

*Informed by policy and evidence*

*Developed with the right systems and infrastructure*

*Delivered with our people and partners*

Criminal court business  
Civil court and tribunal business  
Online services and information  
Core infrastructure

Scottish Courts  
and Tribunals Service



Digital Strategy – 2018-2023



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## Introduction

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An efficient and effective courts and tribunals system is one of the cornerstones of modern society. It allows people to assert their rights if they have been infringed; to be reassured that allegations of crime will be pursued fairly and openly; and to seek the support of the system at key points throughout their lives, should the need arise. In any modern society the administration of justice must be trusted by the people and organisations depending on it. It will only keep that trust if it keeps pace with the times.

The Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service plays a key role in the administration of justice. We provide the environment in which justice is done – and seen to be done. As society develops we must keep that environment under review. Whilst significant cases will always involve formal hearings in a court or tribunal people increasingly expect us to work flexibly and transact digitally. Those using the system will struggle to understand if simple administrative business is carried out on paper alone or if routine steps in cases can only proceed if a wide range of people attend a hearing at a particular place and time.

The ability to improve the system using digital technology, coupled with a growing uptake of that technology across society, provides a unique opportunity to improve the administration of justice. We can make justice more accessible and efficient; make the experience of appearing in court less stressful and collaborate with other agencies to improve the quality and efficiency of what we do.

Digital Innovation is one of the strategic priorities set in our [corporate plan](#) – it makes clear that:

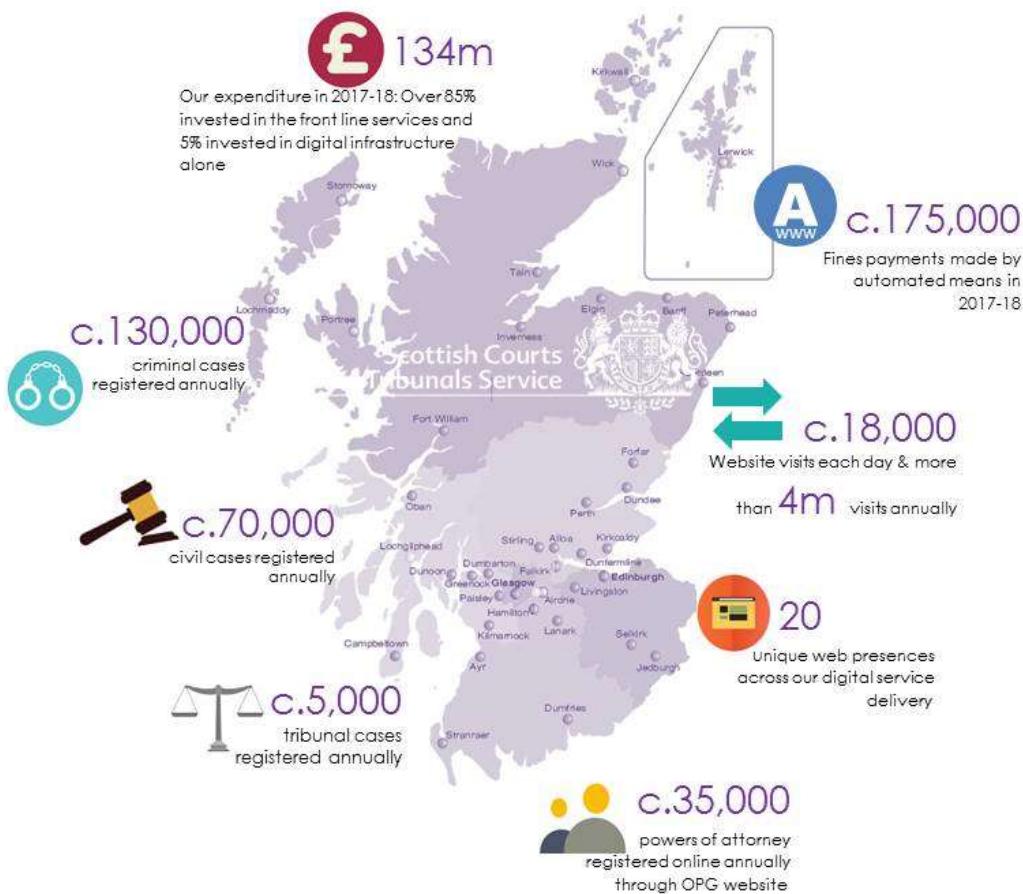
We will place digital innovation at the centre of what we do and maximise the opportunities afforded by technology to: improve processes, provide easy access to information, minimise physical appearance and support quicker outcomes.

This strategy sets out how we will deliver that priority over the coming 5 years. Our approach is informed by clear principles, focused on key actions and backed up by structures and processes that provide oversight and control. By delivering on this strategy we will make the best use of technology to improve the justice system, in line with our purpose – “[supporting justice](#)”.

## About SCTS – Who we are and what we do

The Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service is a non-ministerial department established by the Judiciary and Courts (Scotland) Act 2008. Our statutory function is to provide administrative support to the Scottish Courts, devolved Tribunals and the Office of the Public Guardian (OPG).

Our purpose is **supporting justice**. We fulfil that purpose by providing the people, buildings and services needed to support the judiciary, the courts, tribunals and Office of the Public Guardian. We touch the lives of many people across Scotland administering justice the length and breadth of the country. We play a crucial role in delivery of the Scottish Government's [Vision & Priorities for Justice](#), which aim to build "a just, safe and resilient Scotland". Our [Corporate Plan](#) 2017-2020 sets out the key outcomes we will deliver in order to fulfil our purpose and help realise the Government's vision.



Our vision is to **build a Stronger Courts and Tribunals Service** focused on providing access to justice, maximising the benefits of technology and improving the service we provide to all users. All the work we do is underpinned by our core **values** of **respect, service** and **excellence**. Our people are skilled, motivated and committed to these key values and the behaviours that support them.

As we take forward an ambitious reform agenda we need to focus on changes that will deliver the greatest benefit. Our approach to **digital innovation** is based on sound principles, organised through clear priorities and managed with good governance – bearing capacity and affordability in mind.

