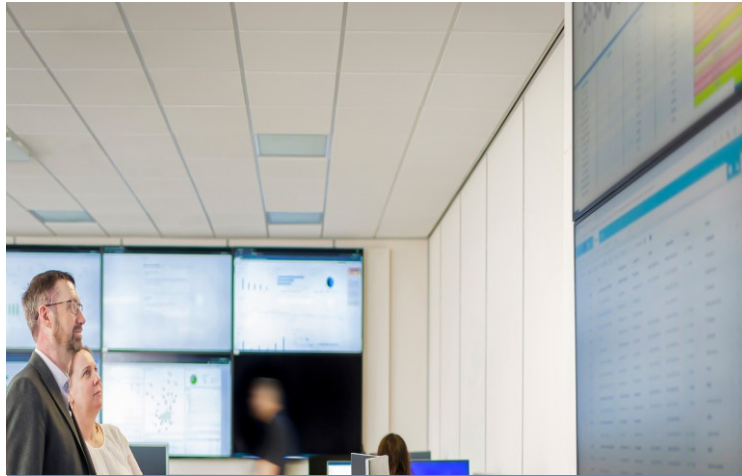


CORPORATE PLAN



2026-29



Corporate Plan 2026-29

Laid before the Scottish Parliament by the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service in
pursuance of section 66(4)(a) of the Judiciary and Courts (Scotland) Act 2008

July 2026

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Chairman's foreword

Rt. Hon. Lord Pentland, Lord President

SCTS Board Chairman



This Corporate Plan sets out the strategic priorities and objectives of the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service to 2029.

Over the last three years, SCTS, has delivered significant improvements to the justice system in Scotland, working in collaboration with the judiciary and other justice organisations. Nationally, criminal trial backlogs more than doubled between 2019 and 2022. They have now recovered in numerical terms - although this masks a growing volume of serious business in the High Court. The speed and efficiency of summary criminal business has improved significantly due to the Summary Case Management processes adopted across all Sheriff Courts. Summary cases are resolved more quickly, fewer witnesses are cited and trials only take place when they need to – reducing the trauma experienced by victims and witnesses. Evidence by Commissioner suites have been introduced across Scotland, enabling vulnerable witnesses to have their evidence recorded in advance of trial. Over 1,000 witnesses gave evidence in this way during 2025-26.

While progress is strong, significant challenges remain. We enter this period facing unprecedented pressures in solemn criminal business, particularly in the High Court. Case volumes and complexity have increased, scheduled trial numbers continue to grow, and waiting times are lengthening. This is not a challenge any single organisation can solve on its own. While the High Court will require additional capacity to ensure waiting periods remain within acceptable bounds, work will also continue to maximise efficiency and utilisation of valuable court resources. The ethos of collaborative working will continue as we develop a new approach.

Case volumes in the devolved tribunals also continue to grow. To help manage this expansion, we will continue to enhance our digital capabilities. Building on our experience of reforming civil business, our goal is to develop an end-to-end digital process where parties can submit and view case documents online; track progress; and receive notifications when updates or new materials are available. We will continue to offer different hearing types to meet the needs of those using the service, while ensuring proceedings are open, fair and efficient. We will publish regular reports on tribunal performance to build transparency and public confidence.

At a time when trust in public institutions is under pressure from many directions, maintaining public confidence is crucial - ensuring justice is not only done but seen to be done. Opening up the proceedings of the appellate courts through livestreaming - first in the Court of Session and now in the Criminal Appeal Court - is an important practical expression of that principle. The new service in the Criminal Appeal Court has widened access for complainers, the public and the media. By promoting open justice, clearly explaining processes and outcomes and giving people the ability to see them for themselves, we can build confidence in the system and those who support it. We will continue to focus on this critical area over the coming period.

Public finances are tight. We must therefore be candid about choices, realistic about the pace of change and focused on improvements that deliver the greatest benefits. I am immensely proud of the dedication and professionalism of everyone who serves the courts, tribunals and the Office of the Public Guardian. With their commitment, and the continued support of other justice organisations, I am confident that we can strengthen the administration of justice, enhance openness and trust, and make sustained progress for the people of Scotland over the life of this plan.

Chief executive's introduction

Malcolm Graham

Scotland's justice system exists to serve its people at critical points in their lives. Courts and tribunals are the places where justice is served, rights asserted and decisions on complex matters made. Over the next three years we will continue to modernise how that work is carried out – with a focus on openness, efficiency and compassion.

It is important to be honest about the pressures we face. Public finances will be challenging throughout this planning period. The Scottish Government's fiscal outlook and public service reform agenda point to a period of real constraint. A wide range of successful reforms have already been delivered – we must now look to standardise and simplify our processes across SCTS. We will therefore complete an organisation wide review, to ensure every pound we spend has the greatest possible impact. Savings and productivity gains will be reinvested in the areas under greatest pressure. This work will involve the digitisation of forms and workflows, the automation of some routine activity and the expansion of self-service options – to improve access whilst reducing costs.



Demand for services in the Office of the Public Guardian (OPG) continues to grow, with Power of Attorney applications rising to around 100,000 a year - up 38% in just four years. We will complete the phased rollout of OPG's new case management system, building on the 2025 Power of Attorney (PoA) release and bringing Guardianship, Intervention and Access to Funds processes online. We will then develop an online public register, enabling digital updates to existing PoAs and electronic submission of guardianship documents and accounts. These reforms will reduce delays, strengthen safeguarding and make it easier for families, carers and professionals to choose the correct process and submit accurate applications at the first attempt.

We will take forward work to modernise criminal justice. We will do this by establishing shared standards and ways of working with other justice organisations so information flows effectively and insights drive more effective management of cases. We will make the case for significant transformation of the core systems that support criminal justice – these are in urgent need of renewal. Investment in them has the potential to unlock improved services alongside greater efficiency. It would also support improved data and analytics, which will allow us to provide better information to those using our services alongside system-level intelligence that will inform further improvements.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is already reshaping public services. For SCTS its potential lies in reducing routine workload, improving user experience and enabling better, more data-driven decisions. We will build on the approaches we have taken to date, adopting AI ethically and transparently, guided by recognised frameworks, to support tasks like document handling, search and insight.

Our people are often the face of the justice system, in whom those using the courts, tribunals and OPG place their trust. We will continue to invest in wellbeing, inclusion and trauma-informed practice so they can carry out their critical roles. We will also support them to build the digital, data and leadership skills that will be needed as roles evolve. We will attract and retain a diverse workforce and support managers to lead through change with clarity and care. By providing a healthy, supportive workplace and the tools to succeed, our teams can focus on those who rely on us every day.

This plan is ambitious because Scotland deserves nothing less. It focuses on the choices that will keep justice open, fair and resilient: targets investment where pressure is greatest; and proposes practical changes to maintain and improve the services we provide. Together with the judiciary and other justice organisations, we will deliver these changes in order to fulfil our purpose - supporting justice.

