

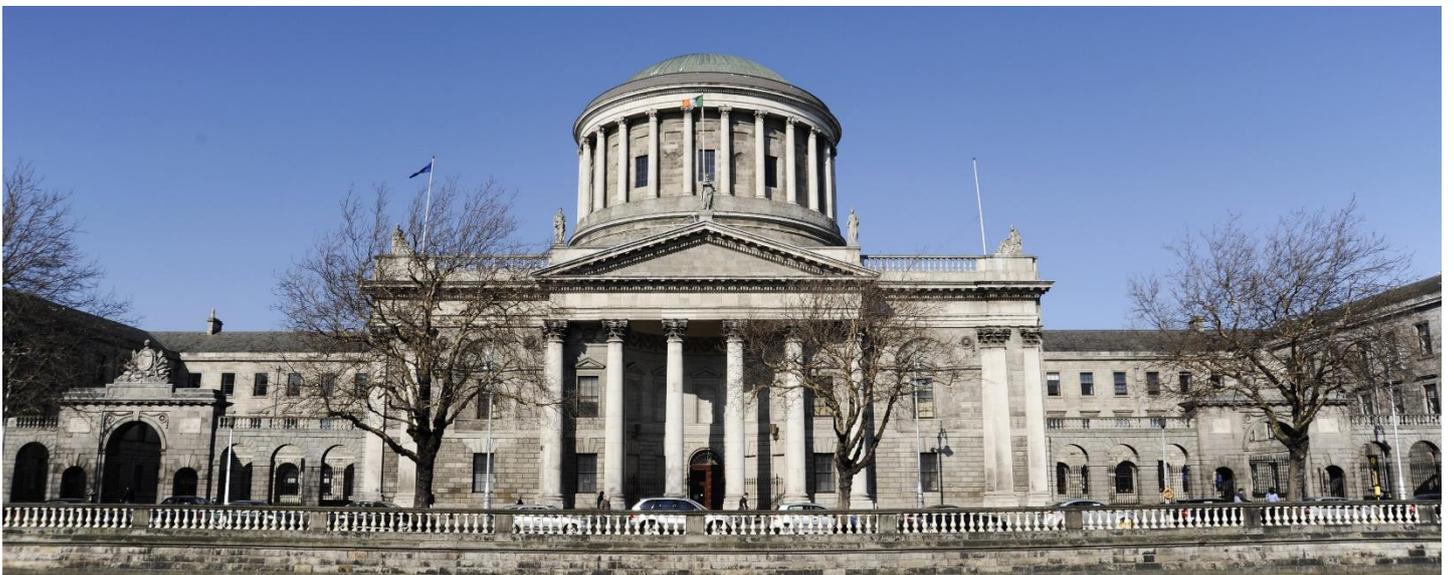


An tSeirbhís Chúirteanna  
Courts Service

# Supporting Access to Justice

*in a modern, digital Ireland*

**LONG-TERM STRATEGIC VISION - 2030**



## FOREWORD

I very much welcome the development of this long-term strategic vision. It builds on the achievements of the Courts Service since its establishment 20 years ago. It recognises the need for reform of the courts system and the role of the Courts Service in bringing about those reforms. The need for reform has been widely endorsed by the views of my judicial colleagues and a wide range of stakeholders, through an unprecedented level of consultation and engagement. It is well established that a functioning courts system is the foundation of a stable democracy and society. Furthermore, access to justice is a fundamental of the rule of law.

The Irish Courts System is ranked highly in terms of judicial independence and, at an international level, our courts and judiciary have a high reputation. But there are real challenges to address. When measured against some (but by no means all) international benchmarks the Irish Courts perform less well. Furthermore, many people find the courts system difficult to navigate, slow and restrictive. We want to make it work better, by building it around the needs of our citizens and business while maintaining the essential requirement of doing justice in accordance with law.

Looking ahead, we need to make sure that our courts system continues to be highly regarded not just in Ireland but across the world. The reforms outlined here will achieve that by combining our respected traditions with the enabling power of technology. The vision is to modernise and upgrade our courts system so that it operates to the highest standard for everyone, from vulnerable court users, witnesses and litigants to judges and legal professionals.

We are bringing forward changes to provide a more open, transparent and accessible courts system that is quicker, easier and more efficient for those who use it, those who work in it and those who pay for it. This includes moving from paper based, inefficient and labour-intensive systems and procedures, to digital systems and streamlined case management and moving some existing court activity online.

