

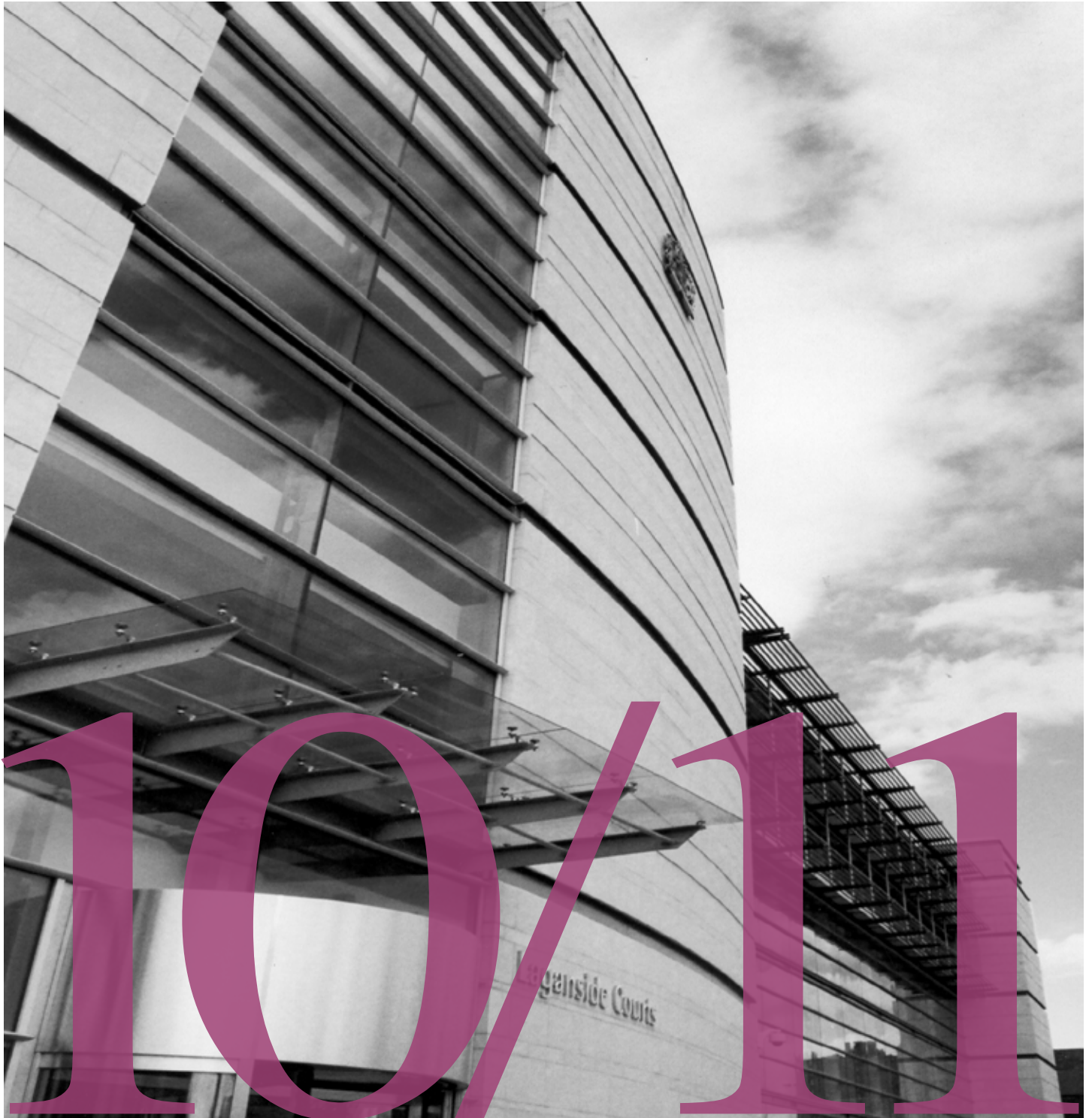


Northern Ireland

Courts and
Tribunals Service

www.courtsni.gov.uk

BusinessPlan



serving the community through the administration of justice

serving the
community
through the
administration
of justice

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Ministerial Foreword



Since my election as Minister of Justice in April 2010 I have been determined that we make the most of the opportunities that the devolution of justice powers offers the people of Northern Ireland.

