

serving the community  
through the administration  
of justice



Northern Ireland Court Service

# Corporate Plan 2008 - 2011

Northern Ireland Court Service  
[www.courtsni.gov.uk](http://www.courtsni.gov.uk)

Should you require any further information about the Court Service please visit our Website at [www.courtsni.gov.uk](http://www.courtsni.gov.uk) or Alternatively contact us at our Information Centre.

This document will be made available in a wide range of alternative formats. Requests for alternative formats should be made to the Information Centre.

From November 2008 we will be relocating to the following address;  
Laganside House,  
23-27 Oxford Street,  
Belfast,  
BT1 3LA  
Other contact details remain the same.

Northern Ireland Court Service  
Communications Group  
Windsor House  
Bedford Street  
Belfast BT2 7LT

Telephone 028 9032 8594  
Facsimile 028 9041 2390  
Textphone 028 9041 2920  
Email [communicationsgroup@courtsni.gov.uk](mailto:communicationsgroup@courtsni.gov.uk)  
[www.courtsni.gov.uk](http://www.courtsni.gov.uk)

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# Foreword



## Foreword

I am pleased to present the new Corporate Plan of the Northern Ireland Court Service for the years 2008 until 2011. This Corporate Plan also includes our Business Plan for 2008/09.

The Northern Ireland Court Service supports the Lord Chancellor in providing an efficient court system to meet the needs of the Northern Ireland public. Our staff work at 21 courthouses throughout Northern Ireland and also at the Enforcement of Judgments Office and at Court Service Headquarters in Belfast. Each of our courthouses has been awarded Charter Mark in recognition of the high level of customer service provided. All of our staff throughout the Court Service are committed to our organisational aim which is – ‘serving the community through the administration of justice’.

This Corporate Plan describes how we intend to modernise the way in which we deliver court administration and customer services. Together with our strategic IT partner Fujitsu Services, we have developed a comprehensive ICT platform for court administration. This platform – called ICOS (Integrated Court Operations System) – will allow us to introduce new and improved ways of working. We have, for example, already introduced customer service centres in Belfast and at Londonderry Courthouse which allow us to use the ICOS platform to support aspects of court administration throughout Northern Ireland.

Our investment in IT will also allow us to deliver many of our services in new and better ways. Our customers will be able to access web-based services. An example of this is our Small Claims Online service which allows customers to bring a case to the Small Claims Court using their home computer. Further details of Small Claims Online can be found at our website [www.courtsni.gov.uk](http://www.courtsni.gov.uk).

As well as responsibility for all of Northern Ireland’s courts, the Court Service will also become responsible during the lifetime of this Corporate Plan for running most of Northern Ireland’s tribunals. Tribunals make important decisions affecting the lives of many thousands of people in Northern Ireland – eg decisions relating to welfare benefits and housing. The Northern Ireland Executive recently decided that the Court Service should assume responsibility for running most of these tribunals. During the years covered by this Corporate Plan we shall be working to give effect to this decision. The Northern Ireland Court Service will in due course become a unified Courts and Tribunals Service.



Following the restoration of devolved government in Northern Ireland, the period covered by this Corporate Plan may see the transfer of responsibility for policing and justice (including the courts) to the Northern Ireland Assembly. When this happens the Northern Ireland Court Service will cease to be a Lord Chancellor's department and will become part of a new Northern Ireland devolved Justice Department.

I hope that this Corporate Plan will provide an informative and accessible overview of the work of the Northern Ireland Court Service in 'serving the community through the administration of justice'.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "D.A. Lavery".

D.A. LAVERY  
Director, Northern Ireland Court Service



# Introduction





## Introduction

This Corporate Plan sets out the strategic objectives for the Court Service over the next three years and explains how we plan to use the resources made available to us.

### Our Role is to:

- provide administrative support for the Northern Ireland courts and judiciary;
- provide administrative support for tribunals;
- enforce civil court judgments through the Enforcement of Judgments Office; and
- support the Lord Chancellor in discharging his Ministerial responsibilities in Northern Ireland including responsibility for judicial appointments and legal aid.

### Our Organisational Aim is:

**‘Serving the Community through the Administration of Justice’**

### Organisational Values

Our organisational aim is supported by the following organisational values –

#### **Integrity**

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

#### **Openness**

We shall undertake our work in an open and transparent manner.

#### **Professionalism**

We shall conduct our business to the highest standards.

#### **Accountability**

We shall be responsible for delivering a high quality service to the public.

#### **Fairness**

We shall treat everyone fairly.

These values have been incorporated into the Court Service’s performance management system.

## Who We Are

The Northern Ireland Court Service is the Lord Chancellor's department in Northern Ireland. It is an independent Civil Service in its own right, and was established as a unified Court Service for Northern Ireland in April 1979.

The Court Service is accountable to Parliament at Westminster through the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice at the Ministry of Justice, the Rt Hon Jack Straw MP. The Minister of State at the Ministry of Justice, the Rt Hon David Hanson MP, has day to day responsibility for the courts in Northern Ireland.