# Our Digital Vision – Executive Summary

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Over the next 5 years the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service will deliver an ambitious programme of reform, working continually to improve the administration of justice. This strategy sets out the key digital developments of that programme on which we will focus. Digital is not an end in itself – but it is clear that well targeted development and investment in digital technology can increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the services and support we provide to the judiciary, to all those who use our services and to those who work to deliver them.

To ensure that our work is well informed, developed and delivered this strategy is founded on **three key principles** that underpin our approach to digital development and investment. Our approach to digital will be:

- **Informed by policy and evidence;**
- **Developed with the right systems and infrastructure;**
- **Delivered with our people and partners.**

Further detail on these principles can be found at pages 5-6.

The strategy identifies four **priority areas** – these are the areas in which digital innovation and development can deliver significant improvements to the administration of justice.

- **Criminal court business;**
- **Civil court and tribunal business;**
- **Online services and information;**
- **Our core infrastructure.**

The bulk of this strategy (pages 7-16) considers these areas in turn – setting out why each is a priority; where we are at present; and what we will do to make progress – the key actions. A summary of the **fourteen key actions** set out under the four priority areas is provided below.

## **Criminal court business (priority 1, pages 7-10)**

1. We will fully support the development and implementation of the Digital Evidence Sharing Capability (DESC) project – as a key prerequisite to reform of the summary justice system.
2. As the DESC project develops we will enhance our criminal case management system – ensuring it will be ready to support full digital case management and online hearings.
3. We will complete the roll-out of high quality video links across our estate to allow the efficient handling of procedural business between courts, prisons and, in due course, police custody units.
4. We will create new purpose built facilities for the taking of Evidence by Commissioner, making best use of technology.
5. We will work with the Scottish Government to develop and implement the provisions of the Vulnerable Witnesses (Criminal Evidence) (Scotland) Bill, to improve the process of taking evidence from child and other vulnerable witnesses – using technology to reduce appearances in court.

## Civil court and tribunal business (priority 2, pages 11-12)

6. We will continue to invest in the development of the Integrated Case Management System (ICMS) introducing online case submission and management – commencing with simple procedure cases ahead of a phased roll-out across the full range of civil court business in the sheriff court.
7. We will use the platform provided by ICMS to enhance our digital case management capabilities in the Court of Session, followed by the devolved tribunals and OPG on a phased basis – supporting the further roll-out of online case submission and active judicial case management.
8. We will use technology to enhance and support the work of Scotland's devolved tribunals, recognising the need to develop approaches that support the tribunal judiciary as they deliver justice across a wide range of locations and operating models.

## Online services and information (priority 3, pages 13-14)

9. We will continue to increase the range of transactional services that we make available online, introducing the ability to pay court fees via the ICMS system and extending the ability to pay fines online to all fine types, removing the restriction on online payment in cases where a driver's licence requires endorsement.

10. We will develop a jurors' hub – creating a one stop shop for jurors to access online – providing information on their role, attendance and supporting claims for expenses.

11. We will consolidate our web presence, reviewing and updating sites on a prioritised basis – including a full upgrade of the core SCTS website to ensure it provides high-quality access to information, advice and services.

## Core infrastructure and systems (priority 4, pages 15-16)

12. We will continue to develop and upgrade our core infrastructure – rolling out the latest operating system and implementing a new unified communications platform to further improve both the functionality and resilience of our network and systems.

13. We will continue to invest in the hardware provided to the judiciary and staff, through a rolling programme of upgrades – allowing us to make the most of new developments including digital evidence presentation, virtual hearings and recording of all relevant business.

14. We will embed cyber resilience into our approach so that we are prepared, secure and able to recover from incidents that take place. We will secure "cyber Essentials Plus" accreditation and maintain membership of the Cyber-security Information Sharing Partnership.

## Governing and Monitoring Progress

The strategy (p17-18) also sets out how delivery will be managed and progress monitored, stressing that successful delivery will require us to have:

- the right **governance** – to oversee and deliver our priorities;
- the right **culture** – to create an environment in which we can develop and succeed; and
- the right **skills** – to be able to develop, deliver, work in partnership and continually innovate the services of the future.

New approaches that improve our service – a new child friendly website for the additional support needs jurisdiction

## Our Approach to Digital – Key principles

Whilst the case for making greater use of technology to improve the administration of justice is compelling, it is crucial that we choose the right developments for the right reasons; that we plan and invest in them properly so they will succeed; and that we implement them in such a way that they are understood, adopted and used to the full.

Over the course of the next 5 years we expect to see a continuation in several trends that have emerged as we have started to take advantage of the benefits that technology can bring –

- The **shift from paper based to electronic** processes will continue;
- Uptake of digital services will lead to a **reduction in the number of people attending** court and tribunal facilities – and to the frequency of visits required for those who do need to attend;
- The **public expectation** for information and advice to be available online and for services to be delivered digitally will continue to grow;
- Our understanding of **what constitutes the “best evidence”** to be presented in a hearing may change – as we consider both the role technology can play and the impact of appearances in person on particular groups – especially child and vulnerable witnesses;
- The desire of all participants to move to **electronic evidence presentation** and **virtual courts**.

These are significant trends that could lead to quite fundamental changes to the way in which court and tribunal business is delivered over the longer term. For those reasons we have established **three key principles** that underpin our approach to digital development and investment – to ensure that all our activity is effectively informed, developed and delivered. As we take forward specific initiatives and projects over the coming years we will ensure that their development observes these principles, supporting the efficient and effective administration of justice and maximising the likelihood of success.

Our approach to digital will be:

### i. Informed by policy and evidence

We do not begin with the notion that digital is “the solution” to the challenges we face in the abstract. We start from the position that we want to deliver the most effective and efficient service in the future – and consider what needs to be done in order to achieve that. We do this through a range of well-established and organised policy programmes, run in collaboration with other justice organisations. At present these include the Evidence and Procedure Review, the Civil Court Reform Programme and the Tribunal Reform Programme. The principal objectives for these programmes over the coming years are set out in the SCTS [Corporate Plan](#). These, in turn, support delivery of the broader [vision and priorities](#) for Scotland’s justice system – agreed by the Justice Board for Scotland.