There is no doubt that the implementation of this strategic vision will require significant investment. However, when viewed in the wider context of the benefits that an effective and efficient courts system makes to society and the economy, the investment required is relatively small. The strategic vision is ambitious and challenging, particularly when considered in the context of a complex, challenging and constantly changing justice sector. However, I am confident that we can achieve our objectives with the support of the judiciary, the Department of Justice and Equality, and through the dedication and commitment of our excellent staff.

We look forward to working collaboratively with all our stakeholders in seeking to bring about a world-class courts system. This is a unique opportunity to transform the Irish courts system and to ensure that it is comparable with the best equivalent court systems in the world.

**Frank Clarke**  
**Chief Justice and Chairperson of the Courts Service Board**

## INTRODUCTION

This long term strategic vision seeks to provide a modern, transparent and accessible courts system that is quicker, easier to access and more efficient. It is ambitious and challenging, particularly when considered in the context of a complex, and constantly changing justice sector. In addition to the general endorsement for reform of the Irish courts system, the external Organisational Capability Review completed in 2018, identified a number of areas that need to be addressed to enable the Courts Service to play a full and effective role in the management of the courts system.

### Need for Collaboration and Support

However, the Courts Service, on its own, cannot implement all that is required to bring about the reforms identified. It requires the full commitment and support, including necessary investment, of a number of key stakeholders and justice partners. We are committed to working collaboratively with stakeholders to support the implementation of the enabling legislative and practice and procedural reforms required to bring about the necessary change. We believe the significant benefits that will flow from the implementation of this vision provide a compelling rationale for the planned reforms. The additional investment required will yield significant monetary and non-monetary benefits to the Courts Service, court users, our justice partners, the wider courts system and to society and the Irish economy. The following is a summary of key areas of reform in this strategic vision:



**Digital Services:** In a world where people perform many transactions online, this strategic vision provides for major reforms in the way the courts system uses technology, that will see a significant increase in access to digital services. This will include e-filing and digital case management, which will reduce the need to file and process paper, reduce non-value-added work, drive greater efficiency and support improved access to justice.



**User Centric Approach:** A core aspect of our approach will be a focus on better understanding the needs of those who interact with the courts system and those who use our services. We will work to simplify court practices and procedures and design our services based on the needs of those who use them.



**Support for Judiciary:** Effective justice systems are anchored in efficiency, quality and independence. We will continue to support the independent judiciary in the administration of justice by providing them with the resources required. This will include modern technology, which will allow judges make optimal use of their knowledge and time in deciding cases.



**Better Ways of Working:** We will continue to invest in our people to ensure that they have the skills and capabilities to perform at the high level required for the implementation of this vision. As we move away from heavily paper based operations, staff will have more meaningful and rewarding roles.



**Better Facilities:** We will continue to modernise court venues and facilities, to ensure those court users who attend in person, will be provided with the level and range of facilities that a modern society should aspire to. We will focus on providing a much higher-level of service in a smaller number of locations.

We are adopting a prudent phased implementation approach, with an initial focus on building the foundations and capabilities to enable this future transformation. This recognises the need to learn lessons from similar programmes internationally. This strategic vision will guide the development of more detailed implementation strategies and work programmes across key areas such as technology, service delivery, people and estates.

**Brendan Ryan, Chief Executive**

## WE WORK IN A COMPLEX ENVIRONMENT

The Courts Service is a statutory independent state agency, established by the Courts Service Act 1998, to support the third branch of Government - the courts and the judiciary. It is a frontline, service focused organisation, providing services in civil, criminal and family courts. The Courts Service has responsibility for the management and administration of the courts, through its offices in the Supreme Court, Court of Appeal, High Courts, Circuit Courts and District Courts, together with the support directorates established as part of the management structure for the Service. There are approximately 1,000 staff working in a geographically dispersed office network, supporting 168 judges and 24,000 court sittings annually across all jurisdictions. It has an annual budget of circa €138m and manages court funds of €1.9bn.

The Courts Service provides a broad range of services that are essential to the operation of the courts system, which in turn is crucial to supporting access to justice. Access to justice is a fundamental right for individuals and organisations and an effective, efficient and modern courts system is essential to Ireland's stable functioning democratic society and its thriving globally-connected economy.

