COURTS SERVICE
An tSeirbhís Chúirteanna

Briefing Paper

Committee of Public Accounts

2018 Appropriation Accounts of the Comptroller & Auditor General

Vote 22: Courts Service

14th November 2019
**Vote 22: Courts Service**

The Courts Service is single programme Vote the purpose of which is to:

a) *Manage the courts*
b) *Provide support services for the judiciary*
c) *Provide information on the courts system to the public*
d) *Provide manage and maintain court buildings and*
e) *Provide facilities for users of the courts*

The Courts Service Vote represents one of six Votes in the Justice Group. The other Votes are The Department of Justice & Equality, An Garda Síochána, The Irish Prisons Service, the Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission, and Policing Authority.

The Courts Service funding for 2018 accounted for circa 5% (€137.575m) of gross expenditure funding in the Justice Vote Group.

The expenditure outturn for 2018 can be broken down as follows:

- **Pay** €52.524m (39%)
- **Non Pay** €30.305m (22%)
- **Courthouse Capital** €5.041m (4%)
- **ICT Capital** €11.334m (8%)
- **PPP Costs – Unitary Charges** €35.799m (27%)

* Non Pay excludes ICT Capital expenditure

Appropriations-in-Aid, which is primarily made up of Court Fee income, amounted to €49.508m for 2018 (37% of total expenditure). This represents a significant element of the Vote and reduces the cost of the running the Court Service to the Exchequer. The net cost therefore of running the Courts Service in 2018 was €85,495m. Courts Fees are charged on civil documents lodged in court.

There were 1,049 fulltime equivalent employees paid from the Courts Service Vote at the end of December 2018.

**Appendix A** below sets out the functional split of the Administrative Budget for the Courts Service for 2017, 2018 and 2019.

**Appendix B** below sets out the breakdown of expenditure items within the Courts Service budget.
**Up to Date Developments**

The Courts Service continues to implement a range of transformational projects and initiatives which deliver both savings and improved productivity and efficiency. Key projects include:

- **Combined Office Review Implementation (CORI)**
  The review was finalised in 2017 and the recommendations arising from the review to put in place a more effective structure and management framework for the delivery of services in provincial combined court offices. These are now being implemented on a phased basis.

- **Probate Review**
  The Probate Services Review examined the delivery of probate services in Dublin and around the country and made a number of recommendations to enhance and modernise the service provided. Significant progress has already been made which has seen waiting times for Probate applications reduced. Discussions are also underway with the Revenue Commissioners which should bring about further efficiencies for citizens.

- **ICT**
  **eCourts and Court Technology**
  The Courts Service continues to develop its on-line services and, in recent years, a number of new systems have been progressed and implemented which include:
  - Application for Leave to Appeal to the Supreme Court
  - Bankruptcy Register
  - E-Licencing for licensed premises
  - Legal Cost Adjudicators
  The Courts Service continues to expand the courtroom technology available to support court sittings and provide greater efficiency to all courts users:-
  - Video Conferencing - the number of courtrooms with video conferencing facilities has increased to 58 across 25 courthouses (an increase of 123% since 2015).
  - Digital Audio Recording - a project involving the upgrade of Digital Audit Recording equipment in more than 240 courtrooms has been completed.
  Other ICT projects include the upgrade of a number of court systems, redesign of the Courts Service website, refresh of technical hardware and ICT security.

- **Learning & Development Strategy**
  Over the period of the Learning and Development Strategy 2016 - 2018, the provision of learning and development services in the organisation has been transformed. The Learning and Development Unit has successfully developed and delivered a range of technical, developmental and coaching programmes to support the organisation. The increased budgetary allocation has resulted in ongoing increases in the numbers of staff receiving training and in the number of training days provided (e.g. an 18% increase in the number of training days per employee in 2018 over the previous year).

- **Change Programme Office**
  A Change Programme Office and governance framework has been put in place to support the implementation of a comprehensive Change Management programme 2017 - 2020. This Programme is aligned with and has been informed by public service and justice reform initiatives.
• **Courts Service Building Programme**
  Significant progress continues to be made in the delivery of modern, suitable court accommodation which contains the facilities required by court users:
  
  o **Courts PPP bundle**
    The delivery of 7 PPP Courthouse building Projects was completed in 2018, providing 7 state of the art courthouses totalling 37,000 sq. metres, containing 31 fully fitted courtrooms, all necessary support facilities for court users, judges and staff. As with the management of the Criminal Courts of Justice, the Courts Service is committed to actively managing public private partnership contracts so as to achieve maximum value for ongoing state investment.

  o **Non PPP Courthouse Projects outside Dublin**
    The Government’s National Development Plan 2018 - 2027 includes a number of courthouse projects outside Dublin in regional cities and county towns where facilities remain substandard including Galway city, Wicklow town, Portlaoise, Tralee and Roscommon. The ability to progress projects further will depend on the availability of funding and site availability.

  o **Proposed Development of a Family Law Complex at Hammond Lane in Dublin**
    This project was also included in the National Development Plan and the Government’s Infrastructure and Capital Development Plan. Discussions in relation to the level of funding required to progress the project in the context of the overall funding available are continuing with the Department of Justice and Equality.

  o **Courthouse Maintenance Programme**
    A planned preventative maintenance programme of courthouse buildings across the State is under way.

