

MCV Service Centre Evaluation | Final report

Magistrates' Court of Victoria

4 December 2023



Nous Group acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians and the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia. We pay our respect to Elders past, present and emerging, who maintain their culture, country and spiritual connection to the land, sea, and community.

This artwork was developed by Marcus Lee Design to reflect Nous Group's Reconciliation Action Plan and our aspirations for respectful and productive engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.

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1 Executive summary

1.1 Context and purpose

The Magistrates' Court of Victoria (MCV) has good reason to be proud of the achievements of the MCV Service Centre (hereafter the Service Centre) in its first 18-months of operation. In a relatively short period, the Service Centre has won widespread support across MCV and from key stakeholders in response to the value it creates for public and professional users alike.

MCV is now motivated to take the work of the Service Centre even further. An immediate aspiration is to expand its service reach for IVO matters following its effective statewide reach for criminal and civil matters. There are also exciting prospects to enhance and refine the service offering to take on a broader range of user enquiries and explore new forms of outreach to public users to ensure that parties are well prepared for their day in court. The performance of the Service Centre to date and horizon opportunities are explored in this evaluation report.

Purpose

MCV engaged Nous Group (Nous) to conduct an independent evaluation of the Service Centre, consistent with the Department of Treasury and Finance's Lapsing Program Evaluation Minimum Standards. The evaluation will support MCV in reviewing the merit and service standard of the Service Centre and informing Government decisions in relation to continued service funding beyond 2024/25.

The aim of the evaluation is to assess to what extent:

- The Service Centre has been implemented efficiently and is relieving workload pressure from supported courts.
- Court users are satisfied with the service experienced when engaging with the Service Centre.
- The benefits as detailed in [REDACTED] have been achieved.

The evaluation also seeks to consider what:

- Factors appear to promote or inhibit the success of the Service Centre.
- Changes (if any) are required to further strengthen the success of the Service Centre.

Methodology and scope

A mixed-methods approach was employed for this independent evaluation. The approach was underpinned by a clear program logic and structured KEQs. The program logic clearly articulates how the interventions are intended to achieve the goals, including highlighting the assumptions in the design of the Service Centre. This allows the evaluation to test the extent to which the outcomes are being achieved as expected, and to pinpoint where in the design or implementation alterations may need to be made.

1.2 Summary of key evaluation findings

Appropriateness and justification	<p>The Service Centre has fast become core to the way MCV delivers value to the Victorian community. It closely aligns and enables several strategic and operational priorities of MCV.</p> <p>It has won broad support across MCV for the intervention and provides a strong base for future refinement and expansion of the model to deliver even more value.</p> <p>Looking ahead, the Service Centre offers enormous potential to drive and shape ongoing digital transformation efforts across MCV.</p>
Effectiveness	<p>Modernised MCV contact management practices to support improved visibility and reporting of demand for e-registry services.</p> <p>Establish centralised response to digital court user enquiries (other than same day hearing-day enquiries).</p> <p>Divert non-complex enquiry responses and administrative tasks from registry staff.</p> <p>We observe that the target indicators articulated in the [REDACTED] for the Service Centre do not necessarily reflect the value it creates in terms of increased access to information, responsiveness and enhancing the court user experience.</p>
Funding and delivery	<p>In effect, the Service Centre now has statewide reach for criminal and civil matters. Integration with existing IVO jurisdiction services is underway, this implementation far exceeds the budget commitment to integrate the IVO jurisdiction service, extending to ten headquarter courts by end of July 2023, exceeding the commitment to six courts by June 2024.</p>
Efficiency	<p>The evaluation's outcomes analysis could not detect an effect of the Service Centre on court timeliness, based on available metrics. Reasons for this finding are discussed in the body of the report, and several hypotheses proposed for future data collection.</p> <p>The Service Centre has exceptional contact response metrics – much timelier and more responsive than comparable service benchmarks. However, this may point to the scope to refine its staffing profile or expand its service footprint without compromising on service quality. This is not unexpected given the underlying data available to forecast service demand at the time combined with initiative in expansion phase over this this period.</p>
Risk	<p>Any cessation of the Service Centre would be a retrograde step. It would likely compromise access, digital service choice, and responsiveness objectives of the MCV, and undo the support generated to innovating the way MCV interacts with public and professional users.</p> <p>Further, any move to reabsorb court user enquiries by local venues will be operationally challenging and may require investment in additional registry staff across the network.</p>
Ongoing funding	<p>MCV did not require financial analysis of the ongoing funding need for the Service Centre as part of this evaluation as it was being undertaken in parallel for a budget bid. However, we note the importance of ongoing funding for the Service Centre if it is to realise a series of horizon opportunities.</p>

1.3 Recommendations

In line with the findings of our independent analysis, we make a set of recommendations (Table 1) to help shape the next phase of the Service Centre. We characterise this next phase as one building on the strong foundations of the initial roll-out so that it can generate even greater value.