The courts system is the framework under which the justice is administered. It encompasses a wide range of stakeholders directly involved on a day-to-day basis in the operation of that system. The Courts Service is part of the wider courts system and a key tenet of implementation of these reforms will be our role in seeking to influence the operation of the system and work with key stakeholders to enhance the delivery of reform. There are other stakeholders who may not be directly involved in the courts system but nevertheless have a direct or indirect interest in and impact on the operation of the system. The Courts Service plays a vital role in managing the courts in seeking to ensure this complex system operates to serve the needs of all stakeholders. This strategic vision will ensure that the Courts Service continues to play an important role in supporting access to justice in a modern digitally enabled environment.

This strategic vision has regard to the current reform environment within the Irish public sector and our stated objectives and ambitions are aligned with the principles of "Our Public Sector 2020" and the "Civil Service Renewal Plan". A review of the challenges and opportunities that shape the environment of the courts system was undertaken over the course of the strategic planning process and this review informed the objectives articulated in this document. While the core mandate of the Courts Service remains unchanged, the context in which it is applied is changing fundamentally.

## **WE HAVE SOUGHT THE VIEWS OF OUR STAKEHOLDERS**

The development of this strategic vision has provided an excellent opportunity to engage with the needs and expectations of our stakeholders. It has been informed by the needs and preferences of our stakeholders; the judiciary, our staff, the legal profession, advocacy groups, other justice partners and those stakeholders who have an interest in the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the courts system. Key themes and requirements emerging from the extensive engagement undertaken include:

### **Greater use of digital**

- Ability to submit, update and track cases online; ability to submit applications and supporting documentation online and make payments electronically
- Ability to share information electronically (and automatically) without duplication
- Greater use of data to manage performance and inform decision-making

### **More effective and efficient processes and new ways of working**

- Need to remove both unnecessary complexity and paper from our processes, through “agile and lean thinking”, supported by better technology
- Need for a review to confirm that the correct level of resources is in place
- Need to adopt a “whole system” approach

### **Better facilities and services at court venues**

- Better support for those attending court, especially for those who are attending for the first time
- Safety of individuals attending court
- Need to modernise much of the current estate which currently presents challenges and constraints to the provision of services

### **Continued engagement**

- Staff want to help shape how future services are designed
- Court users want to be engaged on an on-going basis in the development of future design of services
- Stakeholders and justice partners want to engage in the co-design of future services

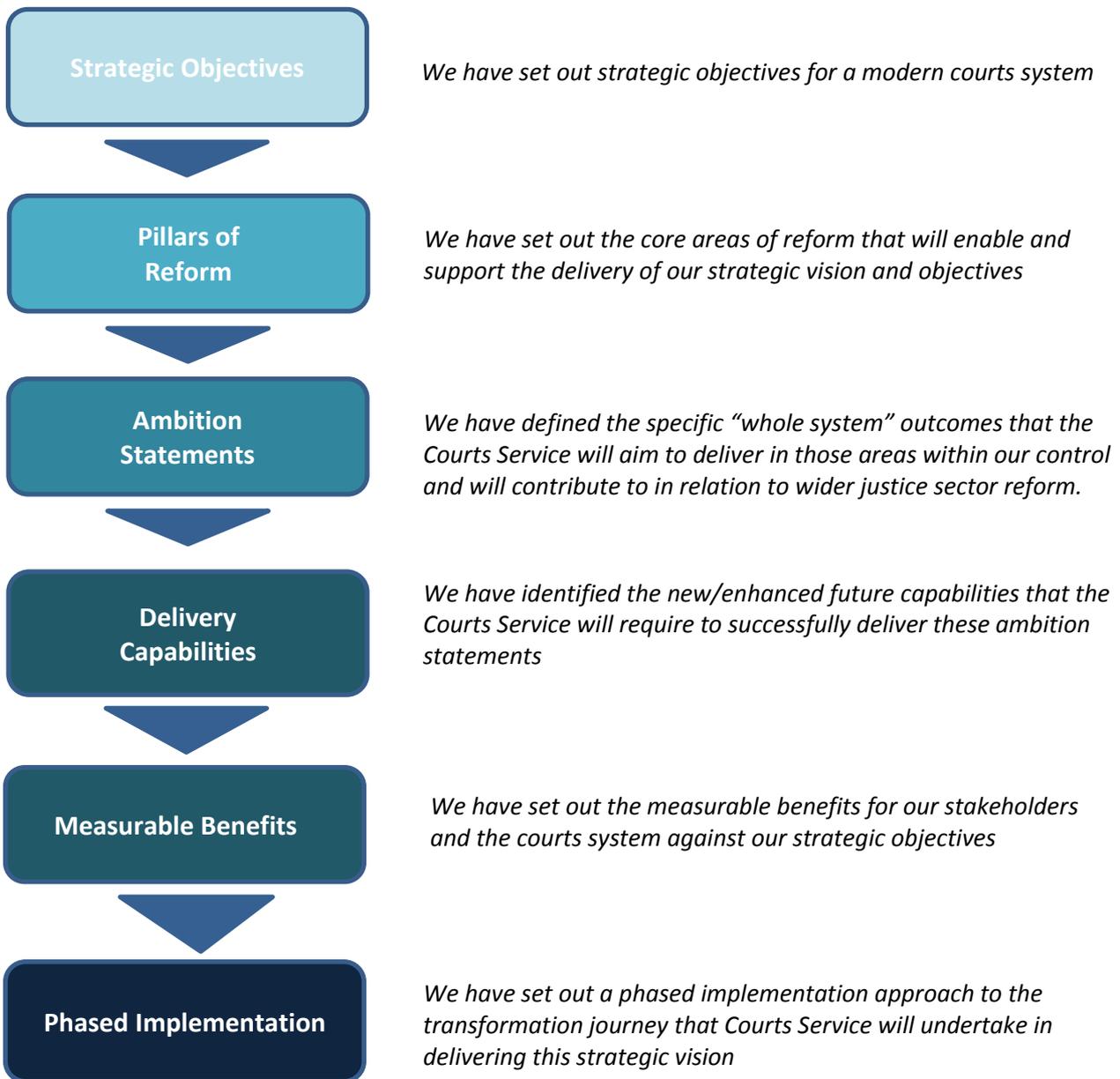
## LINKING VISION, STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES, SERVICE DELIVERY AND REFORM

