

Enabling Access to Justice Programme Delivery Plan

January 2025



Department of
Justice

An Roinn Dí agus Cirt
Máinystrie O tha Laa

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Ministerial Foreword

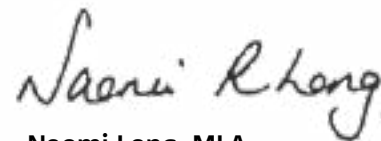
How justice is delivered has far reaching consequences. It helps ensure public safety and protection for the most vulnerable. It helps us defend our rights, secure opportunities and access services. It helps us ensure our wellbeing and to protect our families. It helps us right wrongs. How justice is delivered can have a significant impact on our lives and society and it can affect the cost of public services in the long term. The cost of policing, the cost of prisons, the cost of the health service and of benefits.

With so much at stake, and resources under increasing pressure, it is important to take stock and examine how resources are used and how services are delivered. To question whether user needs and expectations are being met, whether resources are being used to best effect, whether the most vulnerable are being protected. It is with that in mind that I initiated this Reform Programme aimed at enhancing access to justice.

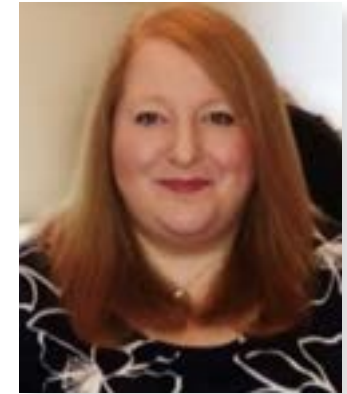
We are lucky that we begin in a good place. We have a strong independent judiciary supported by hardworking courts and tribunals staff, a capable legal profession, a committed voluntary sector and a range of other professionals, all of whom are dedicated to ensuring access to justice is protected, but I want to do more. I want to ensure we are generating the best possible outcomes for citizens. I want to ensure the right support, information and services are available at the right time to enable informed choices and prevent avoidable longer-term impacts. I want to ensure the right representation is available in the right circumstances, that disputes are resolved as quickly, fairly and inexpensively as possible in a system that is seen as just, proportionate and accessible. I also want to make sure that we are maximising the

benefits of investment and resources generate the best possible value. I want to ensure that the benefits of technology and alternative delivery models are seized and the needs of the most vulnerable are prioritised.

I have initiated this Programme in pursuit of those outcomes. The Delivery Plan details my proposed next steps. It follows detailed evidence gathering. I have devoted time to that process because I recognise the critical importance of listening to what those who support the system tell us about the challenges and of listening to victims, witnesses, applicants and respondents and reflecting on how the system, and those we are funding to support them, meet their needs. To understand how and when they want to resolve disputes, how and when they want to receive information and how and when they want to engage with professionals in the system. I am grateful to all who helped with that process. Your contribution has shaped this Plan which I believe will set the framework for future justice delivery, but I will also continue to listen, to learn more as plans progress, to ensure we have properly heard views and to ensure actions deliver expected outcomes.



Naomi Long, MLA
Minister of Justice



Introduction

Delivering an effective justice system is a key component of the Department's mission of working in partnership to create a fair, just and safe community, where we respect the law and each other. How access to justice is enabled is critical to that mission and the Department is initiating an Enabling Access to Justice Reform Programme to improve support and delivery mechanisms.

In developing the reform Programme, the Department recognises effective access to justice requires equal treatment before the law. The reform programme recognises information, support, advice and representation are key to enabling voices, to enabling people to exercise their rights, to challenging inequities and to holding decision-makers to account.

The Department also recognises appropriate remedy does and should extend beyond the formal institutions of the legal system and needs can often extend beyond advice and representation. The Programme therefore seeks to both ensure a right to fair trial, by supporting the continued delivery of high-quality information, advice and representation,

and that issues are resolved using tools appropriate to complexity in a way which minimises stress and acrimony. It seeks to ensure the system is not unduly complicated and is easy to navigate. The Programme also seeks to ensure support targets the specific needs of users, particularly the most vulnerable. Some who encounter the justice system have experienced trauma, have multiple, sometimes complex, needs and they require a range of supports. The Programme therefore recognises the value of tailored, cohesive and agile service delivery.

The Programme also aims to enhance assurances on the quality of supports for access to justice so we can be sure we meet the needs and expectations of service users. It aims to ensure those using services can have confidence in the information, advice and representation they receive, and the wider community can be confident resources are being used to best effect and support is available for the most vulnerable. In so doing, the Programme seeks to build on good practice and the high-quality support and service delivery models already in place.



