



COURTS SERVICE
2ND CUSTOMER
SERVICE ACTION
PLAN

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Foreword

By the Chief Justice and Chairperson of the Board

There is little doubt that the environment we live and work in has changed in the past decade – bringing about a greater awareness of events and rights and an expectation of efficiency and quality in the delivery of services – public or otherwise.

There has been a fine history of public service in Ireland, not least in the administration of the courts. When the Courts Service was established a decade ago it had, together with the advantages of a clear mandate and a fresh approach, a well of experience from which to draw in terms of wisdom, ideas and fairness.

From early on this enabled the service to appreciate its responsibilities to the full range of court users and to adopt a more innovative approach to their needs in terms of giving court users high priority. One of the more important ways of doing this was to recognise the variance of needs of the many different court user groups. Some are more immediate than others; some more private than others, with many trying to contend with an involuntary and maybe difficult experience.

Either way they all share the right to an appropriate response from Courts Service offices and staff oriented to their particular needs.

This second Customer Service Action Plan is one which clearly points the way to meeting our responsibilities in this regard. It further allows court users know what it is they can expect. Importantly it also charts how the many modernisations and changes which have been introduced over the past decade have added to the positive experience of those who rely on the Courts Service as customers or users of court facilities or ancillary services.

I am pleased to commend this report to those who seek a fuller understanding or knowledge of court facilities and services available to the individual citizen who needs to avail of them.

John L Murray
Chief Justice and Chairperson
Courts Service Board

Introduction

By the Chief Executive Officer

I am pleased to introduce the Courts Service's Customer Service Action Plan 2010 – 2012 which has at its core the provision of high quality service to court users.

The development of this plan took place following consultation with management, staff and our Central Partnership Committee. We also invited feedback and comments from callers to court offices, members of the legal professions, members of court user groups and, with the agreement of the judiciary, persons who had served on juries.

In this plan you will find standards for customer service delivery i.e. the key ways in which we will measure our performance against this plan. It includes commitments as to what court users can expect when they call to a Courts Service building, visit a court office, call a court office, or write or email a court office. It also sets out our commitment to monitor and up-date information leaflets and court forms, and to make them available on our website.

It reiterates our commitment to improved standards in relation to health and safety, equality and diversity issues. It also confirms a commitment to the ongoing customer service user group meetings and focus groups – which are a great sounding board for new ideas in what is a two way process. It is through this process, and these meetings, that we have honed some of our most effective changes over the years.

I present this plan to all our court user groups as a significant milestone in our ongoing development: one which both acknowledges the distance we have come already and the need to invite comments and feedback on the service we provide and intend to improve upon.

In conclusion I would like to thank all our staff for their ongoing commitment to customer service and for the investment of so much energy, time and ideas into improved service delivery. I am also grateful to all our users groups, customers and professional bodies who have added greatly to drawing together this, our guide to future interaction and partnership.

Brendan Ryan
Chief Executive Officer

CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 - Introduction

This action plan sets out the Courts Service's standards for customer service delivery in a clear and accessible form. It also aims to describe the manner in which the Courts Service is adhering to the principles of quality customer service

The Courts Service is committed to providing a high standard of customer service to all who engage with the courts system, and to its internal customers, the members of the judiciary and the staff of the Service. This document describes the progress we have made in modernising the Courts Service and in delivering a high standard of customer service since the publication of our first Customer Service Action Plan. It also describes the next steps we intend to take in the years ahead.

Our Mission and Organisation

The Mission Statement of the Courts Service is:

To manage the Courts, support the Judiciary and provide a high quality and professional service to all users of the Courts

This mission statement summarises the statutory mandates of the Courts Service, which are contained in the Courts Service Act 1998.

Our Objectives and Priorities

In our Strategic Plan 2008 – 2011 we have stated that our core objectives are serving court users and supporting the judiciary. Our operational priorities from these objectives are to:

- Put the needs of the court users first
- Support the judiciary
- Improve access to the courts
- Transform service delivery
- Be an employer of choice

Structure of the Organisation

The Courts Service is governed by a Board consisting of a chairperson who is the Chief Justice or another Judge of the Supreme Court nominated by him/her and sixteen other members. The functions of the Board are to consider and determine policy in relation to the Service and to oversee the implementation of that policy by the Chief Executive. The Chief Executive is the accounting officer for the Courts Service and is responsible for the day to day administration and business of the Service.