The long-term nature of this strategic vision provides us with an opportunity to address “whole system” challenges that can only be met through collaborative solutions developed and co-designed with the judiciary, Department of Justice & Equality, other partner organisations and court users.

### OUR VISION

*Delivering excellent services to court users; working in partnership with the judiciary and others to enable a world class courts system*

The structure for the development of this long-term strategic vision is summarised below:



The objectives of this long-term strategic vision are reflected in the desired characteristics of the future courts system that the Courts Service will help facilitate, support and deliver. We have developed a number of key performance indicators to measure performance against these objectives.



**Just;** effective justice systems are anchored in efficiency, quality and independence. We will continue to support the independent judiciary in the administration of justice by providing them with the resources required.



**User-centric** with an enhanced experience for court users; services delivered through a range of channels that are most appropriate for any interaction, providing an easy to navigate, high-quality service and user experience.



**Simplified** provision of access to justice for individuals and organisations through reduced complexity and associated cost, particularly in lower value / lower complexity cases, with people only having to come to court to have their case dealt with where necessary.



**Timely** in the administration of justice i.e. the progress of cases through the courts system will be optimised, with cases not unduly delayed due to administrative or case management issues.



**Integrated** with other justice sector organisations sharing “whole system” information and insights with a focus on interoperability of systems and data.



**Collaborative** working with other justice sector organisations towards “common purpose” outcome ambitions; proactively and cooperatively working together towards shared goals.



**Efficient and Effective** in the administration of justice, with the Courts Service supporting the judiciary using modern technology solutions and best practice processes and procedures to provide a courts system that is value for money for the taxpayer.

The delivery of this strategic vision will require a range of interventions, projects and initiatives across five “pillars of reform”. We will collaborate with our partners in enabling these reforms to be put in place. We will ensure appropriate alignment and balance across these pillars to successfully achieve our strategic objectives.