Priority Areas

Access to justice is enabled by a number of mechanisms and a range of delivery partners. There are a number of interdependencies and responsibility for some potential areas of reform is cross-cutting. Progressing reform and introducing effective improvements is consequently complex and the Reform Programme and Delivery Plan are predicated on support from partners, resourcing, and affordability, or they are sequential or contingent on other ongoing interdependent workstreams and actions. The Delivery Plan is also subject to emerging evidence so we can be assured actions and investments generate expected benefits, but the Department believes the Programme represents the building blocks for reform and will help set a new framework for access to justice.

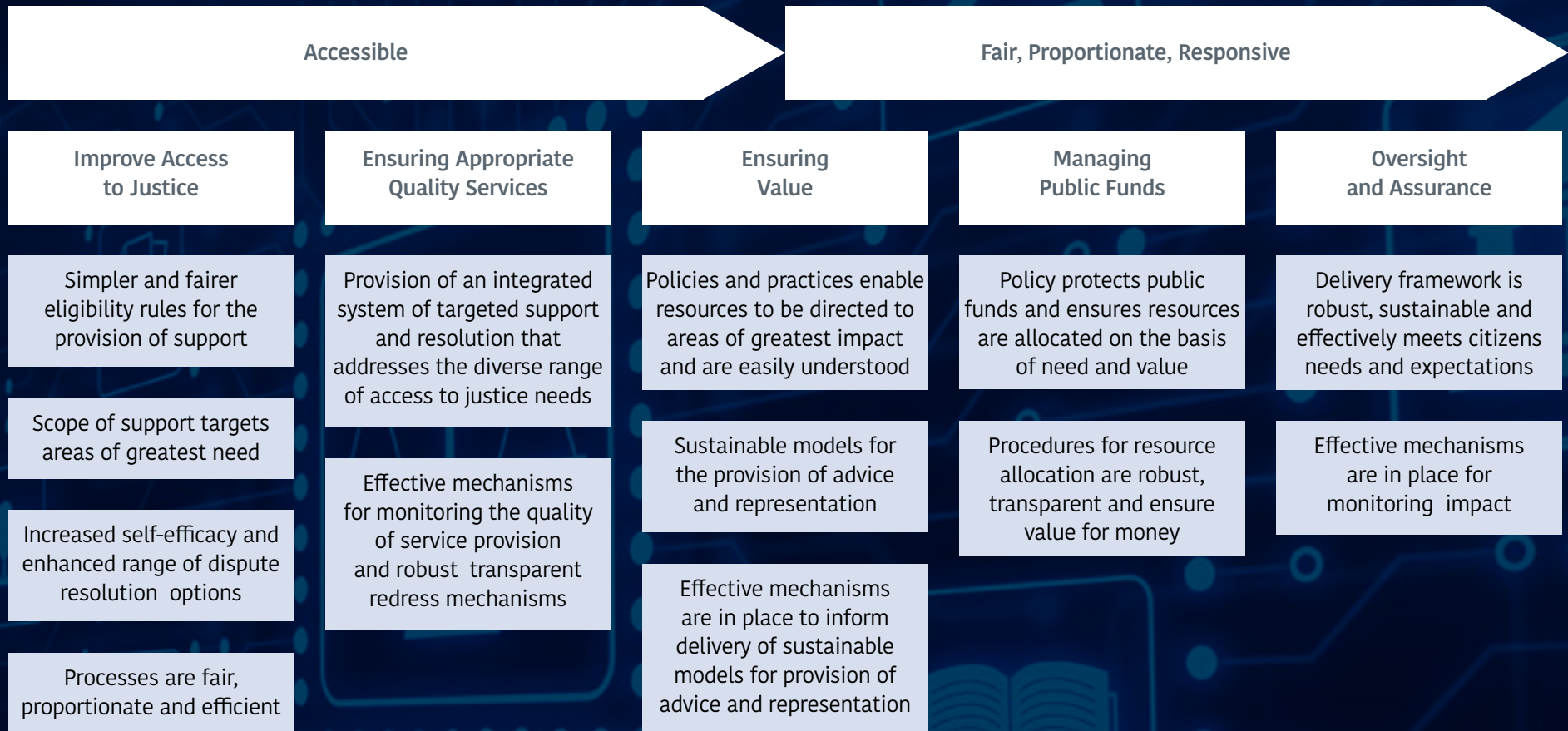
The Programme is brought forward in aid of the Department's ongoing modernisation aims of ensuring the system is accessible, and fair, proportionate and responsive. Reform priorities and initial actions have been informed by a detailed assessment of how resources are currently used and how services are meeting user needs and expectations. The Department has had the benefit of previous Reviews including the Access to Justice Review and the Gillen Review of Civil and Family Justice; learning from other jurisdictions; existing and new management information and data; the Fundamental Review of Criminal Legal Aid led by His Honour Tom Burgess C.B.E; a Foundational Review of Civil Legal Services; research commissioned by the Department in fulfilment of section 29 of the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 on means of supporting access to justice for victims of domestic abuse; a Review and Rapid Priority Setting Exercise of

