

Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service Business Plan 2023-24

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Foreword

I am pleased to present the NI Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) Business Plan for 2023-24. This outlines the actions we will take to deliver our aims and strategic objectives, taking into account available resources. The Plan is, of course, subject to review, as necessary, by an incoming Minister.

Something that always strikes me as I see the work of the Agency and visit staff is the range of work carried out by our organisation. The information in this plan hopefully gives a sense of that.

Over the past year, I have continued to be hugely impressed with the commitment, dedication and professionalism of colleagues across NICTS in ensuring our essential public services are delivered. Supporting and developing our staff is a priority and last year we launched our first NICTS People Strategy. This year we move to the delivery stage. Our People Strategy 2023-24 Delivery Plan contains twelve practical actions that we will deliver between April 2023 and March 2024 to increase opportunities for learning and development; improve how we communicate; support health and wellbeing; help secure the resources we need to deliver our objectives; and improve the experience of new staff joining NICTS.

We will also continue to focus on recovering from the impacts of COVID-19 and will seek to optimise the use of technology and the benefits of working differently as we deliver courts, tribunal and enforcement services.

Delivering our Vision 2030 modernisation portfolio remains a key priority. This includes a range of important programmes focusing on digital modernisation; improved service design; and the modernisation of our estate. Key projects that we will progress this year include Themis (our new digital system and web portal); the Royal Courts of Justice infrastructure upgrade; and North West accommodation.

I look forward to working with colleagues in NICTS, the judiciary and partners across the justice system to deliver this plan in the year ahead.

Glyn Capper
Acting Director NI Courts and Tribunals Service

About the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service

The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) is an Agency of the Department of Justice (DoJ). The role of NICTS includes:

- **supporting:**
 - an independent Judiciary;
 - Northern Ireland's courts;
 - the majority of Northern Ireland's tribunals;
 - the Coroners Service of Northern Ireland; and
 - the delivery of legacy inquests through the Legacy Inquest Unit.
- **enforcing** civil court judgments through the Enforcement of Judgments Office;
- **collecting and enforcing** outstanding financial penalties imposed (or registered) by a criminal court through the Fine Collection and Enforcement Service;
- **managing** funds held in court on behalf of minors and patients; and
- **advising** the DoJ and Minister of Justice on matters relating to the operation of NICTS.

NICTS also provides **administrative support** to:

- the Parole Commissioners for Northern Ireland;
- the Planning Appeals Commission and Water Appeals Commission (PACWAC); and
- the Historical Institutional Abuse (HIA) Redress Board.

An organisation chart for NICTS can be found on page 11 and an overview of our work is provided below.

NICTS at a Glance

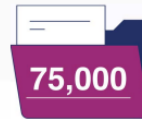
based on the 2022-23 financial year



We have over **900** members of staff.



We support a judicial complement of over **70** salaried and **600** fee paid judicial office holders.



We supported over **75,000** criminal, civil and family court cases.



We supported over **10,000** tribunal cases.



We supported **18** legacy inquest hearings.



Coroners Service dealt with **4,914** deaths and supported **58** inquests.



We are transforming our services: **14** are now available online.



64 courtrooms have been digitally enabled for remote and hybrid hearings.



Over **680,000** audio or video connections were made for remote and hybrid court and tribunal hearings.



Our total resource expenditure was **£104m**.



We received **£38m** in fees and income.



We operate **24** properties with an asset value of **£213m**.



We managed **£337m** of funds held in court.



We collected **£12m** of fines.



We manage contracts with a combined value of over **£170m**.



The Enforcement of Judgments Office enabled the recovery of **£5m** of debt and **266** properties.



We made over **1,100** compensation payments totalling **£27m** to victims of historical institutional abuse on behalf of the HIA Redress Board.

Staffing and Resources

Our people are key to achieving our objectives and the commitment, dedication and professionalism of over 900 staff across Northern Ireland is vital in delivering essential court, tribunal and enforcement services.