**Proactive “whole system” approach**

- Co-design of services and solutions with Justice Partners
- Agreed definition and prioritisation of cross-cutting activities
- Capture service user perspectives of their whole-system journeys
- Consideration of system-wide benefits



**Legislation and Policy**

- Legislation to support transformation agenda
- Modernisation of court practice and procedure
- Key functional policies developed
- Maximise the use of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms
- Minimise requirement for attendance at physical court



**Digital First Approach**

- User insights and experience
- Personalised access to cases and digital services
- Online self-service as far as possible
- Digital Case files
- Workflow and case progress tracking
- Electronic exchange of data
- Data analytics
- Removal of paper processes



**New Ways of Working**

- Agile ways of working and development of solutions
- Lean and paperless processes
- Collaborative working looking at “whole system” responses
- Establishment of Centres of Excellence
- Greater support for case progression
- Better use of data



**Invest in our People**

- Introduction of new and enhanced roles
- Leadership & Management development
- Develop skills profile
- Continuous L&D development environment
- Greater career opportunities
- Succession planning
- Recruitment, retention and development of policy



**Modern Estate and Facilities**

- Rationalised estate
- Concentrate court sittings in fewer venues
- Build new family courts centre (Hammond Lane)
- Development of specialist centres
- Investment in modern facilities to support court users



The mandate of the Courts Service is set out in Courts Service Act, 1998. This strategic vision seeks to interpret the statutory mandate of the Courts Service to reflect a modern, digital Ireland. The ambition statements set out below provide a clear statement of the outcomes, set out against our mandate. We will seek to achieve these ambition statements by working in partnership with the judiciary and others across the justice system, to promote, encourage and deliver transformation.

### MANAGE THE COURTS

1. **Hold and manage hearing and case information digitally**  
*Remove non-value adding document handling and manual interventions from our processes, sharing information electronically both externally and internally minimising data entry.*
2. **Adopt “digital first” for the filing of court documents and case progression**  
*Use digital to enable e-filing of court documents and enhanced case management by monitoring on-going progress of cases between court hearings, minimising the time at court that is required to manage cases, and to focus hearings on the adjudication and determination process.*
3. **Be effective and efficient in the delivery of our services**  
*Use the availability of electronic information to improve our technology solutions, business processes, the ways we work and how we are structured to deliver services. We will develop national centres of excellence to support the new service delivery model.*
4. **Be agile and innovative in driving change across our organisation**  
*Provide staff with the tools, resources and skills to drive innovation, agile change and continuous improvement across our organisation, sharing recognised “good practice” identified both internally and externally.*
5. **Provide staff with interesting and rewarding roles**  
*Develop enhanced roles for staff focused on the management of case progression and engagement with court users. We will develop professional career paths for key quasi-legal roles.*
6. **Proactively manage performance to ensure a high and consistent service**  
*Monitor, report on and manage performance on an on-going basis, and take appropriate data-led interventions to improve performance.*
7. **Play a proactive role as a key element of a modern justice system**  
*Proactively engage externally with others to deliver a modern and joined-up courts system which is fit for purpose in a modern digital world.*
8. **Minimise the number of cases that need be dealt with by the courts system \***  
*Provide alternative disposal and resolution solutions allowing a greater number of lower-level, lower complexity cases to be dealt without requiring a court adjudication.*
9. **Only require attendance in person at hearings where necessary \***  
*Reduce the requirement for attendance at court by increasing the range of matters that can be dealt with online, allowing hearings to be dealt with more efficiently. Allowing low complexity / low value cases and activities to be completed online without the requirement for attendance at court will free up significant time at court.*

***\*In relation to these two ambition statements, the role of the Courts Service will be to work in partnership with the judiciary and others in seeking to bring about these reforms.***

## PROVIDE SUPPORT SERVICES FOR THE JUDGES

10. **Provide the judiciary with access to the resources and information they need**  
*Provide the judiciary with the information and resources to enable them to fulfil their roles, manage their time and support the overall delivery of the ambitions that they share with the Courts Service and others.*
11. **Support the judiciary to focus on those activities which require judicial input**  
*Support the judiciary by taking on more of those tasks which do not require judicial input, thereby allowing the judiciary to focus on those activities which require judicial intervention or decision.*
12. **Promote the profile and reputation of the Irish courts system**  
*Work to enhance the reputation of the Irish courts system so that it is recognised as a world leader in legal dispute resolution.*

