



**Minutes of the meeting of the Courts Service Board
25th September 2023**

Present:

- The Hon. Mr. Justice Donal O'Donnell, Chairperson of Courts Service Board
- The Hon. Mr. Justice George Birmingham, Board Member
- The Hon. Mr. Justice David Barniville, Board Member
- The Hon. Ms. Justice Elizabeth Dunne, Board Member
- The Hon. Mr. Justice Patrick McCarthy, Board Member
- The Hon. Mr. Justice Tony O'Connor, Board Member
- The Hon. Ms. Justice Patricia Ryan, Board Member
- Her Honour Judge Alice Doyle, Board Member
- His Honour Judge Paul Kelly, Board Member
- Judge Alan Mitchell, Board Member
- Ms. Angela Denning, Board Member
- Ms. Deirdre Kiely, Board Member, Chair of Audit & Risk Committee
- Ms. Patricia King, Board Member
- Ms. Sara Phelan, Board Member
- Ms. Michele O'Boyle, Board Member
- Ms. Hilary McSweeney, Board Member
- Ms. Rachel Woods, Board Member
- Ms. Karen Kiernan, Board Member, Chair of Family Law Development Committee

Also, in attendance

- Mr. Tom Ward, Head of Superior Courts Operations
- Ms. Audrey Leonard, Head of Circuit and District Operations
- Ms. Denise Cole, Head of HR
- Mr. Owen Harrison, Head of ICT
- Mr. John Cleere, Head of Corporate Services
- Ms. Emer Darcy, Head of Strategy and Reform
- Ms. Una Murphy, Head of Sustainability
- Ms. Deirdre Doyle, Secretary to the Board
- Ms. Rachel Murphy, Secretariat
- Mr. Damien Dawson, Secretariat

A Quorum was reached.



1. Minutes of meeting of 17th July 2023.

The minutes of the meeting of the 17th July were approved following minor amendments.

Matters arising: There were no matters arising.

2. Meeting actions and decisions:

Action No.	Report	Action / Decision	Update/ Status	Responsibility	Due date
Meeting actions					
CSB 33/2023	Building Committee report	Committee to bring report to Board re Galway	For Agenda	Chair of Committee	TBC
CSB 34/2023	Corporate Strategy update	Strategy development workshop	For Agenda	Secretary	TBC
CSB 35/2023	JPWG	Update following budget allocation	For Agenda	Secretary	November 23
CSB 36/2023	Modernisation Committee	Revert to Board re membership	For Agenda	Chair of Committee	November 23

Meeting Decisions	
n/a	

3. Building Committee update (report CSB 51/2023)

The Chair of the Committee, Ms. Patricia King presented the report as circulated which covered meetings of 25/04/23, 13/6/23, 4/7/23. Topics dealt with at the meeting were as follows:

- Climate Action Roadmap
- Dublin Family Law Courts Project [Hammond Lane]
- Galway Expanded Accommodation



- Venue Review
- Four Courts Lift and Basement Usage
- Sustainability Update
- Procurement
- Capital Budget
- Risk Management
- Building Committee Terms of Reference

Ms. King outlined.

- Progress being made on pathfinder projects in Ennis and Sligo.
- Hammond Lane was originally a Justice PPP project jointly with AGS. In May 2023, decision was taken to proceed as a standalone PPP project. OPW are carrying out the working on planning application which is expected to be submitted in Q4.
- Galway office accommodation - Business case was accepted by the committee at the end of July 2023, negotiations are in progress with regards temporary accommodation. A discussion took place regarding future accommodation. The Board were advised that trying to identify and secure a suitable future site is an ongoing active process. A view was raised that if this isn't progressing that an alternative regional venue may need to be explored. Ms. King undertook to bring this back to the Committee and provide a comprehensive report to the Board regarding Galway.
- Venue review - To define the future configuration of the estate. As is phase is complete. A comprehensive consultation with stakeholders is the next step.
- Tralee – an update was provided regarding the progress of the new site.

A question was raised as to any implications of the delay in submitting planning for Hammond Lane. The Board were advised that this action is not on the projects critical path and that other actions are proceeding in tandem. A discussion took place regarding rising building costs and the impact of same.

Following a question regarding our policy on vacant properties, Ms. Denning advised that properties are offered to the OPW initially and to local councils for other public use.

A discussion took place on how the judiciary can input into the venue review process, Ms. King highlighted the importance of having judicial membership of the Committee and it was noted that Mr. Justice Noonan is stepping down from this Committee.

