

MODERNISING OUR SERVICES

Welcome to 2016's first issue of Justice Matters, the Ministry of Justice's quarterly newsletter for everyone with an interest in a safe and just New Zealand. In this issue, Chief Executive Andrew Bridgman discusses our modernisation journey and we highlight some of our achievements along the way. We also update progress on the leading-edge Christchurch Justice and Emergency Services Precinct and cover some of the great work our teams are doing to make a positive difference for our customers.



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Our modernisation journey – delivering services that focus on customers’ needs

In February I addressed Parliament’s Justice and Electoral select committee to present the Ministry’s 2014/15 Annual Report.

I talked about the journey we’re on to provide modern, accessible, people-centred justice services that deliver better outcomes for New Zealanders.

It’s important to understand that, in providing the range of services that we deliver, we deal with huge volumes. They include, for example:

- processing 450,000 requests for criminal histories
- summoning 135,000 jurors
- receiving 135,000 new District Court criminal cases and 58,000 new Family Court cases
- receiving 15,000 Disputes Tribunal applications
- administering 57,000 criminal legal aid applications
- collecting \$212 million in fines and reparation.

While these needs remain as important as ever, our systems and processes need to change to reflect the New Zealand of today, not the world of 50 years ago.

Modernisation is about transformational change – aligning all the work that’s being done and that will be done to make the Ministry and its services (especially courts and tribunals) work better for people.

It’s a journey to reduce the time it takes to resolve cases, to improve the experience for those who use our justice system, to simplify and standardise our processes and reduce our dependency on services delivered from buildings.

To this end we have many achievements, some which are highlighted on the next page.

As a journey, modernisation is a process of continuous improvement that requires changes to legislation, infrastructure, systems and processes. It’s also a journey that requires the assistance of all participants in the system. To this end, I would like to thank the judiciary, the legal profession, the New Zealand Police and the Department of Corrections, just to name a few, who have been of great help throughout.

We are making good progress but there is more that we’ll be doing to make a real difference to the lives of New Zealanders.



Andrew Bridgman
Secretary for Justice and Chief Executive



Old court cases reduced by 73%

We've continued to focus on reducing the numbers of old cases in the system from our baseline of April 2013, when we set a goal to halve the time it takes to deliver justice services. By the end of December 2015 the number of active cases over 2 years of age in the District Court had been reduced by 73% from April 2013.



Probate processing time reduced by 50%

We are now processing 29,000 probates a year through one centralised office, reducing the time it takes to process an application from 31 to 15 days.

9000 audio-visual links

The extension of audio-visual links between courts and prisons saw 9000 events undertaken through AVL, reducing prison escorts by almost 25%, improving both prisoner and public safety.

Court cases taking less time

In our specialist jurisdictions, we've seen further significant improvements in reducing the average age of cases at the end of 2015, including:

- Māori Land Court (down 35%)
- Environment Court (down 22%)
- Employment Court (down 30%)
- High Court Civil Appeals (down 43%)
- High Court bankruptcy applications (down 28%)
- District Court Civil Originating Applications (down 41%).



Court scheduling streamlined

We've reorganised our court days giving all criminal defendants in high-volume district courts a clearer time when their case will be called, rather than simply asking them to turn up first thing in the morning. This avoids overcrowded courts waiting areas, gives greater certainty when a case will be called and allows everyone to get through the system in the minimum time necessary.



We've also launched a service allowing criminal defendants in a district court to get a text message reminding them of a hearing. More than 1000 people have signed up for the service so far.

