INTRODUCTION

Thank you for that introduction. As Lynda said, my name is Craig McCorkindale and I am the Director of Civil Courts Reform for the Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service. In that capacity I regularly attend meetings of the Scottish Civil Justice Council and I am a member of its Information and Communications Technology Committee. I am here to talk about the work of that ICT Committee - what it has been doing since it was set up and what it is planning to do in the future.

WHAT HAS THE COMMITTEE ACHIEVED?

The work of the Committee is determined by the remit it has been given by the Scottish Civil Justice Council. The main focus is to consider 'how ICT can be used more effectively within the Scottish civil courts to ensure that business can be dealt with as expediently as possible'. That means the Committee looks at:

What IT is needed to support the new rules that will flow from the civil court reform programme;

How to co-ordinate the introduction of any new systems with those systems that are already in place; and

How to make sure IT systems can accommodate what will be an on-going need to change court rules and procedure.

The Committee first met in January last year and has had five meetings altogether. Its work looks very much to the future use of IT in the civil courts and, how that should feed into the preparation of the draft rules of court which play such a large part in the work of the other Committees.

Within the Justice sector there are a range of other groups that consider the use of IT in courts and this committee used a mapping exercise to ensure it understands the links and information flows that need to take place across all those IT groups. The committee considered its own priorities and believes it can play a very useful role in harnessing and co-ordinating selected initiatives.

Looking to the future, it is clear that a significant increase in the use of IT in the civil courts is envisaged. With this in mind, the Committee made recommendations on preparation of the Rules Rewrite Style Guide - that will help ensure that court rules can be written with the future digitisation of processes in mind.

There is a lot happening in the development of specific IT solutions across the justice system at the moment.

To direct its energies appropriately the committee receives regular updates on the various IT projects being undertaken. One of these is the Integrated Case Management System – ICMS - which is one of the areas I have a responsibility for within the courts and tribunals service.

It is in early development stage at the moment and by late 2016 it will provide a modern new electronic system to support the efficient disposal of business for civil court users. It is part of the courts' drive to move away from paper based processes towards a greater use of digital and online transactions. This new system is being taken forward in several phases that started in March this year with the team developing initial 'user stories' which capture early detail on what that system will need to cover from an end user perspective. The project is currently in its third phase which involves the early prototyping of specific elements of functionality – in

essence the core steps in legal process for a civil action prior to any hearing taking place. That phase also includes building one initial working prototype for the bulk submission of cases from legal professionals and one for the online submission of cases from lay users. That system will continue to evolve over the coming months.

To better understand how IT is already being used across the justice system the Committee has undertaken a number of useful and informative visits. We visited the Office of the Public Guardian to find out about the development of their Electronic Power of Attorney Register which provides an alternative way to submit powers of attorney using a secure internet site.

There was also a visit to the Scottish Legal Aid Board to hear about their Legal Aid On-Line system which is available for solicitors' firms to make legal aid applications and which replaced paper applications in 2011.

The third visit was to the HM Courts and Tribunal Service in London to hear about their experience of developing IT systems for courts. From all of these visits the Committee were particularly interested in how each of these areas:

- Identified a programme to address their needs

- The process they used for putting new systems in place

- The way those new systems are currently used; and

- How they intend to progress their systems in the future

The Committee members were happy to find there were a lot of lessons to learn from these organisations that have experienced what the SCTS is currently going through and we were happy to find there were real similarities in their experiences. For example, being flexible and using a combination of methodologies such as agile and waterfall, and I won't bamboozle you with the details of those terms.

The common thread from each visit was that it was helpful to build and test new systems in small steps that can build up to a full package over time and that involving the users of the systems in those key steps is critical to ensuring that a new system can do what is expected of it. That user involvement has started with our early discussion of the ICMS system with some interested parties, and discussions with a wider range of users will continue to build over the coming months as that new system takes shape.

WHAT THE COMMITTEE WILL DO NEXT

Recently the Committee has been considering a report by the Civil Justice Council in London about the use of online dispute resolution in low value claims in England and Wales. That report outlines the many ways in which dispute resolution is already available online – both in the private sector for example ebay's system for resolving disputes and in the public sector such as the system used by the UK Financial Ombudsman Service.

The suggestion made is that improvements could be made in access to justice for those bringing low value claims if an internet-based court service was set up,

This is an area that the ICT Committee plans to examine in detail – although we note that we are a very long way from having entirely online civil courts. This approach is still envisaged as a useful addition not a replacement for traditional courts.

CONCLUSION

On behalf of the Information and Communications Technology Committee I would like to thank all those who have contributed to the work of the Committee so far and who will do so in the future.

It only remains for me to say that Roddy Flinn - Secretary of the Scottish Civil Justice Council, who spoke earlier – will now make the closing remarks.