David Lavery, Rt Hon Jack Straw MP,  
Rt Hon David Hanson MP



We are responsible for the operation of 21 courthouses across Northern Ireland, including Laganside Courts and the Royal Courts of Justice in Belfast. All of our courthouses have received Charter Mark accreditation in recognition of the high level of customer service provided at these venues. The Crown Court, county courts, magistrates' courts, and coroners courts are held throughout Northern Ireland.

Our core business is to provide administrative support for the courts in Northern Ireland i.e. the Supreme Court (Court of Appeal, High Court and Crown Court), the county courts, magistrates' courts and coroners courts.

In addition, 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;
- a number of tribunals including –
  - the Office of the Social Security and Child Support Commissioners and Pensions Appeal Tribunals;
  - the Traffic Penalty Tribunal;
  - the NI Valuation Tribunal; and
  - the Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeal Panel for Northern Ireland.

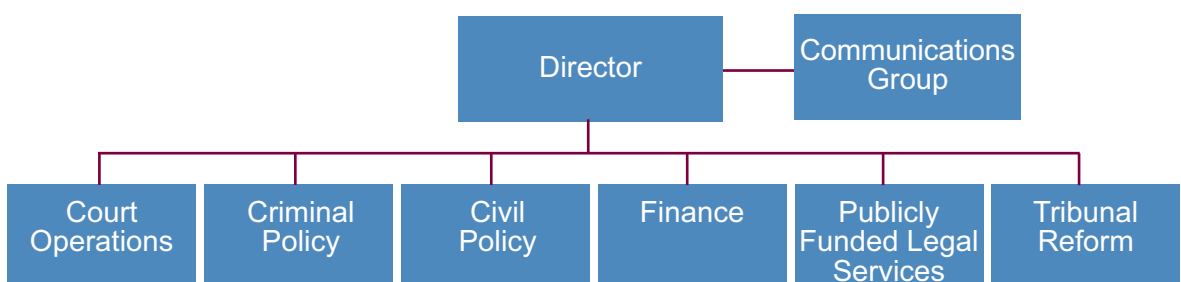
### The Court Service Management Team

The Director of the Court Service is the Head of Department and departmental Accounting Officer. He is supported by a management structure comprising five business Divisions –

- Court Operations
- Policy and Legislation
- Finance
- Publicly Funded Legal Services
- Tribunal Reform

The Management Board includes a non-executive Director, Kevin King, who chairs the Court Service Audit and Risk Management Committee.

### Court Service Management Structure



The Court Service employs some 725 staff, the majority of whom work in our core business of running the courts.

### Sponsorship Role

The Court Service is the sponsor department for two Non Departmental Public Bodies – the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission and the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission.



The Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission was established in November 2003 and is responsible for the provision of publicly funded legal services through the legal aid system in Northern Ireland.

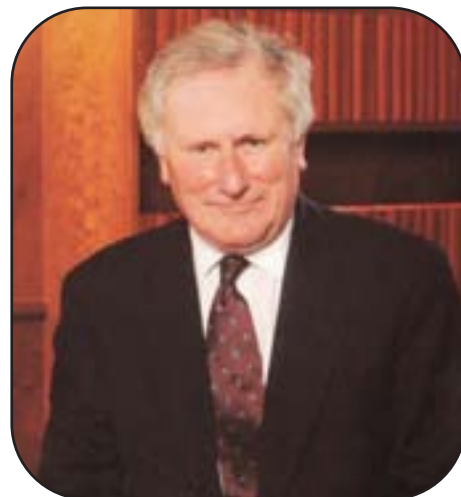
The Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission was established in June 2005 and is responsible for all judicial appointments in Northern Ireland up to and including the High Court.



The Legal Services Commission and the Judicial Appointments Commission are responsible for the publication of their own Business Plans. Their websites can be found at [www.nijac.org](http://www.nijac.org) (NI Judicial Appointments Commission) and [www.nilsc.org](http://www.nilsc.org) (NI Legal Services Commission).

## The Judiciary

The Court Service provides administrative support for the Northern Ireland judiciary. The Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland, Sir Brian Kerr, is head of the judiciary in Northern Ireland. There are approximately 70 full-time members of the judiciary across the various judicial tiers. In addition, there are 241 Lay Magistrates and panels of part-time deputy judges.



**Sir Brian Kerr**

Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland

## Northern Ireland Judicial Complement

Lord Chief Justice	1
Lord Justices of Appeal	3
High Court Judges	10
County Court Judges	17
District Judges (Magistrates' Courts)	21
High Court Masters	7
District Judges	4
Coroners	4
Social Security and Child Support Commissioners	2



**Karamjit Singh**

Judicial Appointments Ombudsman

## Judicial Appointments Ombudsman

Mr Karamjit Singh CBE was appointed Judicial Appointments Ombudsman for Northern Ireland in September 2006. The Ombudsman's role is to investigate complaints from applicants for judicial appointments where maladministration or unfairness is alleged to have occurred. The Ombudsman's Annual Report can be found at [www.nijao.gov.uk](http://www.nijao.gov.uk)



## Strategic Aims

### ‘Serving the community through the administration of justice’

The organisational aim of the Court Service is supported by four strategic aims, which are –

**Delivering responsive customer services** – the Court Service will deliver quality services which meet the needs of our customers.