About SCTS

Who we are

The Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service (SCTS) is a non-ministerial office established by the Judiciary and Courts (Scotland) Act 2008. Its statutory function is to provide administrative support to Scotland's courts, devolved tribunals and the Office of the Public Guardian (OPG). SCTS has a presence in many of Scotland's communities where court and tribunal business is conducted daily. In total the estate comprises 70 buildings made up of courts, tribunals, vulnerable witness suites, and offices. We operate from 51 distinct locations across Scotland's six sheriffdoms. Tribunals also make use of additional venues across Scotland for hearings.

In addition to administering Scotland's courts and tribunals SCTS supports the OPG and Accountant of Court (AOC). The OPG provides guidance and undertakes investigations to protect vulnerable people under the terms of the Adults with Incapacity Act 2000. The Public Guardian is also the Accountant of Court. SCTS also provides the staff and administrative support to the:

- Scottish Civil Justice Council - which drafts rules of procedure for the civil courts, and advises the Lord President on the development of the civil justice system; and the
- Scottish Sentencing Council - which is responsible for preparing sentencing guidelines, and for publishing guideline judgments and information about sentences imposed by the courts in Scotland.

Our purpose and values

The purpose of SCTS is **supporting justice**. We fulfil that purpose by providing the people, buildings and services needed to support the judiciary, the courts, devolved tribunals and OPG. Our work focuses on improving access to justice, promoting open justice, reducing delay and cost within the justice system, and reforming our services through technology to improve efficiency and user experience.

Our values

To help us achieve our purpose, we observe three **key values: respect, service and excellence**. These guide our behaviour, decisions and actions.

The objectives set out in this plan are underpinned by our purpose and values. This ensures that everything we do is in pursuit of an open, fair and efficient justice system, providing the best possible service to those who interact with us - and rely on us - on a daily basis.

RESPECT	SERVICE	EXCELLENCE
• Be courteous • Be open and fair • Work as one team	• Deliver a professional service • Learn in all we do • Set an example	• Innovate • Collaborate • Be accountable

Our structure

SCTS Board (April 2026)



Top row (left to right) – Dr. David Caddick, Summary Sheriff Frank Gill, Malcolm Graham, Rt. Hon. Lord Beckett, Dr. Sophie Flemig, Steven Dickson, Sheriff Olga Pasportnikov

Bottom row (left to right) – Rt. Hon. Lady Wise, Sheriff Principal Aisha Anwar, KC, Margaret Craig, Rt. Hon. Lord Pentland (Chair), Anne Scott, Ruth Innes KC, Lynsey Walker

The Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service is an independent, judicially - led, public body, with the composition of the Board set in statute.

Chaired by the Lord President, Scotland's most senior judge, its membership is drawn from those holding judicial office, members with a legal background and independent members from outwith the justice system. You can find out more about each Board member on our website.

The Board sets the strategic direction of SCTS, makes the key decisions and monitors progress to ensure the delivery of strategic objectives. The Board is supported by four committees covering audit and risk; people; remuneration; and estates, health and safety, fire and security.

Each of the committees oversees major activities relevant to its area, providing specialist direction and guidance to ensure effective management at the strategic level.

Our structure

The Executive Team

Day-to-day management responsibility for the staff and operation of SCTS is delegated to the Chief Executive, who is also a member of the Board. The Chief Executive is supported by six executive directors. Together they make up the Executive Team, who are responsible for operational and corporate delivery. The Judicial Office for Scotland is a separate office established within SCTS to provide support to the Lord President in fulfilling his responsibilities as the head of the Scottish Judiciary.



CHIEF EXECUTIVE
Malcolm Graham



CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER
Alice Wallace

Finance & Procurement
Property Service
Information Technology



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TRIBUNALS & OPG
Tim Barraclough

Tribunals operations
OPG operations



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR STRATEGY, CHANGE & DIGITAL (DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE)
Noel Rehfisch

Strategy and planning
Change and Digital
Policy and legislation
Data & Information governance
Corporate governance



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JUDICIAL OFFICE
Riley Power

Judicial Office for Scotland
Scottish Civil Justice Council
Scottish Sentencing Council



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR COURT OPERATIONS
Paul McKinlay