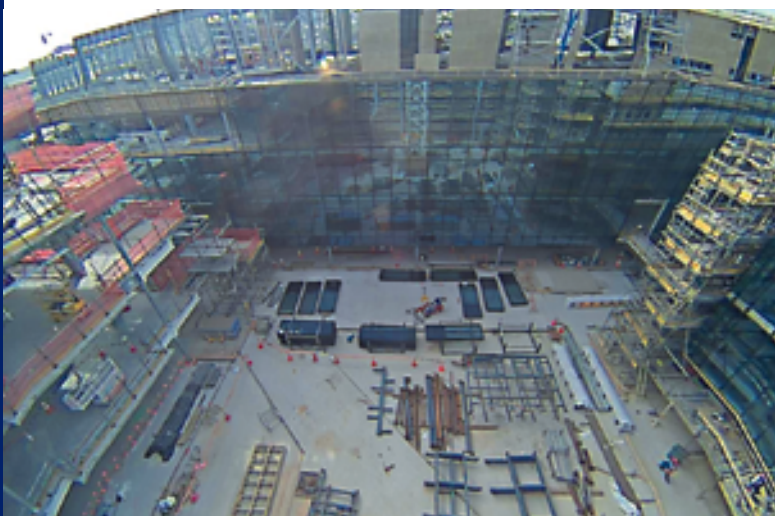
We are continuing to invest \$300 million in the development of the Christchurch Justice and Emergency Services Precinct.

Manukau court expanded

We've invested in the extension of the Manukau courthouse, providing 4 new jury trial courtrooms, extra hearing rooms, holding cells and improved judges' facilities to accommodate growth in what is our fastest-growing court region.

New precinct leads the way in Christchurch rebuild

The construction of the Christchurch Justice and Emergency Services Precinct is taking shape and is well on-track for agencies to move in by mid-2017



For more information, go to the Christchurch Central Development Unit website (ccdu.govt.nz) or check out the Christchurch Justice and Emergency Services Precinct on Facebook.

One of the largest multi-agency projects in New Zealand's history, the \$300 million Christchurch precinct forms an important part of the Canterbury rebuild and is the first major government building to be built in central Christchurch since the 2010 and 2011 earthquakes.

The precinct will be the regional headquarters for the Ministry of Justice, New Zealand Police, the Department of Corrections, New Zealand Fire Service, St John and all 3 civil defence agencies. The judiciary will also be housed in the precinct in a way that recognises and ensures its constitutional independence.

Ministry of Justice Chief Executive, Andrew Bridgman, says the precinct forms a major part of the ministry's mission to deliver modern, accessible, people-centred justice services for New Zealanders.

'Key design features, such as its use of modern technologies (AVL, wifi and fibre), and the way the different services in the building have been arranged to get people through the justice system quicker, are great examples of what we've been doing towards achieving our mission,' says Andrew.

'It's one of the first examples in the world where a complex has been developed with all justice and emergency services in one place. It also epitomises the ministry working together with justice sector partners to lift the standard of regional services across the country.'

The completed precinct will have 19 courtrooms, a dedicated customer service counter, a joint custodial facility with custodial cells, separate visitor interview areas, state of the art security, and an emergency operations centre equipped to handle regional and national incidents.

Considerable attention was also given to advanced seismic design and structural elements of the buildings during planning. Having the latest structural technology means essential services will continue in an emergency.

The development is part of the government's blueprint to rebuild essential services in central Christchurch.



Justice science advisor named

The Ministry of Justice has appointed Dr Ian Lambie, pictured, as the inaugural justice sector Science Advisor.

The role is part of the network of science advisors established across government by the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor, Sir Peter Gluckman.

Dr Lambie is Associate Professor in Clinical Psychology at the University of Auckland.

Secretary for Justice and Chief Executive Andrew Bridgman says Dr Lambie will work across the justice sector to improve access to, and use of, data, research and evidence.

'He will help the justice sector to improve the lives of New Zealanders by advising on the use of best evidence in our cross sector work to reduce crime, victimisation and harm,' says Andrew.



Higher courts welcome wifi

Five higher court buildings – the Supreme Court, Court of Appeal, Court of Appeal hearing centre in Auckland, and Auckland and Wellington High Courts – have recently had wifi installed in the courtrooms and judges' chambers.