**Improving access to justice** – the Court Service will work to make the justice system more accessible.

**Promoting confidence in the justice system** – the Court Service will work to promote confidence in the justice system.

**Supporting an independent judiciary** – the Court Service will support the Judiciary by providing it with a consistently high quality service.



Mock trial team, Laganside Courts, Belfast

We plan to deliver against these strategic aims in the following ways –

Strategic Aim	Outcomes
<b>Delivering responsive customer services</b>	<p>We shall implement a three-year strategy to modernise how we support court business and continuously improve our services to customers.</p> <p>We shall implement a Court Funds Modernisation Programme to improve the administration of funds in court.</p>
<b>Improving access to justice</b>	<p>We shall deliver a modern tribunal system and bring the courts and tribunals together to become a unified Courts and Tribunals Service.</p> <p>In partnership with the Legal Services Commission we shall deliver a programme to reform the legal aid system.</p>
<b>Promoting confidence in the justice system</b>	<p>We shall ensure that the effective delivery of our business is maintained while, at the same time, preparing for the devolution of policing and justice including the courts.</p> <p>We shall contribute to the Criminal Justice Delay Strategy to reduce avoidable delay in the justice system.</p> <p>We shall engage in a programme of community outreach and implement a Corporate Responsibility Strategy.</p>
<b>Supporting an independent judiciary</b>	<p>We shall support the work of the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission.</p> <p>We shall support the introduction of a Concordat on judicial independence.</p>



## Our Resources and People

The Court Service receives its funding from Parliament. Details of our financial allocation for the next three years can be found at **Annex A** of this Corporate Plan.

We employ some 725 staff, the majority of whom work in front line services. An accredited Investors in People employer we have adopted a range of policies and initiatives to support the development of our staff.

The Court Service has made a public commitment to achieve a workforce reflective of the community we serve. We have published a 3-year Employment Equality Plan developed in consultation with the Northern Ireland Equality Commission.

Further details of our people policies can be found at **Annex A** of this Corporate Plan.



# Delivery Objectives







## Delivery Objectives

The delivery objectives for 2008/09 to 2010/11 for each of the business areas for which the Court Service is responsible are described in the following pages.

### Court Operations

#### Objective

**To deliver quality services which meet the needs of our customers**

#### Role

The Court Operations Division of the Court Service is responsible for the day-to-day running of all of the courts in Northern Ireland. The courts handle around 100,000 criminal, civil and family cases each year. The Court Service uses its court-IT platform, ICOS (Integrated Court Operations System), to help it to manage this business.



**Jacqui Durkin**  
Head of Court Operations

Court Operations Division is also responsible for:

- the Coroners Service for Northern Ireland;
- the Enforcement of Judgments Office – which provides a centralised service for the enforcement of civil court judgments;
- judicial support and liaison (which includes sponsorship of the NI Judicial Appointments Commission) and human resources.

The majority of our staff work in Court Operations Division where they deliver a high-quality service to a wide range of customers.

#### Delivery Objectives

The Court Service is committed to continuously improving our services to meet the needs of our customers.

**Court Business Performance** – we shall achieve our Court Performance Standards – these can be found at **Annex B** of this Corporate Plan.





Courtroom in Dungannon Courthouse

We shall also ensure that the effective delivery of our business is maintained, while we make preparations for the devolution of policing and justice, including the courts.

We shall work with the other justice agencies to deliver the inter-agency **Delay Reduction Strategy** to improve the management of criminal court cases and reduce avoidable delay in the justice system.

We shall participate in the **Causeway Programme**, which is an IT programme enabling the justice agencies to share information electronically.

**Business Improvement** – We shall publish a three-year strategy to reflect our commitment to customer service and business improvement. The strategy will allow us to transform the way in which we support court business by making best use of technology, including ICOS (our court based IT platform) and our court estate. In reviewing the court estate we shall take account of the outcome of the review of public administration in Northern Ireland and the new local government boundaries.

The strategy will set out our plans to further extend our Customer Service Centres to support pre and post court activity.

Our strategy will help us to meet the expectations of all court users – especially victims, witnesses, young people and people with disabilities.

We shall maintain recognised quality service accreditation in all of our courts through the new national standard for **customer service excellence** (formerly known as Charter Mark) and through the European Foundation for Quality Management.

**Supporting the Judiciary** – in addition to supporting the Northern Ireland **Judicial Appointments Commission**, we shall work in partnership with the **Lord Chief Justice** and with the judiciary on a wide range of issues as they affect the courts, including the delivery of our published court performance standards (these can be found at **Annex B** of this Corporate Plan).