Each of our programmes brings together the right people to consider how the operation of the system can be improved – and the role that digital services and new technology could play in that improvement. They also consider the sequencing of activity, with a view to avoiding the risk that we invest in automating existing ways of working without asking whether they are as effective as they can be and whether the potential benefits of technology may require the way in which we do business to be reconsidered.

By taking this approach we ensure that digital development is informed by the needs of the judiciary and service users and that, we “innovate before we automate”.



*Our approach to digital is informed by our broader plans and programmes of work*

## **ii. Developed with the right systems & infrastructure**

Having determined that a digital solution will help us achieve our goals we take a careful approach to design, - taking time to ensure that we develop and select the right systems, which will work effectively with our infrastructure – and that of other justice organisations and the public where appropriate.



In common with all central government bodies in Scotland, we will develop our new digital services in accordance with the [Digital First Service Standard](#) – a set of 22 criteria that all digital services developed by Scottish central government bodies must meet. This ensures that our systems are **user-centred, accessible, and innovative**. By following the standard we benefit from lessons learned in previous projects and promote the **uptake** of new services, ensuring they are both **resilient** and **secure**.

In addition to the criteria set by the standard we add the criteria that our systems must be **transparent** and **just**. It is a long established principle of the court system that justice must not just be done, but must be “seen to be done”. Transparency is crucial to a number of aspects of our work, so that both the process and the outcome of that process can be seen to have been properly discharged. This does not mean that business must continue to call in an open court in every case. It means that, as we develop new systems, we must be sure that they support the open administration of justice. In many situations an electronic record, message or process now provides greater transparency than a process carried out in a single court room, requiring personal attendance in order to witness it.

On a practical level ensuring that the changes we take forward are ones that our core IT infrastructure can support effectively is crucial if we are to be able to realise the benefits of innovation. Over the course of the past few years we have significantly improved that core infrastructure, securing **Public Service Network** (PSN) security accreditation by upgrading and modernising the network and core platforms that we use. Section 4.4 explains how we will continue to invest in that infrastructure as it is the, often unseen, bedrock required if we are to build an innovative approach.

## **iii. Delivered with our people and partners**

As we introduce new systems and infrastructure we must never lose sight of the environment in which they will be used and those they will be used by – the judiciary, our staff, the legal profession, other justice organisations and the general public. We need to invest in their desire and readiness to make the most of new processes and systems as much as we invest in those systems themselves. With that in mind there are a number of key areas that we will assess throughout the development and delivery of all our work which involves new digital processes and systems (or the review and updating of existing systems):

- User/customer **engagement and communication** will be embedded in our development process – a system must meet the needs of those it is intended to serve, so we need to listen to those needs;
- **Risks and resourcing** will be kept under constant review – delivering digital programmes is challenging and there is a track record of past difficulties in the public sector. We will take a managed approach to our work, delivering at a pace that balances the need for reform with the resources available and the capacity of our people and others to successfully realise change;
- **Training and support** is a key consideration throughout the development and roll-out of any new digital initiative – we must be sure that all those who will use it can use it to the full – and want to;
- Not all members of the public will be willing or able to use some of the digital services that may be developed – we will bear in mind the need for **assisted digital support** to be built into our work;
- **Evaluation and review** will be an ongoing process as we pilot, introduce and roll out new systems and approaches – so we can improve systems and learn lessons ahead of further reform.



*Working in partnership is key to our success*

# Our Digital Future – Priority areas for 2018-2023

## Priority 1 Criminal court business

### Why is this a priority area for us?

Every year over 100,000 criminal cases are registered in Scotland's courts. With these volumes we need to make sure that our approach to case management is as efficient as possible. Improvements in processes have the potential to realise real efficiencies, for both the courts and those working in them.

Behind each of those numbers are people who may have been the victim of an offence, witnesses caught up in events and often children or vulnerable people who have been affected. As well as doing our business efficiently we have a duty to administer justice – and a desire to do so in a way that supports those people as much as possible. New technology provides us with an opportunity to look at the way criminal business is managed and take steps to improve both its efficiency and effectiveness.



Criminal Courts – a mixture of old and new technology

### Where are we now?

We already make extensive use of our Criminal Operations digital case management system (**COPII**) which allows us to manage case flow, scheduling and the transfer of key information effectively between the police, Crown, courts, prisons and other justice organisations including local authority criminal justice social work departments. COPII provides an accurate national view of all criminal cases and delivers the “back office” support required to run the criminal courts.

The personal attendance of the accused, witnesses, legal representatives the judge and court administrators in a criminal court case remains the operating model for the vast majority of trials – with the appearance of some of these parties often also required for a number of pre-trial procedures. A member of the public from 100 years ago would be able to recognise the format and operation of such a trial. Some of the rationale behind this inertia comes from a desire that justice should be “seen to be done”. As society develops however, it is becoming more clear that there are ways to achieve that outcome that are more effective, efficient and convenient for those involved – using **technology to support a new approach**.

Some inroads have been made into this approach in recent years – for example it is now competent for a variety of court appearances to take place by **video link** from an in-court or remote vulnerable witness site – allowing a witness to give evidence without appearing in the court room and at a location convenient to them. That video link capability is in place across the entire SCTS estate. Video links are also available in the majority of courts which allow a range of procedural hearings to be conducted with accused persons who are in prison on remand or awaiting sentence.

A key part of the work of the SCTS-led [Evidence and Procedure Review](#) has been to consider how the justice system can obtain and present evidence that has the maximum evidential value. This is more likely to be the case with a statement recorded near the time of the event – rather than having to rely on evidence given from memory perhaps months or even years later at trial. In 2017 a High Court Practice Note was issued by the Lord Justice Clerk providing clear guidelines for the process of “**taking evidence by a Commissioner**”, where a witness' examination and cross-examination is recorded in advance of a trial, helping to reduce further the need for vulnerable witnesses to give evidence in person in court.