Civil Legal Aid for cases of Domestic Abuse in Northern Ireland jointly commissioned by the Department and the Commissioner designate for Victims of Crime and other detailed stakeholder engagement. The Department is grateful to all who led and contributed to that work and in particular to the practitioners, voluntary sector organisations and victims, witnesses, applicants and defendants who took the time to share the benefit of their experience so we can improve the system for others. The views, information, data, and recommendations which emerged have helped shape Programme priority areas of:

- Improving Access to Justice;
- Ensuring Value;
- Managing Public Funds;
- Ensuring Appropriate Quality Services; and
- Oversight.



Priority Areas



Actions in fulfilment of those priorities are detailed in the Plan below but it is envisaged the Programme will evolve. As work streams progress, new priority areas and actions will be added. Others may be refined or delivered in a different way on the basis of feasibility assessments, cost benefit analysis, and learning from concept testing initiatives and consultation. The Plan will be republished on an ongoing basis to reflect refinements and new ambitions.

Delivery Plan

In developing the Delivery Plan, the Department has been ambitious. The Department believes aspiration is critical to ensuring a sustainable effective justice system. The Plan is consequently widescale and multi-year. Significant reform cannot be delivered in the short-term, but the Department is committed to delivering at pace where and when we can. Achieving that aim will require the collaboration of all our dedicated partners who support justice delivery and is based upon the assumption that appropriate resources are made available.

We also expect to refine and update the Reform Programme and associated Delivery Plan over time as further information and learning emerge. The Delivery Plan set out below details initial anticipated reform priorities and actions.



Priority: Improve Access to Justice

| Objective | Impact on Citizens / Outcome | Deliverable | Delivery date |
|---|---|--|----------------|
| Ensure simpler and fairer eligibility rules for the provision of support. | Enhance access to justice by widening eligibility criteria and introducing simpler faster application processes to aid efficiency and transparency. | Issue proposals on a new approach to financial eligibility testing. | Q3 2025 |
| | | Publish post-consultation report on proposed new approach to financial eligibility testing. | Q1 2026 |
| | | Consult on legislation to amend financial eligibility rules. | Q3 2026 |
| | | Introduce legislation to amend financial eligibility rules. | Q1 2027 |
| Ensure the scope of support targets areas of greatest need. | Enhance access to justice by increasing range of funding mechanisms available. | Issue proposals to support greater use of private finance to support access to justice, including through the use of conditional fee agreements, insurance, and other commercial financial products, and mechanisms to support public interest and strategic litigation. | Q2 2026 |
| Ensure processes are fair, proportionate and efficient. | Enhance access to justice by ensuring processes are effective and efficient, fair and responsive. | Issue proposals for reformed parole review process and associated remuneration framework. | Q2 2026 |
| | | Publish post-consultation report on the proposals to underpin reformed parole review process and associated remuneration framework. | Q4 2026 |
| | | Introduce legislation to underpin reformed parole review process and associated remuneration framework. | Q4 2026 |
| | Processes and associated remuneration frameworks aid early resolution in the interests of reducing impact of proceedings on victims and witnesses and defendants. | Issue proposals for revised remuneration framework to reflect system changes flowing from Speeding Up Justice Programme Committal Reform project. | Q2 2025 |



| Objective | Impact on Citizens / Outcome | Deliverable | Delivery date |
|---|--|---|----------------|
| Ensure processes are fair, proportionate and efficient. | Processes and associated remuneration frameworks aid early resolution in the interests of reducing impact of proceedings on victims and witnesses and defendants. | Issue proposals for revised remuneration framework to reflect system changes flowing from Speeding Up Justice Programme Early Engagement project. | Q4 2026 |
| Increase self-efficacy and enhance range of dispute resolution options. | Enhance access to justice and improve outcomes by ensuring disputes are resolved with as little acrimony as possible using mechanisms appropriate to the complexity of the case. Reduce costs associated with protracted and repeat applications. | Test alternative dispute resolution models. | Q4 2025 |
| | | Develop a strategy to improve system transparency and awareness of dispute resolution options. | Q2 2025 |