## PROVIDE INFORMATION ON THE COURTS SYSTEM TO THE PUBLIC

13. **Provide information that supports court users to interact with the courts system as easily as possible**  
*Provide practical information that relates to “events” that happen to court users and/or situations that court users find themselves in.*
14. **Provide services which are designed around the needs of users**  
*Design services around the needs of court users as well as our own requirements. Simplify interactions with court users that support access to justice. Services will be simple to use and easy to navigate. Services will be as user friendly as possible for witnesses, victims and parties to family and civil cases. Feedback will drive continuous improvement.*
15. **Adopt “digital first” in the delivery of services**  
*Provide digital access to all appropriate services. Plan for a future state where most user interactions with our services will primarily be digital.*
16. **Provide excellent service for those court users who need to contact us directly**  
*Provide a range of channels to support those individuals and organisations that need to contact and interact with the Courts Service.*
17. **Be a trusted source of court system information**  
*Enable transparency regarding the operation of the courts system through the provision of information.*

## PROVIDE, MANAGE AND MAINTAIN COURT BUILDINGS

18. **Provide a safe, modern and professional environment across our estate**  
*Facilities at court venues will provide a modern setting for the delivery of services that fits with the needs of court users, partners and our future ways of working. The Courts Service’s estate will be focused on the provision of appropriate accommodation which will include a number of specialist centres and a reduced number of venues nationally.*

## PROVIDE FACILITIES FOR USERS OF THE COURTS

19. **Provide excellent services and facilities for those attending court venues and offices**  
*Provide support and facilities for those attending a court venue with an emphasis on assisting the most vulnerable court users.*
20. **Provide joined-up delivery of services**  
*Work with partner organisations to identify and deliver solutions that benefit all parties, users and the taxpayer.*

Successful delivery of our ambition statements will require a combination of new and different ways of doing things. We recognise that there are significant gaps in our current organisation capability that are required to bring about the reforms set out in this strategic vision. The combination of skills and capabilities required are set out below.

Capability Group	Specific Capabilities
<p><b>Driving Strategic Change</b> Leadership and delivery of the transformational change required to realise this long-term strategic vision</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic leadership</li> <li>• Target Operating Model design</li> <li>• Service design</li> <li>• Change management</li> <li>• Culture &amp; behaviour change</li> <li>• Programme &amp; project management</li> </ul>
<p><b>Delivering Technology Solutions</b> Development and delivery of all the technology platforms, solutions and systems required for Courts Service business</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technology infrastructure</li> <li>• Technology solutions (design, development and implementation)</li> <li>• Agile development</li> </ul>
<p><b>Service Delivery and Development</b> Ability to deliver high-quality, high-performing and continuously improving services for all court users</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data analytics</li> <li>• Innovation and Horizon Scanning</li> <li>• User Research (insights and experience)</li> <li>• Performance management</li> <li>• Agile organisation</li> <li>• Case management</li> </ul>
<p><b>Financial Management and Governance</b> Accountable and strategic planning and management of expenditure and income. Effective management of the commissioning of and ongoing relationships with third party suppliers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business case management</li> <li>• Benefits realisation</li> <li>• Production of performance and value for money reports</li> <li>• Procurement and contract management</li> </ul>
<p><b>Collaboration and Engagement</b> Collaborating effectively with all partners and stakeholders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnership working</li> <li>• Stakeholder and staff engagement</li> </ul>

This Vision will deliver a range of both “whole system” benefits for all and specific benefits for each stakeholder grouping.

Stakeholder Group	Benefits
<b>Service Users</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Reduced waiting times</li> <li>✓ User centric simplified and standardised processes</li> <li>✓ Simplified easy-to-understand communications</li> <li>✓ Increased online services, including e-filing, supported by web and telephone support</li> <li>✓ Accessibility to justice via multiple channels</li> <li>✓ Enhanced services, facilities and signage at court venues</li> </ul>
<b>Judiciary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Evidence of inputs and activities, to support a case for additional judicial resources</li> <li>✓ Provision of expertise and support</li> <li>✓ Enhanced exchange of and access to case information and papers (online)</li> <li>✓ Enhanced ability to focus on value-add processes and activities requiring judicial input</li> </ul>
<b>Managers &amp; Staff</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ New more interesting roles (with fewer mundane paper-based tasks)</li> <li>✓ Increased focus on capability and skills development</li> <li>✓ Collaborative, challenging supportive environment</li> <li>✓ Accurate, timely management information</li> <li>✓ Opportunities to use leading-edge tools and techniques</li> </ul>
<b>Department of Justice &amp; Equality (DJE)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Clear visibility of operational, financial and outcome performance data</li> <li>✓ Clear visibility of the Courts Service transformation roadmap</li> <li>✓ Irish courts system as a top-tier performer against peers</li> </ul>
<b>Legal Profession</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Greater online capability including e-filing and online access to case information</li> <li>✓ Reduced requirement to physically attend court hearings</li> <li>✓ Online (24*7) access to digital services</li> <li>✓ Better services and facilities at court venues</li> </ul>
<b>Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Demonstrated Value for Money</li> <li>✓ Better quality performance data</li> <li>✓ Clarity on demand for administrative and judicial resources</li> </ul>
<b>Partner Organisations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Electronic sharing of data (to/from Courts Service)</li> <li>✓ Use of technology (video-link) for court appearances</li> <li>✓ Minimised requirement for physical attendance at court</li> <li>✓ Greater efficiency in the use of resources</li> </ul>

