

NORTHERN IRELAND COURT SERVICE

# BusinessPlan



serving the community through the administration of justice

serving the  
community  
through the  
administration  
of justice

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# Foreword

This plan sets out our business objectives for the current year. It is the second strategic document arising from our Corporate Plan spanning the period 2008-2011.

We have set ourselves four strategic objectives which are to improve the quality of our customer services; increase access to justice; promote confidence in the justice system; and support the independence of the judiciary.

We are focusing on ways in which to deliver these strategic objectives while at the same time maximising business efficiency and contributing to the strengthening of performance across the criminal justice system as a whole.

In recent years we have modernised the way in which court business is managed. Our highly successful Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS) has streamlined the processing of case information and has improved records management. It has allowed us to develop a range of online services so that a number of court transactions can now be carried-out at home and outside normal office hours.

During the year ahead we shall continue to build on that progress through the delivery of our Business Modernisation and Customer Service Strategy which explains how we shall modernise and improve court business. We shall also support the implementation of the Causeway Programme which will electronically connect the criminal justice agencies, thereby helping to reduce delay in the justice system and providing for better quality case information.

Tackling the causes of delay continues to be an important priority for the criminal justice system, and we shall continue to work to improve the flow of criminal cases coming to court. Our Delay Reduction Strategy continues to focus on implementing measures to reduce the length of time taken from arraignment to the case coming to trial.

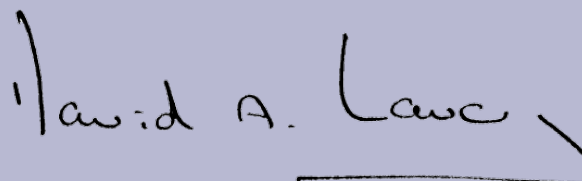
We have published a series of demanding targets to help us to monitor and improve our performance in the management of cases in the courts - averaging 90% planned achievement for the disposal of business. Similar targets have also been set for the Coroners Service and the Enforcement of Judgments Office. The full range of these performance targets is set out in Annex B of this Plan.

I am pleased to report that all of our courthouses achieved the new Customer Service Excellence Standard in 2009. This is a recognition of the professionalism of Court Service staff in dealing with the needs of customers.

Our court staff also continue to engage with their local communities helping to promote confidence in the justice system by delivering an education programme for schools and others to explain the role of the courts in the justice system.

A significant business change will take place later in the year when we assume administrative responsibility for a number of tribunals. Tribunals are an important part of the justice system and we look forward to working with these new tribunals in order to establish a unified courts and tribunals service.

I hope stakeholders will find this Business Plan interesting and informative. We shall report on our delivery of this Business Plan in the Annual Report for 2009/10 which will be published this time next year.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David A. Lavery". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

D.A. LAVERY  
Director, Northern Ireland Court Service



NORTHERN IRELAND COURT SERVICE

# BusinessPlan

# 09/10

# Introduction

This is the second Business Plan arising out of our Corporate Plan.

This Business Plan covers the period April 2009 to March 2010. Performance against the delivery targets outlined in this Business Plan will be published in our Annual Report.

The Court Service Corporate Plan contains four overarching strategic aims:

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





# Departmental Information

## Who We Are

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The Northern Ireland Court Service is the Lord Chancellor's department in Northern Ireland.

### Our role is to:

- provide administrative support for the Northern Ireland courts, i.e. the Court of Appeal, High Court and Crown Court, County Courts, Magistrates' Courts and Coroners' Courts;
- provide administrative support for tribunals;
- enforce civil court judgments through the Enforcement of Judgments Office; and
- support the Lord Chancellor in discharging his ministerial responsibilities in Northern Ireland including responsibility for judicial appointments and legal aid.

We are accountable to Parliament at Westminster through the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice at the Ministry of Justice, the Rt Hon Jack Straw MP. The Parliamentary under Secretary of State, at the Ministry of Justice, Bridget Prentice MP, has day to day responsibility for the courts in Northern Ireland.



## Corporate Aim

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“Serving the community through the administration of justice”

## Corporate Values

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We aim, at all times, to demonstrate the following corporate values:

**Integrity:**

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

**Openness:**

to undertake our work in an open and transparent manner

**Professionalism:**

to conduct our business to the highest standards

**Accountability:**

to be responsible for delivering a high quality service to the public

**Fairness:**

to treat everyone fairly

We have incorporated our Corporate Values into our performance management system for staff so that we can continuously measure the way in which we demonstrate our values.