Table 1 | Eight recommendations outlined in this evaluation

RECOMMENDATION 1A	With pending caseload volumes now returned to pre-pandemic levels, MCV should shift the strategic narrative for the Service Centre to better reflect the multiple forms of value it creates for the system, court venues and staff, and individual court users.
RECOMMENDATION 1B	MCV should develop a target state for the next horizon of the Service Centre's evolution including a clear vision, target service ratios / volumes, and resourcing requirements. This recommendation may be fulfilled in part or full within the [REDACTED].
RECOMMENDATION 2A	Enhance monitoring of total enquiry demand at a system and court venue level in real time. Call data is already sufficient for this purpose. MCV can also readily update its Service Centre performance dashboard to include direct-to-court calls, alongside the data for calls received by the Service Centre. Additionally, MCV should commence data collection for direct-to-court email enquiries using a solution such as targeted mailboxes or upgrading email contact software system.
RECOMMENDATION 2B	Improve insight on user needs and preferences through more new data capture and monitoring needs. Some data items to consider tracking include: repeat callers; type of contact (professional stakeholder or court user); enquiry type; hearing day to non-hearing day enquiry split.
RECOMMENDATION 3	Divert more demand away from the courts to the Service Centre so that court-based registry services can focus on those justice services that require their expertise. To do so, MCV might explore opportunities to route more emails to the Service Centre by default (for example, through having separate inboxes for different enquiries) or to shift away from emails as a primary mode of enquiry (for example, through promoting online submission and webchat). This way the Service Centre would be responsible for triaging emails back to courts as needed, rather than the other way around. The Service Centre could also investigate opportunities to improve triage to better delineate between hearing-day calls that require a registrar and those that do not (for example, 'what time should I arrive for my hearing?' and 'Can I bring a support person?') so that it handles more of the later enquiry type.
RECOMMENDATION 4	Continue to invest in the Knowledge Management System (KMS) which is driving process standardisation for MCV. Ensure that the KMS remains accurate and up to date as best practice court procedures evolve.
RECOMMENDATION 5	Continue to evaluate the performance of the Service Centre. MCV could continue to analyse court timeliness metrics by performing outcome evaluations at the court user or matter level, rather than court level. Alternatively, MCV could evaluate Service Centre performance with metrics

	not related to timeliness. Metrics could relate to meeting users needs, accessibility, confidence in the courts, and user experience.
RECOMMENDATION 6	Prioritise any further expansion of the Service Centre to the IVO courts with the highest abandonment rates given the time sensitive nature of this enquiries.
RECOMMENDATION 7	MCV should carefully weigh the costs and benefits of running a leaner staffing model and accepting a poorer public experience (worse call performance metrics) in the next phase of operation. The Service Centre could use enquiry volume modelling using a desired service quality to inform resourcing levels.
RECOMMENDATION 8	<p>Should a decision be made to cease the Service Centre, MCV should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employ a change management process to reduce negative outcomes from cultural challenges, and • Carefully monitor the effects of a degradation of digital service access across the MCV and identify where service demand flows back into court registries each month. Venues may require additional resourcing to maintain acceptable response times and some may be at capacity, requiring enquiry redirection to other venues.

2 Introduction and context

This section briefly describes the role of the Magistrates' Court in the Victorian justice system and how the Service Centre fits within this service model. We make the following introductory observations about MCV:

1. A 'front door' to the Victorian justice system.
2. Ripe for ongoing digital reform to enhance the court experience.
3. The Service Centre has fast become a core enabler of the court's strategy.
4. Purpose of this evaluation.

2.1 A 'front door' to the Victorian justice system

MCV plays a crucial role in ensuring access to justice and shaping community confidence in the legal system. As the first level of the Victorian court system, most – if not all – Victorians who experience the court system will have touchpoints with MCV. MCV hears and finalises matters in full or initiates proceedings prior to their transfer to a higher court jurisdiction. Consequently, MCV responds to the highest volume of matters in Victoria – refer to Figure 1.

Figure 1 | Matter lodgements by Victorian court jurisdiction, 2021-22¹



Figure 2 presents the proportion of each type of matter initiated at MCV in 2022-23. Of matters initiated, almost half (or 66 per cent) are criminal matters. The remaining proportion of matters comprise family violence and personal safety Intervention Order (IVO) matters (19 per cent) and other civil matters (15 per cent).

Figure 2 | Proportion of criminal, IVO, and civil initiations, MCV, 2022-23



¹ Includes civil and criminal lodgements within the MCV for FY22.

2.2 Ripe for ongoing digital reform to enhance the court experience

Across Australia and internationally, courts are rapidly investing in digital transformation to enable greater self-service and digital access to registry services. Figure 3 presents a selection of digital court reforms and investments underway across the country.

MCV is very much a part of this digital reform landscape. It continues to learn from and embed service model improvements ushered in during COVID-19 pandemic. Growing recognition of the valuable role technology can play in the delivery of and access to justice is front of mind: *"Our court users are asking for modern pathways that place them at the centre of our processes and provide the option to complete certain tasks online."*²

Notable digital improvements that are changing the face of MCV's service model include:

- **Hybrid hearings** – reshaping how court hearings are delivered through a mix of in-person and online hearings.
- **Online applications for Family Violence Intervention Orders (FVIO)** – this enhancement was fast-tracked during the pandemic to support increased access to the FVIO application process via an online form.
- **Family Violence Coordination Tool** – A collaborative tool that brings MCV, Victoria Police, Victoria Legal Aid, and other community service providers together.
- **A Case Management System (CMS)** – the deployment of a new case management system is central to the court's digital transformation. The court celebrated its civil release in October 2022, and the five subsequent stages are planned for release in the near term.

Notwithstanding these rapid improvements to the court's service model, there are still vast opportunities for MCV to continue improve the court experience for court users and to streamline operational demands on staff alike.