Priority: Ensuring Appropriate Quality Services

| Objective | Impact on Citizens / Outcome | Deliverable | Delivery date |
|---|---|---|----------------|
| Ensure the availability of an integrated system of targeted support and resolution that addresses the diverse range of access to justice needs. | Enhance access to justice and improve outcomes by ensuring the availability of tailored services which effectively meet user needs. | Issue proposals to improve specialist support, including legal, for specific vulnerable groups, focusing initially on victims of domestic abuse, people in housing stress, and migrants including refugees. | Q4 2025 |
| | | Commence operationalisation of proposed new support mechanisms. | Q2 2026 |
| Ensure effective mechanisms for monitoring the provision of quality of services and robustness and transparency of associated redress mechanisms. | Enhance access to justice by providing assurance on quality and value for money. | Issue discussion paper to key stakeholders on quality thresholds and associated monitoring and redress mechanisms. | Q1 2025 |
| | | Report on review of quality standards, monitoring and redress mechanisms for suppliers of publicly funded legal support. | Q4 2025 |



Priority: Ensuring Value

| Objective | Impact on Citizens / Outcome | Deliverable | Delivery date |
|---|---|---|----------------|
| Ensure policies and procedures enable resources to be directed to areas of greatest impact and are easily understood. | Enhance value by improving transparency and ensuring resources are used to best effect where there is a clear tangible value by ensuring simplicity, clarity, value for money, and to provide a mechanism for managing legal aid expenditure. | Issue proposals to reform merits testing in civil legal aid. | Q2 2025 |
| | | Publish post-consultation report on merits testing in civil legal aid. | Q3 2025 |
| | | Issue guidance to the Legal Services Agency on the operation of merits testing. | Q4 2025 |
| Ensure sustainable models for the provision of advice and representation. | Continued availability of high quality/advice and representation by ensuring fair proportionate remuneration. | Establish reference group to identify, collate and validate data to inform current and future reform proposals. | Q1 2025 |
| | | Consider how the reference group may evolve to aid development of future policy. | Q3 2025 |



| Objective | Impact on Citizens / Outcome | Deliverable | Delivery date |
|--|---|--|------------------------|
| <p>Ensure sustainable models for the provision of advice and representation.</p> | <p>Continued availability of high-quality advice and representation by providing fair proportionate remuneration.</p> | <p>Publish post-consultation report on proposals to amend</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • remuneration for advice and representation in the Crown and Magistrates’ Courts; • remuneration for Civil and Family proceedings; • and consolidate mileage rates. | <p>May 2025</p> |
| | | <p>Introduce legislation to amend</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • remuneration for advice and representation in the Crown and Magistrates’ Courts; • remuneration for Civil and Family proceedings; • consolidate mileage rates. | <p>May 2025</p> |
| | | <p>Introduce pilot to assess the wider impact of replacing half day refresher fees with full day refresher fees.</p> | <p>Q2 2025</p> |
| | | <p>Publish evaluation of refresher fee pilot and issue proposals on proposed long-term arrangements.</p> | <p>Q3 2026</p> |
| | | <p>Issue proposals to review remuneration framework for representation and advice in the Crown and Magistrates’ Courts.</p> | <p>Q1 2026</p> |



| Objective | Impact on Citizens / Outcome | Deliverable | Delivery date |
|--|--|--|---|
| Sustainable models for the provision of advice and representation. | Continued availability of high-quality advice and representation by providing fair proportionate remuneration. | Publish post-consultation report on the review of the remuneration framework for representation and advice in the Crown and Magistrates' Courts. | Q3 2026 |
| | | Introduce primary legislation amendments relating to legal aid remuneration frameworks for advice and representation. | Q1 2028 |
| | | Issue proposals for a new remuneration framework for civil legal services. | Q3 2026 |
| | | Publish post-consultation report on a new remuneration model for civil and family proceedings. | Q4 2026 |
| | | Pilot arrangements for the payment of interim fees and early discharge of disbursements. | Q2 2025 |
| | | Publish evaluation of pilot arrangements for interim fee payments and earlier discharge of disbursements and issue proposals on proposed long-term arrangements. | Q2 2026 |
| | | Issue proposals to enable the exercise of higher rights of audience by solicitors. | Q3 2026 |
| | | Publish post-consultation Report on proposals to enable the exercise of higher rights of audience by solicitors. | Q1 2027 |
| | | Introduce legislation to enable the exercise of higher rights of audience by solicitors. | Q1 2027 |
| | | Representation is reflective of society. | Issue proposals to aid diversity within providers of advice and representation. |



