



Estates Strategy

2022 - 2025



An tSeirbhís Chúirteanna
Courts Service

Contents

Foreword	4
1. Introduction	6
2. Estates Strategy Framework	13
Vision	14
Pillars	14
Sustainability	19
3. Actions	20
4. Implementation	25



Foreword

Foreword

“The Courts Service Estate will play a crucial role in facilitating the transformation of the Courts Service and in enhancing our user centric approach to the delivery of services. This Estates Strategy is the first of its kind for the Courts Service and sets out an ambitious long-term vision for the estate and the strategic initiatives to be taken to advance our journey towards it.”



I am delighted to introduce the Courts Service Estates Strategy 2022-2025, which aims to ensure our buildings and facilities – a major public asset – properly serve their users’ needs and at the same time support the modernisation of the organisation, delivering on a vital pillar of reform outlined in our Strategic Vision – 2030.

Since the establishment of the Courts Service, our overall estate has improved dramatically with the delivery of some modern and high standard buildings and many enhancements to other local and regional court venues. While significant progress has been made by the Courts Service to improve the overall estate, a considerable amount of work remains to be done to bring all facilities up to appropriate modern standards.

This Estates Strategy has been prepared for the period 2022 to 2025, to align with the Courts Service’s current multi-annual capital funding. It provides a plan of action to support our various modernisation work streams and other Programme for Government priorities for the next four years. We serve the public in a changing world and so new service delivery models and new channels to access services will change how our buildings are utilised by staff, the judiciary and court users. This strategy sets out how we intend to develop the estate to respond to digitisation, modernisation, and new working arrangements. With such change comes enormous opportunities to ensure all our facilities meet the most up-to-date standards of design, accessibility, dignity and efficiency.

With Government support we will continue to develop new and improved infrastructure through the estate capital investment programme. We will apply best practice to estate management and maintenance, and continue the good practice of widespread consultation with the full range of court users and the Judiciary in the design and delivery of all building developments and enhancements.

I look forward to implementing the actions in this first strategy to provide facilities which will support improved access to justice in a modern, digital Ireland.

