office space. ○ Level of compliance with Disability and H&S requirements ○ Availability of court venues for court sittings ○ Reduced energy usage and reduced carbon emissions ○ Implementation of Fines Act ○ Increase in online service usage ○ Improved efficiency & performance ○ Increased use of courtroom technology ○ Improved use of website by court users.

Goal 6: Deliver Excellence in Governance, Accountability & Value for Money

STRATEGY: Implementation of best practice corporate governance, performance management and management practices to ensure the Service meets in mandates, achieves value for money for tax payer's funds and effectively manages risks to the operation of the courts.

Actions	Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Use agreed key performance indicators to monitor and report on performance at corporate and business unit level ○ Implement performance budgeting in line with Government policy ○ Continue to operate effective corporate governance and risk management frameworks ○ Continue to operate effective budgetary and business planning mechanisms ○ Maximise revenue through regular reviews of court fees. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Greater accountability & transparency regarding performance of the Service ○ Achievement of organisational objectives ○ Better resource allocation ○ Increased income.



An tSeirbhís Chuirteanna
Courts Service

Strategic Plan 2011 – 2014

GOAL 1

Deliver high quality services by transforming administrative structures and processes

- ✓ Complete roll-out of combined court office model
- ✓ Review SMT and Regional Structures
- ✓ Review service delivery across jurisdictions in the greater Dublin area
- ✓ Agree standards of customer service in the light of available resources
- ✓ Implement standard operating procedures and processes
- ✓ Centralise functions and processes

GOAL 2

Supporting the Judiciary

- ✓ Provide necessary supports (research, secretarial and technical) to judges
- ✓ Build on our working relationship with the judiciary to ensure effective operation of the courts
- ✓ Maximise the use of courtroom technology

GOAL 5

Maximise the use of all accommodation and information & communications technology

- ✓ Rationalise the number of court venues and offices
- ✓ Ensure court buildings are maintained to an acceptable standard
- ✓ Implement capital building programme
- ✓ Continue commitment to energy-saving/environmentally friendly energy usage
- ✓ Implement changes to ICT systems to support operation of the Fines Act
- ✓ Increase the number of services available online
- ✓ Increase the exchange of data electronically with agencies interacting with the Service
- ✓ Maximise the use of existing ICT, including courtroom technology
- ✓ Maximise the potential of website and intranet platforms

GOAL 3

Support our people

- ✓ Implement learning and development programmes
- ✓ Implement technical support
- ✓ Make PMDS more effective
- ✓ Implement people management initiatives
- ✓ Implement resource allocation
- ✓ Achieve more flexibility and mobility in the deployment of staff

Delivering Service, Transformation and Value

GOAL 4

Support case management and listing

- ✓ Bring forward proposals for development of legislation and court rules
- ✓ Support the judiciary in reducing waiting times
- ✓ Develop proposals for enhanced adjudicative functions for County Registrars
- ✓ In collaboration with justice sector agencies support the effective management of court sittings
- ✓ Identify proposals for rationalisation and simplification of court procedure

GOAL 6

Deliver excellence in governance, accountability & value for money

- ✓ Use key performance indicators to monitor and report on performance
- ✓ Implement performance budgeting
- ✓ Operate effective corporate governance and risk management frameworks
- ✓ Operate effective budgetary and business planning mechanisms
- ✓ Maximise revenue through regular reviews of court fees