Deputy Secretary Higher Courts, Robert Pigou, says the wifi is for judiciary, counsel, self-representing litigants, and other justice sector agencies like Police, Corrections and the Ministry of Social Development.

'It's part of our commitment to modernising court services by enabling those people to use their tablets, laptops and other mobile devices in court,' he says.

Wifi will also be installed in the High Court at Christchurch when the new precinct opens in 2017.

Strengthened courthouse to reclaim its former glory

Cabinet has agreed to strengthen and restore Dunedin's historic category 1 heritage courthouse.

This delivers on Justice Minister Amy Adams' recommendation and her support for the return of court services to the historic building.

The courthouse was closed in 2011 after engineers found parts of it fell well short of the minimum 34% rating required under the current New Building Standard (NBS) for earthquake strength design.

The project's estimated cost is more than \$15 million. It will include seismic strengthening to between 60% and 70% NBS and a refurbishment in line with our goal to modernise New Zealand's court services.

We'll call for tenders within the next 4 months and hope to appoint a main contractor later this year. The work is expected to take 2 years.

In the meantime, court services in Dunedin will continue at the temporary High Street site.





Marine and Coastal Area Act made easy

Are you keen to learn more about the Marine and Coastal Area Act 2011? Then check out our video on Youtube or go to The Office of Treaty Settlements page at www.govt.nz

Under the Marine and Coastal Area Act, whānau, hapū and iwi can seek recognition and protection of longstanding customary interests. The Act also preserves and protects existing recreational fishing rights, navigation rights and all other existing uses in New Zealand's common marine and coastal area.

Marine and Coastal Area Manager, Rhonda Taylor, says the video aims to raise awareness among Māori of the 3 April 2017 deadline for applications under the Act.

'The video provides an overview of the Act and what customary rights and customary title mean for Māori and for all New Zealanders,' says Rhonda. 'It's a complex area that the video aims to make more easily understood.'



Australasian award for Rangatahi Court

The work of our Rangatahi Courts has been acknowledged with the 2015 Australasian Institute of Judicial Administration Award for Excellence in Judicial Administration.

Rangatahi Courts received the award ahead of nominations from Australia's federal and state courts.

The selection panel was particularly impressed by the way local Māori communities were engaged in assisting their own young offenders to achieve youth justice.

Introduced 5 years ago, Rangatahi Courts are widely accepted within the justice sector and by Māori as a legitimate response by our courts to addressing some of the fundamental issues underlying the high levels of offending by Māori in New Zealand. Rangatahi Courts use social services, tikanga wānanga (cultural programmes), plus whānau, hapū and iwi resources to help guide young offenders from a life of crime.

Developed by the New Zealand judiciary, the concept was informed by the experience of the Koori Courts in Australia.



More te reo Māori to be heard in district courts

Te reo Māori has recently been introduced for the opening and closing of all district court sessions with justices of the peace and community magistrates.

The expanded te reo announcements follow their successful introduction in the Family Court, Youth Court, Māori Land Court, Waitangi Tribunal, Rangatahi Youth Court and Matariki Court.

Deputy Secretary District Courts and Special Jurisdictions, Karl Cummins, says the te reo Māori announcements have been well received by people using the court system.

'It's about our customers after all, as well as respecting New Zealand's biculturalism,' says Karl.



Criminal legal aid fees set to change

Legal Services Commissioner, Sarah Turner, recently published her decision on changes to criminal fixed fees for legal aid.

This followed a review of the criminal fee schedules, introduced in March 2012, to see how they were working in practice and to identify any issues or gaps.

A staged increase in government funding up to \$4.92 million over the next 3 financial years has enabled the commissioner to revise the criminal legal aid fees. The first set of changes will be introduced on 4 July, 2016.

The setting of fees is an independent statutory function of the commissioner. Reviews of fees, including this review, are an operational matter for the commissioner and aren't a policy change in the approach to fees. The commissioner must act within the financial parameters set by the Secretary of Justice and the government.