Priority: Managing Public Funds

| Objective | Impact on Citizens / Outcome | Deliverable | Delivery date | |
|--|--|---|--|----------------|
| Policy protects public funds and ensures resources are allocated on the basis of need. | Delivery structures enable need to be addressed early, at the point of need. | Issue proposals to review the framework of legal aid remuneration for Extradition. | Q1 2026 | |
| | | Issue proposals to reform the delivery models to provide Legal Aid. | Q2 2026 | |
| | | Publish the post-consultation report on proposals to reform the delivery models to provide Legal Aid. | Q4 2026 | |
| | Increase value for money and access to justice. | | Issue proposals relating to the scope of criminal legal aid, and if relevant associated merits tests. | Q2 2025 |
| | | | Publish post-consultation report on scope of criminal legal aid (and associated merits tests). | Q4 2025 |
| | | | Introduce guidance and/or amend legislation to reflect the outcome of the consultation process and policy intentions on the scope of criminal legal aid (and associated merits tests). | Q1 2026 |
| | | | Issue proposals to amend the scope of civil legal services to avoid displacement of potential private financing, and to ensure that representation is available where it is needed. | Q2 2025 |



| Objective | Impact on Citizens / Outcome | Deliverable | Delivery date |
|--|---|---|----------------|
| Policy protects public funds and ensures resources are allocated on the basis of need and value. | Resources targeted to areas of greatest need. | Publish post-consultation report on amendments to scope of civil legal services. | Q4 2025 |
| | | Introduce legislation to amend the scope of civil and criminal legal services. | Q2 2026 |
| | Improve outcomes by ensuring those who can afford to meet their legal costs do so and allow resources to be redirected to areas of greatest need. | Issue proposals to reform the scope of and enhance utilisation of recovery of defence costs orders. | Q2 2025 |
| | | Publish post-consultation report on the proposed legislation to reform the scope and enhance the utilisation of recovery of defence costs orders. | Q4 2025 |
| | | Introduce legislation to reform the scope and enhance the utilisation of recovery of defence costs orders. | Q4 2025 |
| | Improve outcomes by ensuring clarity for victims, witness and defendants, ensuring appropriate use of public resources and allow funds to be directed to areas of greatest value. | Review arrangements governing cases left on the books to ensure effective disposal of cases. | Q3 2025 |
| | | Publish outcome of review of cases left on the books. | Q3 2026 |



| Objective | Impact on Citizens / Outcome | Deliverable | Delivery date |
|---|--|---|----------------|
| Policy protects public funds and ensures resources are allocated on the basis of need and value. | Increase transparency in public spend and efficiency of payment processes. Enhance ability to demonstrate legal aid remuneration is fair and represents value for money, and is subject to government audit and accountability mechanisms. | Issue proposals to reform taxation of legal aid remuneration for High Court bail applications. | Q1 2025 |
| | | Publish post-consultation report on proposals to reform taxation of legal aid remuneration for High Court bail applications. | Q3 2025 |
| | | Introduce legislation prescribing new arrangements for legal aid remuneration for High Court bail applications. | Q1 2026 |
| | | Issue proposals to reform taxation of legal aid remuneration for Criminal Court of Appeal cases. | Q4 2025 |
| | | Publish post-consultation report on proposals to reform taxation of legal aid remuneration for Criminal Court of Appeal cases. | Q2 2026 |
| | | Introduce legislation prescribing new arrangements for legal aid remuneration for Criminal Court of Appeal cases. | Q1 2027 |
| | | Issue proposals to reform taxation of legal aid remuneration for Judicial Review applications. | Q1 2026 |
| | | Publish post-consultation report on proposals to reform taxation of legal aid remuneration for Judicial Review applications. | Q3 2026 |
| | | Introduce legislation prescribing new arrangements for legal aid remuneration for Judicial Review applications. | Q4 2026 |
| | | Support is targeted to those most in need and mistakes are rectified quickly. Improve independence, fairness, predictability and speed. | |
| Publish post-consultation report relating to modernisation of the civil legal services appeals processes. | Q4 2026 | | |
| Introduce legislation governing civil legal services appeals. | Q1 2027 | | |