² MCV Annual Report 2021/22, p.13

Figure 3 | A select snapshot of digital court reforms across Australia



2.3 A core enabler of the court’s strategy

The MCV Strategic Plan for 2022-2026 – ‘*Service. Community. Innovation. Delivering Court Excellence*’ – sets out the court’s vision and direction for this period. It comprises four pillars to support an overarching aspiration to be ‘an innovative and accessible court delivering fair, transparent and efficient justice’.³ The Service Centre makes a demonstrable contribution to each pillar, per Figure 4.

Figure 4 | Alignment of the Service Centre to MCV’s strategy



³ MCV, [Strategic Plan 2022-2026](#): Service. Community. Innovation. 2022.

2.4 Purpose of this evaluation

In July 2023, MCV engaged Nous Group to conduct an independent evaluation of the Service Centre. The evaluation is compliant with the Department of Treasury and Finance's Lapsing Program Evaluation Minimum Standards. In this way, the evaluation will be an input to whether the initiative receives continued funding beyond 2024/25.

The **aim of the evaluation** is to assess to what extent:

- The Service Centre has been implemented efficiently and is relieving workload pressure (met or unmet demand) from supported courts.
- Court users are satisfied with the service experienced when engaging with the Service Centre.
- The benefits as detailed in the [REDACTED] have been achieved.

The evaluation also seeks to consider what:

- Factors appear to promote or inhibit the success of the Service Centre.
- Changes (if any) are required to further strengthen the success of the Service Centre.

The **primary audience** for the evaluation is two-fold:

- MCV who will use the findings from the evaluation to inform decisions about the future of the Service Centre, including for their submission for continued funding and potentially IVO service expansion.
- Department of Treasury and Finance who will want to understand the outcomes delivered by the Service Centre as a funded initiative.

3 Methodology

This section details our mixed methods evaluation design, which integrates qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis to triangulate evaluation findings. We briefly describe:

1. Mixed-methods evaluation approach
2. Program logic and key evaluation questions
3. Analysis of early outcomes
4. Scope and limitations.

3.1 Mixed-methods evaluation approach

Nous used a mixed method approach to evaluate the Service Centre. This approach involves drawing from a range of evaluation sources, including consultations, desktop reviews as well as court administrative performance datasets. We conducted different types of analyses and triangulated insights to develop robust findings for each key evaluation question (KEQ). Figure 5 presents a snapshot of key forms of data analysis used to inform this evaluation. Please refer to A.2 for the list of stakeholders engaged for this purpose, and 0 for program documents we reviewed.

Figure 5 | Snapshot of data analysis and consultation activity



Figure 6 summarises the timeline of the work conducted.

Figure 6 | Evaluation timeline



3.2 Program logic and key evaluation questions

The evaluation was underpinned by a program logic and structured KEQs. The program logic clearly articulates how the service change interventions are intended to achieve the goals, including highlighting the assumptions in the design of the Service Centre. This allows the evaluation to test the extent to which the outcomes are being achieved as expected, and to pinpoint where in the design or implementation alterations may need to be made. It describes the logical connection between the:

- *Context* – what is driving the need for the Service Centre?
- *Inputs* – what resources have been provided?
- *Activities* – what services are delivered as part of the Service Centre?
- *Outputs* – what is the immediate change resulting from the activities?
- *Outcomes* – what are the changes observable for court users, MCV venues and the broader system?

Figure 7 details the program logic for the Service Centre. Key evaluation questions are presented at Appendix A.

Figure 7 | Program logic for the Service Centre



3.3 Analysis of early outcomes

Given the Service Centre is only 18-months into operation, we have characterised the outcomes analysis for this initiative as early in nature. Analysis focuses on metrics identified by MCV in the [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Figure 8 presents the theory of change, which is the mechanism by which the Service Centre is hypothesised to achieve the intended outcomes.

Figure 8 | Theory of change



Outcomes are analysed descriptively and inferentially:

- **Descriptive analysis** looks at overall system trends during the rollout and gives insight into what was happening within MCV that may impact on Service Centre outcomes.
- **Causal attribution** of Service Centre impact was tested using difference-in-difference analysis, which enables investigation of the role of the Service Centre in changing target outcomes.

Figure 9 illustrates this approach. Detailed difference-in-difference methodology and outputs are located at A.3.

Figure 9 | Approach to difference-in-difference for outcomes analysis



3.4 Scope and limitations

The **primary scope** of the evaluation is to:

- Evaluate the implementation of the Service Centre and identify whether it is working as intended to achieve benefits detailed in the [REDACTED].
- Identify factors that promote or inhibit the success of the Service Centre and identify any changes that are required to further strengthen the success of the Service Centre.

Items which are **out of scope** for the evaluation are:

- Interviews with stakeholders not listed in A.2, notably direct engagement with court users.
- Development of the 2024/25 funding submission, including calculation of ongoing funding requirements.

Table 2 presents some considerations of the court administrative data analysed for this evaluation.

Table 2 | Data considerations and limitations

Data inputs and limitations	
Use of aggregate court-level administrative data	Outcomes analysis is conducted at the court level, rather than the court user level. This approach tests whether the Service Centre improved the outcomes for the courts it serviced, however it does not test the effect on court users. Future outcomes evaluation could compare the experience of court users who interact with the Service Centre to those who did not.
Variance is high in the initiation data used to calculate finalisation rates	The finalisation rate metric includes initiations which were manually entered by the registry over the comparison period when they have capacity. Noise from inconsistent data capture may mask a more subtle effect of the Service Centre. Finalisation rates were calculated by fortnight to reduce this variance.
The reasons for adjournments are not available	The adjournment rate metric includes all adjournments, irrespective of the reason. Due to the data available, the metric does not target specific types of adjournments which may enable an increased ability to detect an effect. For example, adjournment rates include illness, which the Service Centre could not have influenced.