Court operations
National fines

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR PEOPLE & CULTURE
Vacancy

Human Resources
Education & Learning

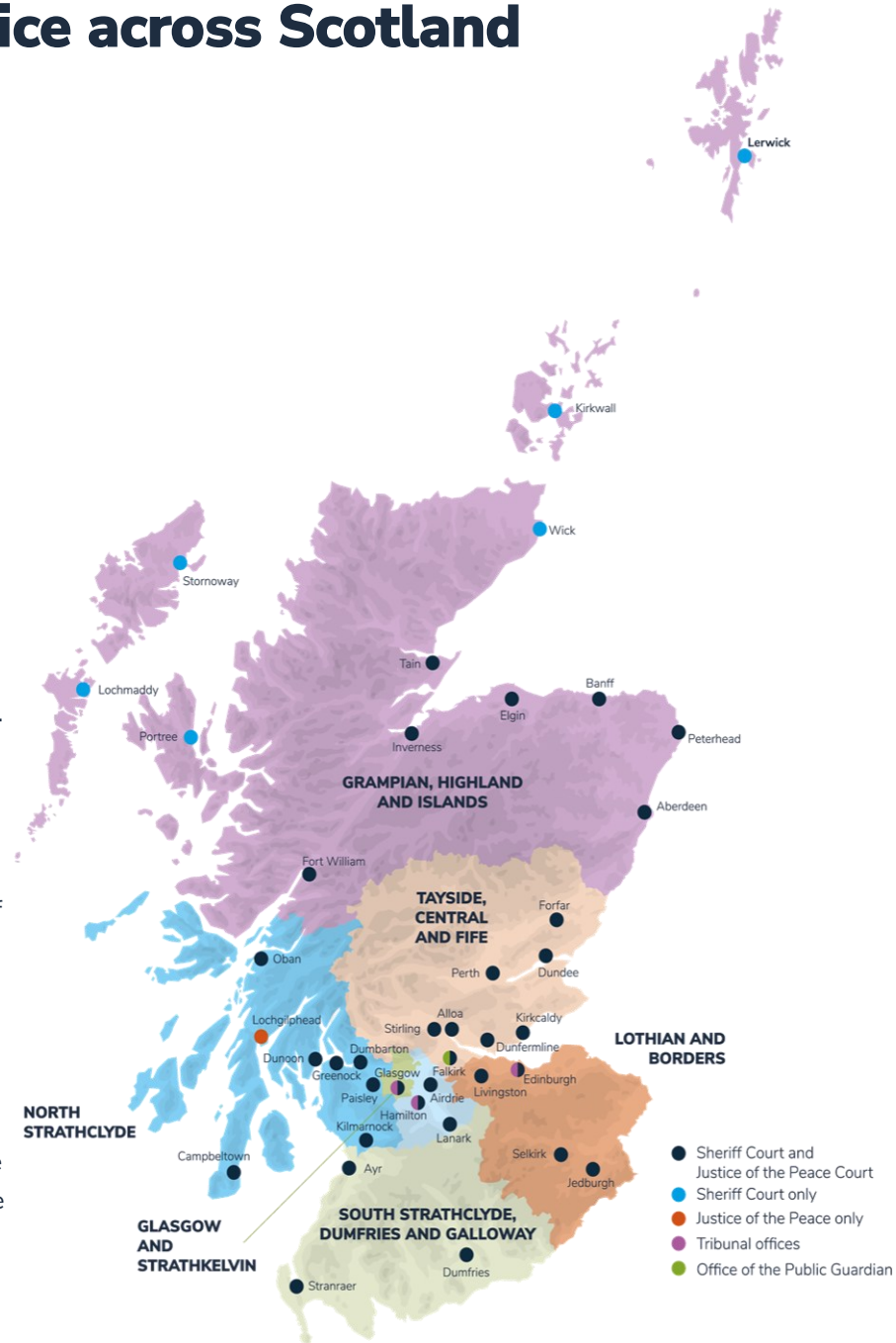
How we support justice across Scotland

The Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service (SCTS) does much more than you might expect. Every day, we support thousands of people across Scotland in different ways. This could mean:

- Attending court or a tribunal
- Serving as a juror
- Paying a fee or fine
- Getting help to manage the affairs of someone who can't do so themselves
- Handling the estate of a loved one who has passed away

Each year, we deal with over 250,000 cases and applications. Behind every one is a person who needs support - whether to protect their rights, resolve a problem, or get help during a difficult time. It is this work – which takes place every day across Scotland – that consumes most of the time, energy and skill of our staff. We take pride in working as one team and providing high levels of service to all those who use the courts, tribunals and the Office of the Public Guardian. Whilst independent, we work collaboratively with the Scottish Government, the Justice Board for Scotland, and a broad range of justice and third sector agencies - taking a system wide perspective to our work.

Whilst delivering core services is our priority, we are always looking for new and better ways to serve the public - through innovation, development and the promotion of accessibility and open justice.



c.1,350

High Court solemn cases registered - up 44% in two years.

c.95,000

Civil cases registered annually

c.2,000

Appeals registered annually

c.100,000

Powers of attorney received annually - up 38% in four years

c.29,000

Commissary procedures registered - a 22% increase over the past 5 years

c.22,000

Tribunal cases registered - a 130% increase over the past 5 years

£237.9m

To fund activities once income and depreciation are taken into account - over 85% invested in front line services and digital infrastructure

2,000 staff

Award winning carers and diversity policies

£2.1m

Invested in energy efficient initiatives - with gas and electricity usage down by 18% and overall emissions reduced by 10% over the past 2 years.

c.700,000

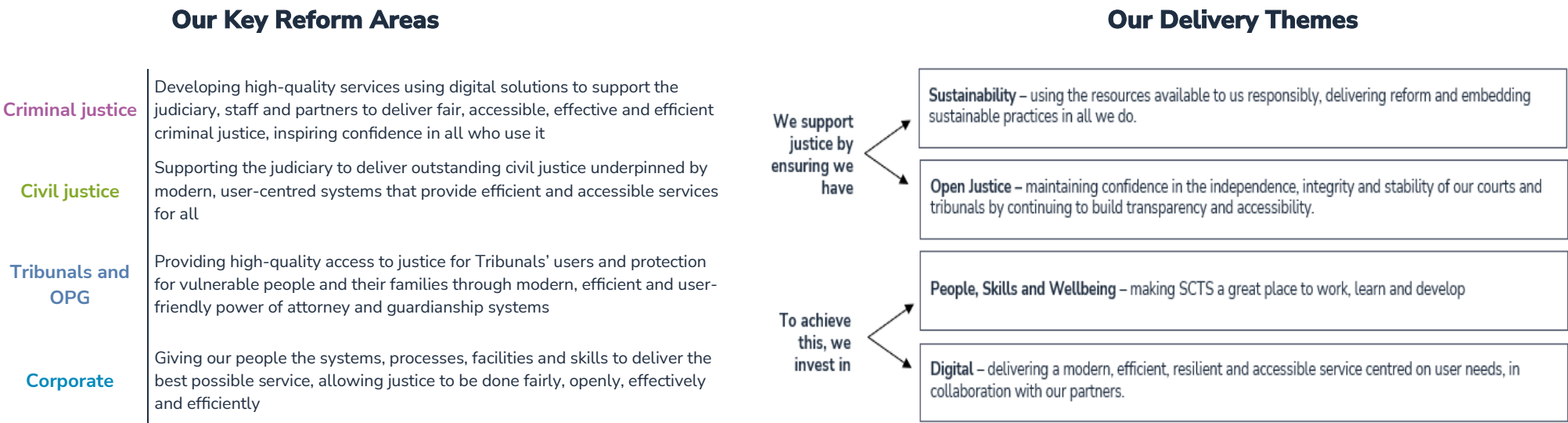
Users viewed cases being livestreamed between May 2023 and December 2025 (approx 100 days of livestreamed hearings).

Our strategy

Over the coming three years, Scotland’s public sector faces a rapidly evolving landscape shaped by fiscal constraint, digital transformation, and changes in the way we work . The ability to make use of new technology - including artificial intelligence, cloud and data-driven tools - will grow. Supporting people to adapt in this environment will be crucial. The combination of both opportunity and risk is clear. Rising global risks ranging from climate impacts to cybersecurity and the ethical use of data will need to be carefully managed, with efficiencies delivered in parallel.

In view of these challenges we need to be clear on both the areas we will focus and the things we want to achieve. This plan breaks our work into:

- **Four key reform areas** - the main areas of our business that we must sustain and improve.
- **Four key delivery themes** - things we want to focus on and develop as we take forward the objectives proposed in this plan.



The next section of this plan describes our operating environment - pages 11-13 consider the future trends, challenges and opportunities we will face, with reference to our delivery themes. Pages 14-18 give an overview of both the progress we have made and the work we have planned in relation to our key reform areas.

Pages 19-22 set out the strategic objectives to which SCTS is committed over the course of this planning period.

Our operating environment

Supporting justice 2026-29 and beyond

As we move into a new planning period, it is important to assess the key trends in society that may affect Scotland's courts, devolved tribunals and the Office of the Public Guardian during that period - and our approach to them. We can do this with reference to our four key delivery themes.

Sustainability

As an organisation delivering critical justice services, sustainability is crucial. We need to be financially sustainable so we can continue to deliver our essential services. We need to be environmentally sustainable in support of wider net-zero goals. We also need to be operationally sustainable by continually improving our efficiency whilst improving the service we provide.

Financial Pressures - The Scottish Government's [Medium Term Financial Strategy](#) (MTFS) signals a medium-term funding gap across the entire Scottish public sector. It notes that Scotland will receive only a 0.8% uplift in real terms budget for each of the next 4 years - which will not meet service growth pressures. This leads to a gap in resource funding (based against current projections) of £2.6 billion by 2029-30. Similar pressures exist in relation to capital funding.