**Supporting the Community** – we shall implement a **Corporate Responsibility Strategy** which will enable us to strengthen our engagement with the community. The Strategy will build on the Court Service's outreach programme under which we invite schools and community groups to visit our courthouses to learn more about the work of the courts in Northern Ireland.

**Accountability and Transparency** – we shall support the work of **Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI)** whose role is to inspect criminal justice organisations with a view to identifying the scope for improvement. CJINI's statutory remit now includes inspection of the Court Service and the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission.

## Tribunals

### Objective

**To modernise the administration of tribunals in Northern Ireland**



**Siobhan Broderick**  
Head of Tribunal Reform

### Role

The Tribunal Reform Division of the Court Service has two primary roles. It is responsible for the administration of a number of tribunals including the Office of the Social Security and Child Support Commissioners, the Pensions Appeal Tribunals and the NI Valuation Tribunal. It is also responsible for delivering a reform programme to achieve a unified tribunals service for Northern Ireland.

Tribunals in Northern Ireland make decisions which affect the lives of many thousands of citizens, for example entitlement to welfare benefits, a child's special educational needs, or employment rights. Our vision is to reform the tribunal system for the benefit of its customers and the wider public.

Around 30,000 tribunal cases are heard each year in Northern Ireland. A list of all the NI departmental tribunals can be found at **Annex C** of this Corporate Plan.



Staff from CICAPNI



A number of tribunals are located in Headline Building - which is also the headquarters of the NI Judicial Appointments Commission.

## Delivery Objectives

We shall take forward a programme of work in support of Tribunal Reform.

**Tribunal Administration** – we shall deliver high quality tribunal administration in those tribunals for which we are responsible. We shall achieve our **tribunal performance standards** and will establish a baseline in respect of customer satisfaction to help us to develop a **customer service strategy** for tribunals. Our performance standards for tribunals can be found at **Annex B** of this Corporate Plan.

**Transfer of tribunals** – we shall develop a programme to transfer all Northern Ireland departmental tribunals to the Court Service. We shall also provide administrative support for any newly established tribunals.

**Tribunal Modernisation** – we shall deliver improvements to the end-to-end process for tribunal users. We shall evaluate the benefits of a new **jurisdictional and judicial structure** for tribunals.

## Judicial Appointments

### Objective

**To support the work of the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission.**

### Role

The Court Service is the sponsor department for the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission and works closely with the Commission on judicial appointment schemes. The Judicial Appointments Commission is responsible for all judicial appointments in Northern Ireland up to the level of High Court Judge.

The Court Service also supports the work of the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Ombudsman, Mr Karamjit Singh CBE, whose role is to investigate complaints from applicants for judicial appointments where maladministration or unfairness is alleged to have occurred.

### Delivery Objectives

We shall work with the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission to ensure that judicial appointments are made in a way which commands public confidence.

We shall ensure that an effective sponsorship relationship exists between the Court Service and the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission. This will include ensuring appropriate governance arrangements are in place to support the Commission's independence.

We shall support the work of the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Ombudsman in order to enhance public confidence in the judicial appointments system.



## Publicly Funded Legal Services

### Objective

**To deliver cost effective publicly funded legal services for those who cannot otherwise afford access to justice.**



**Paul Andrews**  
Head of Publicly  
Funded Legal Services

### Role

The Publicly Funded Legal Services Division of the Court Service supports the Lord Chancellor in the provision of legal aid in Northern Ireland. We maintain a legislative framework to enable individuals to have access to legal aid to assist them with legal problems.

The Court Service sponsors the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission, an Executive Non Departmental Public Body which decides whether individuals receive civil legal aid and pays the bills for criminal and civil cases funded by legal aid.

Legal aid in Northern Ireland costs in excess of £70m each year, of which 60% is criminal legal aid and 40% is civil legal aid.

### Delivery Objectives

In promoting effective and accessible publicly funded legal services the Court Service will work in partnership with the NI Legal Services Commission to reform the legal aid system to ensure that funds are allocated to the most deserving cases.

We shall work closely with the NI Legal Services Commission to enhance cost control, budgetary predictability and value for money in the provision of legal aid.

We shall also support the NI Legal Services Commission in its plans to improve levels of service delivery.

**Civil Legal Services** - we shall deliver legislation for new **Civil Legal Services** which will target legal aid funding to those in greatest need.





Laganside Courts, Belfast

**Criminal Legal Aid** - we shall consult on a new **Criminal Defence Service** which will ensure that those who can afford to pay for their own defence do so while those who cannot and require legal aid will receive appropriate representation.

**Standard Fees** - we shall introduce a system of **standard fees** for lawyers undertaking legal aid work.

**Very High Cost Cases** - we shall introduce a **Very High Cost Case** regime which will provide new funding arrangements for high cost Crown Court cases.

**Financial Management** - we shall support the implementation of upgraded financial management systems within the NI Legal Services Commission including improved financial forecasting. We shall also develop a **funding strategy** to enable the NI Legal Services Commission to operate within the resources available to it in the short and medium term.