After almost four decades we have the opportunity to embrace local accountability, engineer local solutions, stimulate partnership working and re-shape our justice system. Devolution offers the people of Northern Ireland the chance to create Northern Ireland solutions.

I am impressed by the way in which the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service continues to seek out opportunities to improve access to justice for court users and offer value for money to the taxpayer.

Its customer-focus is borne out by the numerous awards received, but I am also impressed by the way management is prepared to think creatively when delivering business solutions.

This is illustrated by some of the current projects such as the continuous expansion of online and telephone customer services enabling customers to transact business around the clock.

The Performance Standards targets set by the Courts and Tribunals Service in this Business Plan are challenging, but also encouraging as they demonstrate the drive and commitment to excellence that I expect of a modern public sector business.

David Ford MLA
Minister of Justice

Introduction

This is the first Business Plan for the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service. In this Business Plan we explain how we will serve the community through the administration of justice.



The devolution of responsibility for policing and justice to the Northern Ireland Assembly took effect on 12 April 2010. This had the effect of bringing the policing and justice system under the direction and control of a Northern Ireland Minister, Mr David Ford MLA, and the Northern Ireland Assembly. This transfer included responsibility for courts and tribunals.

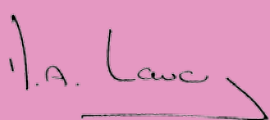
For just over 31 years, court administration in Northern Ireland was the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Court Service, which was the Lord Chancellor's department in Northern Ireland. The Lord Chancellor's responsibilities for the Northern Ireland courts came to an end on 12 April and were transferred to the new Department of Justice.

The Department of Justice in Northern Ireland has a statutory duty to ensure that there is an efficient and effective system to support the business of Northern Ireland's courts. The discharge of this statutory duty within the Department is the responsibility of the Courts and Tribunals Service, which is an Agency of the Department of Justice.

The Courts and Tribunals Service provides administrative support for all of Northern Ireland's courts. At the same time, we are also responsible for running most tribunals in Northern Ireland. The plan is to create a unified administration for courts and tribunals by the beginning of Business Year 2011/12.

In this Business Plan we explain the areas of public administration for which the Courts and Tribunals Service will be responsible during 2010/11. We set out our Key Objectives and the practical steps we will take to achieve them. This Plan includes a range of performance targets for courts and tribunals. We will publish regular reports on our performance against these targets. At the end of the current Business Year we will publish an Annual Report accounting for what we have achieved.

I hope that readers will find this Business Plan interesting and informative. Further information on the work of the Courts and Tribunals Service can be accessed via our website at www.courtsni.gov.uk.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'D.A. Lavery', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

D.A. LAVERY

Director, NI Courts and Tribunals Service

Background

The Northern Ireland Court Service, which was formerly the Lord Chancellor's Department in Northern Ireland, became the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service on 12 April 2010 with the devolution of policing and justice. The Courts and Tribunals Service provides a new unified administration for courts and tribunals and is an agency of the new Department of Justice for Northern Ireland.

The role of the NICTS is to:

- provide administrative support for all of Northern Ireland's courts, i.e. the Court of Appeal, High Court, Crown Court, County Courts, Magistrates' Courts and Coroner's Courts;
- provide administrative support for tribunals;
- enforce civil court judgments through the Enforcement of Judgments Office; and
- Sponsor the work of Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission.