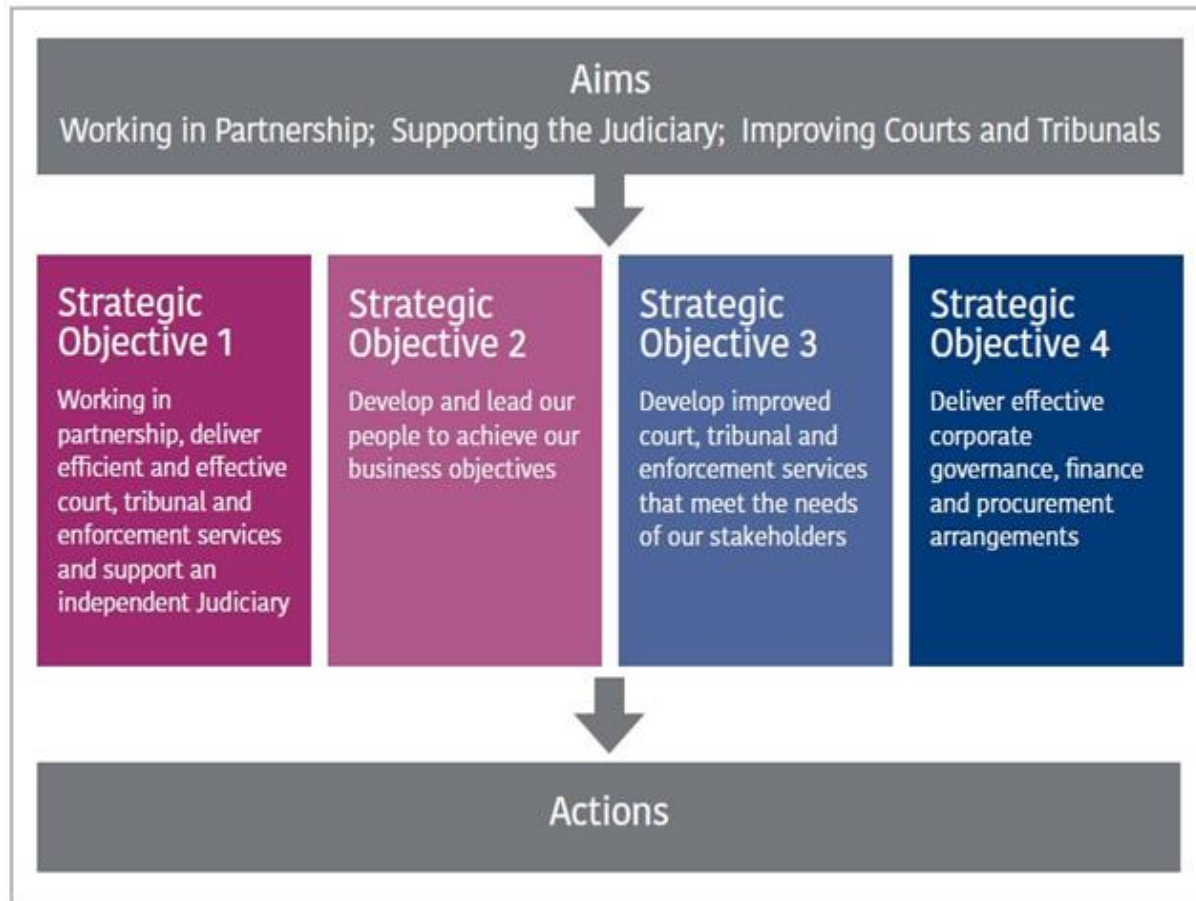
Last year we launched our first NICTS People Strategy based on five key pillars: Skills; Leadership; Engagement; Wellbeing and Resources. In the Strategy NICTS committed to working with staff, the DoJ, Trade Union Side, and other key stakeholders to develop a series of annual delivery plans that detail the actions we will take to deliver the achieve our Strategic Outcomes in the Strategy. The People Strategy 2023-24 Delivery Plan was launched in March 2023 and demonstrates the continued commitment of NICTS and DoJ to developing and supporting staff across the Agency.