Under the Chief Executive, the work of the Courts Service is organised into five directorates as follows:

Supreme and High Court Operations which has responsibility for the Supreme and High Court Offices and support services to the Judges of the Supreme and High Court, and for the business of the offices of the High Court

Circuit and District Operations which has responsibility for the District Court offices and the Circuit Court Offices throughout the country, the offices of the regional managers, and support services to the Circuit and District Court Judges

Resource Management which has responsibility for the management of human resources, training and development of staff, and all of the financial activities of the Courts Service including management of funds in court and of funds arising from the payment of fines, court fees, bail and family law payments

Reform and Development which has responsibility for provision of support to the respective Court Rules Committees, modernisation and reform of court procedures and forms, improvement of practice and procedure in court offices and coordination of Courts Service initiatives for changes in legislation on the courts, and for the Information Office and website development

Infrastructural Services which has responsibility for providing information and communications technology (ICT) service to the Courts Service, for capital building projects and for maintenance of existing court and court office buildings

In addition, the **Office of the Chief Executive Officer** provides the Secretariat to the Board and to the Chief Executive Officer, and has responsibility for Media Relations, Judicial Support Services, Freedom of Information, and internal audit.

CHAPTER 2:

STANDARDS FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE DELIVERY

Chapter 2 - Standards for Customer Service Delivery

In this chapter we have set out the service standards court users can expect when they transact business with us, whether they call in person to one of our buildings or offices, or contact us by letter, phone, or email.

Visitors to Courts Service Buildings

Visitors to Courts Service premises will receive the following standards of service:

- Universal access: over one third of our buildings, including the 22 courtroom Criminal Courts of Justice in Dublin which opened in November 2009, have universal access. We are committed to achieving this in all our buildings through the implementation of our capital building and maintenance programmes.
- We will work proactively to assist court users with special access needs to visit court buildings.
- Health and safety issues, including the appointment of a Safety Officer, will be addressed in every office.
- We will ensure that court facilities are safe, accessible and convenient to use.
- Adequate facilities will be provided for jurors at all times.
- Where practical we will provide consultation rooms in all court venues.
- We will seek to provide public toilets, including wheelchair accessible toilets, where possible.

Visiting court offices

Visitors to court offices will receive the following standards of service:

- The public opening hours of all our offices will be indicated at each office and on our website.
- We will seek to ensure that our opening hours match court users' requirements and that they are uniform throughout the Service insofar as possible.
- All court users will be treated with dignity and respect.
- Visitors will be treated in a polite and courteous manner with due respect for their right to privacy and confidentiality insofar as our facilities permit.
- The staff of court offices will attend to you as quickly as possible.
- We will provide clean comfortable waiting areas where immediate service cannot be provided.
- Where space permits we will place display stands with relevant information for court users in public areas.

Telephoning court offices

We will ensure that court users who telephone court offices receive the following standards of service:

- Court offices will continue to display their telephone numbers on our website and in any information leaflets they produce.
- Phone calls will be answered promptly.
- Staff will identify themselves when answering.
- Voice mail messages will be returned promptly.
- Where queries cannot be answered immediately staff will take the caller's details and call back.

Writing and emailing to court offices

We will ensure that letters and emails sent to court offices will be dealt with in accordance with the following service standards:

- Letters will be replied to within 15 working days. If it is not possible to reply fully within that time we will issue an interim reply explaining the position followed as quickly as possible by a complete reply.
- Emails will be replied to within 7 working days. If it is not possible to reply fully within that time we will issue an interim reply explaining the position followed as quickly as possible by a complete reply.
- Staff who are on leave or away from their office for any reason will use the automated “out of office” message.
- All court offices will continue to operate shared email addresses whose details will be publicised and kept up to date on our website to provide an option for court users who have general queries for that office.
- Letter and emails we receive in Irish will be replied to in Irish in accordance with the requirements of the *Official Languages Act 2003*.

Availability of information relating to court sittings and proceedings

- The Legal Diary will be updated for the Supreme Court, Court of Criminal Appeal, High Court, Central Criminal Court, and all Circuit Courts on our website every day during the legal sittings.
- Written, reserved judgments of the Supreme Court, Court of Criminal Appeal and High Court will be posted to our on-line judgment database.
- Information on Court Rules, details of the fees payable for filing court documents, Court Practice Directions and information on court sittings on our website will be updated on an ongoing basis.
- We will ensure that the information we place on our website about court offices throughout the country is kept up to date for the assistance of court users.