4. Modernisation Committee update (report CSB 52/2023)

The Chair of the Committee, The Hon. Mr. Justice Donal O'Donnell, presented the report as circulated which covered meeting of 26th July 2023. Topics dealt with at the meeting were as follows:

Key Achievements since May

- Family Law
- Assisted Decision Making Capacity
- Appointments Booking Service
- Digital Desktop Modernisation Project
- 360 Virtual Tour



- Cashless Payments
- Digital Jury Platform
- Modernisation Programmes
- Family Reform Programme
- Civil Reform Programme
- Criminal Reform Programme
- Data
- Estates Strategy
- People and Organisation Strategy
- Partner Coalition and Communications
- Modernisation Programme Management

It was noted that there were no key decisions, risks, or recommendations for the Board at this time. It was noted that the Modernisation programme is at a critical stage and that it may be advisable to add additional members to the Committee with expertise in areas such as transformational ICT. It was suggested that a review of the skillset of the Committee may be advisable to identify where any gaps lie. It was agreed to discuss this further when Ms. Emer Darcy was in attendance later in the meeting.

A discussion took place as to whether it would be beneficial to have a mid-way review of the modernisation programme, it was agreed to come back to this later in the agenda.

5. Family Law Development Committee update (Report CSB 39/2023)

The Chair of the Committee, Ms. Karen Kiernan, presented the report as circulated which covered meeting of 3rd July 2023. Topics dealt with at the meeting were as follows:

- The Family Justice Strategy and Family Courts Bill
- Recommendations on the provision of information on family law services to the public
- The committee conducted a review of its terms of reference
- Committee Work Plan 2022/2023
- Discussion on the 3rd National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
- Discussion on the in-camera rule
- Discussion on the Report on the Intersection of the Criminal Justice, Private Family Law, and Public Law Child Care Processes in relation to Domestic and Sexual Violence
- Discussion on the Parental Alienation Research Report and Policy Paper
- Discussion on lessons learned from the pandemic experience in family law work

Ms. Kiernan advised that at the next Family Law meeting they will look at policy in place in this area and the linkages between the various policies and strategies, in addition to reviewing what worked and didn't during the pandemic. Additionally, research into the perspective of Family Court user will be reviewed. It was noted that there were no risks or decisions for the Board at this time.

6. Climate Action Roadmap Update (Report No: CSB 54/2023)

Ms. Una Murphy, Head of Sustainability, attended along with Mr. John Cleere, Head of Corporate Services for this item, and presented the update as circulated. which was the updated Climate Action Roadmap for noting.

The report recapped the Climate Action Roadmap requirements for public sector bodies and highlighted changes from 1st to 2nd iteration of Roadmap. In addition, it



provided an update on new requirements under climate action mandate 2023.

It was noted that the first climate action roadmap was approved by the Board in March, however the new requirement for approval in the future is that it goes to the SMT and CEO for approval and is brought to the Board for attention.

Ms. Murphy provided an overview of targets and the measures being undertaken and plans to achieve them. It was noted that this would be difficult to achieve and dependent on resourcing for projects. An update was provided on the pathfinder projects being undertaken and it was noted that a review of these pilots would be taken, and learnings will inform future projects.

A discussion took place regarding actions being taken towards sustainable travel e.g., electric vehicles and bicycles. It was noted that a pilot is in place regarding EV chargers, following which a review would be undertaken prior to any further action in this area. Ms. Murphy advised that Government policy in provision of these chargers is awaited.

A view was expressed that our reporting in the annual report should be expanded, Ms. Denning advised that this had been expanded for 2022 and could be further expanded for 2023.

The Sustainability and Communications unit have been asked to prepare a summary of the actions in the Climate Action roadmap for distribution to judges and staff.

The Chair thanked Ms. Murphy for the update. Ms. Murphy then left the meeting.

7. Strategic Plan 2021-2023 update (report CSB 55/2023)

Ms. Denning presented the report as circulated and advised, that the next plan is due by May 2023, and that this means the next Board will be developing plan. She noted that as the JPWG report requires each Court to have their own strategy, it was crucial that the next plan aligns to these. She provided an update on the impact of actions taken under each of the six goals of the plan.