Our Corporate Aim

“Serving the Community through
the Administration of Justice”

Corporate Values

We aim, at all times, to demonstrate the following corporate values –

Integrity:

to interact with our customers with the highest degree of integrity, promoting an atmosphere of honesty and trust

Openness:

to undertake our work in an open and transparent manner

Professionalism:

to conduct our business to the highest standards

Accountability:

to be responsible for delivering a high quality service to the public

Fairness:

to treat everyone fairly

We have incorporated our Corporate Values into our performance management system for our staff so that we can measure the way in which we demonstrate our values on a continuous basis.

Strategic Aims

Our Corporate Aim is supported by four Strategic Aims, which are:

Delivering responsive customer services – we will deliver quality services which meet the needs of all courts and tribunals users.

Improving access to justice – we will help make the justice system more accessible to everyone.

Promoting confidence in the justice system – we will work to promote confidence in the justice system.

Supporting an independent judiciary – we will support the Northern Ireland judiciary providing it with a consistently high quality service.

Performance against the delivery targets outlined in this Business Plan will be accounted for in our Annual Report.

Departmental Information

Who we are

The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) currently has a staff of 900, and this will increase to almost 1000 when the remaining tribunals transfer later this year. We are responsible for the operation of 21 courthouses and four tribunal hearing centres across Northern Ireland. All of our courthouses have received the **Customer Service Excellence Standard** in recognition of the high level of service provided to court and tribunal users.

While our core business is the provision of administrative support for the courts and tribunals in Northern Ireland, we are also responsible for –

- the Enforcement of Judgments Office (EJO) – which provides a centralised service for the enforcement of civil court judgments;
- the Court Funds Office – which manages funds held in court on behalf of minors and patients;



The Management Team

The Director of the NICTS, **David Lavery**, is the Chief Executive of the Agency and its Accounting Officer. He is supported by a Management Board comprising the Heads of each of the NICTS business Division:

George Keatley, Head of Business Operations

Jacqui Durkin, Head of Business Development & Services

Siobhan Broderick, Head of Tribunal Reform

Laurene McAlpine, Head of Civil Policy & Legislation

Geraldine Fee, Head of Criminal Policy & Legislation

Anthony Carleton, Head of Finance

Robert Crawford, Head of Public Funded Legal Services Division

Our organisational chart is attached at Annex A.

Our Staffing and Resources

The NICTS currently employs 900 staff, the majority of whom deliver front-line services at courthouses throughout Northern Ireland and in the Enforcement of Judgments Office. This number will increase to almost 1000 staff when the remaining tribunals transfer this year.

With the devolution of policing and justice our staff have become members of the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

We recognise that a skilled and committed workforce is essential to the successful achievement of our corporate aims.

We have received the **Investor in People 10 year award**, which recognises our ongoing commitment to staff development and continuous business improvement. As an organisation, we are committed to learning and development, and ensuring that staff have the right skills to deliver the business priorities.

We have in place a range of people management policies, including a flexible working policy.

The NICTS is committed to diversity and to delivering our commitments under the Department of Justice Equality Action Plan.

Our budget for 2010/11 is –

	£m
Core Courts and Tribunals Service	58.8
NI Legal Services Commission	85.0
Total Resource Budget	143.8
Capital Budget	8.8

Our Sponsorship Role

The NICTS sponsors the **NI Legal Services Commission** which is responsible for the provision of publicly funded legal services in Northern Ireland under the Legal Aid Scheme.



The Commission publishes its own Corporate and Business Plans, which can be found on their website **www.nilsc.org.uk**

Support for the NI Judiciary

The NICTS is responsible for providing administrative support to the Northern Ireland judiciary. One of our key strategic aims is to ‘support an independent judiciary’.

The Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland, The Rt Hon Sir Declan Morgan, is head of the Judiciary and President of the courts of Northern Ireland.