## What will we do over the period of this Strategy?

### A New Model for Summary Criminal Justice

The case for further reform of the summary justice system is strong. In 2015-16 approximately 52,000 trial diets called in the sheriff court but only 9,000 proceeded with evidence being led. In the same year it was estimated that some 460,000 witnesses were cited to give evidence but only 92,000 were required to do so. The propositions of the **Evidence and Procedure Review** seek to improve the operation of the system, putting stronger case management at its core, based around the following principles:



- Wherever possible all pre-trial procedure should take place as part of a digital case management process, with court hearings only for contested pre-trial pleas or case management issues.
- Intermediate and trial diets should no longer be allocated when a not guilty plea is lodged. Trial diets should only be allocated (and witnesses cited) once the case management process is complete.
- Strong judicial oversight of the case management process should be applied to bring about more agreement of evidence where possible, and to ensure trials focus on what is truly in dispute.
- In those cases in which guilty pleas are tendered, there should be the option, where appropriate, for sentencing to be conducted without the need for the accused to appear in court.

Implementing this model would represent the most significant overhaul in our criminal justice process in living memory – and will take time. One of the key prerequisites will be the development of a cross justice solution for the handling of digital evidence. The Scottish Government is leading the development of this through the **Digital Evidence Sharing Capability project**. The objective of this project is to allow digital sharing of all evidence required to manage criminal cases – evidence would be captured once and made available, as appropriate, to all parties involved in a case. This has the potential to deliver significant efficiencies by:

- removing delay by providing real-time access to evidence whenever and wherever required;
- enabling early case management hearings to take place;
- witnesses only being cited for trials that are likely to proceed;
- avoiding the repeat handling and storage of physical productions; and
- providing accurate audit logs for disclosure purposes i.e. who has seen what and when.

The project is still in the design stage – the timescale on which significant change can be achieved will be heavily dependent on its successful introduction and uptake.

#### Action 1– We will fully support the development and implementation of the Digital Evidence Sharing Capability (DESC) project – as a key prerequisite to reform of the summary justice system

The second significant change that will be required to realise this model is an enhanced **digital criminal case management system**. This will also be a major undertaking as the system will need to be able to facilitate full digital case management. For such a system to be effective it will need to be able to support communication between all parties to a case including the judiciary, prosecution, defence and court administrators. Ideally a system of this nature would provide the ability:

- for participants to appear virtually via video link;
- for all parties to view the same version of the “electronic case file” with real time access to supporting case papers for the hearing in question;
- to simultaneously view and comment on any “digitised evidence” led at the hearing; and
- to store a record of the proceedings as part of the official court record.

In relation to more minor offences where guilt is not disputed such a system may also allow the accused to respond online to the charges made and for financial penalties to be administered by the court without any need for physical appearance.

There should be no doubt that the changes proposed represent a radical shift from the existing system – redefining access to justice based on a digital model as opposed to the current outdated processes. Implementation of this approach will require leadership and collaboration across the justice system. It will also require legislative change and significant investment up-front to create a faster, fairer system that can be delivered at a lower ongoing cost. And it will require a recognition that the costs and savings may not fall equally to any one organisation. The full realisation of this approach will extend beyond the 5-year span of this strategy – we believe it to be the best approach however – which will deliver a modern system meeting public expectation and at a lower public cost in future.

**Action 2 – As the DESC project develops we will enhance our criminal case management system – ensuring it will be ready to support full digital case management and online hearings.**



Improving processes and tackling case “churn” is at the very core of the proposals of the Evidence and Procedure Review. As it will take time to develop and introduce the proposed new model a number of other actions will be taken forward in parallel. A range of “**interim measures**” will be piloted over the coming year to identify reforms to the summary justice system capable of delivering improvement, which will be developed and implemented as part of our work to create a new “system model”. These pilots may further inform our digital agenda, but may also lead to practical improvements that can be introduced more quickly.

We will also ensure that our core infrastructure remains resilient, flexible and up to date – in order that it can accommodate new developments. Further information on our core infrastructure can be found at section 4.4. It is clear at this point that we will increasingly need to be able to support remote communications to realise the benefits of digital case management and hearings – and that effective video links will play a key part in that development.

**Action 3 – We will complete the roll-out of high quality video links across our estate to allow the efficient handling of procedural business between courts, prisons and, in due course, police custody units.**

## A new approach to taking evidence from child and vulnerable witnesses

Victims and witnesses often find themselves involved in the court system through no action or fault of their own – and the role they play is crucial. Significant improvements in the service provided have been achieved over the past few years, including the introduction of service standards agreed by all major justice organisations and the extension of access to “**special measures**” for witnesses in a broader range of circumstances – including the option of giving evidence via video link. The work led by the Evidence and Procedure Review noted that the experience of giving evidence in court can be particularly distressing for child and vulnerable witnesses. Our vision for the future is that every child and vulnerable witness should be supported to give their evidence:

- as early as possible in the proceedings;
- in the course of one forensic interview, where appropriate; and
- in an environment away from the court.

That approach minimises the likelihood of subjecting the witness to further harm or trauma and allows them to give their best evidence as early as possible, whilst recognising the need not to compromise the fairness of the trial or the rights of the accused. This goal is recognised by the Scottish Government who have announced their intention to introduce appropriate changes to legislation to support the **greater use of pre-recorded evidence** in the criminal courts, eliminating the need for children in particular to have to attend court. Technology has a significant role to play in realising the success of this approach.

A suite of evidence taking facilities will be opened in the state-of-the-art Glasgow Tribunals centre, alongside a supporting control room and editing suite. These rooms will be multi-functional, supporting the work of both the courts and tribunals. Three vulnerable witness rooms with special furnishings will also be provided. Young people have been involved in the design of these facilities, with the aim of minimising the stress and trauma of giving evidence - using multiple discreet cameras and mirrored glass to create a more reassuring environment.