| Objective | Impact on Citizens / Outcome | Deliverable | Delivery date |
|--|---|--|---------------|
| Policy protects public funds and ensures resources are allocated on the basis of need. | Improve simplicity, clarity and value for money. | Issue proposals for a new approach to calculating assisted person contributions towards the cost of civil legal aid and the operation of the statutory charge. | Q3 2025 |
| | | Publish post-consultation report on legislation to amend rules on contributions and the statutory charge. | Q2 2026 |
| | | Introduce legislation to amend approach to statutory contributions and statutory charge. | Q1 2027 |
| | Increase value for money, support early resolution of cases where appropriate. Avoid unnecessary delay and associated costs. | Issue proposals to expand the use of limited certificates to improve accountability, efficiency, fairness and impact. | Q3 2026 |
| | Increase value for money, support early resolution of cases where appropriate. Avoid unnecessary delay and associated costs. | Issue proposals to ensure grant of legal aid/certification supports efficiency. | Q1 2026 |
| | Increase value for money, support early resolution of cases where appropriate. Avoid unnecessary delay and associated costs. | Publish post-consultation report in relation to grant of legal aid/ certification. | Q3 2026 |



| Objective | Impact on Citizens / Outcome | Deliverable | Delivery date |
|--|---|--|---------------|
| Policy protects public funds and ensures resources are allocated on the basis of need and value. | Increase value for money, support early resolution of cases where appropriate. Avoid unnecessary delay and associated costs. | Introduce legislation governing grant of legal aid/certification. | Q3 2026 |
| | Appropriate use of public resources and allow funds to be allocated to areas where they will generate value. Avoid unnecessary delay and associated costs. | Issue proposals in relation to change of legal representation in publicly funded cases. | Q1 2026 |
| | | Publish post-consultation report in relation to change of legal representation in publicly funded cases. | Q3 2026 |
| | | Introduce legislation governing change of legal representation in publicly funded cases. | Q3 2026 |
| | Appropriate use of public resources and allow funds to be allocated to areas where they will generate value. | Issue proposals on principles governing remuneration for publicly funded legal services. | Q1 2025 |



Priority: Oversight and Assurance

| Objective | Impact on Citizens / Outcome | Deliverable | Delivery date |
|--|--|---|----------------|
| The delivery framework is robust, sustainable and effectively meets citizens needs and expectations. | Interventions are tailored and effectively meet user needs, and resources are focused on areas of greatest impact. | Consult on principles underpinning strategy for access to justice. | Q1 2025 |
| | | Publish post-consultation report on principles underpinning access to justice. | Q3 2025 |
| | | Publish a Strategy for Access to Justice. | Q3 2025 |
| | Continued availability of high-quality advice and representation by ensuring fair proportionate remuneration through a more agile, less resource intense approach to review. | Review arrangements for oversight and legislative and administrative frameworks for the provision of public legal services including the merits of an independently chaired advisory board. | Q1 2026 |
| | | Publish outcome of review of oversight arrangements and legislative and administrative frameworks for the provision of public legal services. | Q3 2026 |
| Effective mechanisms are in place for monitoring impact. | Enhanced access to justice by capturing information on provision and the need to allow tailored service provision. | Introduce management information changes to capture information on section 75 characteristics of those receiving support. | Q4 2025 |



Timeline

Actions will be subject to cost/benefits analysis and where relevant business case approval for funding as work streams progress but the table below provides an indication of anticipated progress:

| By end of | The Department will: | Priority Area |
|-------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| March 2025 | Establish reference group to identify, collate and validate data to inform current and future reform proposals. | Ensuring Value |
| | Issue discussion paper to key stakeholders on quality thresholds and associated monitoring and redress mechanisms. | Ensuring appropriate quality services |
| | Issue proposals to reform taxation of legal aid remuneration for High Court bail applications. | Managing Public Funds |
| | Issue proposals on principles governing remuneration for publicly funded legal services. | Managing Public Funds |
| | Consult on principles underpinning strategy for access to justice. | Oversight and Assurance |
| May 2025 | Publish post-consultation reports on proposals to amend remuneration for advice and representation in the Crown and Magistrates' Courts, and in civil and family proceedings. | Ensuring Value |
| | Publish post-consultation report on proposals to amend and consolidate mileage rates. | Ensuring Value |
| | Introduce legislation to amend remuneration for advice and representation in civil and family proceedings. | Ensuring Value |
| | Introduce legislation to amend remuneration for representation and advice in the Crown and Magistrates' Courts. | Ensuring Value |
| | Introduce legislation and guidance to amend and consolidate mileage rates. | Ensuring Value |