## Policy And Legislation

### Objective

**To deliver high quality policy and legal advice to Ministers and the Court Service**

### Role

The Policy and Legislation Division supports the Court Service's Ministers and Management Board by providing policy advice and legislation. The Division also provides the department's legal advice and handles litigation and judicial reviews involving the department and the judiciary.



**Laurene McAlpine**  
Head of Civil Policy

The Court Service responds to Government policy initiatives and legislative proposals to ensure that the courts are equipped to deal with any changes to the law that impact on Northern Ireland. Many of these changes are initiated by other government departments. The Court Service will therefore maintain an understanding of the broader context in which both devolved and non-devolved government is operating. The Court Service will also develop its own policies and legislation to improve its services to the public, the judiciary and other stakeholders in the justice system.

Additionally, high quality legal advice is provided to the Lord Chancellor and the Management Board. Policy and Legislation Division also provide the Secretariat to the several court rules committees which regulate court procedures.

### Delivery Objectives

We are committed to improving access to both civil and criminal justice and to develop more efficient ways to resolve disputes.

**Civil Justice** – we shall support the work of the **Civil Justice Committee**, chaired by the Lord Chief Justice, to improve the processing of civil claims in the High Court and county court including any necessary adjustments to existing **court jurisdictional limits**.

We shall improve the **legislative framework for the enforcement of civil debts** through the Enforcement of Judgments Office.



**Geraldine Fee**  
Head of Criminal Policy

We shall engage with the relevant bodies to enhance the existing **rights of audience** of solicitors in court.

**Family Justice** – we shall work with other government departments on specific family law initiatives to ensure they are effectively implemented in the courts.

**Criminal Justice** – we shall develop proposals to **widen the pool of people currently eligible to serve on a jury** and will keep under review the current non-jury trial arrangements to ensure they are operating effectively and command public confidence. We shall contribute to initiatives such as identifying alternatives to imprisonment for **fine default** and **addressing avoidable delay** in the justice system.

We shall also actively contribute to the **Sentencing Reform** Implementation programme in partnership with other criminal justice agencies.

**Coroners Service** – we shall review the existing **Coroners legislation** to ensure that it meets the requirements of families and other court users.

**Judicial Independence** – we shall develop a Concordat on judicial independence and a Court Service framework document as part of the programme of work to prepare for possible Devolution of Justice and Policing.

**Governance** – we shall continue to build good partnerships with the other criminal justice organisations in Northern Ireland, and support the work of the Northern Ireland Criminal Justice Board.

## Finance

### Objective

**To deliver a controlled financial and commercial environment, achieving value for money.**

### Role

The Finance Division provides the Court Service with a wide range of financial and commercial services. It supports the department by ensuring that the resources available to it are utilised in an efficient and effective manner.

It leads on the provision of value for money, quality financial services, and enables an holistic approach to financial planning, policy and financial management. It is also responsible for providing Risk and Assurance services to the Accounting Officer, and for all commercial and estates management services.

Finance Division is responsible for the management of the Court Funds Office which manages funds in court for minors and patients with a combined fund value of £250m.

### Delivery Objectives

The Court Service is committed to making the best use of the financial resources available to it to deliver high quality public services.

**Financial Management** – we shall continue to improve our methods of **resource planning and performance management** through the improvement to our processes and systems.

We shall progress the implementation of **efficiency measures** to reduce the cost of providing court administration while at the same time supporting improvements in customer service delivery – doing more with less. We shall **modernise the court estate** to enhance service delivery and provide better value for money.

**Funds in Court** – we shall take forward a **Court Funds Modernisation Programme** with the objective of enhancing our stockbroker arrangements, strengthening systems



**David Thompson**  
Head of Finance



Hi-tech courtroom, Laganside Courts

and procedures, revising governance arrangements and considering the potential for longer term reform through a planned programme of strategic and legislative change.

**Corporate Governance** – we shall support the continued development of **corporate governance and assurance** within the Court Service proportionate to risk. We shall maintain our information assurance and **business continuity arrangements**.

**Effective Procurement** – we shall review and enhance our **procurement strategies and procedures** to ensure effective procurement practices which demonstrate value for money. We shall also initiate a **Change Programme** for Information Sharing/Information Technology services (IS/IT) with the objective of ensuring that the Court Service maximises the value for money of its IS/IT arrangements. We shall improve and oversee the Court Service's ability to manage programmes and projects through to successful delivery.

**Shared Services** – we shall, through the introduction of **shared services** with other government departments, develop and implement strategies for the achievement of efficiency gains which can be released to front line customer delivery.





# Managing The Plan





## Managing The Plan

Overall responsibility for the delivery of this Corporate Plan rests with the Management Board which is chaired by the Director of the Court Service.

The Director is responsible to the Lord Chancellor for ensuring that the Court Service achieves its strategic priorities. The Lord Chancellor has a statutory duty, under the Constitutional Reform Act 2005, to ensure that there is an efficient and effective system to support the business of the NI courts and that appropriate services are provided for those courts.

