



Department of
Justice
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Digital Justice Strategy 2020 – 2025



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Foreword by the Minister of Justice and Criminal Justice Board

The justice system is different to other public services provided to citizens by the government. People encounter the justice system when they are victims of crime and have been caused harm or injury, when they have witnessed a crime or when they are perpetrators of a crime. The system involves a range of professionals working across a number of organisations which contribute to the justice process - they are responsible for arresting and charging individuals, ensuring a case is brought to court for sentencing and overseeing the completion of court sentences in custody or the community.

This can mean the system is complex to understand and challenging to navigate for victims, witnesses, defendants and their families. Those working in the legal profession can also find it difficult to keep up to date with the progress of their cases. We recognise justice delivery could be improved through the better use of technology and digital solutions.

We also know that the speed of justice does not meet the public's expectations. This needs to be improved. The lack of tailored, up to date information about how a case is being handled can be frustrating for those affected. People do not always know where or who to go to for information about what has happened with their case to date and/or what will happen next.

Having easy to access, personalised information will help people better understand and trust how the justice system works. Updating processes within and across organisations is important to help the justice system work efficiently and be more cost effective. We want to get better at using the best tools to report and analyse our data so good quality information drives our decision making and policies.

Modernising justice means we need to think differently about how we do things and better understand what citizens expect and want from us. We think the best projects involve the whole justice system working together.

The majority of the work to develop this Strategy was completed before the impacts of COVID-19. However, it is clear from the new ways of working that have, and will continue to be, introduced as the system recovers from COVID-19 that digital solutions will play an increasingly important role in the criminal justice system.

This strategy identifies priorities which seek to improve the experience of people in contact with the justice system and promote collaborative working so that, working in partnership, we can make a positive difference for everyone in Northern Ireland.



Naomi Long,
Minister of Justice



Sir Declan Morgan,
Lord Chief Justice



Simon Byrne,
Chief Constable



Stephen Herron,
Director of
Public Prosecutions



Peter May,
Permanent Secretary,
Department of Justice

The Criminal Justice Board (CJB) is the main strategic oversight group for the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland. It is chaired by the Minister of Justice and members include the Lord Chief Justice, the Chief Constable, the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Justice.

Introduction and Strategic Context

The organisations responsible for the development and delivery of this strategy include: the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI); the Public Prosecution Service (PPS); Forensic Science Northern Ireland (FSNI); the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS); the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS); the Youth Justice Agency (YJA); Legal Services Agency (LSA); the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNi); the Department of Finance (DoF); and the Department of Justice (DoJ). This strategy builds on the ICT and digital strategies of these organisations. We want to create opportunities for organisations to learn from each other, so that new ideas emerge about how we work together and what can be done differently for the benefit of people in contact with the justice system.

The Causeway IT system - which links police, prosecution, forensic science, courts and prisons - is, we believe, the only system of its kind in Europe. Causeway means that information is collected once and exchanged securely and electronically from point of arrest to the conclusion of the case. Causeway reduces duplication, enhances data security, generates significant data and provides a good platform for further innovative use of technology.

An important element of this strategy is not only exploring emerging technologies and their application to the justice process, but also encouraging our staff to seek new and better ways of doing things. Understanding what citizens expect and want is critical as we shape our future priorities. We recognise that we are unlikely to have the resources to implement every technological development we identify, so we will prioritise those initiatives which have the best potential to deliver on our Programme for Government commitments.

The principles that we want to promote in the delivery of this strategy are:

Citizen engagement

Citizens will be able to make use of a wider range of digital solutions to engage with the justice system. Personalised information for individuals about their justice journey will be more readily available. We will make it easier for people to know who to contact about their case. More, better quality information will be available about how effectively the justice system is performing.

Collaboration

We know the best results are achieved when everyone works together to improve services. Justice organisations are committed to working collaboratively to identify and deliver digital projects which support our Programme for Government commitments - reducing crime, reducing reoffending and improving the efficiency of the justice system.

Modernisation

We want our staff to think differently about how they do their jobs and develop new skills so they can make best use of technology. The success of this strategy is not based on digitising what we currently do, but on new ways of working, a better understanding of citizens' needs and expectations and a commitment to continuous improvement.

Highlights - Digital Developments across Justice

Significant work has already been undertaken across the justice system to develop our use of technology.