| By end of | The Department will: | Priority Area |
|-----------------------|---|---------------------------|
| June 2025 | Issue proposals for revised remuneration framework to reflect system changes flowing from Speeding Up Justice Programme Committal Reform project. | Improve Access to Justice |
| | Introduce pilot to assess the wider impact of replacing half day refresher fees with full day refresher fees. | Ensuring Value |
| | Develop a strategy to improve system transparency and awareness of dispute resolution options. | Improve Access to Justice |
| | Issue proposals to reform merits testing in civil legal aid. | Ensuring Value |
| | Issue proposals relating to the scope of criminal legal aid, and, if relevant associated merits tests. | Managing Public Funds |
| | Issue proposals to amend the scope of civil legal services to avoid displacement of potential private financing, and to ensure that representation is available where it is needed. | Managing Public Funds |
| | Issue proposals to reform the scope and enhance utilisation of recovery of defence costs orders. | Managing Public Funds |
| | Pilot arrangements for the payment of interim fees and early discharge of disbursements. | Ensuring Value |
| September 2025 | Issue proposals on a new approach to financial eligibility testing. | Improve Access to Justice |
| | Publish post-consultation report on merits testing in civil legal aid. | Ensuring Value |
| | Consider how the reference group may evolve to aid development of future policy. | Ensuring Value |
| | Review arrangements governing cases left on the books to ensure effective disposal of cases. | Managing Public Funds |
| | Publish post-consultation report on proposals to reform taxation of legal aid remuneration for High Court bail applications. | Managing Public Funds |



| By end of | The Department will: | Priority Area |
|-----------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| September 2025 | Issue proposals for a new approach to calculating assisted person contributions towards the cost of civil legal aid and the operation of the statutory charge. | Managing Public Funds |
| | Publish post-consultation report on principles underpinning access to justice. | Oversight and Assurance |
| | Publish a Strategy for Access to Justice. | Oversight and Assurance |
| December 2025 | Test alternative dispute resolution models. | Improve Access to Justice |
| | Issue proposals to improve specialist support, including legal, for specific vulnerable groups, focusing initially on victims of domestic abuse, people in housing stress, and migrants including refugees. | Ensuring Appropriate Quality Services |
| | Issue guidance to the Legal Services Agency on the operation of merits testing. | Ensuring Value |
| | Publish post-consultation report on scope of criminal legal aid (and associated merits tests). | Managing Public Funds |
| | Publish post-consultation report on amendments to scope of civil legal services. | Managing Public Funds |
| | Report on review of quality standards, monitoring and redress mechanisms for suppliers of publicly funded legal support. | Ensuring appropriate quality services |
| | Publish post-consultation report on the proposed legislation to reform the scope and enhance the utilisation of recovery of defence costs orders. | Managing Public Funds |
| | Introduce legislation to reform the scope and enhance the utilisation of recovery of defence costs orders. | Managing Public Funds |
| | Issue proposals to reform taxation of legal aid remuneration for Criminal Court of Appeal cases. | Managing Public Funds |
| | Introduce management information changes to capture information on section 75 characteristics of those receiving support. | Oversight and Assurance |



| By end of | The Department will: | Priority Area |
|-------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| March 2026 | Issue proposals to review remuneration framework for representation and advice in the Crown and Magistrates' Courts. | Ensuring Value |
| | Introduce legislation prescribing new arrangements for legal aid remuneration for High Court bail applications. | Managing Public Funds |
| | Introduce guidance and/or amend legislation to reflect the outcome of the consultation process and policy intentions on the scope of criminal legal aid (and associated merits tests). | Managing Public Funds |
| | Issue proposals to reform taxation of legal aid remuneration for Judicial Review applications. | Managing Public Funds |
| | Issue proposals to ensure grant of legal aid/certification supports efficiency. | Managing Public Funds |
| | Issue proposals in relation to change of legal representation in publicly funded cases. | Managing Public Funds |
| | Issue proposals to aid diversity within providers of advice and representation. | Ensuring Value |
| | Publish post-consultation report on proposed new approach to financial eligibility testing. | Improve Access to Justice |
| | Review arrangements for oversight and legislative and administrative frameworks for the provision of public legal services including the merits of an independently chaired advisory board. | Oversight and Assurance |
| | Issue proposals to review the framework of legal aid remuneration for Extradition. | Managing Public Funds |
| June 2026 | Issue proposals to support greater use of private finance to support access to justice, including through the use of conditional fee agreements, insurance, and other commercial financial products, and mechanisms to support public interest and strategic litigation. | Improve Access to Justice |
| | Issue proposals for reformed parole review process and associated remuneration framework. | Improve Access to Justice |
| | Commence operationalisation of proposed new support mechanisms. | Ensuring Appropriate Quality Services |
| | Publish evaluation of pilot arrangements for interim fee payments and earlier discharge of disbursements and issue proposals on proposed long-term arrangements. | Ensuring Value |
| | Issue proposals to reform the delivery models to provide Legal Aid. | Managing Public Funds |