The Court Service publishes an Annual Report which is laid before Parliament and can be found at our website [www.courtsni.gov.uk](http://www.courtsni.gov.uk)

### Monitoring Performance

#### Internal performance monitoring

Performance management in the Court Service is based on the principle that business objectives, and the targets which underpin them, are owned and managed by accountable individuals.

The Management Board meets monthly to review strategy, delivery plans and to monitor progress. The Management Board also meets monthly as the Finance Committee of the Court Service to monitor the department's financial performance.



Court Service Staff at the NI Criminal Justice Awards

The Management Board receives regular reports on the achievement of efficiency targets and modernisation plans. Progress reports are provided regularly to the Lord Chancellor and the Court Service Minister.

**External review**

Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) is responsible for the inspection of the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland including the Court Service. CJINI also undertakes a number of thematic inspections each year. The Court Service (and the NI Legal Services Commission) now fall under the remit of CJINI and will participate in these inspections.

The Northern Ireland Audit Office, on behalf of the National Audit Office, is responsible for auditing the Court Service Resource Accounts and for reporting the results to Parliament. The accounts of the Court Funds Office are also subject to external audit.

**Managing risk**

The Court Service has an established risk management framework. Formal risk management procedures have been implemented and the Audit and Risk Management Committee, chaired by a non-executive Director and including members of the departmental Management Board, receives regular updates on departmental risks.

In addition, the Court Service may instruct its external auditors or its Risk and Assurance Branch to carry out value for money and efficiency reviews on specific matters of interest.





## Our Resources and People

### Resources

The department receives its financial settlement from Parliament every three years - this is known as the 'Comprehensive Spending Review' or 'CSR' and covers the years 2008/09, 2009/10 and 2010/11. The CSR 07 financial settlement for the Northern Ireland Court Service was developed with the objective of providing a sustainable resource platform to support its ongoing business activities, and to take account of the anticipated devolution of policing and justice in Northern Ireland.

The CSR07 settlement (with 2007-08 baseline for comparison) is as follows:

NI Court Service CSR07 Settlement	CSR 07			
	2007/08 £m	2008/09 £m	2009/10 £m	2010/11 £m
NI Court Service Net Operating Costs	60	65	64	64
Publicly Funded Legal Services (legal aid)	84	65	65	65
NI Judicial Appointments Commission	2	2	2	2
<b>Total Resource Budget</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>Capital Budget</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>

The Court Service also manages £250m funds in court each year.

### People

Court Service staff are integral to the successful delivery of our key priorities. We employ 725 staff the majority of whom work in front-line services. We operate a number of family friendly policies to assist those with caring responsibilities, which include part-time and term-time working, and job-sharing.

The Court Service follows the Civil Service Code of Practice on the Employment of Disabled People that aims to ensure that there is no discrimination on the grounds of disability and that access to employment and career advancement in the Department is based solely on ability, qualifications and suitability for the post.



The Court Service has a Code of Practice on the Employment of People with Disabilities and a Good Practice Guide for Managers. A Disability Liaison Officer has been designated to support staff with disabilities.

### **Learning and development**

The Court Service recognises that in order to achieve its objectives it has to invest in all of its staff. The Court Service will implement and review its Learning and Development Strategy to ensure that it is aligned with the Professional Skills for Government initiative, which sets out the skills and knowledge staff should have.

### **Diversity and Equality Strategy**

We are an equal opportunities employer. Policies are in place to guard against discrimination, and to ensure that there are no unfair or illegal discriminatory barriers to employment and advancement in the department. A designated Diversity Officer has been appointed with responsibility for promoting awareness of diversity and evaluating the impact of policies.

We also operate an Equal Opportunities Policy which guards against discrimination in employment, a Diversity Strategy, which values difference and an Equality Scheme which ensures that all 9 groups contained in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 are protected.

An Employment Equality Plan has been put in place to draw together all the proposed activity, which will take place in relation to these policies within the life of the corporate plan.

A Dignity and Harmony at Work policy is in place and provides systems and procedures to enable and support staff to challenge harassment and bullying.

Additionally the Court Service has appointed a Diversity Champion at Management Board level to give strategic oversight to the way in which we embrace and deliver our workforce agenda.