Angela Denning

Chief Executive Officer, The Courts Service

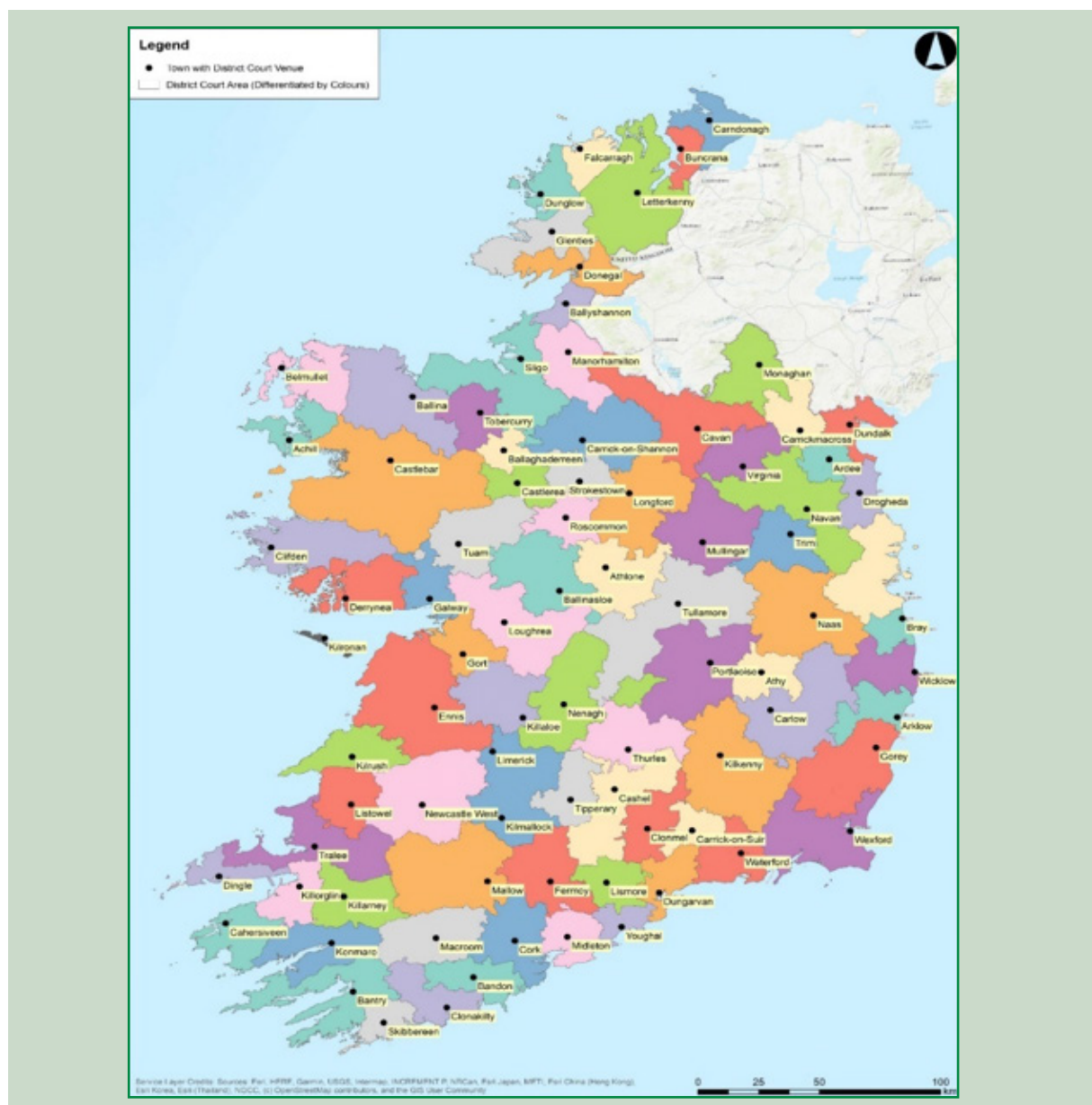
1

Introduction

1. Introduction

Estate Profile

The vast courts estate is mainly dominated by historic buildings, rich in architectural and cultural heritage with many courthouses providing an important landmark in cities and towns across Ireland. The estate is spread across 83 district court areas, as outlined in the map below. It currently comprises more than 103 individual buildings, the average age of which is 162 years old. Reflecting their age, status and civic role, a large proportion of court buildings are protected structures and are of heritage significance.



District Court Areas

In its recent history the Courts Service has successfully refurbished and modernised a number of court buildings nationwide. This investment has greatly enhanced courthouse facilities around the country. The Criminal Courts of Justice is one of eight buildings delivered through public private partnership (PPP), along with new or substantially modernised facilities in Cork, Limerick, Waterford, Wexford, Letterkenny, Mullingar and Drogheda.



The Criminal Courts of Justice, Parkgate St, Dublin 8.

Many other historic courthouses have also been modernised including facilities in Kilkenny, Castlebar, Dundalk, Monaghan, Ennis, Nenagh and Trim.

Many facilities have undergone minor adaptations to improve service delivery or user experiences, most notably in response to COVID.

A major new Family Law Complex is currently being designed for the Hammond Lane site adjacent to the Four Courts, and is among the key Courts Service priorities under the National Development Plan 2021 - 2030 (NDP¹). The National Planning Framework

¹ The National Development Plan 2021 - 2030 available: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/774e2-national-development-plan-2021-2030/> <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/09022006-project-ireland-2040/>

and the NDP 2021 - 2030 combine to form Project Ireland 2040. The proposed development will provide state of the art facilities for Family Law matters and will allow for the replacement of existing sub-standard family law facilities in Dublin.

Whilst some court facilities are therefore modern or have been upgraded, adapted or enhanced in relatively recent years, a high proportion of court buildings are nonetheless in poor condition and have not been modernised nor adequately maintained. Furthermore, many are historic properties and protected structures, which limits their scope for adaptation, remodelling or modernisation to meet contemporary needs.

Key Challenges and Opportunities

The key challenges facing the Courts Service have long been evident, and many have been highlighted during the consultation undertaken in preparation of this strategy. These include its scale, geographic spread, age and historic status, the evolving and wide-ranging functions it serves and standards with which it must comply. Through this strategy we seek to address some of the legacy issues such as poor historical maintenance, the time and labour-intensive work required to make changes to individual buildings and the limited resources available to enhance our vast estate.

The new and urgent challenges associated with climate policy, improving the energy efficiency and the decarbonisation of our estate is addressed as part of a separate **Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2021-2024**, which was published in 2021.

We recognise that there are great opportunities offered by the development of new ways of delivering court services, improved transport accessibility to venues, reduced necessity for in-person court attendance, greater digitisation of services, greater specialism in the functioning of venues, flexible working practices, and the further adoption of enabling technology.