Data inputs and limitations

Limited data available to serve as a comparison group

The rapid rollout of the Service Centre enables comparisons of four pairs of criminal courts and two pairs of civil courts only. This is because there is only a small window (between two and six months) in which there was a sample of courts with access to the Service Centre and sample of similar courts without access at the same time. This limits the courts available to select as pairs for comparison. Given outcome metrics were calculated on a fortnightly basis, shorter comparison periods may not allow enough data to detect an effect.

Limited longitudinal data available to indicate outcomes

Case finalisations require a case to have been 'completed' in the sample period. Many cases in the sample will not be finalised yet. This should not prejudice the results as it occurs for both courts (intervention and comparison). However, it further reduces the sample size, lowering the ability of the analysis to detect an effect.

Family Violence Contact Centre performance and outcomes prior to integration with the Service Centre are not in scope

A limited intervention order contact service, the MCV Family Violence Contact Centre (FVCC) was established in 2018 because of a government adopted recommendation from the Royal Commission into Family Violence (2016). The Service Centre integrated the FVCC in late July 2023 as a commitment resulting from the [REDACTED]. There is insufficient data to evaluate its impact since service consolidation. This evaluation considers the integration of the FVCC but does not assess impact prior to joining the Service Centre.

4 Key findings

This section details the findings for the evaluation based on our primary and secondary data analysis per the methodology outlined in the previous section. The findings are presented against the relevant evaluation domain as follows:

1. **Appropriateness and justification** – The Service Centre has fast become core to the way MCV delivers value to the Victorian community.
 2. **Effectiveness** – Progress towards its stated objectives and early outcomes.
 3. **Funding and delivery** – Roll-out highlights include an expanded scope delivered ahead of schedule and within budget.
 4. **Efficiency** - Exceptional contact response metrics may indicate excess capacity.
 5. **Risk** – Cessation would be a retrograde step and likely compromise access, digital choice, and responsiveness imperatives.
 6. **Ongoing funding** – Necessary to realise a set of horizon opportunities.
-

4.1 Appropriateness and justification

KEQ 1 TO WHAT EXTENT IS THE SERVICE CENTRE MAKING PROGRESS TOWARDS ITS OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES?

MCV launched a pilot of the Service Centre in March 2022 to 'relieve pressure on registry staff and to assist to reduce the pending caseload' that grew to unsustainable levels during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. It builds on earlier iterations of a Family Violence Contact Centre by extending the service breadth and benefits to *all court users*, as well as the modes of engagement.⁴

Since commencement of this pilot phase, it has rapidly expanded its geographic reach and breadth of offerings in support of MCV's strategic and operational objectives. It has fast become core to the way MCV delivers value to the Victorian community.

In this section, we describe how the Service Centre adds value to the strategic and operational priorities of MCV.

4.1.1 A service model snapshot

Located in Melbourne's central business district, the Service Centre responds to phone, email and webchat enquiries. Phone enquiries are transferred from metropolitan and regional courts using a first contact telephone menu or interactive voice response (IVR) interface which triages the caller through to either the

⁴ Rec. 63 of the *Royal Commission into Family Violence, Victoria 2016* proposed that MCV consider establishing an e-registry as a central online file-management portal and an offsite contact centre for managing registry related queries. In response, MCV commenced a proof-of-concept Family Violence Contact Centre (FVCC) in 2018. By FY21, the FVCC handled over 200,000 enquiries by phone and email that would otherwise have added to the administrative workloads of local court venues.

originating court (per the number dialled) for 'same day hearing day' services or Service Centre for any other enquiry. Emails are triaged by the local court venue to filter the priority same day hearing day contact, from pre-hearing day contact which is dealt with by the Service Centre.

The Service Centre is designed to support both public and professional court users. Figure 10 presents the key user groups, including subgroups of professional court users who support public users.

Figure 10 | Target professional and public court users



18-months on from commencement, the services delivered by the Service Centre continue to grow, evolve, and mature, quickly becoming a core piece of infrastructure for how MCV operates. The current service model is illustrated at Figure 11, including the way different modes of contact initiated by public and professional users are triaged currently.

Figure 11 | High-level service model overview of the Service Centre

USER	CONTACT MODE	MCV SYSTEM RESPONSE	
		LOCAL VENUE	SERVICE CENTRE
INBOUND ENQUIRIES			
PUBLIC	IN PERSON		
	EMAIL	▶ MANUAL TRIAGE	▶ FILTERED EMAILS
	CALLS (VRI Interface)	▶ HEARING DAY ENQUIRIES	▶ OTHER ENQUIRIES
	WEBCCHAT		
SELF-SERVICE			
PROFESSIONAL	CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM		
	WEBSITE		
OUTBOUND CONTACT			
SMS OUTBOUND REMINDERS			

4.1.2 Value creation at multiple levels

Funding for the Service Centre was premised, in large part, on helping to 'reduce the backlog' that grew rapidly during the COVID-19 restrictions period. Specifically, the [REDACTED] highlighted the benefits that it would have on relieving pressure on registry staff through diverting digital (call and email) enquiries away from local courts so that registry staff would have more time to focus on in-person readiness, providing judicial support, and managing complex cases to help the flow of matters into court and therefore address the pending caseload. Notwithstanding our assessment of the contribution of the Service Centre to addressing pending caseload, which is examined in subsequent sections of this report (see section 4.2.3) this justification – on its own – is no longer fit-for-purpose.