Availability of information and court forms

- We will continue to monitor and up-date the information leaflets on our website.
- We will continue to provide information on our website on topics relevant for court users as new legislation and practices develop.
- We will ensure that new information is translated into Irish and into a wide range of languages to meet the language needs of all court users as resources allow.
- We will review and expand the number of the frequently used court forms that are posted in an easy to use format in the court forms section of our website.
- We will ensure that our website continues to be accessible to persons with disabilities.

Health and Safety

We ensure compliance with national health and safety standards and we continue to monitor, develop and communicate procedures to ensure a safe and healthy work environment for staff, visitors and contractors. The Corporate Policy Safety Statement will continue to be updated on a regular basis and Safety Officers have been appointed in each court building. Health and safety training is provided for Safety Officers, Safety Representatives, First Aiders, and Fire Wardens and includes information on management and employee responsibilities under the *Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005* and related legislation.

A large number of staff have been trained to use the defibrillator machines which are located throughout the Dublin court buildings and many of the court offices throughout the country. The Courts Service's Safety Monitoring Committee will continue to meet regularly, to monitor policy and practice in relation to safety, health and welfare at work.

Equality and Diversity

We have appointed Equality and Diversity Officer to promote Equality Policies. We will continue to ensure through our training programmes that our staff treat all court users with courtesy and that they are understanding of the diverse communities we serve.

Accessibility

A section of our website has been dedicated to accessibility. We recognise that accessing our services goes beyond physical access to and within buildings and includes access to information, an understanding of court processes, and an inclusion in court proceedings in an atmosphere of equality. We have appointed an Access Officer whose contact details are in the appendix to this plan. Users with access related needs or comments are invited to contact the Access Officer who will assist them in accessing the services they require.

Customer Service

A section of our website has been dedicated to customer service. Staff are made aware of the information it contains as part of their induction and training. This section of the website is mainly intended to help court users to find information about the service standards we have set for ourselves through our Customer Service Action Plan, our Customer Service Charter, the complaint form and the contact details for the Courts Service Quality Customer Service (QCS) Officer.

Also on this part of the site you will find links to other areas of the website which may be helpful to court users, such as sections where information leaflets, court rules and court forms can be accessed.

Customer Service Charter

We will review our existing customer service charters in the light of our Statement of Strategy 2008 – 2011 to ensure that they continue to reflect the service standards we aspire to deliver.

Implementation and Measurement

Implementation and evaluation of this action plan are essential to ensure high quality customer service. We will take the following steps to ensure that we deliver service in keeping with the standards in this action plan:

- We will continue to include service to court users as a key objective in all business plans.
- We will undertake regular surveys targeting specific groups of court users to ensure that our processes meet court users' needs.
- We will continue to consult court users through the court and court office based user groups we convene in Dublin and throughout the country for the professionals using our services, convening meetings of these groups at least twice each year, and more frequently if needed.
- We will monitor service delivery through regular reports to our Senior Management Team.
- We will report in the Courts Service's Annual Report on the monitoring and evaluation we undertake, and on the results of surveys and other evaluation mechanisms we use.
- We will continue to report in our Annual Report on complaints made to the Courts Service's Quality Customer Service Officer, and the outcome of these complaints.

Comments, suggestions and feedback

We welcome comments, suggestions and feedback on the service we provide. If there are any matters that you would like to bring to our attention, please contact the Courts Service's QCS Officer whose contact details are in the appendix to this plan.

CHAPTER 3:

OUR CUSTOMERS: THOSE WHO USE OUR SERVICES

Chapter 3 - Our Customers: those who use our services

In speaking of the activities of the Courts Service and the services it provides, we prefer to use the term 'court user' in place of customer, as we recognise that many of those who engage with the courts do not do so by choice.