Policy and Strategic Context

The Strategy is framed against the mandate of the Courts Service as set out in the Courts Service Act 1998, in particular the requirement to “provide, manage and maintain court buildings” and to “provide facilities for users of the courts”.

In 2019 the Courts Service published our Strategic Vision 2030 which aims to fundamentally transform how services are delivered:

“Delivering excellent services to court users; working in partnership with the Judiciary and others, to enable a world class Courts system”.

One of five key areas of reform identified is to provide better facilities, with the following vision statement commitment:

“We will continue to modernise court venues and facilities, to ensure those court users who attend in person, will be provided with the level and range of facilities that a modern society should aspire to. We will focus on providing a much higher-level of service in a smaller number of locations”.

Providing a modern estate and facilities was highlighted as one of five pillars of reform, where our ambitions include to:

- rationalise the estate;
- concentrate court sittings in fewer venues;
- build new family courts centre (Hammond Lane);
- develop specialist centres; and
- invest in modern facilities to support court users.

A comprehensive Modernisation Programme was subsequently established to deliver on the ambition set out in the Strategic Vision 2030, and a new three-year Corporate Strategic Plan 2021 – 2023 has been approved.

Goal 5 of the Corporate Strategic Plan is to

“Provide a modern and improved estate and facilities”, with a strategic goal aiming to “Provide buildings that are modern, fit-for-purpose, safe and accessible and support the new ways in which we will conduct business”.

The NDP also includes commitments for capital investment priorities by the Courts Service, including:

- ICT projects to support the Courts Service Modernisation Programme.
- New or refurbished courthouses in various locations around the country.
- Family Law Complex at Hammond Lane.

Approach to Strategy Creation

As part of the process of preparing the Estates Strategy, consultation was undertaken with external and internal stakeholders on a range of matters relevant to court buildings and building infrastructure. This provided important insights into how staff, the Judiciary, legal practitioners and those working across the justice sector interact with the estate and highlighted what many feel are its fundamental strengths and weaknesses. Important issues raised included the importance of accessibility, the protection of the dignity of users, provision of flexible space, adequate security, improved circulation, provision of video links/video booths, high quality ICT capacity, wi-fi connections, and digital services.

In addition to this consultative engagement, the Estates Strategy Team engaged in a series of workshops to drive and shape the overall strategy framework, and to develop an appropriate strategic vision, along with strategic pillars and initiatives. The workshops were also used to share the feedback from consultations and to reflect the feedback in the formation of initiatives and actions within the Estates Strategy.

The Estates Strategy has been prepared for the period 2022 to 2025, to align with the Courts Service's current multi-annual capital funding. It seeks therefore to set appropriate long-term objectives and put in place short and medium-term initiatives and actions to reach those goals.



Four Courts, Dublin.

Benefits

The pillars, initiatives and actions outlined in this strategy will provide a roadmap for the evolution of the estate and how it is to be managed over the next four years and beyond. At all times, a user-centric approach will guide us in providing a range of enhancements across design, facilities management, proactive maintenance, accessibility, security, and health and safety.

The introduction of new service delivery models and new channels to access services will change how Courts Service buildings are used by the Judiciary, staff and court users. This strategy makes commitments to respond to strategic changes in how the organisation defines new and innovative work methods and service delivery initiatives.

The courts estate represents a great asset, but one which requires investment, management, and maintenance. Doing so within this agreed strategy framework can ensure the asset is utilised effectively, and that goals and objectives are clear. It will ensure they align with wider organisational ambitions and processes, that all stakeholder views are heard, and that the necessary steps are taken to achieve our shared ambitions.



Waterford Courthouse, Catherine St, Co. Waterford.

2.

Estates Strategy Framework

2. Estates Strategy Framework

To realise and unlock the full potential of our estate it will need to undergo significant transformation. This will begin with defining what the optimal future estate will look like, and the development of a roadmap to move towards it. The estate will also need to support and facilitate modernisation and new ways of working by staff, the Judiciary and court users. Enhancements can also be made to the ways in which the estate is operated and managed in areas such as governance, the use of technology, and building maintenance.

Vision

In the operational and policy context described earlier, and in light of the detailed consultation on the challenges and opportunities facing the estate, the vision of the Courts Service Estates Strategy is:

‘A fit-for-purpose estate that facilitates access to justice for all users and is responsive to our future ways of delivering services’.