The ongoing value of the Service Centre is much greater than one of helping to put downward pressure on pending caseload. This narrative downplays the enormous value the Service Centre has created - in quick order - for the MCV. The Service Centre offers demonstrable value at multiple levels – system, court, individual users – and is a core enabler of several strategic and operational priorities of the MCV. In Figure 12, we identify three ways that the Service Centre creates value for MCV at a system level.

Figure 12 | System value enabled by the Service Centre

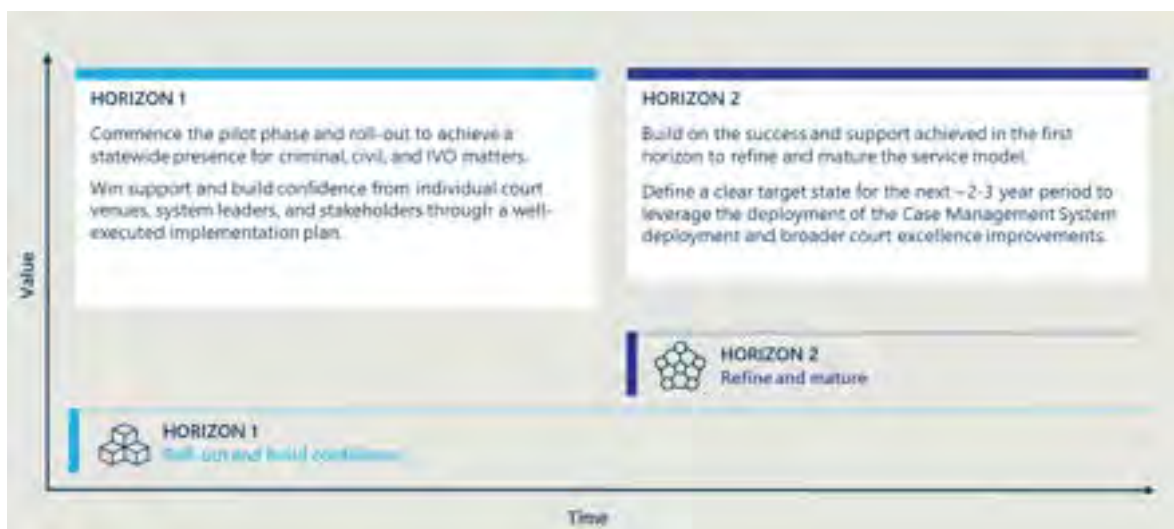


4.1.3 Strong base, enormous potential

Only 18-months into its implementation, the Service Centre has rapidly become a core part of the evolving MCV service model. It is regularly cited by the Chief Magistrate and executives in terms of its close alignment to the strategic and operational objectives of the court. This is an impressive achievement for an initiative that represents a significant shift to 'the way things get done' across a complex service system with an overriding preference to in-person delivery until very recently.

In Figure 13, we present an indicative maturity for the Service Centre. We characterise the roll-out phase to the current period as the first of two horizons. The implementation achievements to date have won broad support across MCV for the intervention and provide a strong base for future refinement and expansion of the model to deliver even more value. Indeed, the Service Centre offers enormous potential for the ongoing digital service transformation underway across MCV.

Figure 13 | An indicative maturity model for the Service Centre



RECOMMENDATION 1A

With pending caseload volumes now returned to pre-pandemic levels, MCV should shift the strategic narrative for the Service Centre to better reflect the multiple forms of value it creates for the system, court venues and staff, and individual court users.

RECOMMENDATION 1B

MCV should develop a target state for the next horizon of the Service Centre's evolution including a clear vision, target service ratios / volumes, and resourcing requirements. This recommendation may be fulfilled in part or full for the [REDACTED].

4.2 Effectiveness

KEQ 2 TO WHAT EXTENT IS THE SERVICE CENTRE MAKING PROGRESS TOWARDS ITS OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES?

4.2.1 Sound progress against stated service objectives

The business case for the Service Centre identified the following three primary service objectives for the model:

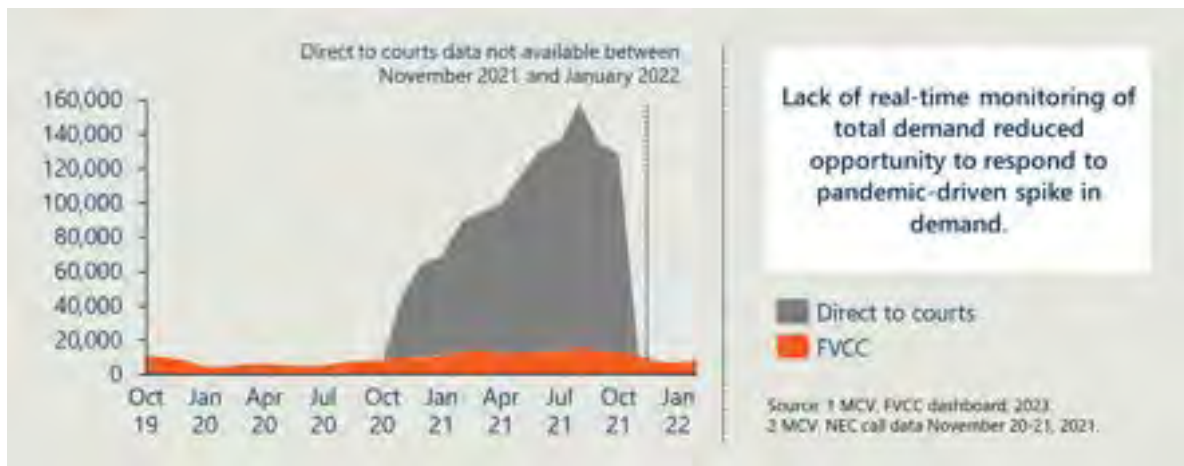
- Modernise MCV contact management to support improved visibility and reporting of demand for e-registry services.
- Establish centralised response to digital court user enquiries other than hearing-day enquiries.
- Divert non-complex enquiry response and transactional and administrative tasks from registry staff.