**Hearing Room plans for the new video evidence suite in Glasgow**

We will also refurbish existing facilities in Edinburgh and create new permanent facilities in Aberdeen and Inverness as an integral part of the new Justice Centre that is under construction.

These dedicated facilities, together with the impact of the Lord Justice Clerk's [Practice Note](#), will allow evidence to be taken on commission in a greater proportion of appropriate cases – making use of technology to improve both the quality of evidence captured and the experience for those required to give it.

**Action 4 – We will create new purpose built facilities for the taking of Evidence by Commissioner, making best use of technology.**

**Action 5 – We will work with the Scottish Government to develop and implement the provisions of the Vulnerable Witnesses (Criminal Evidence) (Scotland) Bill, to improve the process of taking evidence from child and other vulnerable witnesses – using technology to reduce appearances in court.**

## Priority 2 Civil court and tribunal business

### Why is this a priority area for us?

Our systems of civil and administrative justice exist to allow disputes to be addressed, rights asserted and specific actions ordered where appropriate. Around 80,000 civil cases were registered in 2017-18. Those turning to the courts and tribunals to seek help in resolving disputes want them to be resolved fairly, quickly and in a cost-effective way. There can be no doubt that the traditional system of civil justice in Scotland delivered fairness – over the past few years a programme of significant change has commenced – intended to improve both the speed and efficiency of that system, whilst maintaining the integrity and independence of which it can be proud. New technology will play a significant role in the success of that programme.



**Scotland's Civil Courts – moving towards digital case management**

### Where are we now?

Considerable reform has already taken place across Scotland's civil justice system, with the recommendations of the – [Civil Courts Review](#) leading to the passage of [Courts Reform \(Scotland\) Act 2014](#) – which also paved the way for the successful **merger of court and devolved tribunals'** administration. These reforms created the first new judicial office in Scotland for over a century (the Summary Sheriff) and established both the Sheriff Appeal Court and the national Personal Injury Court.

Coupled with these structural changes the most significant review and reform of the rules governing civil court business in over a century is currently under way. The rules rewrite has led to the creation of the new **Simple Procedure** for lower level claims, which have been developed with the use of online transactions in mind. The process of reviewing and updating court rules across the civil sphere will continue, under the auspices of the [Scottish Civil Justice Council](#) – ensuring that future processes are designed to make best use of technology, as opposed to automating the current system. As the rules are rewritten they will support a move towards more active judicial case management.

Ensuring that we have the bedrock of a sound case management platform from which to build was essential if we are to realise the benefits of active judicial case management across Scotland's civil courts and tribunals in the future. In 2016 our back office systems were upgraded with the launch of our new **Integrated Case Management System** (ICMS). ICMS currently provides the "back office" support for the processing of civil business in Scotland's 39 Sheriff Courts, the Sheriff Appeal Court and the All-Scotland Personal Injury Court. Since its launch we have continually developed the system to build on its initial functionality – and are now looking to deliver greater levels of integration for broader and more specialist areas of civil business. ICMS provides us with a critical platform for the development of civil business in the future, paving the way for increased use of online services.

### What will we do over the period of this Strategy?

Over the period of this strategy we will see the introduction and growth of online management of procedural steps in both civil and administrative business. This will reduce the need for physical attendance at a court or tribunal at those hearings where it is genuinely necessary. **Online submission** of cases will be introduced, active judicial case management through the ICMS system will become the norm and increasing use will be made of digital evidence presentation for cases that do call in court and in tribunal hearings – making use of the electronic case file developed by the system.

To deliver on these ambitions we have developed the **Civil Online** – a customer-facing portal providing access to the case papers, linking these with the procedural and programming information that already makes up the backbone of ICMS. Civil Online was launched in March 2018, allowing the parties to a Simple Procedure case, or their representatives, to track details of the case online – to check whether the case has been contested and to view the dates of any scheduled hearings in the case. The system has been optimised for use on PCs, tablets and phones.

Civil Online will be extended from 2019 onwards – marking the beginning of cases being fully documented in a **digital case file**, with the ability to submit a case electronically. Those using Civil Online will be able to complete an online claim form, submit all supporting documents and pay their fees online. Court staff will be able to use this form to effect service on the respondent(s) and be able to account for fees paid online. Sheriffs will be able to view the electronic case file that will enable them to make decisions in both chambers and the court room. Over time a greater proportion of procedural steps will be capable of being carried out without the need for attendance in court, with the system notifying parties and supporting online management of the case. “Virtual hearings” where parties “appear” by audio or video conference will minimise the need for appearance in person.

In conjunction with the Scottish Civil Justice Council we will set out a timescale for the extension of Civil Online and digital case files across all other types of civil action including appeals, commercial and family including divorce and child protection actions.

**Action 6 – We will continue to invest in the development of the ICMS system, introducing online case submission and management – commencing with Simple Procedure cases ahead of a phased roll-out across the full range of civil court business in the sheriff court.**

The ICMS system has been designed specifically with reuse in mind. As a **case management platform** it provides a number of core business functions that need to be carried out in order to manage most court and tribunal processes effectively – including:

- High quality document management allowing papers to be collated into an “electronic case file”;
- Calendar, caseload & scheduling tools for allocating and communicating hearing dates & venues;
- Case management tools, allowing procedural decisions to be taken, recorded & communicated;
- Data analysis and the production of management information reports; and
- The ability to process fees and caveats where required.

Once the roll-out of Civil Online across Sheriff Court business has been completed we will review the potential of the system to act as our core case management platform. Provided that review confirms this approach we intend to use the platform provided by ICMS to migrate the broad range of case management systems we currently operate across courts and tribunals – creating a modern, streamlined approach to case management. This process will be iterative – **learning lessons** from one migration to the next. Its pace will be influenced by the availability of resources to manage and introduce new systems effectively – something which requires **training and communication** in addition to system development and testing. We will prioritise this process of migration – ensuring that those systems that will benefit most take priority – starting with the Court of Session and moving to a range of devolved tribunal jurisdictions and to the Office of Public Guardian.