# Annex B

## Court And Tribunal Performance Standards

**Some of the Court Performance Standards are set by the Lord Chief Justice while others are set by the Court Service as indicated below –**

### Criminal Business

**To facilitate the efficient disposal of criminal business.<sup>1</sup>**

- 80% of Crown Court defendants will be arraigned within 6 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 6 weeks of a plea or finding of guilt
- 80% of magistrates' courts adult defendants will have their case disposed of within 9 weeks of 1st listing
- A finding will be reached within 12 weeks from 1st listing for 80% of youth court defendants

### Civil Business

**To facilitate the efficient disposal of civil business.**

- 98% of Queen's Bench writs will be listed within 4 months of being set down
- 97% of civil bills will be listed for hearing within 18 weeks of receiving a Certificate of Readiness
- 97% of civil administrative processes will be completed within 5 working days
- 97% of mortgage applications will be listed for hearing within 6 weeks
- 97% of creditors' petitions will be listed for hearing within 6 weeks

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<sup>1</sup> These are set by the Lord Chief Justice

## Family Business

**To facilitate the efficient disposal of family business.**

- 97% of Children Order applications will be listed within 10 weeks of receipt
- 95% of Office of Care and Protection annual case reviews will be carried out within 6 weeks of receipt of complete Controllers accounts
- 95% of applications under the Mental Health Order will be listed within 5 weeks of receipt
- 95% of divorces will be listed for hearing within 6 weeks of correct pleadings being lodged

## Coroners Service Business

**To facilitate the efficient disposal of Coroners Service business.**

- 95% of all non autopsy deaths will be dealt with within 3 days of a Coroner's decision to proceed by that means
- 90% of all natural deaths that require an autopsy but not an inquest will be passed to the appropriate coroner within 3 days of the receipt of a post mortem report

## The Enforcement Of Judgments Office will:

- Issue 85% of Notices of Intention within 2 days
- Accept 90% of enforcement applications within 8 days
- Complete 95% of register searches within 1 days of receipt
- Recover £8.00 in judgment debt for every £1 spent in enforcement fees
- Recover by payment 65% of total debt lodged
- Complete 80% of repossessions within 100 days of allocation to an Enforcement Officer
- Accept 80% of taxation applications within 22 days
- Issue 90% of taxation assessments within 15 days

## **Tribunal Business**

### **To facilitate the efficient disposal of tribunal business**

- 95% of NIVT cases will be listed within 8 weeks of representations from all parties being received
- 98% of applications for leave to appeal to the Social Security Commissioner will be listed within 8 weeks of a direction
- 90% of pensions appeals will be listed for hearing within 20 weeks of receipt of the statement of case
- 95% of TPT postal/in person applications will be listed within 40 days of receipt of appeal papers
- 90% of CICAPNI cases will be listed within 13 weeks of agreed papers being received

### **CICAPNI specific targets:**

- To resolve 90% of appeals returned by Presenting Officers Section within 6 months of receipt
- To hear a maximum of 6 and a minimum of 4 cases per daily hearings session
- Average cost of each appeal to be maintained below £1k
- To receive less than 10 complaints per year
- To receive 15 or less applications for judicial review per year





# Annex C

## **Northern Ireland Tribunals**

The Court Service currently has responsibility for the following tribunals –

- Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeal Panel for Northern Ireland
- NI Valuation Tribunal
- Office of the Social Security Commissioners and Child Support Commissioners and Pensions Appeal Tribunals
- Traffic Penalty Tribunal
- Tribunal established under section 91 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

It is planned to transfer the following NI departmental tribunals to the Court Service –

- Appeal Tribunals NI
- Care Tribunal
- Fair Employment Tribunal
- Industrial Tribunals
- Lands Tribunal
- Mental Health Review Tribunal
- Planning Appeals Commission
- Police Medical Pensions Appeal Tribunal
- Rent Assessment Panel
- Reserve Forces Reinstatement Committee
- Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal
- Tribunal established under Schedule 11 of the Health and Social Services (NI) Order 1972
- Water Appeals Commission

serving the community  
through the administration  
of justice

Northern Ireland Court Service

# Business Plan 2008/09

## Court Service Business Plan

**This Business Plan covers the period April 2008 to March 2009. Performance against the delivery targets outlined in this Business Plan will be accounted for in our Annual Report.**

The key strategic aims of the Court Service are –

- delivering responsive customer services
- improving access to justice
- promoting confidence in the justice system
- supporting an independent judiciary

We have agreed a number of delivery targets to support these aims and will deliver these as detailed below during the period April 2008 to March 2009.

### Court Operations

**To deliver quality services which meet the needs of our customers**

To deliver Court Performance during 2008/09 we shall –

- meet all our court performance standards and achieve full cost recovery in the Enforcement of Judgments Office;
- meet our Causeway Programme targets;
- deliver year 2 of the Delay Reduction Strategy;
- recruit a Medical Advisor for the Coroners Service.



Front of House, Laganside Courts, Belfast



Crime awareness day, Criminal Justice Week, Armagh Courthouse

To deliver Business Improvement during 2008/09 we shall –

- develop a new three-year strategy to explain how we will modernise the courts and improve customer service delivery;
- achieve Customer Service Excellence in all our courts;
- review our court boundaries taking account of the review of public administration in Northern Ireland and the new local government districts;
- implement our commitments under the Victim & Witness Strategy and other interagency initiatives.

To support the Community during 2008/09 we shall –

- implement our Corporate Responsibility Strategy

To deliver Accountability and Transparency during 2008/09 we shall –

- facilitate CJINI inspection programme and implement agreed action plans;
- implement Year-2 of our Employment Equality Plan;
- participate on the programme of work to prepare the courts for the Devolution of Justice and Policing.