Modernise MCV contact management to support improved visibility and reporting of demand for e-registry services

By March 2022, the MCV successfully transitioned to the new Genesys contact management system. The new system enables calls to be streamed according to the nature of the user enquiry. It tracks calls across the system and facilitates insight into enquiry demand to inform the MCV workforce management scheduling. Prior to this, contact data was not routinely available to MCV, except for IVO matters in the ten courts serviced by the FVCC.

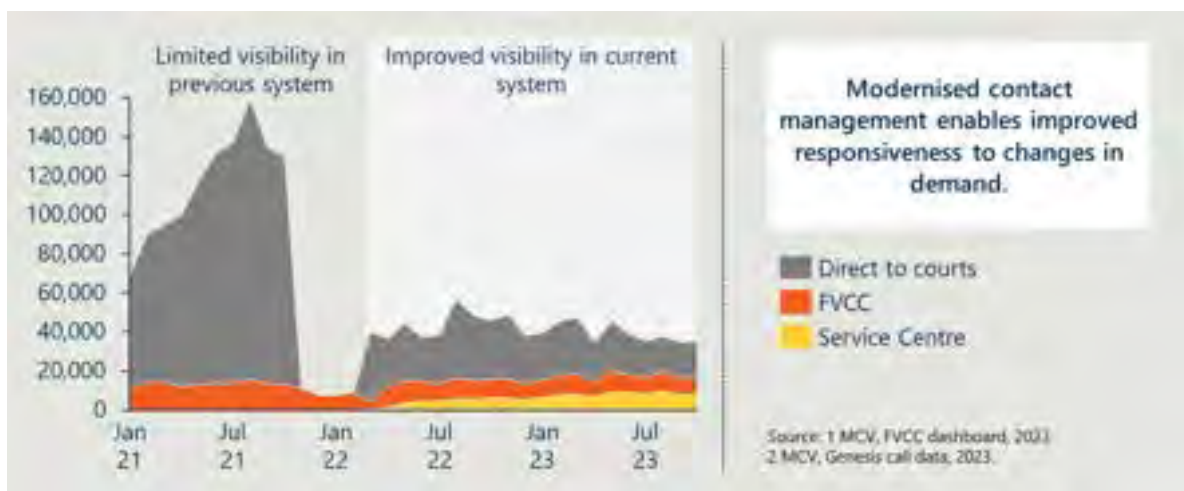
A brief snapshot of call data was collected in November 2021 for all courts using basic network data which demonstrated the elevated call demand at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, as part of the pilot service preparation activities. Notably, the data was collected after demand had begun to decline, limiting the opportunity for MCV to better tailor its response to pandemic impacts. FVCC data extends to October 2019 and together these systems provided limited insight into call demand at MCV. Figure 14 presents the snapshot available in early 2022.

Figure 14 | Enquiry demand snapshot at the end of January 2022



The Genesys system captures calls made directly to the primary court phone number at each court venue, which then flow to the Service Centre (non-hearing day). Figure 15 displays the call volume captured in real time by the Genesys system since its introduction.

Figure 15 | The changing picture of MCV enquiry response monitoring



Establish centralised response to digital court user enquiries other than hearing-day enquiries

Registry services at MCV can be accessed in-person or via phone, email or webchat. The Service Centre responds to all enquiries other than same day hearing day enquiries and provides a growing number of e-registry services, a number of which facilitate the transfer of information to other justice system service providers. (See Appendix B for a full list of e-registry services performed by the Service Centre.)

Emails about criminal and civil are sent directly to the courts and filter back to the Service Centre at the discretion of registry staff. IVO matter emails are sent directly to the Service Centre and filtered back to the courts, but the Service Centre leadership advise this is less efficient. In consultation, senior registry staff described withholding some criminal and civil emails that could have been sent to the Service Centre for the development of trainee court registrars, a core capability which must still be upskilled. The volume of direct emails to courts is not tracked, but the Service Centre receives 67 per cent as many emails as calls. A similar split across MCV would mean that MCV receives approximately 205,000 ‘action initiating’ emails per annum from court users and system stakeholders. Additional calls and emails made directly to specific court staff are not tracked. However, stakeholders described this as a commonplace practice for local professional court users due to their high contact relationship with local court staff, which may indicate higher enquiry demand than is visible.

Prior to the Service Centre, MCV did not have visibility of what proportion of calls were hearing day enquiries. Figure 16 presents the proportion of Service Centre and FVCC calls received through the MCV main line. As the Service Centre expanded, it took on a greater proportion of calls. However, fewer calls than anticipated were directed to the Service Centre, which handled less than half of total calls each month.