There are 72 full time members of the judiciary across the various judicial tiers, 209 Lay Magistrates and 389 Tribunal Members –

Lord Chief Justice	1
Lord Justices of Appeal	3
High Court Judges	10
County Court Judges	17
District Judges (Magistrates' Courts)	21
District Judges (County Court)	4
High Court Masters	7
Social Security and Child Support Commissioners	2
Lands Tribunal Member	1
Appeal Tribunal Members	2
Coroners	4
Lay Magistrates	209
Fee Paid Tribunal members	389



Sir Declan Morgan

Business Planning 2010/11

The NICTS Business Plan complements the Department of Justice (DOJ) Business Plan for 2010/11 and is consistent with stated Ministerial priorities.

The NICTS is implementing the Balanced Scorecard approach to business planning and performance management during 2010/11. A copy of the corporate scorecard is attached at **Annex B**.

Delivering the Plan

The NICTS Agency Board will review progress against the 2010/11 Business Plan on a quarterly basis.

At an operational level, Divisional Business Plans will be monitored on an on-going basis.

Corporate Governance

The NICTS has developed a **Framework Document** to support the effective governance of the Agency. This provides details of the arrangements which have been established to ensure good management of NICTS business.

The Framework Document outlines the role of the Agency Board and its sub-committees and provides details of our internal control and assurance procedures. A copy can be found on our website (www.courtsni.gov.uk).

Key Objectives 10/11

Business Operations

To deliver responsive customer services during 2010/11 we shall:

- Meet our court business performance standards (our performance standards are set out at **Annex C** of this Business Plan)
- Work to reduce avoidable delay in the conduct of criminal cases
- Maintain Customer Service Excellence accreditation for all our courthouses
- Pilot initiatives aimed at reducing waiting times at court for victims and witnesses.



George Keatley,
Head of Business
Operations

To promote confidence in the justice system during 2010/11 we shall:

- Support victims, witnesses, children and young people as they come into contact with the court system
- Deliver a programme of outreach activity
- Support the Criminal Justice Inspectorate inspection programme

To support an independent judiciary during 2010/11 we shall:

- Support the Lord Chief Justice in the effective deployment of judicial resources
- Support the work of the Judicial Studies Board
- Support the work of the Judges' Council

Tribunal Reform



Siobhan Broderick,
Head of Tribunal Reform

To deliver responsive customer services during 2010/11 we shall:

- Meet all of our tribunal performance standards (our performance standards are set out at **Annex C** of this Business Plan)
- Modernise and improve service delivery for users of NI tribunals

To promote confidence in the justice system during 2010/11 we shall:

- Establish a unified Tribunals administration
- Establish a baseline of public confidence in the administration of tribunals

To support an independent judiciary during 2010/11 we shall:

- Support the tribunals appointments process

“modernising the administration of
tribunals in Northern Ireland”

Business Development and Services

To deliver responsive customer services during 2010/11 we shall:

- Lead the delivery the 2010/11 Action Plan for our Business Modernisation & Customer Service Strategy, including:
 - Implementing the agreed policy on the provision of in-court interpretation services
 - Implementing Case Tracking On-line
 - Introducing additional payment facilities for the EJO
 - Developing online services for matrimonial cases and initiating cases in the EJO
- Deliver our commitments to the Causeway Programme



Jacqui Durkin,
Head of Business
Development & Services

To improve access to justice we shall:

- Evaluate responses to the “Redrawing the Map” consultation on Court Boundary Reform

To promote confidence in the justice system during 2010/11 we shall:

- Embed and monitor compliance with Information Assurance policies and meet Department of Justice accreditation requirements.

To deliver accountability and transparency during 2010/11 we shall:

- Implement our Equality Action Plan commitments
- Maintain our status as an Investor in People

Civil Policy & Legislation



Laurene McAlpine,
Head of Civil Policy &
Legislation

To improve access to justice we shall:

- Increase the financial jurisdiction of County Courts
- Extend Solicitors' Rights of Audience
- Support the work of the Civil Justice Committee
- Support the protection of children under the Hague Convention

To promote confidence in the justice system we shall:

- Develop proposals for the establishment of an Office of Public Guardian
- Consult on the disclosure of information in respect of proceedings involving children

To support an independent judiciary:

