

COUNTY
COURT OF
VICTORIA

COURT DIRECTIONS 2017–22

MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF JUDGE

This document is the expression of the County Court's commitment to improvement over the next five years. It details the priorities the Court will pursue to ensure it continues to meet the expectations of the community. The goals are ambitious, but necessarily so. The world is changing – rapidly and profoundly – so we must adapt if we are to meet the challenges and embrace the opportunities that lie ahead.

For more than 160 years the Court has kept pace with a changing world. When it was established in 1852, the Court's principal role was to handle small civil claims in the County of Bourke (which takes in parts of present day Melbourne). Today the County Court has jurisdiction for the whole of Victoria and comprises 67 judges (including three who sit as the heads of other jurisdictions). It now hears even the most complex civil matters and deals with all indictable offences except murder and treason.

Court Directions 20 17–22 is a roadmap for the next era – guiding projects in areas including technology, community engagement, service provision, and judicial and staff support.

In one sense the changes brought about through this document will be significant. However, the County Court, with its long and proud history, will remain true to its fundamental role in the community – it will continue to uphold the highest standards of fairness in the administration of justice, and its commitment to independence, impartiality and transparency will remain unwavering. I commend this document to you.

Chief Judge Peter Kidd
County Court of Victoria

ABOUT THE COUNTY COURT OF VICTORIA

The County Court is the principal trial court in Victoria. It hears and determines over 12,000 matters each year.

The Chief Judge and the County Court's 66 other judges are supported by over 300 staff.

Judges sit in three divisions: Criminal, Common Law and Commercial. In addition to proceedings in Melbourne, judges hear cases at circuit courts in 12 regional Victorian centres.

County Court judges also sit as the heads of jurisdiction at the Magistrates' Court, Coroners Court and Children's Court, and they sit at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal as Vice-Presidents.

OUR PURPOSE

To hear and determine matters in a fair, timely, efficient and accessible way.

OUR STRENGTHS

- A commitment to the very highest standards of justice
- Adherence to the principles of openness and transparency
- Professional and highly-motivated staff
- Future focused

OUR CONTEXT

The Court has identified a variety of factors currently influencing, or likely to impact on the environment it operates in.

- Increased community interest in public institutions will lead to demands for greater openness and transparency.
- Media attention, including via social media, will, increasingly, shape and even represent community opinion about the Court and, in turn, lead to demands for improved access to a broader range of court information.
- The unfolding digital revolution presents an on-going opportunity for the Court to improve its services and interactions with the community, not just with new technology but through new systems and processes.
- To enhance public trust and confidence, the Court will need to continue to work to promote public understanding – of the Court, and of the fairness, integrity and independence of the court system as a whole.
- The government and the community are not only interested in the operations of the County Court, but also in its contribution to the performance of the broader justice system.
- With the greater independence of the court system, there is an opportunity for the courts, the tribunal and Court Services Victoria to work together to provide better and more integrated services to the community.
- With continued strong population growth and the substantial increase in police numbers, the number of court cases will increase significantly. The infrastructure and processes of the Court will be challenged to handle this caseload.
- Growing caseloads will be accompanied by increased case complexity. Ongoing changes to government policy and the law, increasing use of technology in evidence, increasingly complex forensic evidence, and the expanding number of self-represented litigants are among the many drivers of complexity.
- With greater independence, the courts are, and will continue to be more accountable for their financial efficiency and sustainability.
- Despite funding constraints, court users will expect ongoing improvements in efficiency and services and timeliness.
- While respecting the separation between the courts and the other arms of government, the Court will have an ongoing role providing, where appropriate, considered contributions in relation to justice policy.
- Judges' work will continue to expand and they will continue to be exposed to difficult and confronting cases. There will be greater public scrutiny of their work.
- Court administrators will require exceptional skills, commitment and professionalism to support the imperative that courts continue to improve, both in terms of their performance and efficiency.

OUR OBJECTIVES

The County Court's priorities for the next five years will be guided by seven objectives.



IMPROVE THE COURT USER EXPERIENCE

Enhance services and programs to meet the needs of court users and improve justice outcomes.



HARNESS NEW TECHNOLOGY

Embrace new technology and rethink systems to enhance transparency, improve service and increase productivity.



ENGAGE WITH THE COMMUNITY

Improve transparency and the accessibility of information to build understanding of the Court and its processes.



SUPPORT JUDGES & STAFF

Strengthen capability, and support the well-being of judges and staff.



REFORM BASED ON EVIDENCE

Implement improvement initiatives based on best-practice and strong evidence.



EXPAND & EXPLORE SPECIALISATION

Specialise to better meet the needs of specific court user groups.



COLLABORATE WITHIN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

Contribute to the overall performance and effectiveness of the justice system.

OUR PRIORITIES

The following priorities support the Court's purpose and will help it achieve its objectives.

IMPROVE THE COURT USER EXPERIENCE

- Listen to, and understand court user needs and interests via surveys and other means.
- Make information easily available to court users and targeted to their needs.
- Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our systems to reduce complexity, and the time and cost to court users.
- Provide improved support services to self-represented litigants.

REFORM BASED ON EVIDENCE

- Develop robust, evidence-based business cases to support requests for external support for new systems, services and initiatives.
- Test and implement improved systems for listing and case managing trials.
- Redesign the systems and work of Registry to improve service and increase productivity.
- Develop a model to better understand and forecast demand.

HARNESS NEW TECHNOLOGY

- Implement a modern end-to-end case management system.
- Improve business intelligence and data analytics capabilities.
- Provide a modern flexible IT environment which supports personal and organisational productivity.

EXPAND AND EXPLORE SPECIALISATION

- Pilot a new operating model for circuit courts at Shepparton.
- Explore the expansion of the County Koori Court to other regional locations.
- Explore the potential of other specialist courts.

ENGAGE WITH THE COMMUNITY

- Make court information and data open, transparent and easy to find, where appropriate.
- Use social media and other digital channels to engage with the community and build understanding of the Court's work.
- Proactively engage with traditional media.
- Increase publication and understanding of sentences.
- Improve media access to court information.
- Webcast sentences where appropriate.
- Develop and implement in-house and outreach programs for schools.
- Redevelop the Court's website.

COLLABORATE WITHIN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

- Work with other justice agencies to streamline system-wide processes.
- Undertake joint projects with other jurisdictions where there are synergies and economies of scale.
- Share and reuse common technology systems across courts, where possible.
- Standardise back-end systems and processes and share services with other courts where this makes sense.
- Provide input on broader justice policy issues on the impacts on the Court and its users.

SUPPORT JUDGES AND STAFF

- Improve systems to enhance work satisfaction and productivity.
- Improve induction and support for new judges.
- Expand judicial professional development, both through the Judicial College of Victoria and internally.
- Provide better support for the return of reserve judges.
- Expand judge and staff well-being programs.
- Build the capability of court staff by increasing investment in training and development.



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