Figure 16 | Proportion of MCV calls directed to the Service Centre, FVCC and the courts



Divert non-complex enquiry response and administrative tasks from registry staff

A central premise of the Service Centre model is the diversion of non-complex enquiry responses from registry staff. Prospective registry staff must commit to a two-year trainee court registrar program prior to commencing at courts and thereafter are paid at a higher salary band than Service Centre staff, who take three weeks to train. As such recruitment of registry staff for regional Victorian courts is deeply challenging, with workforce degradation possible at any time over those two years, compared to recruitment for the Service Centre, which targets only the skills necessary for digital enquiry and administrative responses and centralised in Melbourne.

“It [the Service Centre] has opened up a new workforce stream for us... We can't attract enough registrars to keep up with demand. It created a different working model.”

Given the high proportion of calls that are still handled by registry staff at venues, the Service Centre took on additional administrative tasks such as the entering of criminal initiations on the Courtlink database. The Service Centre calculates that the initiative took the equivalent of more than 15,000 hours of enquiry response and administrative tasks from overcapacity registrars in 2022-23.⁵ Figure 17 presents a breakdown of all Service Centre activity.

Figure 17 | Service Centre enquiry response and limited e-registry services since inception



4.2.2 Supported by effective recruitment and onboarding

Consistent with similar industries such as call centre operators, the Service Centre faces regular turnover of staff. The entry level nature of the roles see staff pursue other career opportunities, roughly around 12 months of service on average. This sees leaders of the Service Centre having to onboard new staff throughout the year in addition to their usual management responsibilities.

“We are finding now that people are sort of leaving after 12 months or so because the pay for a grade two entry level is not great and they can see that they come, they get some skills with us. There are a lot of opportunities elsewhere.”

Service Centre leadership

⁵ Calculated by the Service Centre as number of emails (at 5 minutes per email), sum of total call duration, plus time taken to process order requests (at 5 minutes per request).

Despite rolling onboarding of new staff, this staffing model appears to be executed efficiently and effectively. Client Service Officers (CSOs) are onboarded via a three-week induction program, which includes client service training, observations at venue, system stakeholder presentations and shadowing of more senior staff. After three weeks the staff are often ready to field public enquiries, albeit with extra monitoring and coaching to ensure quality control.

A key enabler of the efficient and effective onboarding of staff is the KMS, an online repository of over 1,300 best practice court procedures. The KMS was initially developed to support CSOs to provide timely, consistent, and accurate responses to public and professional court users at the Service Centre, and given its success, MCV has expanded access to over 850 operational staff statewide. The introduction of the KMS enables process standardisation by providing one-way, same-way court procedural advice, regardless of where that enquiry originated across the state.

“Training and the knowledge management system are the key enablers to make that happen... the workforce was built from nothing.”

Court leader

4.2.3 Target indicators may not capture the breadth of benefits

Improving access to justice, and increased confidence in the courts were key drivers for the establishment of the Service Centre. For this reason, during design, court timeliness metrics were selected as the best target indicators for these outcomes, given the data available at that time. Table 3 presents the outcomes identified in the initial business case.

Table 3 | Target benefits from the initial business case

Benefit	Indicator	Measure
Improved access to justice	On time case processing ⁶	Increased matters finalised within established timeframes
	Drop in pending caseload ⁷	Reduced matters in backlog
	Increased case clearance	Increased finalisation rate
	Reduced delays in case resolution	Reduced adjournment rate
Increased confidence in the courts	Reduced cost per matter ⁸	Average cost per matter

However, there might be more appropriate indicators to monitor progress toward these primary objectives. For example, more direct and immediate indicators such as: increased access to information; client feedback on staff responsiveness; and court user experience could be helpful additions.

Equally, the Service Centre offers benefits for staff and the court itself, which are not currently reflected in the indicators outlined in Table 3. Broader benefits for the MCV such as improved staff experience, workforce development and recruitment pathways could also be worthy additions.

⁶ On time case processing requires matter-level data rather than court-level data so has been excluded from difference-in-difference analysis to attribute Service Centre impact.

⁷ Drop in pending caseload is a consequence of increased case clearance so has been excluded from difference-in-difference analysis to attribute Service Centre impact.

⁸ This report does not include an economic evaluation and data on cost per matter is not available per court. Reduced cost per matter excluded from difference-in-difference analysis to attribute Service Centre impact.

Outcomes analysis did not detect an effect of the Service Centre for court timeliness metrics

During the period of Service Centre operations, the overall MCV finalisation rate was high, and the backlog decreased, which indicates that MCV is meeting overall timeliness targets. Notably, MCV is decreasing the backlog faster than expected due to high finalisation rates, but adjournment rates are dropping more slowly.

Figure 18 presents the overall picture of MCV court timeliness metrics.