**Action 7 – We will use the platform provided by ICMS to enhance our digital case management capabilities in the Court of Session, followed by the devolved tribunals and OPG on a phased basis – supporting the further roll-out of online case submission and active judicial case management.**

In developing our systems and infrastructure we need to be conscious of the fact that Scotland’s **devolved tribunals** have particular ways of working, which can be supported through effective use of technology. Tribunals and their panel members often work remotely – their judiciary are principally part-time and the operating practices of each tribunal vary in order to provide the greatest level of accessibility and support to those who use them. Bringing the administration of devolved tribunals into the SCTS has created the opportunity to develop more effective, secure and innovative resources and systems to support the delivery of administrative justice. We have already developed an innovative, child-friendly website for the [Additional Support Needs jurisdiction](#) of the Health and Education Chamber of the First-tier Tribunal for Scotland – and are piloting a new approach to the secure provision of case papers for a number of tribunal members across Scotland.

**Action 8 – We will use technology to enhance and support the work of Scotland’s devolved tribunals, recognising the need to develop approaches that support the tribunal judiciary as they deliver justice across a wide range of locations and operating models.**

## Priority 3 Online services and information

### Why is this a priority area for us?

The majority of Scots do not find themselves having to deal with courts or tribunals regularly – however, when they do, it may be at a significant or stressful point in their lives. That being the case it is important that they are able to access the information and advice they are looking for quickly and conveniently. The increase in both internet usage and means of accessing the web has made getting to advice and information easier than ever – it is incumbent on us to ensure that, when people reach that information, it meets their needs in the most effective way.

Whilst contact with the system may be an infrequent experience for most that does not mean that our customers will expect routine transactions to be inconvenient – they will expect courts and tribunals to be able to deal with a range of transactions online. It is in their interests, and ours, that we should be able to do so.



*Online payment of fees and fines offers convenience to the user and efficiency and security to SCTS*

### Where are we now?

The [SCTS website](#) contains a range of static and dynamic advice and information that is accessed frequently by both professional court users and members of the public. Traditional information such as static pages on types of procedure and advice on what to do in particular circumstances is complemented by more modern content such as [video guides](#) on what to expect in court if you have been cited as a potential juror. In addition to the core SCTS website we manage around 20 other websites providing information on a range of tribunals and the work of the [Office of the Public Guardian](#). We also provide advice and information that is hosted on [mygov.scot](#), which acts as a hub for information on public services in Scotland.



*Jurors can view a video explaining what to expect before attending court*

A number of the more simple transactions that customers wish to process with us can be carried out online. For example over 110,000 [fines payments](#) are made per year by automated means (online or via our automated telephone service) reducing significantly the number of people who need to attend public counters at court to pay. It is also possible to apply for a [Power of Attorney online](#) – last year some 35,000 submissions for the registration of a Power of Attorney were made online, accounting for 55% of initial submissions made. We also provide an online channel for [cited jurors](#) to acknowledge the receipt of their citation, check the information and advice we provide on jury trials, and download forms.

### What will we do over the period of this Strategy?

Priorities 1 and 2 in this strategy have already set out our ambitions in relation to increasing the role played by technology in case management and the potential for a far greater proportion of procedural court business to be managed using technology – supported by virtual hearings in the longer term. In early 2018 we launched a new [criminal online portal](#) – allowing over 12,000 unique users from a range of justice and third sector organisations to access specific case information which they have a legitimate need to view in order to support case management or provide services and support to victims, witnesses or the accused.

The appetite for a service of this nature underscores the importance of providing case information in a format that can be accessed digitally. Moving from the ability to access such information to a position where more of the administration of cases can be carried out online has significant potential benefits for both SCTS and those using its services.

Across the broader range of services administered by SCTS we will continue to review those that are capable of supporting **online transactions** with a view to introducing these. In particular, we believe that the payment of fees and fines is a core transaction that should move towards online processing as fully as possible – as this offers efficiency and security benefits for both customers and the organisation.

The introduction of our Integrated Case Management System will increasingly allow fees to be paid as an integral part of the application process. In relation to fines some legislative constraints currently exist which preclude certain road traffic offences from online payment – we are working with the UK and Scottish Governments in order to remove those constraints.

**Action 9 – We will continue to increase the range of transactional services that we make available online, introducing the ability to pay court fees via the ICMS system and extending the ability to pay fines online to all fine types, removing the restriction on online payment in cases where a driver's licence requires endorsement.**

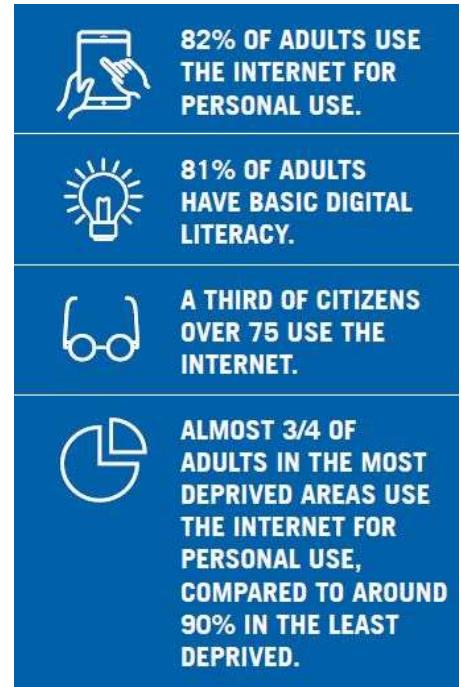
Whilst we currently offer a range of advice and information to **jurors** online, there is scope to improve the service so that communication, attendance and the payment of expenses are co-ordinated through an online hub – providing convenience to jurors, more accurate information for court administrators and increased speed and security in the payment of expenses.