On 27 April 2023, the Secretary of State NI set out the budget position for 2023-24, providing to the Department of Justice a non-ring fenced Resource DEL budget of £1,122m (excluding HMT funding for Additional Security and NI Protocol). This reflected an effective reduction against the Department's baseline of 1.7%. The Budget also provided a Ring Fenced budget of £93m and a Capital DEL budget of £129m.

As a result, NICTS has received a non-ring fenced Resource DEL budget of £51.7m, a Ring Fenced budget of £8.8m and a Capital DEL budget of £4.3m.

Aims, Objectives and Values

In support of the DoJ's mission of 'working in partnership to create a fair, just and safe community where we respect the law and each other', NICTS has three **Aims** which inform the four **Strategic Objectives** in our Business Plan. Each Strategic Objective has a series of supporting **Actions**. All of our work is underpinned by the **NICS values** of Integrity, Honesty, Objectivity and Impartiality.



2023-24 Strategic Objectives and Actions

Strategic Objective 1 – Working in partnership, deliver efficient and effective court, tribunal and enforcement services and support an independent Judiciary.		
Action	Target Date	Owner
1. Support the judiciary, courts, tribunals and enforcement services by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensuring the availability of appropriately trained staff for each business area; and maximising the availability of appropriate court and hearing venues and infrastructure to support digital hearings; in line with the Victim Charter; NICTS performance standards; public health guidance; and available resources.	March 2024	Chief Operating Officer Chief Modernisation Officer
2. Work in partnership with stakeholders to support recovery of the justice system, taking account of available resources.	March 2024	Chief Operating Officer Chief Modernisation Officer
3. Support delivery of justice reform initiatives including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> committal reform; bail and remand reform; speeding up justice; reviewing the remit of the magistrates' court; and implementation of Gillen review recommendations. 	March 2024	Chief Operating Officer
4. Support the delivery of the scheduled legacy inquest caseload for 2023-24.	March 2024	Head of LIU and CSNI

Strategic Objective 2 – Develop and lead our people to achieve our business objectives.

Action	Target Date	Owner
1. Deliver the NICTS People Strategy Year 1 (2023-24) Delivery Plan under the pillars of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills; • Leadership; • Engagement; • Wellbeing; and • Resources. 	March 2024	Head of Corporate Services
2. Develop the NICTS People Strategy Year 2 (2024-25) Delivery Plan.	January 2024	Head of corporate Services