| By end of | The Department will: | Priority Area |
|-----------------------|--|---------------------------|
| June 2026 | Introduce legislation to amend the scope of civil and criminal legal services. | Managing Public Funds |
| | Publish post-consultation report on proposals to reform taxation of legal aid remuneration for Criminal Court of Appeal cases. | Managing Public Funds |
| | Issue proposals for the modernisation of civil legal services appeals processes. | Managing Public Funds |
| | Publish post-consultation report on legislation to amend rules on contributions and the statutory charge. | Managing Public Funds |
| September 2026 | Publish outcome of review of oversight arrangements and legislative and administrative frameworks for the provision of public legal services. | Oversight and assurance |
| | Publish outcome of review of cases left on the books. | Managing Public Funds |
| | Publish post-consultation report on proposals to reform taxation of legal aid remuneration for Judicial Review applications. | Managing Public Funds |
| | Consult on legislation to amend financial eligibility rules. | Improve Access to Justice |
| | Publish post-consultation report on the review of the remuneration framework for representation and advice in the Crown and Magistrates' Courts. | Ensuring Value |
| | Issue proposals to enable the exercise of higher rights of audience by solicitors. | Ensuring Value |
| | Publish evaluation of refresher fee pilot and issue proposals on proposed long-term arrangements. | Ensuring Value |
| | Issue proposals for a new remuneration framework for civil legal services. | Ensuring Value |
| | Issue proposals to expand the use of limited certificates to improve accountability, efficiency, fairness and impact. | Managing Public Funds |
| | Publish post-consultation report in relation to the grant of legal aid/certification. | Managing Public Funds |
| | Publish post-consultation report in relation to change of legal representation in publicly funded cases. | Managing Public Funds |
| | Introduce legislation governing grant of legal aid/certification. | Managing Public Funds |
| | Introduce legislation governing change of legal representation in publicly funded cases. | Managing Public Funds |



| By end of | The Department will: | Priority Area |
|----------------------|---|---------------------------|
| December 2026 | Publish post-consultation report relating to modernisation of civil legal services appeals processes. | Managing Public Funds |
| | Publish post-consultation report on a new remuneration model for civil and family proceedings. | Ensuring Value |
| | Publish post-consultation report on the proposals to underpin reformed parole review process and associated remuneration framework. | Improve Access to Justice |
| | Introduce legislation to underpin reformed parole review process and associated remuneration framework. | Improve Access to Justice |
| | Issue proposals for revised remuneration framework to reflect system changes flowing from Speeding Up Justice Programme Early Engagement project. | Improve Access to Justice |
| | Publish the post-consultation report on proposals to reform the delivery models to provide Legal Aid. | Managing Public Funds |
| | Introduce legislation prescribing new arrangements for legal aid remuneration for Judicial Review applications. | Managing Public Funds |
| March 2027 | Introduce legislation to amend financial eligibility rules. | Improve Access to Justice |
| | Publish post-consultation Report on proposals to enable the exercise of higher rights of audience by solicitors. | Ensuring Value |
| | Introduce legislation to enable the exercise of higher rights of audience by solicitors. | Ensuring Value |
| | Introduce legislation prescribing new arrangements for legal aid remuneration for Criminal Court of Appeal cases. | Managing Public Funds |
| | Introduce legislation governing civil legal services appeals. | Managing Public Funds |
| | Introduce legislation to amend approach to statutory contributions and statutory charge. | Managing Public Funds |
| March 2028 | Introduce primary legislation amendments relating to legal aid remuneration frameworks for advice and representation. | Ensuring Value |



Should you have any queries about the content of this document, please contact: eajdconsultations@justice-ni.gov.uk



Department of
Justice

An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt
Máinnstríe O tha Laa