• **Family Law Mediation**
  The Courts Service continues to support family law mediation initiatives which offer an alternative to a court determined outcome and can provide a more appropriate means of resolving family disputes. Full time mediation services are provided in Dolphin House Family Law Court in Dublin, and part time services are provided in Naas, Carlow, Cork, Dundalk, Ennis, Limerick, Kilkenny and Tipperary.

• **Cross Agency Initiatives**
  The Courts Service continues to work with the Department of Justice and Equality, other justice agencies and practitioners to promote and support the effective administration of justice.

**Organisational Capability Review**
In 2018, at the request of the Civil Service Management Board, the Courts Service participated in an organisational capability review of the Courts Service to review the structures, capabilities and approaches of the Service in relation to Strategy, Leadership Delivery and Organisational Capability. The Report made a number of recommendations for the future development of the Service which have been approved by the Courts Service Board and Government. The actions outlined in the Action Plan are to be delivered within a 2 year period.
Long Term Strategy
A key recommendation of the Organisational Capability Review was that the Courts Service should develop a long term vision for the organisation. Work on the development of a Strategic Vision has now been completed and sets out the high level strategic objectives for the Courts Service over the next 10 years. These objectives are designed to support the provision of a more open, transparent and accessible court system. A key focus for the organisation will be a digital transformation process in relation to the way in which the Courts Service operates and delivers services. A detailed plan is being developed which will set out how the vision will be achieved.

I welcome the opportunity to expand on any of the above initiatives at our meeting on the 14th November next.

Angela Denning
Chief Executive Officer 7th November 2019
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenditure Item</th>
<th>2017 REV</th>
<th>2017 Outturn</th>
<th>2018 REV</th>
<th>2018 Outturn</th>
<th>2019 REV</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>€'000</td>
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<td><strong>A.1 (i) Salaries, Wages and Allowances</strong></td>
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<td><strong>A.2 (ii) Travel and Subsistence</strong></td>
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<td><strong>(iii) Training and development and Incidental Expenses</strong></td>
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<td><strong>(iv) Postal and Telecommunications Services</strong></td>
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<td><strong>(vi) Office Premises Expenses</strong></td>
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<td>16,576</td>
<td>15,509</td>
<td>18,076</td>
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<td><strong>(vii) Consultancy Services and Value for Money and Policy Reviews</strong></td>
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<td>100</td>
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<td><strong>A.3 Courthouses (Capital Works)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>A.4 PPP Costs – Capital Regional</strong></td>
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<td><strong>A.4 PPP Costs – VAT</strong></td>
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<td>18,189</td>
<td>3,737</td>
<td>3,799</td>
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<td><strong>Gross Total</strong></td>
<td>140,080</td>
<td>133,115</td>
<td>137,575</td>
<td>135,003</td>
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<td><strong>Appropriations-In-Aid</strong></td>
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<td>Fees</td>
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<td>Receipts from pension-related deduction on public service remuneration</td>
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<td><strong>A-in-A</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Net Total</strong></td>
<td>92,252</td>
<td>84,022</td>
<td>89,606</td>
<td>85,495</td>
<td>93,124</td>
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</table>

1 Includes deferred capital of €6.0m for 2018
2 Includes deferred capital of €2.50m for 2019
Breakdown of expenditure items

A.1. (i) Salaries, Wages and Allowances
   - Salaries
   - Overtime

A.2. (ii) Travel and Subsistence
   1. Home travel
   2. Foreign travel:
      (a) EU
      (b) Other
   3. Air Travel Emissions Offsetting Payments

A.2. (iii) Training and Development and Incidental Expenses
   1. Entertainment
   2. (i) Staff Training
      (ii) Judicial Training
   3. Miscellaneous
   4. Stenography and other fees
   5. Legal Services

A.2. (iv) Postal and Telecommunications Services
   1. Postal Services
   2. Telecommunications Current
   3. Telecommunications Capital

A.2. (v) Office Equipment & External IT Services
   1. Computer and data preparation equipment and related items – Capital
   2. Photocopying equipment and requisite materials
   3. Other office machinery and related supplies
   4. I.T. External Service Provision - Capital

A.2. (vi) Office Premises Expenses
   1. Maintenance
   2. Heat, light and fuel
   3. Furniture and fittings
   4. General Office Expenses
   5. Leases

A.2. (vii) Consultancy Services and Value for Money and Policy Reviews

A.3. Courthouse Capital Works

A.4. PPP Costs
   PPP Costs - Capital CCJ
   PPP Costs – Capital Regional
   PPP Costs - VAT

B. Appropriations-in-Aid
   1. Fees
   2. Miscellaneous
   3. Pension Levy*

* Receipts from pension-related deduction on public service remuneration