- Support the post-devolution arrangements for judicial appointments

Criminal Policy & Legislation



Geraldine Fee,
Head of Criminal Policy &
Legislation

To promote confidence in the justice system we shall:

- Deliver an information initiative to ensure better information for sentencers
- Develop proposals to widen the jury pool
- Support the enactment of the Justice Bill
- Consider the scope for a civilian fine enforcement model
- Input into the Executive Strategy on regional or minority languages

Finance Division

To deliver accountability and transparency during 2010/11 we shall:

- Produce Agency financial plans and reports in accordance with NI Executive timetables
- Oversee the delivery of the NICTS Financial Operating Plan
- Support the Accounting Officer by delivering risk, assurance and compliance strategies
- Support the Management Board corporate governance monitoring and reporting



Anthony Carleton,
Head of Finance

To deliver funds in court during 2010/11 we shall:

- Progress the Court Funds Modernisation Programme

To deliver effective Commercial & Estates activity we shall:

- Develop an Outline Business Case in support of a new Court Estate Strategy
- Work in partnership with NI Prison Service and Youth Justice Agency within the Custody Review Project to improve security and safety of courthouse custody areas and prisoner management

Public Funded Legal Services



Robert Crawford,
Head of Public Funded
Legal Services Division

To improve access to justice we shall:

- Maintain a robust governance, probity and challenge function over the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission in relation to financial management, business planning and strategic decision making
- In conjunction with the Legal Services Commission, assist with the development and delivery of reform projects via a Transformation Programme Board, that will lead to tangible cost savings
- Efficiently and effectively discharge policy and advisory responsibilities in relation to criminal and civil legal aid provision
- Keep under review the provision and delivery of legal aid services and bring forward proposals for further reforms where necessary
- Commission a fundamental review of Public Legal Services in Northern Ireland
- Provide timely and appropriate support to the Justice Minister and the Legal Services Commission on legal aid matters