The Scottish Government's [Public Service Reform Strategy](#), published in June 2025, sets a target of reducing public sector corporate costs by £1 billion, which represents around 20% of these costs. In addition the [Fiscal Sustainability Delivery Plan](#) sets a public sector workforce reduction target of 0.5% on average over the next 5 years - "whilst protecting frontline services".

For SCTS it would appear that budget pressure will be significant throughout the planning period. This will require us to make difficult choices about what we focus on, redesign services end-to-end, work more closely with justice partners and demonstrate measurable productivity improvements to protect frontline delivery. We have set ambitious objectives for the coming 3 years in this plan - the extent to which we will be able to achieve them will be, to a degree, dictated by the funding we have available.

Service pressures - higher levels of serious criminal case registrations have continued to accelerate. SCTS is receiving, on average, 112 High Court indictments each month in 2025-26 compared to 92 per month in the prior financial year - an increase of 22% in a single year..

Our recently published [criminal case modelling](#) indicates that solemn (cases before a jury) business levels will grow further in the coming years, acutely so in the High Court. This growth is driven by a number of factors, including increased reporting levels and changes to the law of corroboration, which are likely to increase the number of prosecutions for serious sexual offences in particular. The modelling demonstrates that, at current capacity levels, High Court backlogs will continue to grow, to potentially very serious levels. This indicates

that an increased level of High Court trial court capacity will be required in the longer term to avoid substantial impact on scheduled trials and associated waiting periods.

Continued growth in the business of the **devolved tribunals and the Office of the Public Guardian (OPG)** is also placing significant pressures on SCTS. The growth in business is welcome, as it represents successful realisation of the government's strategy to make increased use of specialised jurisdictions and to ensure that people across Scotland are planning for the future and are well-protected by the state.

OPG's caseloads have soared, with Power of Attorney applications up by 38% in the past four years, to around 100,000. Business levels are expected to keep growing. Significant case growth is also apparent across almost all devolved tribunal jurisdictions – social security in particular. New jurisdictions are to be added in the coming years. Unlike in the civil courts, fees are not charged in tribunals. This encourages cases to be registered but adds considerably to SCTS' administrative costs (and associated judicial members' fees) without any associated revenue stream to offset a proportion of those costs.

Our operating environment

Supporting justice 2026-29 and beyond

Sustainability (cont.)

Climate change - over the medium term, Scotland is likely to face increased disruption due to the impacts of climate change. The **Scottish National Adaptation Plan 2024–2029** expects leadership and collaboration across public services, with annual reporting under the [Public Bodies Climate Change Duties](#). As we deliver on our core function of supporting justice, we must also play our part to mitigate climate change wherever we can.

In 2025, SCTS achieved *Carbon Reduce* certification - an internationally recognised programme for measuring and managing carbon emissions. This marks our second consecutive year of certification, allowing us to track our progress. This includes:

- emissions from gas and electricity reducing by 18%;
- overall reported emissions down by 10%; and
- decreasing paper consumption.

As part of our ongoing commitment to enhancing sustainability across our estate, we continue to invest in our infrastructure and promote smarter ways of working. The potential for energy efficiency or emissions reduction is considered as part of the initial development approach of relevant programmes and projects.

Open Justice

Justice being dispensed in public is one of the most fundamental principles of a strong democracy. It reinforces the independence, integrity and stability of our courts and tribunals, recognising that they play a crucial role in supporting an effective society.

At a time of increasing challenge to democratic institutions, it is critical that public and media trust in the integrity of the courts and tribunals is maintained. Being open and transparent in all aspects of our work serves to protect and promote judicial independence. By promoting open justice, clearly explaining processes and outcomes and giving people the ability to see them, we can maintain confidence in the system and those who support it.

The need for such an approach has never been more pressing. The Scottish Government's Future Trends for Scotland [report](#) identifies key trends that are likely to be important to Scotland over the coming years. It highlights that:

- mis and disinformation are on the rise with increasing political and social polarisation, and growing challenges to democratic institutions;
- public confidence in government and civic bodies has fallen significantly in recent years;

- there is a shift away from traditional print media towards digital and social platforms, influencing how people access information; and
- widening inequality impacting access to services.

These trends underscore the need for courts and tribunals to remain visible, accessible and trusted. Working with the judiciary SCTS has already supported a range of activities in this area, to provide greater live access to significant cases, supply information in easy to use formats, support the media in their crucial work and ensure that a broad range of high-quality data on the operation of the system is available. Work in this critical area will continue over the coming period.

Our operating environment

Supporting justice 2026-29 and beyond

People, skills and wellbeing

The planning period ahead will be shaped by significant demographic, economic and societal trends - influencing how we attract, develop and support our people.

Developing technology, automation and AI will continue to reshape job roles and skill requirements. Building capability in digital skills, data literacy and emerging technologies will be as continual as it will be important. To remain resilient and adaptable, lifelong learning has become a cornerstone of workforce development - and organisations that provide it will be at an advantage.

Wellbeing challenges are becoming more pronounced across society as a whole. Mental health issues, increased loneliness and greater recognition of neurodiversity call for inclusive practices and robust wellbeing support. Economic pressures, and widening inequality, can also influence access to opportunities and increase stress on individuals and organisations.

These factors underscore the need for a comprehensive approach to workforce planning, that prioritises flexibility, skills development and wellbeing while leveraging technology to enhance productivity and fairness. Our strategy also has diversity and inclusion at its core, ensuring that recruitment, progression and leadership reflect Scotland's changing demographics. By fostering an

inclusive culture and removing barriers for underrepresented groups, we are building a workforce that is resilient, innovative and representative of the society that we serve.

Digital

Over the past five years, justice organisations have made significant strides in digital adoption. However, this transformation remains incomplete - reliance on older case management systems makes it difficult to share data effectively, provide better service and realise efficiencies. Progress in this area will be essential to unlock opportunities and achieve the public service reform ambitions set by the Scottish Government. Effective use of digital approaches can help contain costs while building service quality and resilience.

The increasing integration of **AI, automation and machine learning** across public and private sectors is set to continue. While these technologies can enable significant efficiency gains, they can also introduce complexity and potential disruption, due to the changes required to established processes and job roles. SCTS is already working in this area—our aim is to make changes that will benefit service users and staff alike.

The Scottish Government's *Strategic Framework for a Cyber Resilient Scotland 2025–2030* emphasises that,

while emerging technologies bring opportunity, they also attract new threats. Robust cybersecurity protocols, threat intelligence collaboration (through bodies like the Scottish Cyber Coordination Centre) and continuing investment in both staff awareness and digital infrastructure will be required as new services and processes are developed.

The importance of **ethical and inclusive design** in digital services will grow over the coming period, in line with broader inclusion and equality objectives. As we develop new approaches these must be open, transparent and provide equitable access to justice regardless of geography, background or circumstance. User research and collaboration will be at the heart of our approach.

