

MEETING OF THE COURTS SERVICE BOARD
28th April 2020

The Courts Service Board met on 28th April 2020.

Minutes and Documentation from Committees of the Board

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

- Minutes of the Finance Committee – 27th January 2020 and 2nd April 2020
- Minutes of Audit & Risk Committee – 27th January 2020
- Minutes of Family Law Court Development Committee – 25th November 2019
- Minutes of the Building Committee – 9th October 2019

The Board considered and approved the following Reports:

Chief Executive Officer's Report

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

- **Covid 19:** – The Chief Executive outlined the steps taken by the Service as the Covid 19 emergency became more pronounced. She emphasised that the importance of communicating to society that the courts were being kept open, albeit on a reduced scale. The situation had allowed the Service to make progress in areas related to the modernisation agenda such as moving payments over to EFT and the issue of judgements in the High Court electronically, without a court appearance.

The aim was to do as much business as possible during this emergency period, to make some progress on the extensive backlogs that are developing. The ICT team are examining platforms to support virtual courts that could be hosted on the Service's infrastructure. On the question of increasing the business transacted in Courts in the meantime, the Service will have to work out what business can be transacted safely as well as looking at circulation routes. It was noted that it will not be possible to have courtrooms in use at the same time as some courts are using up to 3 courtrooms to adhere to social distancing requirements to hear matters. The Board

passed a formal resolution thanking the staff of the Courts Service for their work above and beyond the call of duty and asked that this be communicated to the staff.

- **Budget for 2020** - the Covid 19 emergency has had detrimental effect on the national finances. The Chief Executive said that the signs were that the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform have yet to reveal exactly how the recent crisis will affect the votes for agencies and Departments. It is expected that that revised estimates will be brought before the Dáil, once the new Government is formed. She also indicated to the committee that fee income to the Service was down and the longer the present restrictions are in place, the greater shortfall.
- **Oversight agreement** - the oversight agreement with the Department of Justice & Equality has been approved and will be before the Board at its June meeting

Financial Report 2020

The Board considered the Financial Report, as circulated. The Board noted:

- **Reduction in fee income** – The impact of Covid 19 on fee income generally is very significant. While there is some prospect of fee income in respect of civil proceedings coming back later in the year, the shortfall in income from licensing will not be recouped. Licensing business by its nature is linked to public holidays and celebrations like weddings. The projected shortfall in income to end April is €3m and if the situation persists to the year end, the shortfall for licensing income will be of the order of €9m.
- **Changes in spending patterns** – Covid 19 has seen the postponement of projects that will result in savings and underspends. There was increased expenditure in licensing of software and new laptops within the ICT budget but the level of this expenditure is not exceptional.

Annual Report of the Audit and Risk Committee

The Board considered the Annual Report of the Audit and Risk Committee and noted its contents.

Modernisation Programme

The Service continued to be on track to have the Strategic Business Case and Target Operating Model documents ready in time for the June Board Meeting. The Service was continuing to develop the project along 4 main workstreams:

- Modernisation Programme Board
- Modernisation Committee
- Stakeholder Engagement

- Development of the Target Operating Model and the Strategic Business Case

Some of the new approaches tried during the crisis will be part of the permanent solution while others will not. It was agreed that the project should not lose momentum because of the Covid 19 emergency.

Risk Register

The Service had identified 10 strategic risks for the corporate risk register, 5 which were identified as high and the remainder were medium. The Service has taken a cascade approach to risk management with Directorates identifying their own risks, the due dates for action and progress report.

Self-Assessment evaluation

The findings of the report and the areas of interest were noted. It is intended that the findings will inform the work of the external evaluation, which will be finalised in time for the October meeting of the Board.