Corporate Support Group



Colin Ross,
Head of Corporate
Support Group

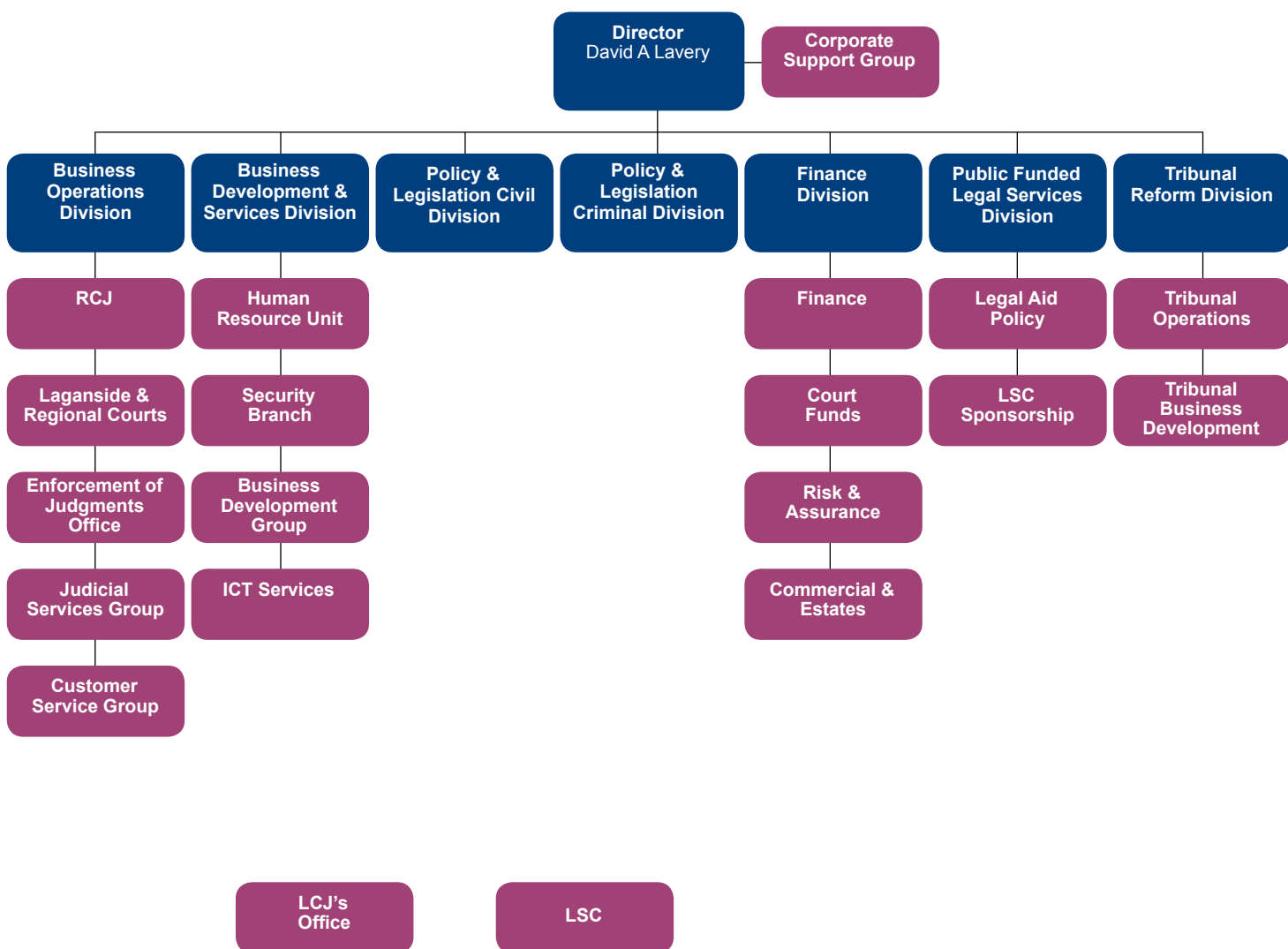
To provide effective support to the Minister and the Assembly and to oversee, promote and explain the work of the agency we shall:

- Communicate with customers and stakeholders in a way that is relevant, current and accessible during 2010/11
- Respond to media enquiries in an efficient and timely manner

Annexes

Annex A

Our Organisational Structure



Annex B

Corporate Scorecard

<p>Access to Justice</p> <p>AJ1: To deliver independent efficient and effective Courts, Tribunals and Enforcement Services</p> <p>AJ2: To deliver affordable publicly funded legal services to those who cannot otherwise afford Access to Justice</p>	<p>Customers and Services</p> <p>CS1: To deliver responsive quality services that meet the needs of court and tribunal users</p> <p>CS2: To contribute to public confidence in the administration of the justice system</p>
<p>Finance and Processes</p> <p>FP1: To deliver a controlled financial and commercial environment achieving value for money</p> <p>FP2: To continuously improve our business processes</p>	<p>Organisation and People</p> <p>OP1: To develop and lead our people to achieve our objectives</p> <p>OP2: To maximise our organisation's capacity and capability</p>

Annex C

Performance Standards

Criminal Business

To facilitate the efficient disposal of criminal business¹

- 80% of Crown Court defendants will be arraigned within six weeks of committal
- 80% of Crown Court defendants will start their trial within 18 weeks of committal
- 80% of Crown Court defendants will be sentenced within six weeks of a plea or a finding of guilt
- 80% of magistrates' courts adult defendants will have their case disposed of within nine weeks of first listing
- A finding will be reached within 12 weeks from first listing for 80% of youth court defendants
- 90% of Court of Appeal defendants will have their case listed within three weeks of receipt of the papers

Some of the Court Performance Standards are set by the Lord Chief Justice while others are set by the NICTS as indicated:

¹ These standards with the exception of the Court of Appeal standard are set by the Lord Chief Justice.