Our objectives for the coming period signal our commitment to accelerate digital transformation by strengthening cybersecurity, embedding ethical AI, enhancing digital literacy, and transforming core operations. This is an ambitious package - which may need to be limited depending on the investment we can secure - but the proposals have the potential to realise the benefits of efficiency and innovation, whilst safeguarding the integrity and accessibility of the crucial services we provide.

Key reform areas 2026-29

Criminal justice reform

Scotland's criminal courts enter this planning period having addressed significant case backlogs, which developed initially as a consequence of the pandemic - but were exacerbated by continual growth in the level of serious criminal cases being registered in the High Court and sheriff courts. Total case backlogs have reduced significantly (from a high of 43,000 outstanding cases to around 14,000) through a combination of additional court capacity, coupled with innovative new practice introduced through the rollout of the Summary Case management project. This encourages early case resolution, where appropriate, and reduces the number of unnecessary trial diets. The level of scheduled sheriff summary trials now stands at just under 10,000 - over 4,000 lower than the pre-pandemic position.

The position is markedly different in the High Court however, where the level of serious criminal case registrations continue to grow at over 20% a year (as noted on page 11). A range of innovations and developments is needed to manage business and maintain confidence in the system.

Sexual Offences Court

Scotland faces sustained growth in both the volume and complexity of sexual offence cases. The judicially led Review of the Management of Sexual Offences, conducted by Lady Dorrian, concluded that specialism, stronger case management, and greater use of pre-recorded evidence are required to improve outcomes.

The Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Act 2025 legislated for the creation of a national Sexual Offences Court - creating a specialist environment with jurisdiction to try sexual offences on indictment and procedures tailored to support complainants to give their best evidence. Over the period of this plan SCTS will develop and implement the court, marking a major reform to Scotland's criminal

justice system. To achieve this, we will work closely with other justice organisations to establish the most effective approach to programming, resourcing and structure. At all stages, the importance of delivering a trauma-informed environment will be maintained. This will require appropriate training for all those involved in the business of the court. A key feature will be the use of pre-recorded evidence so the most vulnerable witnesses do not have to attend trial. We will use our expanding network of Evidence by Commissioner suites, which provide safe, managed environments for early evidence capture, reducing the risk of re-traumatisation.

Strengthening the capacity and adaptability of courts

Additional trial court capacity has been in place since 2021 to address solemn court (cases before a jury) backlogs that had accrued during the pandemic (6 additional High Courts and 8 Sheriff Solemn courts). Within the High Court, the level of case registrations has continued to accelerate - projected to be 22% higher in 2025-26 than the year before. SCTS has no control over the level of business registered in the criminal courts. Case registrations in the High Court are significantly outstripping the availability of courts - a trend that shows no sign of abating according to the most recently published [modelling](#).

While the High Court will need further capacity to alleviate pressure and ensure waiting periods remain within acceptable bounds, work will also continue to maximise efficiency and utilisation of valuable court resources - including the introduction of the Sexual Offences court.

Within the Sheriff Solemn Courts, the level of case registrations has returned to pre-pandemic levels. However, the level of adjournments averages 26%. The percentage of adjournments attributable to witness absence averages over 60%. The significant churn and delay this causes leads both to inefficiency and inconvenience. Over the course of this period we will work with other justice organisations to understand and address these issues, reduce delays and improve user experience while safeguarding the rights of the accused.

Criminal justice reform

Key reform areas 2026-29

Strengthening public confidence

Access to, and understanding of, criminal court business is essential to ensure the confidence of the public. Over the course of the previous planning period, a number of initiatives have been taken forward successfully to improve transparency of the court system in general. These included:

- Scotland's first **regular criminal court livestream**, covering appeals against conviction and Crown sentence appeals;
- a **Reporters' Guide** and enhanced **media portal** (providing access to indictments) and a central register for contempt of court orders to support timely, accurate reporting of significant cases by the media; and
- The publication of **monthly criminal data workbooks** and **modelling reports** to improve public understanding of court performance, demand and waiting times.

In collaboration with the judiciary, over the course of this planning period, we will build on these successes by seeking to expand the types of cases that can be livestreamed, increase the filming of high profile sentencing statements and publication of wider case materials. We will also explore how we can enable greater access to remote hearings while protecting the rights of parties - promoting open justice and modern ways of working.

Digitising systems to improve outcomes

The Scottish Government and Justice Partners developed [The Digital Strategy for Justice in Scotland](#) in 2014. This detailed a bold ambition across the justice system framed around three objectives:

- allow people and businesses to access the right information at the right time;
- fully digitised justice systems; and
- make data work for us.

Some progress has been made, such as the introduction of the Digital Evidence Sharing Capability - a secure, unified platform to collect, store and share digital evidence across Scotland's justice partners. For SCTS, the most notable achievement has been the introduction of Civil Online - a portal to submit, track and manage civil cases. Progress in the criminal justice system has been partial and slow. The current criminal case management system is in need of significant reform. Integration between systems is low, with continued reliance on paper records and manual processing – leading to duplication of effort and an inability to provide the open, accessible approach that we and our users deserve.

Over this planning period, we will co-develop, approve and deliver a refreshed digital plan with a shared vision for the future of our criminal courts. This will set out the operating model for the criminal court supported by a prioritised, costed investment case. We will work in collaboration with other justice agencies to develop a platform that can, with the necessary protections in place, be used system wide. In taking a coordinated, digital first approach, we can:

- simplify user journeys: particularly for victims and witnesses, through integrated services;
- increase efficiency and throughput: by reducing delays and improving productivity;
- enable data-driven decision-making: which will support better outcomes and facilitate resource allocation; and
- restore public trust: by making justice more transparent, accessible, and responsive.



Criminal justice reform

Click on the icon to view the Criminal reform objectives, 2026-29

Civil justice reform

Key reform areas 2026-29

New Legislation

The Scottish Government publishes an annual Programme for Government, detailing the legislation it will take forward. The Scottish Civil Justice Council prepares draft rules of procedure for the civil courts, and advises the Lord President on the development of the civil justice system in Scotland. SCTS aims to modernise its civil systems to support changes being brought forward - while safeguarding usability, reliability and security. Recognising finite resources, over this planning period we will prioritise reforms delivering the greatest public benefit. These improvements will strengthen Scotland's reputation as a modern, efficient and trusted forum for handling civil disputes - encouraging both high profile and specialist litigation. We will also engage with the new Scottish Government, following the 2026 election, in order to understand their priorities and advise as to their impact on the courts, tribunals and the Office of the Public Guardian.

Meeting the needs of service users

Investment in our civil case management system over recent years has transformed the way in which business is managed and heard. We now have a single system for all civil cases in the Court of Session, Sheriff Court, Sheriff Appeal Court and Scotland's National Personal Injury Court.

For solicitors, it is now possible to electronically track the progress of the vast majority of civil case types across all Sheriff Courts, the Court of Session and the National Personal Injury Court (circa 90% of cases). In addition, solicitors can lodge all documents electronically for simple procedure claims and non-initiating documents (any document lodged after a case has commenced).