More information is available on our website at justice.govt.nz/services/legal-services-commissioner



Attracting top talent to work here

Jobs at our ministry feature in a new website attracting talented people from overseas.

General Manager People and Performance Kellie O'Sullivan says the website connects top talent from around the world to New Zealand-based companies and organisations.

'The website gives us the opportunity to profile the ministry and helps ensure we have a good pool of candidates for some of our hard-to-fill, high-skill positions,' says Kellie. 'It aims to attract expat kiwis thinking about returning home and migrants looking to relocate to New Zealand.'

'The site is used by other government agencies such as the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment and Ministry of Health and large private sector employers.'

'It includes video clips of some of our people talking about what it's like working at the ministry.'

For more information go to workhere.co.nz



Innovative teams take top honours

The Ministry of Justice internal court awards, which recognise innovation and success, were presented late last year.

Deputy Secretary District Courts and Special Jurisdictions Karl Cummins says the annual awards showcase the work taking place to modernise our court system.

'The 2015 winning teams demonstrate excellence, innovation and a commitment to customer service,' he says.

The award winners from the 3 court categories were:

- *for district courts:*
Auckland Civil and Family Services Team for significant improvements to the timeliness of Family Court appointments.
- *for higher courts:*
National Transcription Service (which transcribes hearings from courts throughout the country), pictured, for its work to ensure courts progress cases efficiently.
- *for special jurisdictions:*
Specialist Courts Group, which supports the Employment, Environment and Coroners courts, for reducing the average age of cases in their jurisdictions by more than 30% since 2013.



\$20-million helping hand for victims

More than \$20.2 million generated by the government's offender levy since its introduction in 2010 has benefited victims of crime.

The \$50 levy is imposed on all offenders at the point of sentencing and contributes to financial grants and support services for victims.

General Manager, Provider and Community Services, Alison Hill says the 15 new grants and key victim support services weren't previously available.

'The offender levy generates funds that help ease some of the financial and emotional pressures faced by victims of crime,' says Alison. 'It also ensures offenders contribute to addressing the harm their offending has caused.'

In the 2014/15 financial year, cash received from the offender levy totalled more than \$3.6 million.

Of that amount, some \$2.5 million was spent on additional support and services for victims of sexual violence, including \$1.7 million for specialist sexual violence court victim advisors. These are trained staff experienced in working with sexual violence who support some of the most vulnerable victims through the court process.

The offender levy also funded financial assistance such as travel grants for those victims who need to travel to attend court or parole hearings, and grants to families of homicide victims for funeral expenses, lost income and counselling. In 2014/15, the financial assistance grants helped more than 3400 victims.



Public Defence Service success compares well

Almost half of the appeals undertaken by the Public Defence Service (PDS) in the past 2½ years have been successful.

During that time, PDS has taken some 55 cases to the Court of Appeal and appeared in 2 appeals to the Supreme Court.

PDS Director Madeleine Laracy says the success rate compares favourably overall with the success rate in defendant appeals to the Court of Appeal, both here and in comparable jurisdictions.

'We don't take on appeals out of an expectation that the appeal will be allowed,' says Madeleine. 'Our focus is on the defendant's right to appeal and whether the appellant had a fair trial or sentencing.'

'We recognise that when an appeal is allowed, others involved, particularly any complainants, can feel aggrieved but a defence counsel's role in the appeal process is to hold the system to account and require court processes to be redone if there is a substantial due process or fairness failure. Appellate courts don't allow appeals lightly and when they do, it means that something fundamental has gone wrong with the earlier proceeding. Sometimes the only way that can be remedied is to order a new trial or quash the convictions altogether.'

'In an ideal world, the system would get it right 100% of the time and it wouldn't be necessary to hear appeals. However, the trial process isn't infallible and that's why a robust appeal process is essential.'

With around 150 lawyers, the PDS is New Zealand's largest law firm.