The term court user also recognises the wide range of persons who interact with the Service. Those who use the Courts Service include:

1. Persons who are parties to court actions and cases
 - litigants in civil and family law cases
 - accused in criminal cases
 - applicants under the licensing laws
 - marriage exemption applicants
2. Persons who are involved in court actions and cases, but not parties to them
 - Witnesses in civil or criminal cases
 - Victims of crime
 - Expert witnesses
3. Professionals
 - Solicitors
 - Barristers
 - Gardaí
 - Prison Officers
 - Probation and Welfare Officers
 - Law Clerks
 - Legal Agencies
 - Legal Cost Accountants
4. Persons and professionals using the services provided by the Courts Service including those provided by
 - The Probate Registries in Dublin and throughout the country
 - Circuit Court Offices in respect of the Property Registration Authority
 - The Office of Wards of Court
 - The Office of the Official Assignee in Bankruptcy
5. Public representatives
 - Members of the Oireachtas
 - Local Councillors
6. State Bodies
 - Government Departments and Offices especially the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform and the Department of Finance
 - Local Authorities
 - The Health Service Executive

7. Other groups and individuals

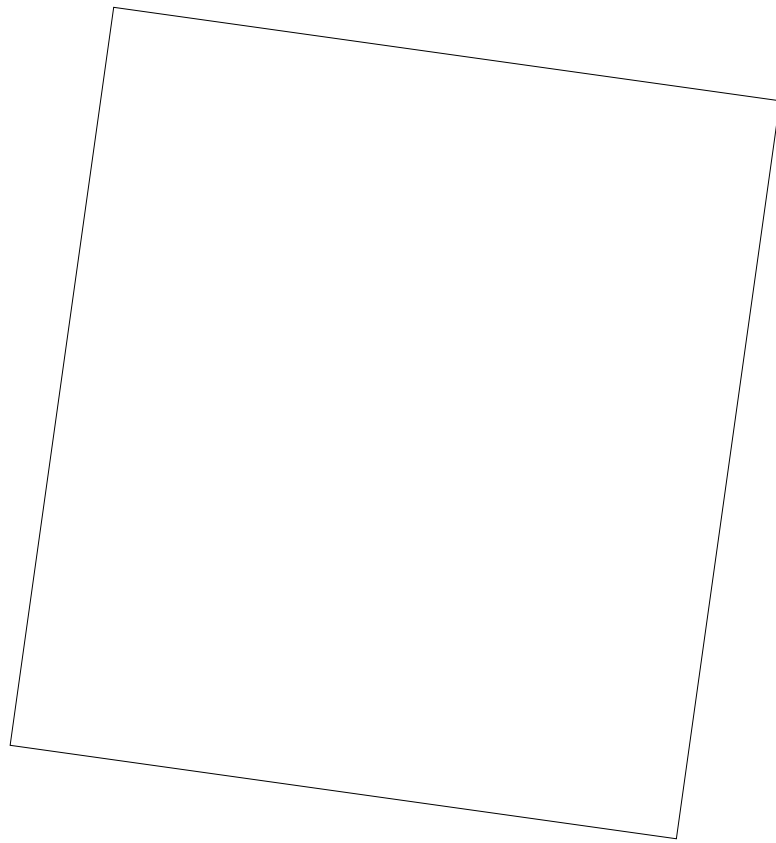
- The Media
- Groups supporting the victims of crime
- Voluntary groups
- Schools, colleges and students

Internal Customers

Under the Constitution, the judiciary is independent in the exercise of its powers and functions. Our statutory mandates include the provision of support services for the Judges. Judges are important users of the services we provide, which is reflected in our mission statement and in our strategic plan.

In the same way, the Courts Service Board which has a responsibility under the Courts Service Act 1998 to determine the policy of the Courts Service and oversee its implementation is also one of our key internal customers.

Above all, the staff of the Courts Service, who deliver all the services we provide, are internal customers in their own right. We acknowledge their commitment to providing high quality service to court users. We will continue to train and support our staff to enable them to continue to increase their effectiveness in meeting the needs of those who engage with the court system.



CHAPTER 4:

IMPROVEMENTS WE HAVE
MADE SINCE OUR FIRST
CUSTOMER SERVICE ACTION
PLAN WAS PUBLISHED

Chapter 4 - Improvements we have made since our first Customer Service Action Plan was published

In our first Customer Service Action Plan, which we published in 2002 we described a number of improvements and modernisations we had already introduced, or which were at the planning stage. Since then, we have made significant further improvements in the services we deliver and in the facilities we provide for court users.

Modernisation of Courthouses

In our first Customer Service Action Plan we referred to the seven year building plan that we produced in 2001. This Plan has since been revised and over 60 key projects have been prioritised during the course of the existing National Development Plan 2007 - 2013. In the past eight years the service has invested over €200 million in court buildings which has resulted in the completion over 50 major construction or refurbishment projects been completed. Many of these projects have been in county towns where District, Circuit and High Courts can now sit in dignified and appropriate surroundings.