Civil Business

To facilitate the efficient disposal of civil business

- 98% of Queen's Bench writs will be listed within 3 months of being set down
- 98% of civil bills will be listed for hearing within 16 weeks of receiving a Certificate of Readiness
- 97% of small claims default decrees will be issued within five working days of application or notice of acceptance of liability
- 97% of mortgage applications will be listed for hearing within six weeks
- 97% of creditors' petitions will be listed for hearing within six weeks

The Enforcement of Judgments Office

- Issue 95% of Notices of Intention within three days
- Accept 90% of enforcement applications within eight days
- Complete 85% of repossessions within 100 days of allocation to an Enforcement Officer
- Accept 90% of taxation applications within 22 days
- Issue 95% of taxation assessments within 13 days

Family Business

To facilitate the efficient disposal of family business²

- 90% of Children Order applications will be listed within 6 weeks of receipt of correct papers
- 95% of Office of Care and Protection annual case reviews will be carried out within six weeks of receipt of complete Controllers accounts
- 95% of applications for controllership orders [where no objection has been lodged] will be issued within 14 days of receipt of all required paperwork
- 97% of undefended divorces will be listed for hearing within 6 weeks of receipt of certificate of readiness

² The courts seek to attain the requirement prescribed in the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 that any matter relating to children will be dealt with expeditiously. Any steps in the process will be informed by that statutory imperative and by the provisions of the Case Management Protocol for Public Law Cases.

Coroners Service Business

To facilitate the efficient disposal of Coroners Service business:

- 97% of all deaths investigated that do not require a post mortem examination will have the certificate of registration issued to the Registrar of Deaths within 3 working days of the death being reported to the Coroner.
- 92% of all deaths that require a post mortem examination and that examination reveals a natural cause of death will have the certificate of registration issued to the Registrar of Deaths within 5 working days of receipt of the post mortem report.
- 90% of inquests will have a hearing fixed within 28 days of the Coroner's direction to list.

Tribunal Business

To facilitate the efficient disposal of tribunal business:

- 98% of NIVT cases will be listed within eight weeks of agreed papers being received.
- 98% of applications for leave to appeal to the Social Security Commissioner will be listed within eight weeks of a direction.
- 98% of appeals to the Social Security Commissioner will be listed within eight weeks of a direction.
- 90% of pension appeals will be listed for hearing within 25 weeks of receipt of the statement of case.
- 98% of TPT postal/personal appeals will be listed within 40 days of the agreed papers being received.
- 90% of CICAPNI cases will be listed within 16 weeks of agreed evidence bundle being received.

Some of the Tribunal
Performance

Standards are set by
the relevant Tribunal
President while
others are set by the
NICTS.

- 90% of SENDIST appeals will be listed within eight weeks from the end of the case statement period.
- 80% of MHRT appeals will be disposed of within eight weeks of receipt³.
- 95% Care appeals will be listed for preliminary hearing within 18 weeks of receipt.
- 95% of Care appeals will be listed for hearing within 18 weeks of preliminary hearing.
- 95% of notice parties to cases before the Lands Tribunal will be sent notification of a case within 5 working days of registration;
- 90% of referrals will have the date of first mention/review fixed within 5 working days of the Lands Tribunal's direction to list;
- The first hearing for Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance appeals will be within 9 weeks of receipt of appeal by the Appeals Tribunal;*
- The first hearing for Employment and Support Allowance appeals will be within 8 weeks of receipt of appeal by the Appeals Tribunal;*
- The first hearing for Income Support; Job Seekers Allowance; Social Fund and Incapacity Benefit will be within 8 weeks of receipt of appeal by the Appeals Tribunal.*
- The first hearing for all jurisdictions will be within 9 weeks of receipt of appeal by the Appeals Tribunal;*

** NICTS assumed responsibility for the administration of the Appeals Tribunal on 1 April 2010, these are preliminary standards which will be reviewed during the course of the business year. The reporting against the standards is based on averages.*

³ This standard is set by the Tribunal President.



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