## How we are Structured

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There are **21 courthouses** across Northern Ireland, the largest being Laganside Courts and the Royal Courts of Justice in Belfast. All of our courthouses have achieved the new **Customer Service Excellence Standard** in recognition of the high standard of customer service provided to the public.

The Court Service is also responsible for the **Coroners Service for Northern Ireland** which is headed by a High Court Judge as Presiding Judge for Coroners Service. The Coroners Service includes a full-time coroners judiciary, and a number of Coroners Liaison Officers who support bereaved families and liaise with the other agencies involved in the process of death investigation and certification.

While our core business is the provision of administrative support for the courts in Northern Ireland, we are also responsible for:

- the **Enforcement of Judgments Office** (EJO) - which provides a centralised service for the enforcement of civil court judgments;
- the **Court Funds Office** - which manages £250m funds held in court on behalf of minors and patients; and
- a number of **tribunals** including - the Office of the Social Security Commissioner and Child Support Commissioners and Pension Appeals Tribunal, the Traffic Penalty Tribunal, the NI Valuation Tribunal and the Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeals Panel.

The Court Service will progress a programme of tribunal reform during 2009/10 to transfer all departmental tribunals to the Court Service with a view to establishing a unified Courts and Tribunals Service for Northern Ireland.



*Jacqui Durkin*



*Laurene McAlpine*



*Geraldine Fee*



*David Thompson*



*Paul Andrews*



*Siobhan Broderick*

## Court Service Management Board

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The Director of the Court Service, David Lavery, is the Head of the Department and Principal Accounting Officer. He is supported by a Management Board which comprises a number of Divisions headed by:

- **Jacqui Durkin**, *Head of Court Operations*
- **Laurene McAlpine**, *Head of Civil Policy and Legislation*
- **Geraldine Fee**, *Head of Criminal Policy and Legislation*
- **David Thompson**, *Head of Finance*
- **Paul Andrews**, *Head of Public Funded Legal Services*
- **Siobhan Broderick**, *Head of Tribunal Reform*

The Management Board also includes two non-executive members.

## Our Staffing and Resources

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The Court Service employs approximately 750 staff the majority of whom deliver frontline services at the 21 courthouses throughout Northern Ireland and the Enforcement of Judgments Office. We recognise that a committed and skilled workforce is fundamental to the successful achievement of our corporate goals and to quality service provision.

The Court Service has continued to retain its status as an Investor in People (IiP) in recognition of its commitment to learning and development, and to ensure that staff have the right skills to deliver the business priorities. We will deliver our Corporate Learning Plan 2009/10 in order to ensure that all our staff are properly skilled to deliver our priorities for this year and to deal with the challenges as part of a new Department of Justice.

We have in place a range of people management policies, including a flexible working policy to allow those with caring and other responsibilities to balance their home and work life commitments.

The Court Service is committed to diversity and has developed an Equality Action Plan in consultation with the Northern Ireland Equality Commission. The Plan covers the period 2007 to 2009, and we are currently developing a new three-year plan for 2010 - 2012.

An organisational structure for the department is at Annex A.

We receive our funding from Parliament and our resources for 2009/10 are:

	2009/10 £m
Core NI Court Service	65.7
NI Legal Services Commission	65.0
NI Judicial Appointments Commission	1.6
<b>Total Resource Budget</b>	<b>132.3</b>
<b>Capital Budget</b>	<b>4.8</b>

## Our Sponsorship Role

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

The **NI Legal Services Commission** was established in 2003 and is responsible for the provision of publicly funded legal services in Northern Ireland under the Legal Aid Scheme.

The **NI Judicial Appointments Commission** was established in 2005 and is responsible for judicial appointments up to and including High Court Judge.

Both commissions publish their own Corporate and Business Plans. These can be found on their websites [www.nilsc.org.uk](http://www.nilsc.org.uk) and [www.nijac.org](http://www.nijac.org)

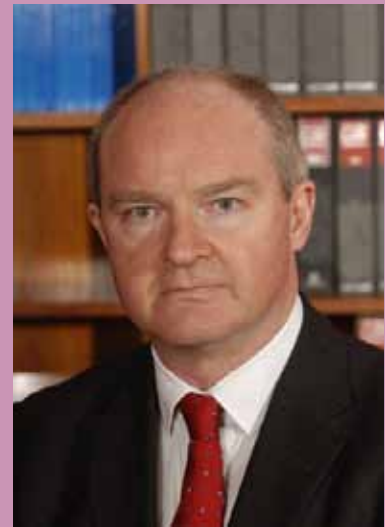
The **NI Judicial Appointments Ombudsman**, Mr Karamjit Singh CBE, was appointed in 2006. The Ombudsman's role is to investigate complaints from applicants for judicial appointment where maladministration or unfairness is alleged to have occurred. Further information is available at [www.nijao.gov.uk](http://www.nijao.gov.uk)

## Support for the NI Judiciary

The Court Service is responsible for providing administrative support to the Northern Ireland judiciary. One of our key strategic aims is to 'support an independent judiciary'.

The Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland, Sir Declan Morgan, is head of the judiciary in Northern Ireland and is responsible for judicial deployment and discipline.

There are 67 full time and two part time members of the judiciary across the various judicial tiers and 224 Lay Magistrates. There are also panels of deputy judiciary who are assigned to court hearings as business needs arise.



*Sir Declan Morgan*

Lord Chief Justice	1
Lord Justice of Appeal	3
High Court	10
High Court Masters	7
County Court Judges	17
District Judge (Magistrates' Court)	21
District Judge (County Court)	4
Social Security & Child Support Commissioners	2
Coroners	4
Lay Magistrates	224

# Court Operations

“To deliver quality services which meet the needs of our customers”

To deliver responsive customer services during 2009/10 we shall:

- meet all of our court performance standards (our court performance standards are set out at Annex B);
- support the integration of the Causeway Programme with the Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS) to share information electronically across the criminal justice agencies;
- reduce avoidable delay in the conduct of criminal cases by delivering the Delay Reduction Strategy;
- implement our Workforce Strategy;
- deliver the 2009/10 Action Plan for our Business Modernisation and Customer Service Strategy;
- implement the outcome of our public consultation process on the introduction of Hearing Centres;
- maintain Customer Service Excellence Standard accreditation for all of our courthouses;
- pilot a Courts NI Contact Centre;
- carry-out a Customer Exit Survey at all our courthouses;
- appoint Fines Officers to increase the number of fines paid and reduce the number of committal warrants issued;
- effectively manage our ICT service procurement arrangements; and
- facilitate effective case management in an endeavour to expedite the hearing of legacy inquest cases.





To improve access to justice during 2009/10 we shall:

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- implement a policy for the provision of interpreters in the civil and family courts; and
- consult on proposals to change the current court jurisdictional boundaries.

To promote confidence in the justice system during 2009/10 we shall:

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- implement our commitments under interdepartmental strategies to support victims, witnesses, children and young people;
- deliver a programme of outreach activity at courthouses;
- facilitate the Criminal Justice Inspectorate inspection programme and implement agreed action plans; and
- participate in the programme of work to prepare for the devolution of policing and justice, while ensuring that business continuity is maintained.



To deliver accountability and transparency during 2009/10 we shall:

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- implement our Equality Action Plan; and
- maintain our status as an Investor in People.

# Tribunal Reform

“To modernise the administration of tribunals in Northern Ireland”

To deliver responsive customer services during 2009/10 we shall:

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- meet our tribunal performance targets (these are set out at Annex C); and
  - develop a strategy setting out how we shall modernise the tribunals and improve customer service delivery.

To promote confidence in the justice system by assuming administrative responsibility for NI tribunals we shall:

- 
- begin the process of creating a unified Courts and Tribunals Service by transferring administrative responsibility for a number of NI departmental tribunals to the Court Service; and
  - establish a Charity Tribunal under the new Charities legislation.



# Judicial Appointments

To support an independent judiciary during 2009/10 we shall:

- provide the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission with quality information on judicial appointments;
- give effective sponsorship to the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission;
- support the work of the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Ombudsman;
- support the Lord Chief Justice through the effective deployment of judicial resources.



“To support the work of the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission”

# Publicly Funded Legal Services

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

To deliver responsive customer services and improve access to justice during 2009/10 we shall:

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- support consultation on a new Civil Legal Services scheme;
- consult on new means and merits tests for a Criminal Defence Service scheme; and
- support the smooth transition of legal aid into a devolved environment.

To enhance control, predictability and value for money from the Legal Aid Fund during 2009/10 we shall:

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- implement new administrative arrangements and fees structures for Very High Cost Criminal Cases; and
- introduce standard fees for Magistrates’ Court criminal cases.

To support enhanced financial management within the Legal Services Commission during 2009/10 we shall:

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

# Policy and Legislation

To improve access to justice during 2009/10 we shall:

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- consult on enlarging the jurisdiction of the county courts;
- review the legislative framework for the enforcement of civil debts through the Enforcement of Judgments Office;
- develop proposals for the court - related aspects of the Mental Health and Capacity Reforms;
- finalise the legislation to enhance the existing rights of audience of solicitors in court;
- develop policy options on separate representation of children in private law proceedings; and
- support the work of the Civil Justice Committee.