**Action 10 – We will develop a jurors' hub – creating a one stop shop for jurors to access online – providing information on their role, attendance and supporting claims for expenses.**

As an organisation our span of responsibility has grown over the past 5 years, through changes in policy and the merger of the administration of Scotland's courts and devolved tribunals to create the SCTS. Whilst we continually update the content published on our **websites** to ensure it remains relevant and up to date the organisation has inherited a range of different sites, many of which were developed by other organisations. There are a variety of underlying technologies and hosting partners involved in the current development and maintenance of these sites.

Consolidation of our "**web estate**" has the potential to improve consistency, ensure that high security and design standards are met and to provide value for money as we develop and maintain our online advice, information and services over the coming years.

As we consolidate the maintenance and hosting of the sites we have the opportunity to redesign those sites where appropriate – providing more **intuitive advice and information** services that will allow users to quickly find the right information and seek a speedier resolution of their dispute. We have already launched several new websites for devolved tribunal jurisdictions – and plan to pilot our new approach in the development of the Mental Health and Social Security Chamber websites which will be developed towards the end of 2018.



*Current Internet use in Scotland (source – Scottish Government Digital Strategy)*

**Action 11 – We will consolidate our web presence, reviewing and updating sites on a prioritised basis – including a full upgrade of the core SCTS website to ensure it provides high-quality access to information, advice and services.**

## Priority 4 Core infrastructure

### Why is this a priority area for us?

In the past the majority of our business has been delivered through hearings conducted in court and tribunal buildings – which provide effective, secure and accessible venues in which justice can be administered. We continue to use that physical infrastructure to good effect, but if we are to increase the digital delivery of services we must ensure that our core digital infrastructure is also effective, secure and accessible.

In addition to paving the way for services to be delivered in more effective ways our core infrastructure forms a key part of the backbone which keeps SCTS running every day. As the judiciary and staff of the SCTS work to improve the administration of justice we must ensure they have the tools to do so – supported by a flexible, resilient infrastructure through which they can transact, communicate and administer the business.

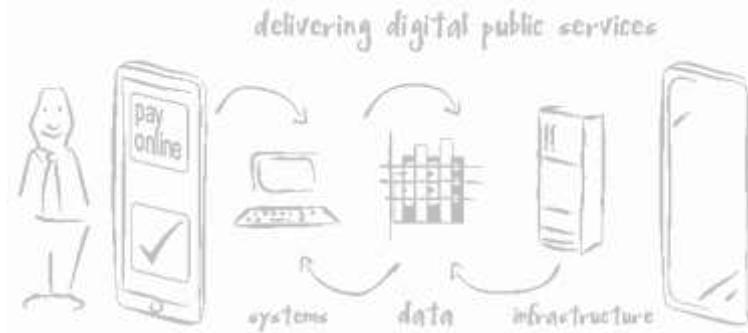
### Where are we now?

Over the past 5 years we have invested significantly in addressing long-standing “technical debts” – upgrading out-of-date infrastructure which, whilst still functional, did not provide a firm foundation for a step change in digital delivery of services. Some of the key activities completed include:

- A complete upgrade of our **local and wide area networks** – ensuring that they are fit for the future;
- A consolidation of our **data centres**, and upgrade of all key infrastructure components, leading to improvements in efficiency and resilience;
- An ongoing “**courtroom technology refresh**” programme – ensuring that the hardware used in courts across Scotland is up to date and that those using it are confident in doing so;
- Securing and retaining **Public Service Network** accreditation – demonstrating that our infrastructure and associated policies and processes meet rigorous, independently set standards in relation to security and data handling, which are regularly reviewed.

Whilst much of this work has taken place behind the scenes it has brought a number benefits – both to those working in SCTS and those using its services. Our core network is fast, stable and resilient. We have been able to build on it – providing **Wi-Fi access** to the judiciary, staff and professional court users – many of whom spend a considerable amount of time in our buildings. The combination of Wi-Fi and the new criminal online portal provides near real-time access to case information for those who require it (e.g. social workers or the police who may need to quickly know the outcome of a case).

The need to **balance accessibility and flexibility with resilience** is an ever present tension in this area – as we seek to capitalise on the benefits an enhanced infrastructure can bring without introducing new risks. In order to support remote working we have established a secure **Virtual Private Network** (VPN) allowing the judiciary and staff to remotely access our network from SCTS devices – to work securely “on the system” regardless of their location.



*Maintaining a modern infrastructure is fundamental to providing digital services that the public can trust*

Whilst these developments are significant, further investment and reform will be required if we are to deliver the priorities set out in the preceding sections. We have identified several key actions in the early period of this strategy. Once delivered we will continue to review the suitability, capacity and resilience of our infrastructure – to ensure it can support our ambitions – introducing further changes if required – and as resources allow.

## What will we do over the period of this Strategy?

We operate from a wide range of locations across the country and have inherited both court and tribunal functions and locations from other public bodies over the past decade. As a consequence of this we find ourselves with a complex and ageing suite of telephony systems and suppliers, which are expensive and difficult to support. These legacy systems prevent us from taking advantage of new features, such as video calls and instant messaging between PC users.

The importance of a **Unified Communications Strategy**, providing a single platform has been recognised by the SCTS Board. Procurement of a main supplier to develop the platform has been completed and implementation will progress throughout 2018-19. This will allow us to work more flexibly – introducing a range of tools and paving the way for the provision of more effective mobile working options. Allied to this we will explore how best to communicate securely with members of the judiciary who do not regularly use an SCTS device, including tribunal members and Justices of the Peace.

We will also upgrade our **core operating system** to Windows 10, allowing the organisation to utilise new user features which are included as standard, as well as support tools which will allow the IT function to implement process automation, reducing the need for 'hands-on' support. This will also allow us to deploy lighter, faster devices in future – many of which will only be available on the new system.

### Action 12 – We will continue to develop and upgrade our core infrastructure – rolling out the latest operating system and implementing a new unified communications platform to further improve both the functionality and resilience of our network and systems.