Highlights include:

Changing Lives app

In 2016, the Probation Board for Northern Ireland developed a mobile app called 'Changing Lives'. The app is specifically designed to help offenders desist from crime and become rehabilitated. The app features a journal for those on probation to track issues, challenges and progress that they can share with their Probation Officer. It also contains a calendar to enter appointments, a mental health section with advice and contacts for support services and an addiction section. There is a section for victims and a contacts section of the app enables people to ring directly through to probation staff as well as out of hours GP services, social services, housing and others.



Legal Aid Management System

The Legal Aid Management System (LAMS) launched in July 2019 and is used by solicitors and barristers that deliver publicly funded legal services. This online application enables members of the legal profession who supply legal aid to electronically submit applications and payment requests, search for and view cases, keep up to date with the progress of requests and communicate with the Legal Services Agency. The system has reduced the number of paper based applications, the time taken to reach decisions on cases and users having to re-enter data.



Prisoner Portal

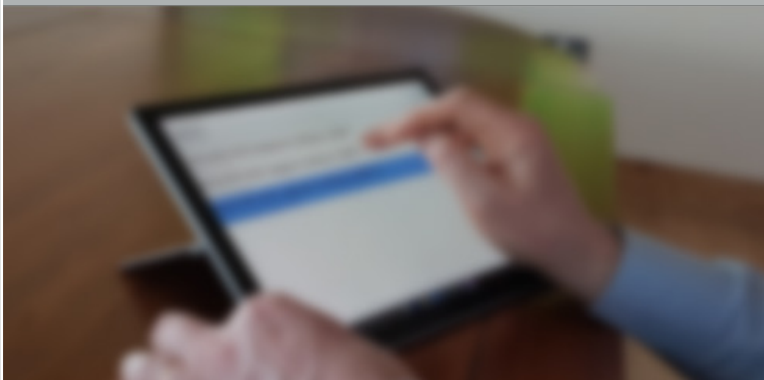
The Northern Ireland Prison Service opened Davis House in October 2019. This is among the most technologically advanced secure accommodation in Europe. Each cell in this accommodation is equipped with a self-service portal, allowing people to gain transferable ICT skills and manage some of their life events whilst in custody. Functions will be introduced on a phased basis and include viewing their personal cash, ordering meals, requests, complaints, viewing scheduled activities, visits availability and booking. There will also be a link to the Prisoner Education Network so people will be able to engage in education from their cells.



Highlights - Digital Developments across Justice

Electronic Case File

In 2018 the Public Prosecution Service released a tablet based Electronic Case File (ECF) application to all their Magistrates' courts users. Previously dozens of individual files had to be transported to court. Now all the information on all the files is available on a tablet. The system is used by prosecutors, counsel and court support officers to ensure they have access to the most up to date case information in a digital format at court. The solution has been enhanced with the implementation of a remote access solution providing staff with secure Wi-Fi access to all PPS systems whilst at court.



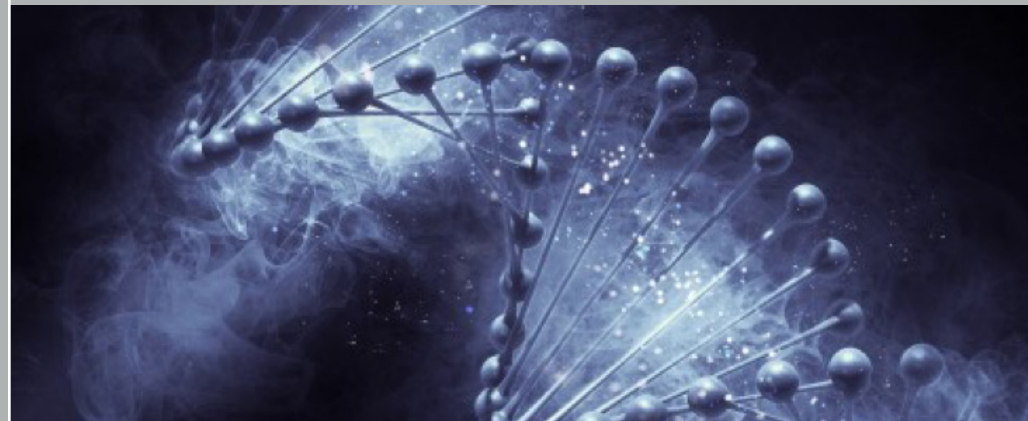
**Public
Prosecution
Service**

Forensic Science Northern Ireland

Forensic Science Northern Ireland launched two new products in 2019.