Work will continue to allow for the online submission of initiating documents (the formal document required to commence a civil case) across all courts. It is anticipated this project will conclude early in the new planning period.

Over the period of this plan we will prioritise user-centred design and continuous improvement as we complete our journey towards a fully end-to-end digital civil justice system. We will expand Civil Online to cover all civil case types, enabling seamless electronic submission and management for solicitors and self-represented parties. Accessibility will remain central, with inclusive language, assistive technology compatibility, and mobile-friendly interfaces. Regular user testing with diverse groups will ensure the system is intuitive and straightforward. Enhanced training and support will build confidence for users of all abilities - creating a system that works for everyone.

Digitising and reforming **commissary business** (estate administration and confirmation) is a key goal for SCTS over this planning period - essential to modernising Scotland's civil justice system. Moving confirmation applications and related processes online will make estate administration faster, more efficient, and resilient. Digital workflows reduce delays, minimise errors, and free up staff to focus on complex matters. They also improve accessibility, allowing executors and solicitors to manage cases remotely without unnecessary travel, supporting those in rural communities. By embracing technology, we are creating a service that is secure, intuitive, and inclusive - delivering timely outcomes and ensuring Scotland's courts remain responsive to the needs of families and professionals in an increasingly digital world.

Over the next three years, we will accelerate the work already under way in relation to **open justice**. We will expand access to information, develop clearer explanations of civil processes and decisions and test new formats that reach wider audiences - such as Court of Session Live, which has already made a number of Inner House hearings viewable online - providing access to case summaries and links to decisions. We will enhance transparency by increasing the availability and clarity of civil data and performance insights, while safeguarding privacy. We will strengthen engagement with users, partners and researchers to understand their needs, measure impact and inform future improvements. We will also explore new channels and tools to share insights and encourage participation, ensuring civil justice in Scotland is open, inclusive and trusted.



Civil justice reform

Click on the icon to view the Civil reform objectives, 2026-2029

Tribunals and Office of the Public Guardian reform

Key reform areas 2026-29

Scottish Tribunals

The First-tier Tribunal for Scotland and the Upper Tribunal for Scotland provide a unified structure of governance and operation for Scotland's devolved tribunals. Each year, their work touches the lives of tens of thousands of citizens, providing justice across a wide range of fields. It draws on the expert knowledge of professionals whose experience underpins the specialist and unique forum of each tribunal.

SCTS continues to support the judiciary in the provision of tribunals that are modern, efficient and user-focused. A number of new tribunal jurisdictions have been added and case volumes are growing. We will continue to manage the expansion of the Scottish Tribunals to support a responsive, efficient, fair and open system that is sustainable and makes best use of technology. We will also make the case to the Scottish Government for adequate resourcing to meet the level of judicial and administrative support required as case volumes continue to grow.

Greater consistency and coordination

Over this planning period we will embed a multi-jurisdictional operating model for tribunals administration that scales as Scottish Tribunals grow. Scheduling will be pooled across Chambers, with shared services to achieve economies of scale. Standard operating procedures will ensure consistency of practice while allowing local flexibility where it improves outcomes. This approach aims to improve user experience, and optimise capacity. It will also provide consistent technical and administrative support for the judiciary and strengthen SCTS operating resilience - ensuring reliable delivery as caseloads rise and new jurisdictions join.

We will continue to expand our digital capability to improve the service. Building on our experience of reforming civil court business, our aim is to develop an end-to-end digital experience where parties can submit and view case documents online; track progress of

their cases and receive notifications when updates or new materials are available. Our goal is to support the judiciary in providing ready access to justice for all users, whilst improving the openness of the system. This will be achieved by taking a user centric approach, continuing to offer in-person, telephone, video and hybrid hearings - giving users practical choices, reducing travel and scheduling barriers, while ensuring proceedings are open, fair and efficient. We will also continue to publish regular reports on tribunal performance, to build transparency and public confidence.

Reform in the Office of the Public Guardian (OPG)

The work to transform OPG's digital services will continue throughout this period, supporting the delivery of a new business model that will improve efficiency, resilience and security. OPG are developing a new case management system, which is being released in three initial phases. Phase 1, which was delivered in 2025, enables all Power of Attorney (PoA) work to be processed. We will continue to enhance and develop this element until we achieve maximum efficiency - something that will be essential to reduce the current backlog of cases.

Phases 2 and 3, will bring Guardianship, Intervention and Access to Funds applications online. We will then develop an online Public Register, giving members of the public and stakeholders the ability to access information on orders made under Adults with Incapacity legislation in real time, at any time.

Future phases will introduce the facility to amend existing PoAs online as well as supporting electronic submission of guardianship documents and accounts through a web portal. These reforms will deliver significant service improvements, and a more stable, resilient system.



Tribunals and OPG reform

Click on the icon to view the Tribunals and OPG reform objectives, 2026-29

Corporate reform

Key reform areas 2026-29

Optimising our services

Funding for public services is likely to remain challenging over the coming period. In response to Scotland's Public Service Reform Strategy, we will continue to focus on efficiency and effectiveness across SCTS. There is scope to further simplify and standardise a number of our processes and practices - using technology to support consistency, accessibility and productivity (through further digitisation of forms and workflows, automating routine activity and expanding self-service options). This work has the potential to improve service whilst reducing longer-term costs. It will require a comprehensive review of existing approaches to ensure we are administering in the most effective way, preserving resources to focus on those who rely on our essential services.

Our people

Our people are dedicated to supporting the judiciary and delivering a first-class public service. Over the past three years we have taken important steps toward embedding trauma-informed practice. It is now part of how we work every day - helping to create a justice system that is fair, compassionate, and responsive to the needs of those affected by trauma.

Staff wellbeing is paramount. We are committed to a healthy, safe workplace and to improving the quality of working life for everyone - recognising that our people are our greatest asset. We value collaboration and diversity in our workforce - reflecting the public we serve. We will continue to invest in developing our people, so they can grow in skill and confidence as we reform and improve, supporting them to succeed in their roles today and in the future.

Cloud services & artificial intelligence (AI)

Over the course of this planning period we will build on the investment we have commenced in scalable cloud-based infrastructure - enhancing our digital security

and making it easier to develop new services. In the justice sector, modern digital platforms have real potential to improve accessibility and efficiency, with online services reducing processing times and achieving higher user satisfaction. This aligns with Scotland's refreshed [digital strategy](#), which commits to resilient, accessible, user-centred public services designed ethically and securely. Investment and collaboration will be required to achieve these changes - we have already made the case to government for support and are leading collaboration in relation to criminal justice system wide reform.

In parallel with moving digital services over to the cloud, we are developing ethical, effective uses of Artificial Intelligence that can enhance service delivery and improve data-driven decision making. We will adopt recognised safeguards by using the Data & AI Ethics Framework and the Scottish AI Playbook to ensure fairness, transparency and public trust. Together, secure cloud foundations and responsible AI strengthen cyber resilience, protect sensitive data and can deliver better outcomes for those who need to use our services.

