



22 February 2023

Dear Colleague,

HMCTS Reform Programme: rebalancing our operational priorities

Working alongside our justice partners, we've made significant progress towards the vision for reform we set out in 2016: to provide a justice system with people's needs and expectations at its heart. Our core principles – to be just, proportionate and accessible – have always underpinned our work.

I'm incredibly proud of what we've achieved and the positive outcomes for court users. Our priority now is to ensure a stable operational environment in which we continue to improve at a steady pace. I'd like to update you on our plans.

Challenging operating environment

As a vital public service, we'll always respond to emerging issues. Wider pressures, such as the long-lasting impact of the pandemic, the number of outstanding cases waiting for hearings, and the rising cost of living affect us as an organisation too.

Within HMCTS, the technology and associated business change of some Reform projects have taken longer than we expected to design, build, test, and implement. This is true across crime and civil, family and tribunals (CFT) jurisdictions.

We also have a number of refinements and enhancements to make to the existing technology to increase stability, while integrating multiple systems – old and new – so that they talk to each other seamlessly.

Mindful of these challenges, we have reviewed our plans for the year ahead with the intention of implementing change in a more manageable way that keeps our focus on the vital day-to-day services we provide.

Priorities and plans for 2024

As we move into the final phase of delivering Reform, I'd like to set out our priorities and plans for the year ahead, which are to:

- deliver the final phase of the Reform Programme and fulfil its original vision
- perform at our best and provide quality services to the people that need them

- create a stable environment so we can continue to improve at a steady pace.

We should not do any one of these things to the detriment of the others; the work we do is too important. We must get the balance right and be clear and open about what is feasible. We've looked at what we've already achieved, our organisational capacity and the pressure on our operations.

The choices we're making now will maximise efficiency and functionality of our technology. We will focus on getting the existing technology right to enable us to provide a more consistent and reliable service to those seeking access to justice through our courts and tribunals, as well as stabilise the experience for all those who use our systems.

Rebalancing our approach

To ease the pressure on the organisation and to ensure continued success, we are extending the overall programme to March 2025.

To ensure the stability we need, we will no longer deliver some parts of it as we had planned. This will allow us to get the current systems and processes to perform to their maximum capacity and ability before adding more.

We also need to spend more time making sure that our processes and ways of working align fully with the technological change. We cannot do one without the other and we have seen the consequences of getting this wrong in the past.

In revising our plans, we have the support of the Lord Chancellor, the Lady Chief Justice and the Senior President of Tribunals.

Revising the remaining scope of Common Platform

We have revised our plans for delivering additional functionality in Common Platform, the principal case management system in the criminal courts, which has received over 1.3 million cases since going live in 2020. We will focus on fixing and enhancing the existing system, improving stability and the experience of those who use it.

We will not proceed with all aspects of the two releases known as 'releases 2 and 3' but will continue with some standalone elements which have already been built, specifically the introduction of digital cracked and ineffective trial forms and the functionality to allow judges to validate sentences.

We will retain the Crown Court Digital Case System, identifying ways we can enhance it in future, while making sure it works effectively alongside Common Platform.

Extending development in the civil, family and tribunal programme to March 2025

Reforms in Civil and Family Private Law are the largest and most complex in the programme.

In civil, family and tribunals, we must balance delivery of reform with other policy priorities, such as changes in immigration, civil automatic referral to mediation, the introduction of an 'intermediate track' for civil money claims, and the potential requirement to re-start work on digitising housing possession cases.

As a result, we will extend the completion date for development for the overall programme from March 2024 to March 2025. Implementation activity will continue throughout 2025 for civil reform.

Our plans still include reforming the issue of Warrants of Control for claimants wishing to enforce a County Court Judgment this way. This means that claimants will be able to issue a Warrant of Control using the new Online Civil Money Claims service, like they currently do on the legacy service Money Claims On Line. All other civil enforcement changes will be removed from our plans, including the reform of end-to-end processes for Warrants of Control and Writs of Control.

These changes will allow us to get the technology right, to integrate systems, and give ourselves and our partners the time needed to adjust to new ways of working.

Improving our estate

Beyond reform, we're making progress on a number of significant property developments. A newly-refurbished site in Leeds includes new employment tribunal rooms and construction is underway to create business & property court hearing rooms. The City of London's construction of a new state-of-the art courthouse, comprising civil, magistrates' and Crown courtrooms, is also well underway.

Our two year funding of £220 million to enhance our maintenance programme between 2023 and 2025 is enabling us to deliver more than 200 improvement projects across England and Wales, making a difference to the resilience, reliability, accessibility, comfort and environmental impact of our court and tribunal buildings.

Last week, we announced the extension of 20 Nightingale courtrooms, to increase capacity in our estate where operationally necessary.

While challenges remain, we're making progress and reducing the risk of site closures while building resilience into the estate.

Preparing for the future

I've published a [blog post](https://insidehmcts.blog.gov.uk/2024/02/22/rebalancing-our-operational-priorities/) today about the planned changes on [Inside HMCTS](https://insidehmcts.blog.gov.uk/2024/02/22/rebalancing-our-operational-priorities/), <https://insidehmcts.blog.gov.uk/2024/02/22/rebalancing-our-operational-priorities/> which you may want to share with your colleagues.

I'm confident that in taking this approach, we've created a solid foundation for the future of the justice system. We'll continue to change and improve and will not stand still as we strive to complete reform, perform at our best and prepare our services for the next generation.

Our many partners across the justice system all have a role to play in this and I'm grateful for your continued support.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nick Goodwin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Nick Goodwin
Chief Executive, HM Courts & Tribunals Service