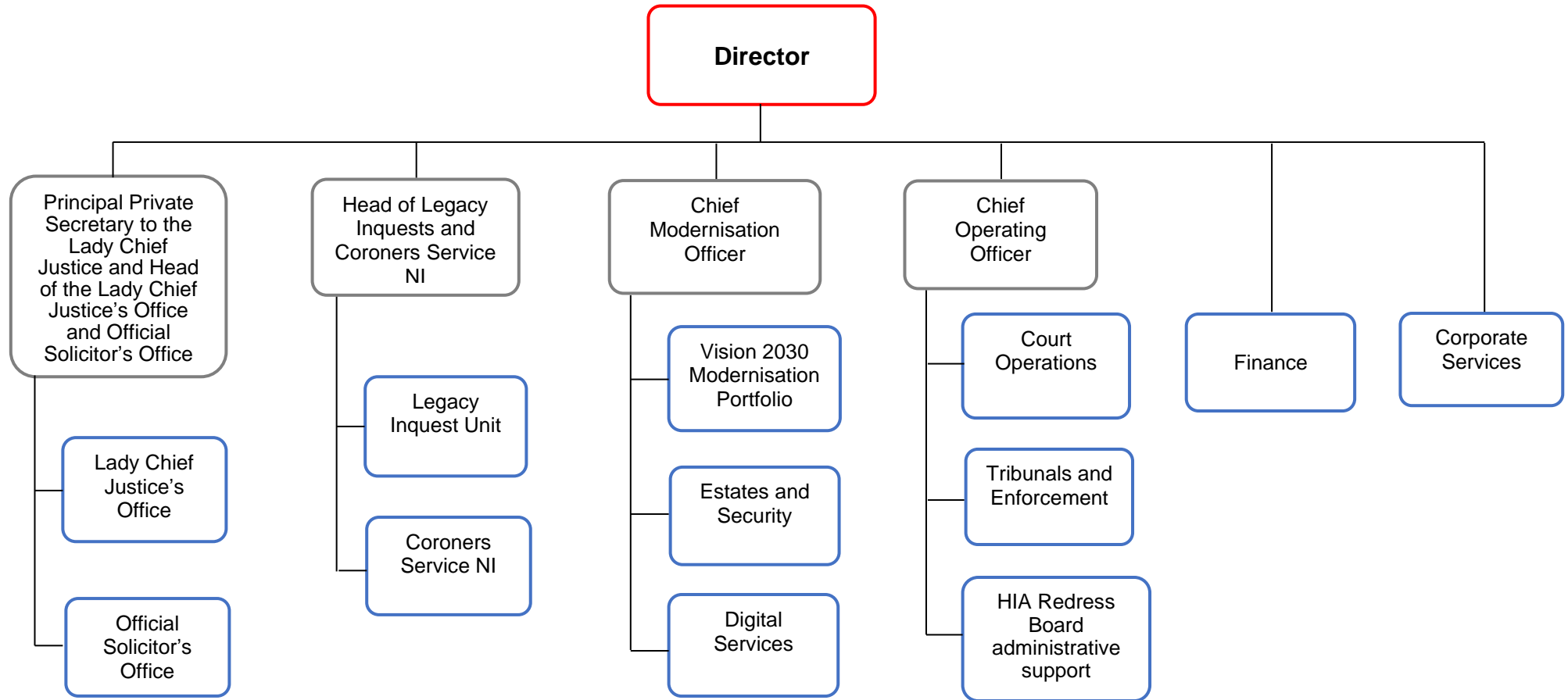
Strategic Objective 3 – Develop improved court, tribunal and enforcement services that meet the needs of our stakeholders.

Action	Target Date	Owner
1. Complete the competitive dialogue procurement process to the receipt of final tenders stage for Themis (the new NICTS digital system and web portal).	March 2024	Chief Modernisation Officer
2. Deliver the agreed programme of digital and service design projects included in the Vision 2030 Delivery Plan for 2023-24.	March 2024	Chief Modernisation Officer
3. Undertake stakeholder engagement to finalise the NICTS Estates Strategy.	September 2023	Chief Modernisation Officer
4. Complete an Outline Business Case for the Royal Courts of Justice infrastructure upgrade project.	October 2023	Chief Modernisation Officer
5. Confirm the strategic direction for North West Accommodation.	June 2023	Chief Modernisation Officer
6. Monitor estates related greenhouse gas emissions and deliver an agreed programme of interventions to reduce carbon emissions and improve energy efficiency and environmental sustainability.	March 2024	Chief Modernisation Officer

Strategic Objective 4 – Deliver effective corporate governance, finance and procurement arrangements.

Action	Target Date	Owner
1. Ensure the effective use of the Agency's budget to maximise efficiency and effectiveness.	Ongoing	Senior Management Team
2. Ensure effective and appropriate corporate governance processes are adhered to across the Agency including appraisal and evaluation of expenditure, procurement of goods and services, contract management and statutory compliance.	Ongoing	Senior Management Team

Organisation Chart



Performance Standards

Judicial Performance Standards

Criminal Business

- 80% of Crown Court defendants will be arraigned within six weeks of committal.
- 80% of Crown Court defendants will start their trial within 18 weeks of committal.
- 80% of Crown Court defendants will be sentenced within six weeks of a plea or finding of guilt.
- 80% of Magistrates' Courts adult defendants will have their case disposed of within nine weeks of first listing.
- A finding will be reached within 12 weeks from first listing for 80% of Youth Court defendants.

