

Meeting of the Courts Service Board

14th October 2019

Minutes and Documentation from Committees

The Board noted the minutes and reports of meetings of the Committees of the Board as follows:

- Minutes of meeting of the Finance Committee on 1st April and 24th June 2019
- Minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee of 25th March and 24th June 2019
- Minutes of the meeting of the Family Law development Committee of 13th May and 24th June 2019
- Minutes of the Building Committee of 29th May 2019

The Board also approved a new Internal Audit Charter.

The Board considered and approved the following reports:

Report on Membership of the Board and Audit & Risk Committee

The Board approved the appointment of Ms. Deirdre Kiely as Chairperson of the Audit and Risk Committee. The Board also approved Mr. Doncha O'Sullivan as a member of the Audit and Risk Committee and Mr. Tom Ward as Secretary to the Courts Service Board.

Approval of new officer to authenticate the seal of the Courts Service

The Board approved the designation of Mr. Tom Ward and Ms. Linda Memery as officers authorised to authenticate the Seal of the Courts Service, in accordance with section 10 of the Courts Service Act 1998.

Report on Expenditure 2019 and Budget Review 2020

The Board considered the report on Expenditure and Budget 2019 as circulated and noted the main issues emerging on the 2019 budget which include:

- A projected underspend to year end on Pay of €2.2m
- A projected over spend on Non-Pay Current of €2.224m
- An underspend on capital of €1.435m
- A shortfall on Court Fees of €0.75m

The service expected to bring in a balanced budget in 2019.

In relation to the 2020 Estimates, the Service has received approval to use High Court Dormant Funds, as provided for in the Civil Liability and Courts Act 2004, in 2020. This will allow the Service to assign a larger budget to ICT next year to underpin the process of modernisation and reform.

Report of the Chief Executive Officer

The Board considered and approved the Report by the Chief Executive Officer and noted major issues including:

- **Oversight agreement:** The oversight agreement for 2019 has been agreed with the Department and the first governance meeting is taking place during the 1st week of November
- **Strategy and Reform Directorate:** The new directorate has been established in line with the Organisational Capability Review, under the leadership of Ms. Audrey Leonard, Assistant Secretary. The Legislation and Rules Unit, which is part of this Directorate, will provide support to the Rules Committees.
- **Judicial Council:** The Service is in discussions with the Department on the arrangements to support the operation of the Council.
- **E-Licensing:** The Service is receiving very good feedback from practitioners who use the new e-Licensing Application. An information strategy is in place to brief solicitors on its operation, as part of its planned extension to other counties.
- **Jury System:** the implementation of the project to centralise jury summoning is going well. It is allowing the service take advantage of significant efficiencies in printing and postal charges. It is a very good example of significant public service reform.
- **Human Resources:** a “New to Grade” programme is proving successful in supporting newly appointed staff as they move into their new role. Improved structures have also been put in place for Judicial Assistants.
- **Website:** work on the website is largely complete and more than 14,000 judgments along with determinations and rules have been migrated to the new site successfully. The legal diary will remain on the old site for the time being until some technical issues are overcome. A new consolidated rules feature, developed with the help of McCann Fitzgerald, has been received positively by practitioners. Once testing of the new site is completed, the Service will commence an information campaign to promote its use.

- **DAR:** The Senior Management Team has approved a new access rights plan to DAR recordings. Roll out of the implementation will be completed early in the New Year.
- **Maintenance of Courts Service Estate:** a nationwide survey of conditions is under way.
- **Court Operations:** The Board was briefed on the challenges around the continued support of Athlone Court Office. The Service has commenced a consultation process with users.
- **Legal Cost Adjudicators:** arrangements are now in place for the new office to commence operations. 2 of the 3 Legal Cost Adjudicator posts have been filled. It is hoped that this post will be filled shortly.

Report on Risk Management

Risk management continues to be actively addressed throughout the organisation. The Service had identified 114 risks under 6 categories and would be reviewing the respective ratings towards year end. Good progress continues to be made in relation to actions and controls.

Report on Hammond Lane

The Board considered the options facing the Service and the funding position facing the service to deliver a project on the Hammond Lane site. The Board asked that for the December meeting, the Chief Executive Officer prepare a comprehensive report looking at the entire estate and its capacity to meet future needs.

The Board also discussed conditions in the Chancery Street Courthouse and problems with the roof. The Board asked that a report on conditions in Chancery street be prepared for the December meeting.

Report on proposal to extend Managed Service Contracts

The Board approved the extension of 2 infrastructure support service agreements with ATOS IT Solutions and Services Ltd. by a further 9 months up to 31st January 2021.

Contract Register

The Board noted the contract register as circulated.

Probate Office fees reform

The Board approved a report on the subject of Probate Office Fees. The proposal has already been considered by the Finance Committee and it is planned to simplify the fee structure, as

outlined. The proposals were developed following a sampling exercise and will see a greater increase in fees for the higher value estates and a small reduction for estates where the value is lower. While re-checking fees were to be abolished, it is anticipated that revenues from these fees will remain broadly unchanged. The Board were advised that the Law Society are supportive of the proposal.