DNA services: STRmix™ is a breakthrough for forensic scientists as it can assist investigations using DNA evidence that was previously considered too complex to interpret and includes a function that allows software to match mixed DNA profiles directly against a database. This is a major advance for cases where there are no suspects and there is DNA from multiple contributors in one sample.

Vehicle Telemetry: many commercial vehicles and a number of personal vehicles are equipped with dedicated or smartphone-app based digital video and data recorders. FSNI's Digital Electronics and Road Traffic Collision experts can use vehicle telemetry/telematics to piece back together the whole story of what really happened during an accident or indeed the exact movements of a vehicle.



Highlights - Digital Developments across Justice

Police Service of Northern Ireland

In 2016 PSNI rolled out Body Worn Video cameras across the service. Body Worn Video provides compelling evidence of the activities of suspects and will enable the raw emotion and action from the scene to be replayed in the courts in a manner that could never be captured in a witness statement. This enables the Police service and the wider justice sector to deliver faster, fairer justice for victims and offenders. It has also significantly enhanced public confidence through more effective and transparent policing.

In 2019 PSNI introduced Fotoware digital photograph albums, replacing printed photo albums. PSNI receives a huge amount of digital imagery, Fotoware has significantly decreased the time required to process and provide access to digital photographs. This reduction in turnaround time from days to hours has made a major contribution to the drive towards speedier justice.



Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service

The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) uses video link facilities in courtrooms to reduce the need for defendants to be physically brought to court. Remote video link facilities are also available for use by vulnerable witnesses. Over recent years these facilities have been enhanced with the introduction of SightLink, a Virtual Meeting Room (VMR) facility which can be accessed from any type of device and supporting up to 30 simultaneous attendees. SightLink is used to facilitate witnesses and experts providing evidence to court from around the world and also facilitates video conferencing. Over the last 3 years Wi-Fi has been made available to the public in all courthouses. This has been expanded to create a secure Wi-Fi service for staff, legal practitioners and the judiciary called LP&C (Legal, Professional & Corporate). As part of the current NICTS courtroom technology upgrade the Wi-Fi coverage is being extended into each courtroom. When fully rolled out this network will provide the backbone for the delivery of new digital justice initiatives.



Theme 1:

Digital Communications and Skills

One of the ways we can contribute to increasing public confidence and trust in the justice system is by communicating more effectively with those who come into contact with the system. This includes people having timely information about what has happened to date in their case and what is likely to happen next. This applies to those who are victims of crime, witnesses and to defendants. We want to get better at providing the right information, at the right time, in a convenient way for all of these stakeholders.

We also recognise the need to equip our staff with new skills so they are able to make the best use of technology. When staff from different justice organisations are working together to deliver collaborative projects, it will be necessary to provide joint training and development opportunities. By doing this, we can increase the digital capability of our staff.



Theme 1: Priorities for 2020 and 2021

My Justice Journey

We want to be better at providing access to tailored information for people in contact with the justice system. This includes victims, witnesses and defendants. Our vision is to provide secure access to information in one place - this information will be relevant to the stage their case is at, from first contact with the justice system until their case is concluded. We want to help people understand what has happened in their case so far, what will happen next and what support services are available for them.

This is a significant undertaking, and it will be important at the outset that we take time to understand the information needs and expectations of our customers. We want a good digital solution that is easy to access and simple and straightforward to use.

This project will be co-ordinated by the DoJ, working in partnership with PSNI, PPS, NICTS, NIPS, PBNI, and the DoF.

We plan to start work on the ‘My Justice Journey’ project from April 2020, and anticipate it will take at least two years to design and deliver.

By March 2022, we will

- better understand what information victims, witnesses and defendants want to have access to;
- have explored what technology and digital solutions could best fit these information requirements; and
- agree a timetable for the introduction of a new means of delivering personalised information to people who come into contact with the justice system.

Digital Capability and Skills

As well as assessing how we can exploit new technology and apply it to how justice organisations work, we also want to invest in training and development of our staff.

We will work with the Department of Finance’s Digital Transformation Service to develop targeted training and development for staff working in justice organisations over the duration of this strategy. We will focus on staff who are responsible for the delivery of these collaborative projects in the first instance.

This project will be co-led by the DoJ with the DoF, and involve the staff of all of the relevant justice organisations.

By March 2022, we will

- conduct a comprehensive training needs analysis of our staff;
- develop bespoke training opportunities for our staff; and
- participate in the DoF’s Digital Academy.