The strategic vision sets out an ambitious future state. In the short-term, we will initially focus on building the foundations for change;

- We will acquire the new digital transformation capabilities that are required to shape and drive the change set out in this strategic vision
- We will take key investment decisions in relation to those core technology systems (Criminal, Civil and Family) that will be used as a basis to deliver the future state

In the early phases of this transformation programme, we will focus on;

- Delivering visible momentum and early progress in this transformation programme, to gain the confidence and buy-in from the judiciary, our staff and stakeholders.
- Addressing priority areas of operational need, we will work with key stakeholders to run pilot projects to test and explore how the use of digital tools and agile techniques can revolutionise our ways of working

We will phase the implementation of this strategic vision over the next 10 years:



## Examples of next steps and initiatives for Transition Phase (To 2022)



### User Centric

- Improve and enhance the Courts Service website
- Conduct user experience research
- Develop walk through videos for court users

### Better ways of working

- Development of people strategy
- Further development and recruitment of skills and capabilities



### Digital First

- Expanding the use of technology in court
- Delivery of e-services including expanding the use of e-filing, e-probate, e-licensing, e-registers
- Expanding electronic exchange of data with other state agencies in criminal and civil cases
- Improving data quality
- Developing digital services strategy

### Facilities

- Improved accessibility for all court users
- Plan improved family law facilities
- Complete condition survey of court venues



### Support for Judiciary

- Introduction of collaboration and communication tools
- Expanding judges intranet tools

# SUMMARY OF OUR LONG-TERM STRATEGIC VISION

We have interpreted our statutory mandate to reflect our future role in a modern, digital Ireland

Our Vision  
***“Delivering excellent services to court users; working in partnership with the judiciary and others, to enable a world class courts system”***

- Objectives** we will deliver and support:
- Just; supporting the judiciary
  - User-centric with a focus on accessibility
  - Simplified services and processes
  - Timely administration of justice
  - Integrated with our justice partners
  - Collaborative working
  - Efficient; providing value for money

- Pillars of Reform** we will leverage:
- Legislation and policy including practice and procedure
  - Digital access to and provision of services
  - New ways of working
  - Invest in our people
  - Modern estate and facilities

**We have set out the specific ambitions we want to deliver**

- Manage the Courts**
1. Minimise the number of cases that need be dealt with by the courts system
  2. Only require attendance in person at hearings where necessary
  3. Hold and manage hearing and case information digitally
  4. Adopt digital first for the filing of court documents and case progression
  5. Be effective and efficient in the delivery of our services
  6. Be agile and innovative in driving change across our organisation
  7. Provide staff with interesting and rewarding roles
  8. Proactively manage performance to ensure a high and consistent service
  9. Play a proactive role as a key element of a modern justice system
- Provide support services for the judges**
10. Provide the judiciary with access to the resources and information they need
  11. Support the judiciary to focus on those activities which require judicial input
12. Promote the profile and reputation of the Irish courts system
- Provide information on the courts system to the public**
13. Provide information that supports court users to interact with the courts system as easily as possible
  14. Provide services which are designed around the needs of users
  15. Adopt digital first in the delivery of appropriate services
  16. Provide excellent service for those court users who do need to contact us directly
  17. Be a trusted source of court system information
- Provide, manage and maintain court buildings**
18. Provide a safe, modern and professional environment across the estate
- Provide facilities for users of the courts**
19. Provide excellent services and facilities for those attending court venues and offices
  20. Provide joined-up delivery of services

**New Capabilities**

We will build or buy the new capabilities we will need to deliver this strategic vision:

- Driving Strategic Change
- Delivering Technology Solutions
- Service Delivery and Development
- Financial Management and Governance
- Collaboration and Engagement

**Phased Roadmap**