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

To promote confidence in the justice system during 2009/10 we shall:

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- consult on transparency of the courts and disclosure in family proceedings;
- consult on extending the use of postal service of summonses;
- develop proposals to improve the initiation of proceedings and service arrangements in the magistrates' courts;
- develop proposals to improve the system of fine enforcement;
- take forward the work resulting from the consultation on widening the jury pool;
- lead on the legislative issues arising from the review of court boundaries;

To support judicial independence during 2009/10 we shall:

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- develop a Concordat on judicial independence.

# Finance Division

“To deliver a controlled financial and commercial environment, achieving value for money”

To deliver accountability and transparency during 2009/10 we shall:

- produce departmental financial plans and reports in accordance with Central Government timetables;
- oversee the departmental Financial Operating Plan and efficiency planning;
- support departmental preparations for devolution of policing and justice; and
- implement the civil fee cost recovery programme.

To deliver Funds in Court during 2009/10 we shall:

- implement a Court Funds modernisation programme.

To deliver Corporate Governance during 2009/10 we shall:

- support the Management Board corporate governance monitoring and reporting;
- support the Accounting Officer by delivering risk, assurance and compliance strategies; and
- work with departmental sponsorship units to deliver strong in-year financial management of departmental sponsored bodies.



#### To deliver effective Commercial and Estates activity during 2009/10 we shall:

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- oversee the department's capital investment programme;
- develop a Court Estate strategy;
- deliver efficiency savings through effective procurement practices; and
- work in partnership with the Northern Ireland Prison Service and the Youth Justice Agency within the Custody Review project to improve security and safety of custody areas and prisoner management.

#### To deliver Information Assurance during 2009/10 we shall:

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- implement Information Assurance policy, practices and procedures in accordance with Cabinet Office and Ministry of Justice guidelines.

#### To deliver security and business continuity during 2009/10 we shall:

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- maintain the department's Business Continuity ISO27001 accreditation status; and
- support the work of Business Continuity planning across the department.

#### To communicate effectively with others during 2009/10 we shall:

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- implement the department's devolution and rebranding communication strategy;
- introduce an enhanced departmental complaints handling procedures; and
- provide support for all public consultations.

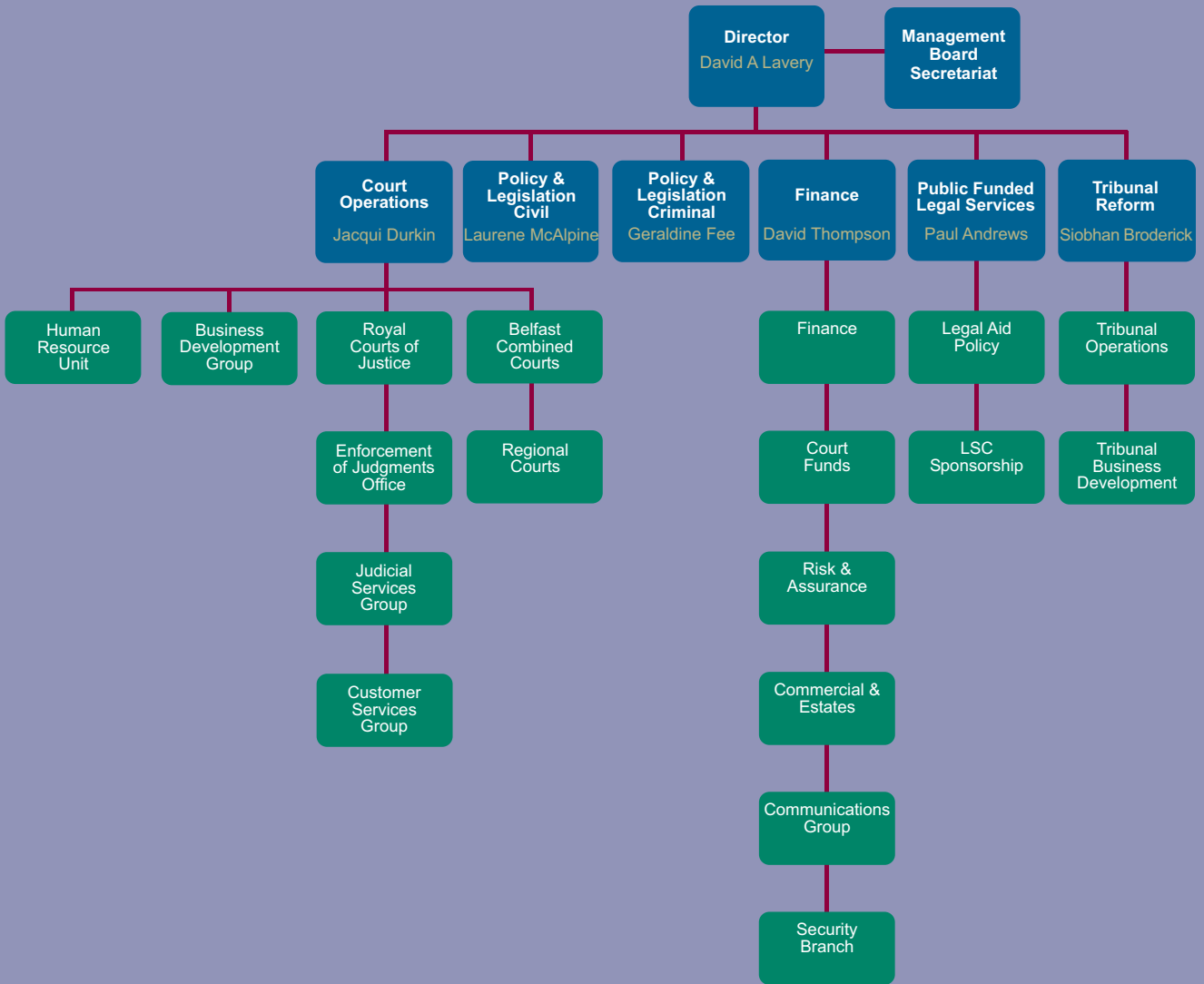
#### To support the community during 2009/10 we shall:

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- implement our Corporate Responsibility Strategy.

ANNEX A

# Organisational Structure



## ANNEX B

# Court and Tribunals Performance Standards

## Criminal Business

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

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

- 90% of Court of Appeal defendants will have their case listed within three weeks;
- 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 a finding of guilt;
- 80% of magistrates' courts adult defendants will have their case disposed of within nine weeks of 1st listing; and
- A finding will be reached within 12 weeks from 1st listing for 80% of youth court defendants.



<sup>1</sup> These standards are set by the Lord Chief Justice, except for the Court of Appeal standard which is an administrative target.

## Civil Business

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To facilitate the efficient disposal of civil business:

- 98% of Queen's Bench writs will be listed within three months of being set down;
- 98% of civil bills will be listed for hearing within 18 weeks of receiving a Certificate of Readiness;
- 97% of small claims default decrees will be issued within five working days of application or notice of acceptance of liability;
- 97% of mortgage applications will be listed for hearing within six weeks; and
- 97% of creditors' petitions will be listed for hearing within six weeks.

## Family Business

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To facilitate the efficient disposal of family business:

- 98% of Children Order applications will be listed within ten weeks of receipt;
- 95% of Office of Care and Protection annual case reviews will be carried out within six weeks of receipt of complete Controllers accounts;
- 95% of applications under the Mental Health Order will be listed within five weeks of receipt; and
- 97% of divorces will be listed for hearing within six weeks of correct pleadings being lodged.

## Coroners Service Business

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To facilitate the efficient disposal of Coroners Service business:

- 97% of all non autopsy deaths will be dealt with within three days of a Coroner's decision to proceed by that means;
- 92% of all natural deaths that require an autopsy, but not an inquest, will be passed to the appropriate Coroner within three days of the receipt of a post mortem report; and
- 90% of inquests will have the date of hearing fixed within 28 days of the Coroner's direction to list.



#### The Enforcement of Judgments Office will:

- Issue 95% of Notices of Intention within three days;
- Accept 90% of enforcement applications within eight days;
- Complete 98% of register searches within one day of receipt;
- Complete 85% of repossessions within 100 days of allocation to an Enforcement Officer;
- Accept 90% of taxation applications within 22 days; and
- Issue 95% of taxation assessments within 13 days.

## ANNEX C

# Tribunal Business

To facilitate the efficient disposal of tribunal business:

- 95% of NI Valuation Tribunal cases will be listed within eight weeks of representations from all parties being received;
- 98% of applications for leave to appeal to the Social Security Commissioner will be listed within eight weeks of a direction;
- 90% of pensions appeals will be listed for hearing within 25 weeks of receipt of the statement of case;
- 99% of Traffic Penalty Tribunal postal/in person applications will be listed within 40 days of receipt of appeal papers; and
- 90% of Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeals Panel cases will be listed within 13 weeks of agreed papers being received.





Should you require any further information about the NI Court Service please visit our website at [www.courtsni.gov.uk](http://www.courtsni.gov.uk) or alternatively contact us at our information centre.

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

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**INVESTORS  
IN PEOPLE**