Our single largest building project since our establishment is the construction of the Criminal Courts of Justice, a dedicated Criminal Court Complex, at the junction of Infirmaroy Road and Parkgate Street near the Phoenix Park in Dublin. This complex has been designed with a specific focus on providing excellent service to all court users and creating a secure environment for the conduct of criminal trials. The complex has 22 court rooms, including technology enabled courts, purpose built facilities for Judges and for those serving on juries, for the legal professions and the media, suites for groups supporting the victims of crime, and consultation rooms to enable parties to meet their legal representatives in privacy.

Media Relations Service

We have also established a media relations unit within our Information Office, to assist us in our statutory mandate to provide the public with information about the courts system by helping the media with their queries and publicising new developments by the Courts Service in the national press and in our magazine, the *Courts Service News*.

Website, e-Services and Services for Schools

The Courts Service's award-winning website has much to offer to everyone who uses the courts, and those interested in the courts system. The website is designed to be easy to use and easy to search.



The *Legal Diary* is on the website and it is up-dated at 5pm every day during court sittings. The Diary sets out all the cases for the following day, and future dates if they have been fixed, in the Supreme Court, the Court of Criminal Appeal, all High Court lists including the Central Criminal Court and for each of the courts in the Circuit Court. District Court cases are too numerous for a web-based diary, but many District Court offices use email to send solicitors a daily list of criminal, civil and other cases.

The website also carries a database of approved judgments delivered by the Supreme Court, the Court of Criminal Appeal and the High Court. This database allows practitioners, academics, students and others to search for and access judgments and to download them free of charge.

Since 2006, applications to the Small Claims Court of the District Court can be made on-line using the portal on the website. This facility has been very well received, and over 40% of small claims are now made electronically.

In 2007 we launched the pilot phase of a system that allows family law maintenance payments to be made to be paid electronically, directly into the recipient's bank account. This facility is now available in all District Court offices.

In 2007 we also launched "High Court Search", a facility available through the website that gives access to the documents filed in, and the status of, all High Court cases that are not required by law to be tried otherwise than in public. This facility allows practitioners and parties to check the status of cases from the comfort of their own home or office. Information on the site is accurate as of the close of business on the previous day.

In 2008, we launched "*Lets Look at the Law*" a law module for second level schools prepared by the Courts Service in consultation with teachers, legal professionals and the Department of Education and Science. The aim of the module is to enable teachers with no prior legal knowledge to introduce students to the Irish legal system.

Also in 2008 we launched the on-line fine payment system. When a fine is imposed in one of the courts in which the system is available, the person liable to pay the fine can use a credit or debit card to make the payment on-line and print a receipt. This facility is available in all District Court offices.

In 2009 we launched a new dedicated section of the website for practitioners and parties who are users of the family law courts. We will locate all information relating to family law in this section for the assistance of those involved in family law cases.

Work is substantially advanced to provide the website in Irish, in accordance with our first Scheme under the *Official Languages Act 2003*. We also provide website content in French, Spanish, Mandarin and Cantonese.

Communicating through Irish

The Courts Service and all court offices have always had a policy of communicating through, and providing services in, Irish for those who wish us to do so. This was reflected in our first Customer Service Action Plan. Since the publication of that plan, the *Official Languages Act 2003* has come into operation. The Courts Service's first Scheme (from 2005 to 2008) under that Act set out the services we provide in Irish, in Irish and English and in English. The second such scheme will be published upon being approved by the Minister for Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. Services in Irish developed in accordance with commitments made in our first Scheme include significant expansion of the information we provide in Irish, such as an Irish version of our website; our Transition Year programme for Schools and Press Releases in Irish, as well as translation quality and standard, public tours, IT systems including our interactive e Small Claims system and email system, phone reception, Gaeltacht office service in Irish, and in our speech training programme for staff.

Equality and Diversity

The Courts Service is an equal opportunities employer. This means that we recruit and promote staff on merit, and that we do not discriminate among staff on any of the grounds contained in the Equal Status Act 2000 when we appoint or promote them. The same policies apply to court users. In order to meet the needs of court users whose first language is neither Irish nor English it is our policy to translate information booklets published on our website into a range of languages. Through our training programmes we ensure that our staff have a good understanding of the diverse communities we serve.