Pillars

The following four pillars have been identified to define the areas of focus within the strategy. They are intended to incorporate the full breath of activities proposed within this Estates Strategy and align with the Courts Service Strategic Vision 2030 and Corporate Strategic Plan 2021-2023.

The pillars identified are illustrated below:



Each pillar contains a number of initiatives which identify specific workstreams to be undertaken as part of the strategy. They have been formulated to address the key challenges facing the estate as identified during the preparation and consultation phase of the strategy, to address NDP and modernisation commitments, to embrace new opportunities that may emerge, and to manage and mitigate risks.



Pillar A: Define the Optimal Estate

This pillar seeks to specify the optimum future scale, service delivery structure, geographical configuration, and design standards for the Courts Service estate. This will generate a clear and agreed future blueprint, inform all estate planning and investment, identify where rationalisation should take place, ensure a coherent modernisation approach, and help identify unmet and priority needs.

Pillar A: Key Actions:

1. Conduct a venue review to help determine the optimal estate configuration.
2. Support and inform the selection of locations for specialists Family Law Courts².
3. Develop a masterplan for the Four Courts Campus /Dublin Central Venues.



Ennis Courthouse, Ennis, Co. Clare.

² As outlined in the Family Courts Bill



Pillar B: Support new ways of working

Under this pillar we will continue to support the Modernisation Programme and public service reform more generally. We will improve the estate, by adapting to further digitisation in service delivery, and the adoption of new technologies and new working arrangements.

Pillar B: Key Actions:

4. Align estate planning and provide for new and evolving service delivery models.
5. Deliver small-scale venue adaptations/pilot projects to support new working approaches and enhanced use of existing accommodation.
6. Ensure buildings best support flexible and collaborative working arrangements.



Cork Court Office, Washington Street, Cork.



Pillar C: Deliver the Capital Investment Programme

This pillar will involve progressing the delivery of the estates capital investment programme, and as such incorporates a range of activities including the ongoing specification of investment needs, the prioritisation of projects and works, the acquisition of sites where required, the planning and procurement of works, and their oversight and management.

Pillar C: Key Actions:

7. Progress the delivery of the Family Law Complex at Hammond Lane.
8. Prioritise wider capital projects for courthouse development and modernisation.
9. Progress the preparatory and appraisal stage of future priority projects.



Kilkenny Courthouse, Parliament St, Co. Kilkenny.



Pillar D: Enhance Estate Management and Governance

To achieve the ambitions set out above, this pillar seeks to ensure that the estate is enhanced, operated and managed within an appropriate governance framework, with clear goals and responsibilities, decision making structures, resources, reporting arrangements, facility management capabilities, organisational linkages and channels of representation and communication.

Pillar D: Key Actions:

10. Define and transition to an enhanced maintenance regime for court buildings.
11. Provide facilities management services that respond to the needs of users and Courts Service operations.
12. Utilise greater levels of technology in the management of the estate.
13. Enhance estate governance and improve the effectiveness of estate management, through new procedures and processes.



Dundalk Court Office, Townparks, Dundalk, Co. Louth.

Sustainability

An important aspect of our estate's transformation over the coming years, complementary to the pillars above, will be driven by the Courts Service sustainability agenda.

'The Climate Action Plan 2021: Securing Our Future' highlights the urgency to act to mitigate climate change and sets out challenging targets for all public sector bodies to continue to lead by example and significantly increase energy efficiency and cut carbon emissions in half by 2030.

The scale of the challenge embedded in these targets is significant given our historic, heritage and complex estate and is therefore covered separately within the Courts Service Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2021-2024, which sets out the priorities and actions to support the energy efficiency and decarbonisation transition of our estate.



3. Actions

3. Actions

Pillar A: Define the Optimal Estate

1. Conduct a venue review to help determine the optimal estate configuration.

ACTIONS

1.1. Review venues within the existing estate, including their condition, utilisation, compliance with standards and regulations, scale, range of facilities, protected status, ownership, running costs, modernisation requirements, and other characteristics, using Condition Assessment Survey and other data sources.

1.2. Determine the optimal future configuration of the estate.

1.3. Identify the steps to be taken and map the process of transitioning to the future estate blueprint, including through the enhancement of existing locations and the development of new venues.

2. Support and inform the selection of locations for specialist Family Law courts.

ACTIONS

2.1. Support the implementation of the Family Law Bill and the identification of potential venues for specialist Family Law courts

2.2. Identify venue adaptations and enhancements necessary for such venues to operate as specialist family law facilities.