Future Priorities **For the period 2023 to 2025, the areas of work to be pursued under this theme include**

- increasing the availability of digital channels for justice system engagement, for example online booking for prison visits; online incident reporting and evidence submission
- developing how justice can work seamlessly in conjunction with other government services
- bespoke training and development for staff and awareness raising for stakeholders regarding digital engagement

Theme 2:

A more effective Justice System

One of the most enduring challenges facing the Northern Ireland justice system is delivering justice in a faster, more effective manner. Speeding up justice is a key policy priority for the Minister and the Criminal Justice Board and there remains much to do.

We want to use advances in technology so that justice organisations can conduct their business as efficiently as possible and can communicate electronically with partner organisations in a seamless way. This will help deliver a justice system which is focused on the needs and expectations of its users and which will optimise technological and digital developments.

We will consider how organisations can communicate effectively with their partners and the public, and also ensure that the best tools are being used for performance analysis and reporting. Having a common set of performance indicators and targets that everyone contributes to will be a useful way of identifying areas for improvement and reduce delay.



Theme 2: Priorities for 2020 and 2021

Digital Evidence Sharing

We want justice organisations which make use of digital evidence - for example PSNI; PPS and NICTS - to share evidence such as CCTV footage or Body Worn Video electronically, rather than relying on the exchange of encrypted DVDs. PSNI and PPS are changing how they manage their digital information so they are in a position to electronically share information.

We aim to deliver the digital sharing of evidence in a phased way, starting with electronic sharing between PSNI and PPS from Spring 2020, followed by rolling out the display of this information in courts from Autumn 2020 and then finally rolling out arrangements to the legal profession and defendants. We will build on the successful introduction of the Legal Aid Management System to enable the legal profession to benefit from this development. This project will be coordinated by the DoJ and involve PSNI, PPS, NICTS, NIPS and, in the final phase, the Department of Finance.

By March 2022, we will

- deliver an electronic solution for the sharing of digital evidence between PSNI and PPS;
- have the facility to display this evidence in courts; and
- have rolled out this facility to the legal profession and defendants.

Optimising the use of Causeway

Causeway facilitates the sharing of information between the police, forensic science and prosecution services, as well as courts and prisons. It therefore contains end to end information about how the justice system works - how cases are dealt with, what decisions are taken and how quickly justice is delivered. End to end information which shows each stage of how a case progresses through the justice system is particularly helpful when complex issues such as speeding up justice are being addressed.

During the first year of the strategy, we will focus on making the enhanced management information from Causeway more widely available to partner organisations, and assess how best to use this information to inform our decision making. We will start off with providing system-wide information on the speed of the justice system. This will involve not only disseminating information to staff, but providing them with skills to produce and analyse tailored information specific to their business needs. We anticipate this project will start in April 2020 and will take at least two years to deliver. The DoJ will coordinate this work, in partnership with Causeway linked organisations as well as colleagues from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

By March 2022, we will

- provide access to enhanced management information from Causeway across partner organisations;
- disseminate end to end performance information about the speed of justice system; and
- determine priorities for the dissemination of additional management information.

Future Priorities **For the period 2023 to 2025, the areas of work to be pursued under this theme include**

- introducing a single electronic case file for organisations involved in the detection, prosecution and sentencing of a case
- using technology to promote effective cross agency case progression to help speed up justice
- greater use of digital technology in the justice system, such as virtual hearings and online pleas

Theme 3:

Innovation

Given the speed at which technology develops, it is difficult to predict what new digital solutions will have the most value to how the justice system operates. Each organisation has in place its own plans for adapting new ways of working and how it will use technology. We do not want to hinder this work, but build on it for the benefit of those who come into contact with the justice system.

We need to continuously review what new technology is on offer and assess what initiatives will have the most positive impact on achieving our Programme for Government outcomes. We recognise too that we do not have unlimited budgets, so collective decisions about our priorities will be required.



Theme 3: Priorities for 2020 and 2021

Improving Disclosure

One of the key improvements Sir John Gillen recommended in his review into the law and procedures in serious sexual offences in Northern Ireland was in relation to disclosure. Sir John recommended a cross - justice digital group should be responsible for examining how technological advances could be used to improve disclosure (recommendation 144). The PSNI and PPS are working to jointly deliver a range of work in this area and have published a Northern Ireland Disclosure Improvement Plan, governed by the co-chaired Disclosure Forum. The Digital Justice Board will link to this oversight group to explore how technology could be exploited to deliver the relevant Gillen Review recommendations. The Department will link primarily with the PSNI and PPS to deliver this priority.