Publications

One of our statutory mandates is to provide information on the courts system to the public. We have published over 50 information leaflets, ranging from detailed guides to making applications for grants of probate, or maintenance in the District Court. They include a heritage series, a magazine *Courts Service News* which highlights developments in the courts, and all editions of the Family Law Reporting Pilot publication, *Family Law Matters*, which gives an insight into the operation of family law in the Irish courts. These publications can be downloaded from our website free of charge. Our annual reports, strategic plans, and reports of the Judicial Appointments Advisory Board, the Committee on Court Practice and Procedure and the Report of the Accountant of the Courts of Justice are also on the website.

Court Rules

Many court procedures are set out in Rules of Court. There are three separate sets of Rules, one for the District Court, one for the Circuit Court and one for the Supreme and High Courts, collectively known as the Superior Courts. These Rules, and the statutory instruments that are enacted from time to time to amend and update them, can be accessed in the “Rules and Fees” section of the website.

Court Fees

Court fees are payable on many of the documents issued and filed, mainly in civil proceedings and licensing applications. These fees are prescribed by Statutory Instruments known as fees orders, and as in the case of the Court Rules, there are separate fees orders for the different jurisdictional levels of the courts. The fees orders are also on the website, in the “Rules and Fees” section.

Court Practice Directions

Some procedures are not set out in the Rules, but are based on directions given by members of the judiciary. These directions are referred to as “Practice Directions” and they can also be found in the “Practice Directions” section on the website.

Court Forms

Many of the forms required for applications to our courts are prescribed by Rules of Court. They are set out in the “Schedules” of the Circuit and District Court Rules and in the “Appendices” to the Superior Court Rules. We also have converted some of the most frequently used forms to a format that allows users to complete them on screen, before printing them. We have placed these forms in a dedicated section of the website, called “Court Forms” for the convenience of practitioners and unrepresented litigants.

Quality Customer Service

In 2003 we engaged an independent external body to carry out an employee satisfaction survey. A questionnaire was issued to all staff of the Courts Service to enable us to learn how satisfied staff were with their conditions of work. The purpose of the survey was to show us the areas we needed to improve to be an employer of choice. A follow-up survey of employee satisfaction was carried out in 2009.

By 2004, as promised in our first Customer Service Action Plan, we had established court and court office based user groups, in Dublin and throughout the country for the professionals using our services. Members of these groups include frequent users of particular court offices and representatives of the legal professions, law clerks, An Garda Síochána, the Prison Service, and the Probation and Welfare Service. These groups usually meet three or four times each year. We greatly appreciate the generosity of the members of these groups who give their time to enable us to improve the service we provide to all users of the courts.

Also in 2004 we held the first of what is now the annual meeting of the Central Customer Service Forum. This Forum enables us to brief the organisations and Government Departments who engage with the Courts Service about new developments and to obtain their views on our activities.

In 2007 we engaged an independent company to carry out a “mystery shopping” survey to provide us with baseline data on the extent to which our public offices comply with the standards we have set for ourselves in our Customer Charter. The results of this survey, which was carried out without any advance warning to the offices that were visited by the researchers, indicate a compliance rate of over 90% with the standards we had set for our Service.

An informal survey was also carried out internally in July 2008. This survey comprised a series of questionnaires targeted at staff, visitors to court offices, members of the legal profession, members of user groups, and, with the agreement of the judiciary, we offered a questionnaire to persons who had served on juries to complete if they wished to do so.

The results of the surveys informed us on our Customer Service training needs, and provided up to date information in relation to the extent to which the actions we are taking are meeting the real needs of those who use our services.

Civil Service Modernisation

Modernisation of the civil service, and of the wider public service, is a key element in social partnership agreements. With aim in mind, the Courts Service has introduced a number of improvements including a streamlined annual business planning process; the processing of all our payments through a shared financial service centre and the implementation of the civil service Performance Management and Development.

Codes of Practice

We have implemented the civil service code, “*A Positive Working Environment*” and the civil service Code of Standards and Behaviour. In September 2006 we published our Employment Equality Policy and we appointed a Disability Liaison Officer. We have also developed and implemented a dress code for staff which takes account of the requirement for many of our staff to attend court as registrars, and of the need to show respect for customers and colleagues in our choice of clothing for the workplace.