NI Courts and Tribunals Service Performance Standards

As part of the 2023-24 business planning process, NICTS reviewed its published Performance Standards. Revised Performance Standards are included below.

Civil Business

- 95% of District and County Court civil bills will be allocated a hearing date within 15 weeks of receipt of a Certificate of Readiness.
- 98% of claims for clinical negligence will be listed for review (before the Master) within 13 months of receipt of writ (applicable to writs lodged since 2011).
- 98% of claims for personal injury will be listed for review within three months of the applicant notifying the court they are ready to proceed to hearing.

- 80% of postal applications for Grant of Probate/Letters of Administration will be issued within seven working days of receipt of correct information.
- 80% of digital applications for Grant of Probate/Letters of Administration will be issued within three working days of receipt of correct information.
- 80% of Small Claims received will be allocated a hearing date within 10 weeks of a notice of Dispute being lodged.
- 80% Default Judgments (County Court Civil Bills) will be processed within five working days of receipt of application.
- 80% Default Judgments (Small Claims) will be processed within five working days of receipt of application.

Family Business

- 90% of Children Order applications will be listed for first direction within six weeks of receipt of correct information.
- 80% of undefended divorces and dissolution of civil partnerships will be listed for hearing within six weeks of date of receipt of the Certificate of Readiness.
- 95% of applications for Enduring Power of Attorney (where no objection has been lodged) will be registered within eight weeks of receipt of all required information.

Coroners Service Business

- 97% of all deaths investigated that do not require a post mortem examination will have the certificate of registration issued to the Registrar of Deaths within three working days of the relevant documentation being received by the Coroner.
- 95% of all deaths where a post mortem examination reveals a natural cause of death, will have the certificate of registration issued to the Registrar of Deaths within five working days of the Coroner making the decision to close the case following receipt of the post mortem report.

- In 95% of inquests the administrative listing arrangements will be completed within 28 working days of the Coroner's direction to list.

Tribunal Business

- 90% of all Tribunal hearing dates will be offered within the specified number of weeks of receipt of correct information.
- 80% of Review Tribunal appeals will be disposed of within eight weeks of receipt.
- 80% of cases regarding Deprivation of Liberty within the provision of the Mental Capacity Act 2016 will be disposed of within 14 weeks of receipt of correct information.
- 90% of Tribunal decisions will be issued to the appellant within five working days of the decision being issued by the tribunal chair.

The Enforcement of Judgments Office

- 85% of cases will have an outcome within 80 working days of acceptance of the enforcement application.
- 85% of repossessions will be completed within 130 working days from the case acceptance date.

Taxing Office

- Produce 95% of Taxation Assessments within 15 working days.

Fine Collection Service

- 80% of cases will have recovered first payment within 100 working days of the official reminder correspondence issuing.

Court Funds Office

- 95% of lodgements received by direct credits will be posted within two working days of receipt in the bank account.

- 95% of confirmations that funds have been received by the Court Funds Office will be issued within five working days of receipt of funds in full in respect of minor cases.
- 95% of non-regular payments will be made within five working days of receiving the relevant information.

Notes

- Office of Care and Protection corporate performance standards will be subject to review in 2023-24 to align with the introduction of a new case management system and will be included as published performance standards in 2024-25. Internal office performance targets have been retained in the interim.
- Progress and progression of the legacy inquests included within the 5-year plan are monitored by the Presiding Coroner and the Legacy Inquest Project Oversight Board.
- NICTS provides administrative support to the following bodies: the Parole Commissioners for Northern Ireland; the Planning Appeals Commission and Water Appeals Commission; and the Historical Institutional Abuse (HIA) Redress Board. Relevant performance information is reported in the independent annual reports of these bodies.