By March 2022, we will

- understand how technology is used in other jurisdictions to assist with disclosure;
- examine the potential for testing new digital approaches such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) to improve disclosure practice; and
- have an agreed set of priorities linked to the Disclosure Forum.

Data Analytics

Large organisations including those in the public sector increasingly recognise the value of data to improve evidence based decision making. Each of the organisations operating in the Northern Ireland justice system holds a vast array of information; Causeway also holds information from the start to the end of the justice process. We want to get better at analysing this data and using the data we possess to gain new insights and a fresh perspective on the efficiency and effectiveness of the justice system. To do this, we need to clearly articulate the issues we are seeking to address, determine whether we have the right data to understand these issues, and then through data analysis decide whether we could do something different to improve performance and as a result, outcomes for citizens. As this is a new area of work, in the first year of this strategy we want to conduct a Proof of Concept to help test out our capabilities and see how best to develop our approach for the future. The Department will lead this work which will involve each of the relevant justice organisations.

By March 2022, we will

- scope out and design a Justice Data Analytics Proof of Concept;
- examine the results of the Proof of Concept project; and
- determine future priorities for Data Analytics.

Future Priorities **For the period 2023 to 2025, the areas of work to be pursued under this theme include**

- ensuring decisions are better informed by real time data and analysis
- exploring how information can be provided to staff through mobile devices and other technology solutions
- using machine learning and other assistive technologies to deal with large volumes of evidence and information

Digital Justice Strategy Delivery Priorities

■ Theme 1: Digital Communications and Skills

■ Theme 2: A more effective Justice System

■ Theme 3: Innovation

2020 – 2021	2021 – 2022	2022 – 2023	2023 – 2024	2024 – 2025
My Justice Journey				
Staff Digital Capability and Skills		Bespoke Staff Training		
Digital Evidence Sharing				
Optimising the use of Causeway				
Improving Disclosure				
Data Analytics Proof of Concept	Data Analytics Project			
	Increasing Digital Channels			
		Integration with other government services		
Awareness raising for stakeholders				
	Digital case file			
	Multi agency case progression arrangements			
	Digital court arrangements			
	Real Time Data Analytics			
	Technology for large data			