- Take a user centric approach.
- Support the Judiciary
- Digital First
- Better ways of working
- Provide a modern and improved estate and facilities
- Accountability and Leadership

Ms. Denning asked the Board to consider if they were satisfied with the structure and targets of the current plan and whether other approaches should be considered for the next plan. It was generally agreed that the Board were satisfied with the approach. The update was welcomed, and it was noted that regular updates to the Board on the implementation of strategy from the SMT were necessary to ensure accountability to the Board.

A discussion took place on various aspects of the 6 goals, including recruitment, training, and retention; consultation with court users regarding provision of service and facilities; funding for digital transformation. It was suggested that the next strategy should include goals in relation to sustainability and inclusion.

The chair noted that early action regarding the development of the next strategy would be welcome. Ms. Denning advised that a strategy development workshop would be undertaken with the Board at a future Board meeting.



Action: CSB 34/2023 Strategy development workshop for agenda.

8. Modernisation programme update (report CSB 56/2023)

Ms. Emer Darcy, Head of Strategy and Reform attended for this item and presented the report as circulated. She highlighted that the transform phase of programme now sees positive changes services are delivered. She provided an update on actions in each of the following workstreams.

- Civil Reform - Assisted decision-making major change in 2023, Civil team oversight of Peter Kelly recommendations, Plain Language of Debt forms, progressing, working ongoing with Civil society forum and practitioners
- Family Reform – Very positive feedback on Family Law information on website
- Criminal Reform – ongoing engagement DOJ sectoral strategy group, engagement re criminal hub, further work on material to support jurors
- Technology and Data – update later in meeting from Head of ICT
- Digital - update later in meeting from Head of ICT
- Estate – update provided by Chair of Building committee
- People & Organisation – ongoing implementation of people and organisation strategy actions
- Partner Coalition & Communications – ongoing implementation of communications strategy
- Modernisation Programme Management – ongoing governance of programmes

The Chair thanked Ms. Darcy for the update.

A further discussion took place regarding the Modernisation Committee composition. It was agreed a further member with digital transformation expertise should be added. It was also agreed that another judge (potentially from the judicial engagement committee) should join the judicial liaison committee. It was suggested that a family law practitioner might be added, however the overlap with the Family Law Committee was mentioned.

Action CSB 36/2023 - The Chair of the Modernisation Committee will revert to the Modernisation Committee and then to the Board regarding the proposed membership.

9. Judicial Planning Working group discussion

Ms. Denning introduced this item and provided an overview of the recent activity in this area, with ongoing bilateral meetings between the Courts Service, the Department of Justice, and the Judicial Implementation group. It was noted that the Head of ICT and Data met with the Court Presidents regarding data indicators which are required to measure implementation of the recommendations. It was noted that the first run of the data will be finalised end of September and would be accompanied by a narrative provided by the Court Presidents. It was noted that scheduling of Courtrooms has moved to the Courts Service.

A discussion took place regarding the funding required for the necessary resources to support implementation. Ms. Denning undertook to prepare and circulate a note for the Board after the budget allocation.



Action CSB 35/2023 - Update to Board following budget allocation.

10. Senior Management Strategic update (CSB 57/2023)

The Senior management team attended for this item and presented in turn an update on their area of responsibility.

10.1. Superior Courts Directorate update

Mr. Tom Ward, Head of Superior Courts Operations provided an overview of highlights and progress in 2023 to date and outlined;

- Progress on replacement of progress CMS in the High court, which will go live in the coming days
- Commencement of Assisted Decision-Making Capacity Act
- Commencement of eProbate project

He outlined the emerging challenges in his Directorate;

- Implementation of the Assisted Decision-Making Capacity Act. There will be various challenges for Wards of Court Office and General Solicitors Office, with all wards discharged in a 3-year timeframe

He outlined future goals as follows;

- High Court case management system - Focus on staff training which will allow staff to correctly result cases which in turn will improve information to all judges and staff
- Assisted decision making capacity Act - Support offices affected by this Act to move Wards through to discharge
- eProbate - Reorganise and streamline service delivery in consultation with users

A discussion took place regarding the Assisted decision-making regime and the various factors contributing to the slow start to its uptake.