## **Tribunal Reform**

### **To modernise the administration of tribunals in Northern Ireland**

To deliver tribunal administration during 2008/09 we shall –

- review the measurement methods and targets for tribunal performance and meet the current tribunal performance targets;
- map customer service provision with a view to making improvements to customer service delivery.

To deliver the transfer of tribunals during 2008/09 we shall –

- work with others in the tribunal sector to implement the tribunal transfer programme;
- transfer the administration of Police Medical Pensions Appeal Tribunal; Care Tribunal; Schedule 11 Tribunal; Lands Tribunal; Mental Health Review Tribunal; Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal to the Court Service.

To modernise tribunals during 2008/09 we shall –

- review the scope for integration of common services and support functions.

## **Judicial Appointments**

### **To support judicial appointment schemes and the work of the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission**

During 2008/09 we shall –

- provide the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission with quality information on judicial appointments;
- give effective sponsorship to the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission;
- support the work of the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Ombudsman;
- provide quality advice to the Lord Chancellor on judicial appointments and re-appointments at relevant key stages;
- support the Lord Chief Justice through the effective deployment of deputy judiciary.



## Publicly Funded Legal Services

**To deliver cost effective publicly funded legal services for those who cannot otherwise afford access to justice**

To deliver reform of publicly funded legal services during 2008/09 we shall –

- prepare legislation for a new civil legal services scheme;
- consult on new means and merits tests for a criminal defence service scheme.

To enhance control, predictability and value for money from the legal aid fund during 2008/09 we shall –

- establish a Very High Cost Unit within the Legal Services Commission;
- introduce standard fees for magistrates' court criminal cases.

To support enhanced Financial Management within the Legal Services Commission during 2008/09 we shall –

- support the implementation of enhanced financial management systems within the Legal Services Commission;
- implement with the Legal Services Commission a fund management strategy for legal aid.



Magherafelt Courthouse

## Policy And Legislation

### To deliver high quality policy and legal advice to Ministers and the Court Service

To deliver Civil Justice during 2008/09 we shall –

- support the Civil Justice Committee in their programme of work;
- participate in an Inter-departmental Working Group on Mental Capacity;
- review the legislative framework for the enforcement of civil debts through the Enforcement of Judgments Office;
- develop proposals to enhance the existing rights of audience of solicitors in court.

To deliver Family Justice during 2008/09 we shall –

- consider the policy proposals in England and Wales on disclosure in family court proceedings for Northern Ireland.

To deliver Criminal Justice during 2008/09 we shall –

- contribute to the initiative to identify alternatives to imprisonment for fine default;
- provide legislative support and input to Bills, such as the Criminal Justice and Immigration Bill, Counter Terrorism Bill and Presumption of Death Bill;
- consult on widening eligibility for jury service;
- lead on the legislative issues arising from the review of the court boundaries.

To support judicial independence during 2008/09 we shall –

- support the **Devolution of Justice** programme by developing the necessary legislation to provide for the transfer of the Lord Chancellor's functions;
- we shall also develop a Concordat on judicial independence and a Court Service framework document.

## Finance

### **To deliver a controlled financial and commercial environment, achieving value for money**

To deliver Financial Management during 2008/09 we shall –

- produce the Departmental Resource Accounts and Management Accounts within the agreed timescales;
- review civil court fee cost recovery;
- develop a financial operating plan and high level Income Strategy for the department;
- manage the department's capital programme;
- initiate a Disability Discrimination Act Strategy for the court estate.

To deliver Funds in Court during 2008/09 we shall –

- implement the recommendations of the CFO Modernisation Project Board;
- complete tender exercise for client portfolio management services;
- undertake a strategic review of Court Funds Office.

To deliver Corporate Governance during 2008/09 we shall –

- review the overall organisational Governance Framework and make recommendations for improvement;
- revise the department's audit strategy, risk and assurance framework;
- maintain the department's Business Continuity ISO 27001 accreditation status.

To deliver effective Procurement during 2008/09 we shall –

- manage contract exit arrangements, IS/IT service specification, tender process and implementation programme;
- review and enhance existing contract management procedures;
- develop procurement guidelines.

To deliver Shared Services during 2008/09 we shall –

- identify and develop strategies for the achievement of efficiency gains.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

For further information on the work of the  
Northern Ireland Court Service please contact

**Northern Ireland Court Service**

Communications Group  
Windsor House  
Bedford Street  
Belfast BT2 7LT

Telephone 028 9032 8594  
Facsimile 028 9041 2390  
Textphone 028 9041 2920  
Email [communicationsgroup@courtsni.gov.uk](mailto:communicationsgroup@courtsni.gov.uk)  
[www.courtsni.gov.uk](http://www.courtsni.gov.uk)

From November 2008 we will be relocating to the following address;  
Laganside House,  
23-27 Oxford Street,  
Belfast,  
BT1 3LA  
Other contact details remain the same.