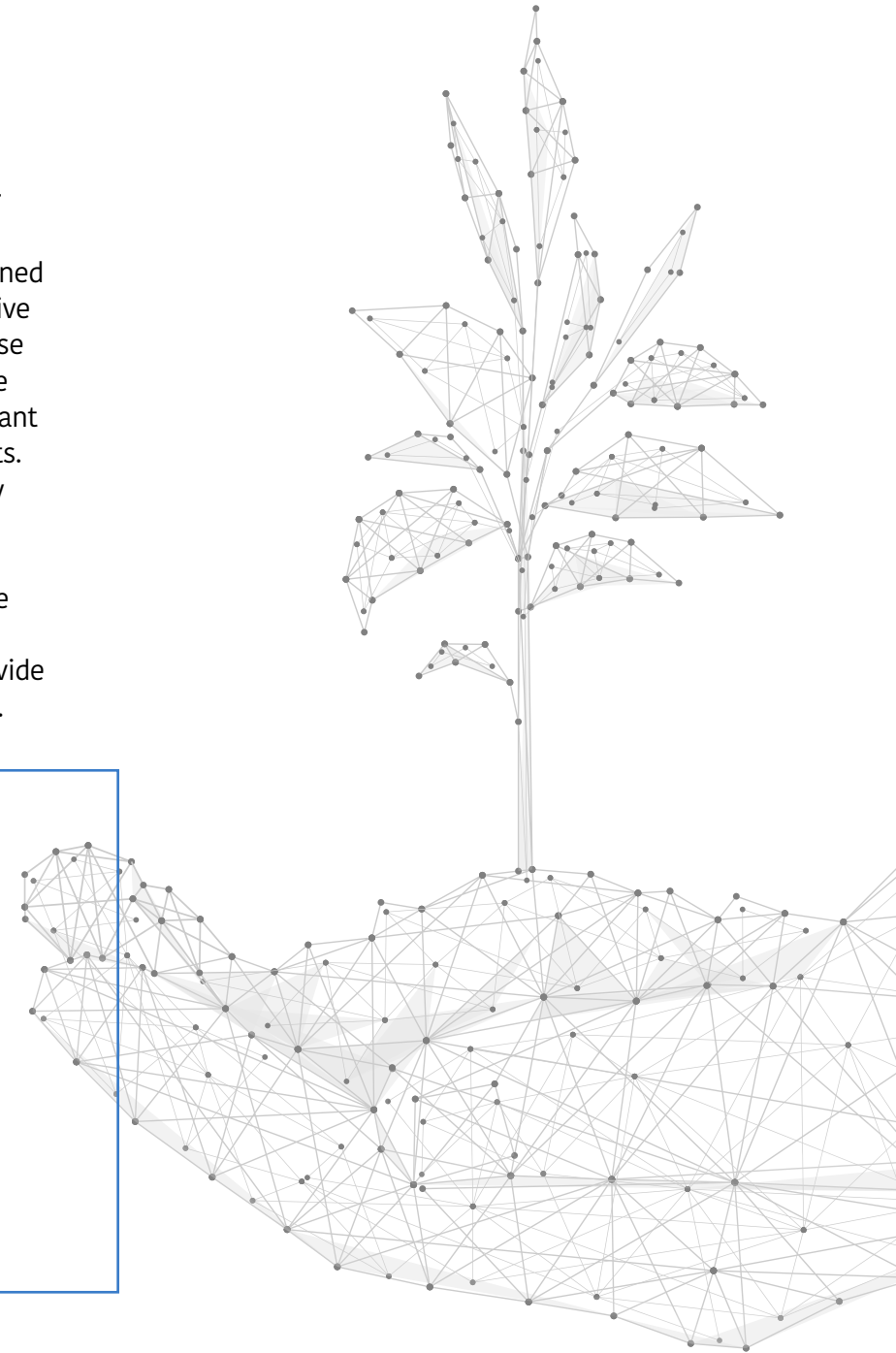
Resources

As outlined in the introduction, this strategy is not designed to replace the digital or ICT strategies that each of the contributing organisations have in place, nor will it add another layer of decision making / bureaucracy about how respective organisations prioritise their resources on technological developments. There is, however, an opportunity to be more joined up in developing business cases and making bids for funding which will support collaborative projects and initiatives for the benefit of people in contact with the justice system and those who work within it. As individual projects are scoped and developed, business cases will be completed to inform funding bids which, if approved, will enable projects to proceed. Relevant organisations have also given a commitment to prioritise resources to collaborative projects. We recognise to effectively plan and implement agreed collaborative projects, funding may be required over a number of years.

During the first year of the strategy, we will therefore explore how best we can disseminate information about funding opportunities to support digital development and innovation. We will work in partnership with colleagues from the Digital Transformation Service to provide our staff with the necessary skills to make the best use of new and emerging technologies.

Stakeholder Feedback

As agreed collaborative projects are delivered, it will be important to ensure that what we are doing is meeting the expectations of people who are in contact with the justice system. We will make more joined up efforts to engage with people in contact with the justice system - victims of crime, witnesses and defendants and their families - so we better understand their expectations and how technology can be used to meet these expectations and improve their experience of the justice system. We also want to engage with others who have a stake in the delivery of trusted, cost effective justice - including the legal profession and those working in the voluntary and community sector - to hear what digital solutions would be useful from their perspective.



Next Steps

For the first year of this strategy, justice organisations will focus on delivering collaborative projects which will make a tangible difference to the effectiveness and efficiency of the justice system.

Successful delivery of these projects will mean

- We will have a better understanding of how we can make personalised information available for people who engage with the justice system;
- We will help our staff be better prepared to make use of innovation, technology and digital solutions in their day to day jobs; and
- Justice organisations will make use of technology to exchange and display digital evidence to help speed up justice.

To co-ordinate this work, the Digital Justice Board chaired by the Department of Justice will identify priority collaborative digital projects to support the delivery of our Programme for Government commitments. We also want to ensure there is room in our plans to take account of new and emerging technologies and digital solutions and be responsive to stakeholders as they provide us with feedback on how digital approaches could improve their experience of engaging with the justice system.

An annual progress report will be provided to the Minister of Justice and the Criminal Justice Board, which is also responsible for approving future priorities with regard to collaborative digital developments across the justice system.

[If you wish to contribute ideas on future priorities for the Digital Justice Strategy, please contact the Justice Performance Team.](#)