10.2. Circuit and District Operations Directorate update

Ms. Audrey Leonard, Head of Circuit and District Courts Operations attended for this item and provided an overview of highlights and progress in 2023 to date and outlined actions relating to;

- Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act – establishment of new processes and procedures, new helpdesk to support staff and practitioners and staff training
- Establishment of a Data Retention Court
- Staff Training – Variety of actions been taken in the short-term to train new entrants, accompanied by development of a longer-term training framework
- Review of Regional Office Structure
- Procurement



She outlined the emerging challenges in her Directorate;

- JPWG - planning and resourcing addition court sittings, and the associated back-end work
- Training – continues to be a challenge to train new staff
- ADMC – bedding down period due to complexity
- Impact of New Legislation
- Summonses awaiting scheduling

She outlined the future goals as follows;

- Accredited technical training program for court registrars and support staff
- Improved customer service delivery (Full roll out of appointment booking service in all offices)
- Greater use of data to inform scheduling and case management with roll out of Circuit Court Family Law System in 2024
- Regional offices take on expanded role taking into account current responsibilities but also including HR and training roles
- Legacy criminal case management systems replaced

The improvements in training regionally was positively noted and commended by a Board member.

10.3. Strategy and Reform Directorate update

Ms. Emer Darcy presented the report as highlighted, noting there was significant overlap in the modernisation update that she had provided earlier and particularly highlighted the ongoing work with regard to Learning and Development and in the Legislation and Rules unit.

10.4. ICT Directorate update

Mr. Owen Harrison presented the report as circulated and provided an overview of highlights and progress in 2023 to date with regard to the following.

- Digital Desktop Modernisation Project - completed
- Judicial Desktop Rollout – progressing
- Judicial ICT Support Modernisation – more proactive service
- Judicial Bench Rollout – 2-year project
- Video Courtroom Expansion – now at 132
- Cyber Security – New head of cyber security in place, significant investment in this area
- Wi-Fi Rollout – 3-year programme
- Data Retention, Data Reports, Data Dictionary – Head of Data in place, significant work ongoing
- Digital Jury System – new system to allow jurors respond online
- Unified Case Management System (UCMS) ADMC first go live, followed by Progress, then Circuit Family Law, need to replace 140 systems
- ADM case management system – live
- High Court CMS & Online Portal
- Circuit Family CMS & Online Portal
- General Solicitors Office – digitised



A discussion took place on the difficulties of recruiting and retaining staff in the ICT area, which is an ongoing challenge, with salaries being significantly less attractive than the private sector.

10.5. Corporate Services Directorate update

Mr. John Cleere, Head of Corporate Services, provided an overview of highlights and progress in 2023 to date in the areas below;

- Court Funds Office - €2.5bn Court Funds (20,970 beneficiaries)
- Financial Management Section - secure & manage €180m
- Estate Management Unit – 102 Venues & circa 246 courtrooms
- Business Continuity Planning (BCP)

He outlined the future goals in the areas below;

- Deliver Estates Strategy Projects
- PRA
- Estate Management Governance & Ways of Working
- Commence Four Courts Action Plan
- Dublin Family Law Courts
- Sustainability – Climate Action Road Map
- Site Acquisitions
- Estimates Funding 2024
- Manage and Invest Court Funds
- Drive NSSO FMS Project

He highlighted the challenges in progressing the Dublin Family Courts PPP, procurement, and resourcing, and well as budgetary challenges for the organisation. Following a query re courts funds, Mr. Cleere afterwards confirmed the value relating to Wards of Court is €1bn.

10.6. Human Resources update

Ms. Denise Cole, Head of Human Resources, attended for this item and provided an overview of the current position regarding staffing in the organisation. It was noted at this point last year that recruitment was the main issue. Through significant efforts since then, progress has been made with recruitment, which means that development and retention is now a key focus. It was highlighted that the average stay in role is 3 years, both for new entrants and those promoted, which fundamentally changes how staff need to be developed in the organisation, then would have been the case traditionally.

A range of statistics were provided regarding age profile, length in service and so on, which illustrates how the workforce is changing.

A discussion took place on the use of interns, Ms. Cole advised that the intention is to review whether benefits have been achieved through this practice, but early indications are positive with a proportion choosing to return to work with the Service following graduation.



The low salary at starting grades was discussed which does little to attract new entrants, with those who chose to work for the Courts Service being attracted to the purposeful work available in the organisation.

A discussion took place regard any possible regrading of roles, it was noted that any wish to do this must be instigated by staff side with Department of Expenditure, NDP and Reform.

The Chair thanked the Senior Team for their reports and noted the positive work being undertaken.

11. AOB

The provisional meeting dates for 2024 were circulated.

It was noted that the next meeting of the Board would take place on 6th November in Greenstreet Courthouse.