3. Develop a master plan for Four Courts Campus/ Dublin Central Venues.

ACTIONS

3.1. Examine and compare options for configuring the Four Courts campus alongside central Dublin venues for the future.

3.2. Specify and commence a programme of works and projects to implement the selected masterplan.

Pillar B: Support new ways of Working

4. Align estate planning and provide for new and evolving service delivery models.

ACTIONS

- 4.1. Support the alignment of court buildings and facilities to the organisation's new service delivery models.
- 4.2. Ensure buildings are configured to reflect new ways of working through greater use of digitisation and technology in the delivery of services.

5. Deliver small-scale venue adaptations/pilot projects to support new working approaches and enhanced use of existing accommodation.

ACTIONS

- 5.1. Design and test local innovative projects aimed at enhanced user experiences including for example wayfinding, flexible spaces, providing information, and circulation.
- 5.2. Support the continued roll out of high technology courtrooms, and the enhanced IT capacity of all court venues.

6. Ensure buildings best support flexible and collaborative working arrangements.

ACTIONS

- 6.1. Reconfigure office space to support a more collaborative working environment and to facilitate modern working practices.
- 6.2. Configure buildings to support organisational policies with respect to blended and flexible working arrangements.
- 6.3. Provide enhanced staff welfare facilities such as lockers, rest rooms and showers.

Pillar C: Deliver our Capital Investment Programme

7. Progress the delivery of the Family Law Complex at Hammond Lane.
ACTIONS
7.1. Determine the detailed design for the new Family Law Complex at Hammond Lane, and secure Part 9 Planning.
7.2. Progress the project through its sequential phases (pre-procurement, procurement, contracting).
7.3. Manage and monitor construction phase effectively, according to agreed schedule.
8. Prioritise wider capital projects for courthouse development and modernisation.
ACTIONS
8.1. Develop an objective framework for the prioritisation of significant building investment projects.
8.2. Determine a prioritised listing of investment projects to be delivered.
9. Progress the preparatory and appraisal stage of future priority projects.
ACTIONS
9.1. Undertake appropriate needs analysis and options comparisons in specific locations.
9.2. Acquire sites at locations requiring newly built court venues.
9.3. Plan and appraise projects thoroughly through their sequential phases, in accordance with the Public Spending Code.

Pillar D: Enhance Estate Management and Governance

10. Define and transition to an enhanced maintenance regime for court buildings.
ACTIONS
10.1. Define the optimal maintenance regime for the estate.
10.2. Undertake a gap analysis between current service delivery and the desired standard.
10.3. Define a roadmap to transition to the preferred maintenance regime.
11. Provide facilities management services that respond to the needs of users and Courts Service operations.
ACTIONS
11.1. Review the delivery of contracted facilities management services.
11.2. Define standards of building and facility management services to be met cross the estate for all user requirements.
11.3. Enhance safety and security in Courts Service buildings.
12. Utilise greater levels of technology in the management of the estate.
ACTIONS
12.1. Introduce an online facilities management helpdesk system for staff throughout the estate.
12.2. Improve the integration of digital systems between Courts Service and facilities management service providers.
12.3. Introduce new property management technologies to enhance how Courts Service buildings are utilised, managed, maintained and serviced.
13. Enhance estate governance and improve the effectiveness of estate management, through new procedures and process.
ACTIONS
13.1. Define appropriate internal governance and operational roles and responsibilities.
13.2. Review contract management procedures to promote best practice and consistency.
13.3. Review key relationships with external service delivery partners to improve the user experience.

4. Implementation

4. Implementation

A comprehensive implementation plan will be followed to ensure all the strategic actions set out, and all initiatives and actions are delivered.

Implementation will be led by the Corporate Services Directorate and the Estates Management Unit, with the active involvement, engagement and co-ordinated input of all other Directorates. Task definition, the assignment of delivery roles and responsibilities, and timeframes and delivery milestones will be established for all actions. Appropriate collaborative structures and processes will be put in place where actions involve strategic alignment with wider organisational processes. Appropriate teams, resources and supports will be provided to ensure actions are completed.

All initiatives set out in the strategy will involve thorough consultation with staff representatives, the Judiciary, and users.

Implementation will be subject to the governance structures in place, with key decision-making the responsibility of the Courts Service Building Committee, and ultimately, the Courts Service Board. Progress will be monitored closely and reported regularly to both.

Finally, the strategy will be subject to review, and will be adapted as required to reflect policy developments, resource commitments, and operational needs as these evolve.