Customer Charters

We have also developed the Courts Service’s corporate Customer Service Charter and customer charters for local offices. These charters, which are displayed in all court offices, set out clearly the standards of service that we will provide to persons calling to or using the services of those offices. The Courts Service Customer Service Charter can be accessed in the customer service section of our website.

Health and Safety

The safety, health and welfare of staff and court users is a paramount consideration for the Courts Service. We have therefore prepared a Corporate Policy Safety Statement to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, an environment which is safe and healthy both for employees and others who could be affected by the delivery of the business of the Courts Service.

Accessibility

Our aim is to provide top class facilities for all users of the courts. We recognise that access includes physical access to and within buildings, access to information, an understanding of court processes, and an inclusion in court proceedings in an atmosphere of equality. We have provided wheelchair access and ramps, induction loops for hearing aids and Braille signage in all our refurbished court buildings. Our website complies with the guidelines adopted by the Irish National Disability Authority and users can listen to it being read aloud using a free download called *Browsealoud* which is particularly helpful for people with reading difficulties, reduced sight or English language issues. We have appointed an Access Officer whose contact details are set out in the appendix to this plan.

QCS Officer

The Courts Service has appointed a Quality Customer Service (QCS) officer to deal with formal complaints if they arise. The complaint form is available in all court offices and can also be accessed in the customer service section of our website. Contact details for the QCS Officer are set out in the appendix to this plan.

Training

We are committed to investing in customer service training for staff, with a particular emphasis on those who are in regular contact with court users and members of the general public.

CHAPTER 5:

NEXT STEPS

Chapter 5 - Next Steps

A wide range of persons and organisations use our services directly or indirectly, and we are conscious of the need to provide the highest level of service to all of them. We are committed to ensuring that the core principles of Quality Customer Service are embedded in everything we do, including our Statement of Strategy, Business Plans, and our Human Resource Strategy. We will also ensure that the commitment to Quality Customer Service extends to staff throughout the organisation.

Courts Service Statement of Strategy (2008 – 2011)

This statement of strategy which was presented to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform in November 2008 describes our objectives and activities for the three years to November 2011. It is set in the context of a vision for the service for 2020 in order to set out a long term course for the Service.

The principle operational priority we have identified in the statement of strategy is “Putting the needs of court users first.” The strategy explicitly states that our core objectives are serving court users and supporting the judiciary, and our operational priorities flow from these objectives.

We are therefore seeking to build an organisation which will ensure that

- court cases are processed as quickly as possible
- there will, where possible and practical, be a single point of contact for court users
- court procedures will be simpler and more accessible locally
- more services will be available through the Internet and by telephone
- persons and agencies involved in the justice system will be enabled to exchange information and documents with court offices electronically
- on-line access to information on the progress of cases will be improved

We will therefore continue to engage with court users to keep them informed and to obtain their comment and suggestions on new developments and existing services. We will also carry out a comprehensive review of our organisational structures and adjust them to ensure that they meet the needs of the rapidly changing environment we operate in.

In putting the needs of court users first we will ensure that

- all court users are treated with dignity and respect
- our planning and decision making is informed by our consultation with those who use the courts together with the Judges and staff who work in them
- every effort will be made to provide services at court offices, by telephone and through the Internet we will make the best use possible of our existing technology to enable court users to transact business electronically with us

Business Plans

Each business unit within the Courts Service prepares an annual business plan which identifies how it will contribute to the overall delivery of the Courts Service’s goals as set out in the Statement of Strategy. Each plan identifies actions to be taken in meeting the core objectives of the Strategic Plan such as, for example, serving court users

Human Resource Strategy

The Courts Service needs to be flexible and adaptable to successfully meet the challenges of the changing environment in which we now operate. We recognise that change in any single area of the organisation impacts on all the others, and on Judges and court users. We are developing a HR strategy designed to ensure that our culture facilitates creativity, innovation and on-going change, while at the same time keeping our structures, systems and processes aligned with each other.

Appendix:

Contact details for the Courts Service's Quality Customer Service Officer

QCS Officer

The Courts Service
Phoenix House
15/24 Phoenix Street North
Smithfield
Dublin 7

Telephone: 8886000

Email: QCSO@courts.ie

Contact details for the Courts Service's Accessibility Officer

Ms Lauri Walsh
Phoenix House
15/24 Phoenix Street North
Smithfield
Dublin 7

Telephone 8886000

Email: QCSO@courts.ie