If the facilities in our courts and tribunals are to keep pace with our ambitions for change we must ensure our hardware is capable of supporting new systems and ways of working. Our ongoing programme of **courtroom technology upgrades** will ensure that we have the resources in place to succeed. As the upgrades continue we aim to roll-out hardware that will support digital evidence presentation, the ability to hear evidence and conduct hearings "virtually" and the capacity to record a greater proportion of business (through audio and/or video) providing a record that can be referred to should it be required in the future. We will upgrade our facilities based on priorities agreed with the judiciary and staff, continually ensuring that technical capability is informed by operational need – and that those using the systems are provided with **training and support** to get the most out of them.

### Action 13 – We will continue to invest in the hardware provided to the judiciary and staff, through a rolling programme of upgrades – allowing us to make the most of new developments including digital evidence presentation, virtual hearings and recording of all relevant business.

The growth of the internet has brought greater speed, efficiency and access to many of the services we provide to our users, the judiciary and staff. These technologies can transform the way we do business, communicate and provide key services. However, our increasing use of (and dependence on) such services poses new risks.

As our use of digital increases we have a duty to ensure that information is protected, systems are secure and that, should anything go wrong, we are able to quickly and effectively respond and recover – learning lessons from any incident. We take our duties in relation to **cyber resilience** very seriously and will continue to ensure that security and resilience is central to our approach.



*The threat of cyber-attack is significant – and one that we must be prepared for*

### Action 14 – We will embed cyber resilience into our approach so that we are prepared, secure and able to recover from incidents that take place. We will secure "Cyber Essentials Plus" accreditation and maintain membership of the Cyber-security Information Sharing Partnership.

## Realising our priorities – how this strategy will be delivered

This strategy contains an ambitious list of actions brigaded under four key priority areas. By taking these actions forward SCTS can demonstrate delivery of the outcomes set out under strategic priority 6 (Digital Innovation) of its corporate plan, alongside the delivery of a number of other significant outcomes that will improve our services and the support provided to our staff.

Successful delivery will require us to have:

- the right **governance** – to oversee and deliver our priorities;
- the right **culture** – to create an environment in which we can develop and succeed; and
- the right **skills** – to be able to develop, deliver and continually innovate the services of the future.

### Governance

Overall responsibility for delivery of this strategy rests with the SCTS Board. Specific actions outlined in the strategy will be prioritised and delivered over the period of the strategy. Implementation of these will be led by SCTS staff under the authority of the Chief Executive.

A structured approach is taken to managing major change projects in the SCTS, based on best practice. Significant change projects will be categorised as “corporate projects” and will be required to establish sound, costed plans before work commences. A robust process of project reporting and monitoring is used to ensure both progress and expenditure are properly controlled and exceptions highlighted and managed. Major projects report to both the SCTS Board and the relevant programme of which they are a part, allowing the organisation to maintain effective oversight of the key actions set out in this strategy and to keep under review whether we are on track to deliver them.

The Strategy will need to be flexible as business priorities and other factors can change our focus. The SCTS Executive Team will periodically review whether the activities set out remain relevant, are properly prioritised and achievable. It will also ensure that our approach remains aligned with that of other justice bodies – supporting the [vision and priorities](#) for the justice system as a whole.

### Culture

Successful implementation of this strategy will require it to be owned and delivered across SCTS. Our leaders, managers and staff all have a role to play in supporting the actions proposed. Whilst the IT function will play a key role in a number of the technical and infrastructure developments, the strategy is much broader than a plan for the work of the IT Business Unit – and will create new ways of working across traditional teams and units. New systems and ways of working facilitated by technology provide the opportunity to **change the way in which we work across the organisation** – where that is the case we will take a flexible approach to manage both the opportunities and challenges that arise.

We need to **support our people** as digital innovation changes the way we work, where we work, how we organise our work, the tools we use and how we communicate. A rapid pace of change can be the norm when working with digital technology – and while this allows us to rationalise and innovate it creates the risk that we leave people behind.

A key step in avoiding that risk will be to ensure that the changes we make **demonstrably improve our systems and processes** – both for those using our services and those administering them. As we deliver on this strategy we need to find ways for people to use more of the digital skills they have developed in their daily lives, as approaches that make use of these will be embraced and effective.



**New technology will only be successful if our people are engaged in its development and skilled in its use**

## Skills

Our [People Strategy](#) identified that we will only make a success of new systems and technology if our people have the skills to exploit them:

*The need for increased digital literacy generally, coupled with specialist service delivery and support within corporate functions, must inform our recruitment and development agendas over the coming years. Improvements to succession planning and skills matching regimes will be required to ensure we can move at the pace of the change. (p10)*

As the way in which we learn, develop and improve (both as individuals and as an organisation) evolves to exploit the use of technology our approach must be one that is supportive. Our focus must be on **learning and development** – to ensure that our people understand and are eager to get the most out of new approaches – not just on training to ensure people can use new systems.

At the organisational level we need to ensure our medium and long term approach is one that creates a supply of people who are willing to lead and innovate in this new environment – and that our approach to each and every change is one that is carefully planned, well-executed and brings benefits for all those involved. To achieve these goals we need to ensure that we are:

- **Attracting people who want to work in digital.** We want SCTS to be an employer where staff (existing or new) can start and develop a digital career. We need to highlight the unique opportunities available over the coming years in order to develop and attract people who can help us to realise the ambitions set out in this strategy – and be both advocates and leaders of change.
- **Creating opportunities for people across the organisation to lead and be involved in digital initiatives.** We need to think carefully about how we develop and create a digital culture. That means giving people permission to experiment, work across teams and supporting them to take risks. We need to create space for experimentation and learn from the approaches we use to developing new systems – such as agile.
- Giving people the time to **learn and adapt to new systems and ways of working** – many good systems have failed in organisations because the organisation (and its people) have not been ready for them. We must invest at least as much time, effort and expertise into ensuring that the judiciary and our staff:
  - Understand the need for change;
  - Are allowed to become familiar with new systems before they are launched; and
  - Have the ability to influence the development of new systems and to suggest improvements once they are in place.



Collaboration across the organisation will be necessary to ensure we develop the skills required, as we embark on a major programme of change which has the potential to significantly improve the administration of justice over the coming years.