Modernising our estate

SCTS has taken great strides to modernise its estate and reduce carbon emissions. [Carbon Reduce](#) certification has allowed us to track our progress on managing our emissions - our latest return (autumn 2025) reports an 18% reduction in gas and electricity and overall reported emissions down by 10%. We will continue to invest in efficiency and low carbon measures, in pursuit of the net-zero by 2045 goal. However, this will be challenging given the age and listed status of much of our estate, and constrained capital budgets.

In addition to addressing emissions, we aim to modernise our estate to remove barriers and support equal access to justice - providing modern, welcoming public areas and infrastructure that makes it easier for people to engage with proceedings and access information, promoting open justice. We will create collaborative, flexible workspaces that enhance wellbeing and enable teams to work together, improving service delivery.



Corporate reform

Click on the icon to view the Corporate reform objectives, 2026-29



Criminal justice reform

Developing high-quality services using digital solutions to support the judiciary, staff and partners to deliver fair, accessible, effective and efficient criminal justice, inspiring confidence in all who use it

Delivery Themes

D1: Sustainability

D2: Open Justice

D3: People, Skills and Wellbeing

D4: Digital

Objectives		Aligned delivery themes
1	We will, working with the judiciary and other justice organisations, agree a new Target Operating Model for our criminal courts. This will set out the whole-system case for change, covering people, processes and technology. Subject to approval and funding, we will roll out improvements based on this model, to shorten case timelines, improve user experience and make operations more consistent and resilient	D1 D2 D3 D4
2	We will develop a digital platform for the criminal justice system, working in collaboration with the Criminal Justice Digital Leadership Group and aligned to Scotland's digital strategy, that improves integration, data sharing and analytics to generate new insights - allowing justice organisations to respond effectively to emerging trends, streamline processes and improve user experience	D1 D2 D4
3	We will, with support from other justice organisations, prepare for the implementation of a new specialist national court for all solemn sexual offences, supporting a trauma informed approach to some of the most serious offences prosecuted in Scotland - with all our people trained in trauma-informed practice and procedure	D1 D3
4	We will continue to support the judiciary and justice organisations to increase efficiency, court utilisation, and strengthen the capacity and adaptability of the courts – supporting timely access to justice and best use of resources, while maintaining the integrity of criminal proceedings and safeguarding the rights of all parties	D1 D2 D3
5	We will continue to provide the public with confidence that we are supporting a well-functioning criminal court system by enhancing access to and understanding of the operation of our courts through: • embedding the practice of livestreaming in the Criminal Appeal Court, supporting more media coverage of criminal court sentencing and supporting documentary makers to extend the kinds of criminal cases featured; • publication of high-quality statistical data, explaining how we operate and what we are doing to improve; • exploring how we can enable greater access to remote hearings while protecting the rights of parties; and • supporting journalists by further developing our media portal that includes information on high profile cases, indictments and contempt of court orders, so they can report timeously, accurately and fairly.	D1 D2 D4



Civil justice reform

Supporting the judiciary to deliver outstanding civil justice underpinned by modern, user-centred systems that provide efficient and accessible services for all

Delivery Themes

D1: Sustainability

D2: Open Justice

D3: People, Skills and Wellbeing

D4: Digital

Objectives		Aligned delivery themes
1	We will continue to develop and expand our Civil Online portal, enabling electronic submission of all civil business case types, and ensuring our services are intuitive, inclusive, and accessible – creating a system that works for everyone, regardless of ability, location, or level of digital confidence	D1 D3 D4
2	We will reform commissary business within Scotland's sheriff civil courts, developing a new digital case management system. This will enable all case documentation to be submitted and viewed online; the tracking of case progress and receipt of notifications when new documents are available	D1 D4
3	We will continue our journey to promote open justice – increasing knowledge and confidence in the understanding of civil court processes and decisions by: - developing accessible public-facing resources, such as plain-language summaries and visual guides; - publishing anonymised civil case data and performance insights, supporting accountability, research, and continuous improvement; and - improving further the presentation of livestreaming from the inner house of the court of session and associated case information.	D1 D2
4	We will continue to support transformation of the civil justice system in Scotland, adapting our systems to support changes made by both the Scottish Civil Justice Council and the Scottish Government - strengthening Scotland's standing as a modern, efficient and trusted forum for hearing civil disputes.	D1 D2



Tribunals and OPG reform

Providing high-quality access to justice for Tribunals' users and protection for vulnerable people and their families through modern, efficient and user-friendly power of attorney and guardianship systems

Delivery Themes

D1: Sustainability

D2: Open Justice

D3: People, Skills and Wellbeing

D4: Digital

Objectives		Aligned delivery themes
1	We will work to strengthen the effectiveness and sustainability of the devolved Scottish Tribunals, by: • advocating on behalf of the tribunals with the Scottish Government for sufficient resource to address the widening gap between the demands on the tribunals system and its capacity to meet those demands; • developing a multi-jurisdictional operating model within the tribunals administration including a balanced and responsive scheduling approach; and • providing the judiciary with technical and administrative support as part of a flexible and effective hearings model	D1 D4
2	We will continue to improve the service provided by the devolved Scottish Tribunals administration as caseloads continue to grow by considering the options and developing the benefits of digital services that may include end to end service enabling: • case documentation to be submitted and viewed online, an ability to track case progress and receipt notifications when new documents or updates are available; and • a consistent cross-jurisdictional approach to providing a secure area for tribunal members to access case documentation and collaborate online	D1 D2 D3 D4
3	We will continue to improve the accessibility, transparency and understanding of tribunals - promoting open justice by: • developing accessible public-facing resources, such as plain-language summaries and visual guides; • offering hearing mode choices (in person, video or hybrid) to tribunal users, subject to judicial oversight; and • publishing tribunals case data and performance insights, supporting accountability, research, and continuous improvement;	D2
4	We will continue the work to transform the operation of OPG/AoC to help meet increasing demand, the needs of the wider health and social care policy environment and the requirements of forthcoming Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Amendment Bill by: • reviewing the strategic operating model for OPG, and developing proposals for more responsive and efficient service delivery; and • building on the opportunities provided by the new case management system to reduce delays in PoA registrations and create a more responsive system that allows users to interact more effectively with all aspects of OPG's services	D1 D2 D3 D4
5	We will enhance the protections for those in need by a) making the review of Guardianship accounts process more effective and efficient using the new case management system b) expanding our capacity to pursue investigations into the misuse of Guardianship powers and Powers of Attorney; and c) implementing the Judicial Factors Act 2025	D1 D3 D4



Corporate reform

Giving our people the systems, processes, facilities and skills to deliver the best possible service, allowing justice to be done fairly, openly, effectively and efficiently

