

Courts Service
Estate Management Unit
Phoenix House
15/24 Phoenix Street North
Smithfield
Dublin 7

11th June 2015

We are delighted that there is a proposal to develop dedicated family and child court facilities in Dublin. Treoir's comments, which we hope will prove useful, are mainly around adequate accommodation for the provision of extended services.

As providers of information to unmarried parents we are well aware of the trauma and practical difficulties faced by families trying to resolve disputes in the courts and for this reason we always encourage our clients to explore all options before accessing the court.

We believe that following the commencement of the Children and Family Relationship Act 2015 and the Civil Registration (Amendment) Act 2014 the demands on the court service will be even greater than at present. There will be a requirement to have adequate facilities for children as the legislation will result in many more families availing of the courts. Step parents, grandparents and others acting in loco-parentis will be able to seek legal remedies that were not available to them in the past. This needs to be taken into account when designing facilities for the future.

Treoir recommends that accommodation should be made available for the following:

Mediation Service

The mediation service currently provided within the family law courts in Dolphin House is an invaluable service and should be maintained and indeed expanded within the family court service. This service should be offered to all clients accessing the family courts (where practicable). It should continue to be free and should be suitably housed and easily accessible.

Legal Information Service

A Legal Aid information service should be made available on-site, as is currently in place in Dolphin House. Accurate, up-to-date publications providing information to parents on legal issues such as guardianship, custody, access, establishing paternity etc. should be available to take away. Treoir currently provides the family law court with publications relating to the legal situation of unmarried parents. Our information officers regularly speak to parents who have accessed the courts unnecessarily. For example parents are often unaware that guardianship can be obtained by signing a statutory declaration where there is agreement between the parents. Having the appropriate information could negate the necessity of going to court.

Referral Service

Information on appropriate referral services such as counselling agencies, social work services, self-help groups etc. should be available and publications clearly and attractively displayed.

Consultation Rooms

Having an adequate number of private consultation rooms is essential. This is particularly relevant for clients availing of legal aid services and where there are domestic violence issues.

Facilities for Children

Facilities must be child friendly, particularly now that there will be a requirement to seek the views of children on matters concerning them. New legislation states that in arriving at its decisions "*the court shall ensure that the child concerned, to the extent possible given his or her age and understanding, has the opportunity to make his or her views on the matter known to the court...*". Age appropriate facilities should be made available for children, to include: changing facilities for babies, a crèche/play area with toys.

Facilities for refreshments

As clients are often present in the courthouse for extended periods of times there should be access to affordable snacks and drinks.

Treoir will be happy to take part in any further consultation around the exciting development of a new family courthouse in Dublin.

Kind regards,

Brenda Forde,
Senior Information Officer
TREOIR