Delivery Themes

D1: Sustainability

D2: Open Justice

D3: People, Skills and Wellbeing

D4: Digital

Objectives		Aligned delivery themes
1	We will attract and retain a diverse workforce, fostering a resilient, inclusive and trauma-informed culture that supports wellbeing	D3
2	We will equip our workforce for the future – investing in continuous learning, leadership and digital confidence	D3 D4
3	We will continue to upgrade our digital infrastructure – using scalable cloud-based services – to improve the accessibility, security and efficiency of our services	D1 D2 D4
4	We will develop ethical and effective uses of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to streamline processes, freeing up staff time to focus on higher-value activities and improving service delivery	D1 D3 D4
5	We will continue to modernise our estate - improving accessibility, building collaborative and flexible spaces and focusing on energy efficiency – as we work towards the net-zero goal	D1 D3
6	We will review and optimise our support services - improving processes, making use of technology and strengthening workforce capability to deliver efficient, resilient, and customer-focused support for frontline operations	D1 D3 D4

Monitoring progress and performance

This plan sets out our strategic objectives over the three-year period from 2026-29. It will be supported by corporate strategies setting out our longer-term direction on Estates, Finance, People, Sustainability and Digital development.

Overall responsibility for the delivery of this plan rests with the SCTS Board, which meets at least six times per year. Support is provided by formal Board Committees, including the People Committee, Audit and Risk Committee and the Estates, Health and Safety, Fire and Security Committee.

Performance management

Delivery of specific actions and detailed monitoring of performance are the responsibility of the Chief Executive, supported by the Executive Team. Collaborative justice wide initiatives will be managed, and progress will be monitored, through the Scottish Government's Justice Board.

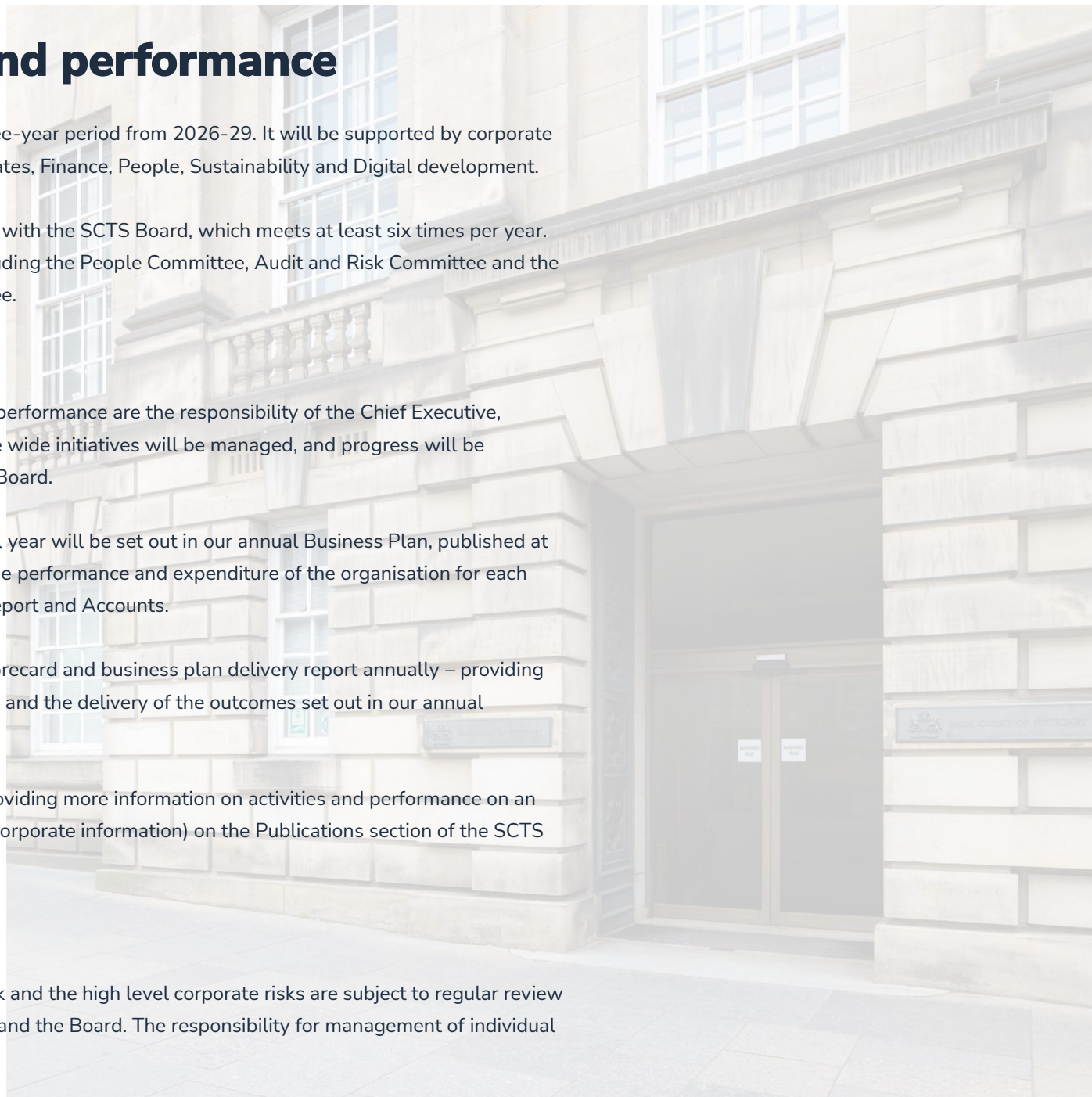
More detailed performance outcomes for each financial year will be set out in our annual Business Plan, published at the beginning of each business year. A full report on the performance and expenditure of the organisation for each financial year is published in the form of our Annual Report and Accounts.

In addition the Board also publishes a performance scorecard and business plan delivery report annually – providing an overview of key aspects of operational performance and the delivery of the outcomes set out in our annual business plan respectively.

These documents complement this Corporate Plan, providing more information on activities and performance on an annual basis. They can be found (alongside other key corporate information) on the Publications section of the SCTS website.

Risk management

SCTS maintains a formal Risk Management Framework and the high level corporate risks are subject to regular review by the Executive Team, the Audit and Risk Committee and the Board. The responsibility for management of individual risks is delegated to specific risk owners.



Further information

SCTS website

www.scotcourts.gov.uk

SCTS statistics, plans, reports and data

www.scotcourts.gov.uk/about-the-scottish-court-service/reports-data

SCTS Board

www.scotcourts.gov.uk/about-the-scottish-court-service/the-scottish-court-service-board

Office of the Public Guardian

www.publicguardian-scotland.gov.uk

Other courts and tribunals

www.scotcourts.gov.uk/the-courts/the-tribunals/other-courts-and-tribunals

Judicial Office for Scotland

www.judiciary.scot/

Scottish Civil Justice Council

www.scottishciviljusticecouncil.gov.uk

Scottish Sentencing Council

www.scottishsentencingcouncil.org.uk/

Vision for Justice in Scotland

www.gov.scot/publications/vision-justice-scotland/

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