Figure 18 | Court timeliness metrics during Service Centre rollout

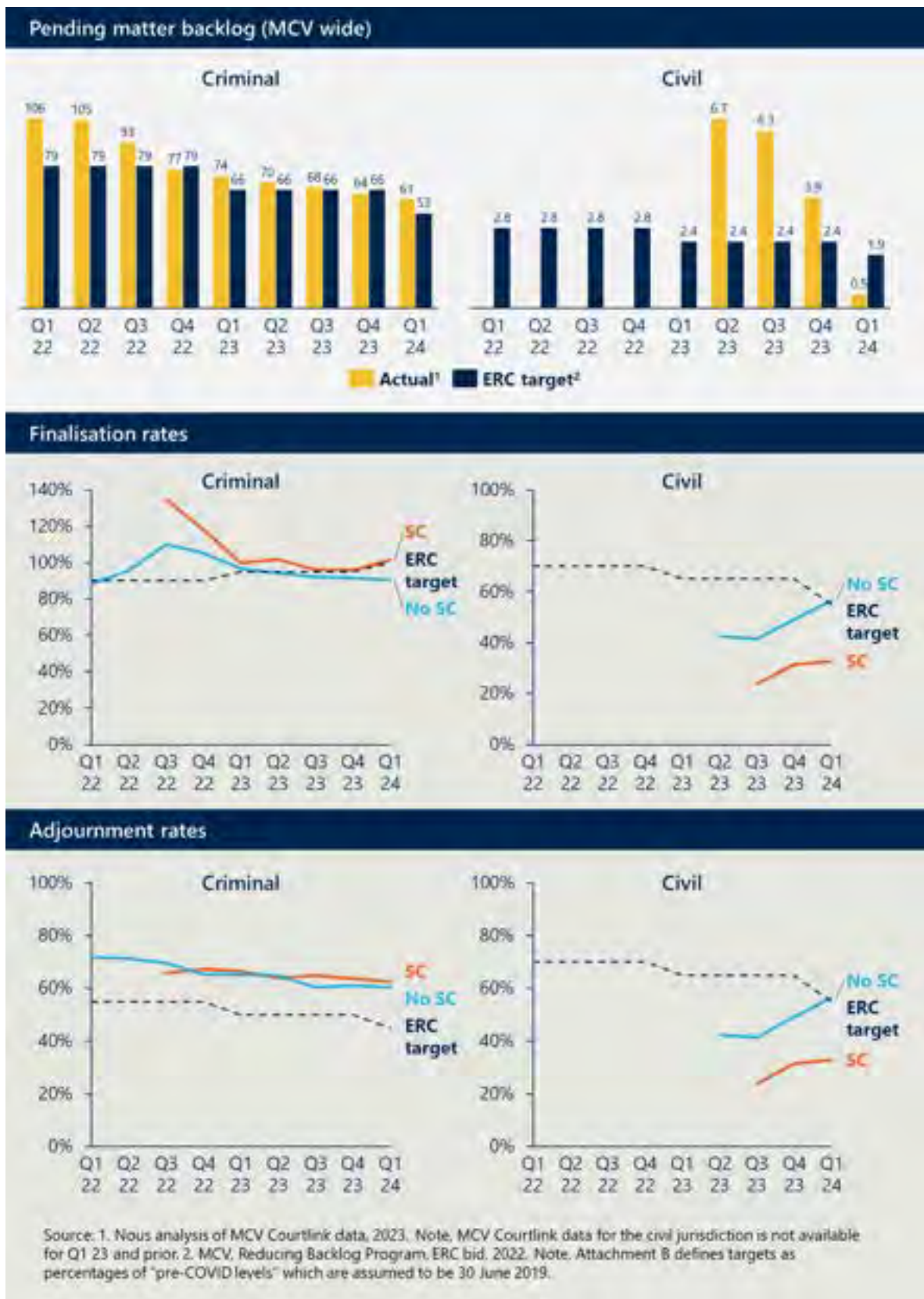


Table 4 highlights and interprets the Q1, 2023-24 adjournment rates and finalisation rates.

Table 4 | Q1, FY24 adjournment rates and finalisation rates

Indicator	Jurisdiction	FY24 Q1 Courts with Service Centre	FY24 Q1 Courts without Service Centre	Interpretation
Finalisation rate	Criminal	101%	90%	Service Centre courts <i>outperforming</i> target
	Civil	33%	57%	Service Centre courts <i>underperforming</i> target
Adjournment rate	Criminal	62%	60%	Service Centre courts approximately <i>meeting</i> target
	Civil	33%	57%	Service Centre courts <i>outperforming</i> target

Although MCV-wide trends in court timeliness are positive, difference-in-difference analysis found no effect of the Service Centre on these outcomes – despite the overall improvements in court timeliness, this cannot be attributed to the Service Centre.

Future evaluations will need to investigate possible explanations for the lack of a detected effect, including:

- Is the model appropriate for improving adjournment rates or finalisations?
- Did lower-than-forecast enquiry volumes flowing to the Service Centre at this stage of its expansion limit the opportunities for intervention?
- Alternate demands on registrar capacity preventing them from realising the benefits of additional capacity to improve matter readiness.
- Variance from the backlog of manual case initiations masking finalisation rates over short comparison periods (see limitations).
- Statistical design at the court-level is not granular enough to detect outcomes for court users that contact the Service Centre (see limitations).

Figure 19 presents an example of the null difference-in-difference finding which demonstrates similar outcome trends both before the rollout and after the rollout. More detailed outputs of the difference-in-difference analysis are located at A.3.

Figure 19 | Heidelberg-Frankston criminal court comparison



Improved access to information through delivering an exceptionally responsive court user experience

In consultations, stakeholders described improved access to information as an indicator of access to justice. The value of improving court user experience goes beyond faster resolution. Responsive court services are critical to ensuring fair and equitable justice.

At Victoria Legal Aid obviously our goal is access to justice and so I really see the impact and the benefits in that light, and I think the biggest impact is responsiveness. It's accessible information and a consistency of approach.

– Kate Bundrock, Director of Summary Crime and Therapeutic Justice, Victoria Legal Aid⁹

In terms of responsiveness, the Service Centre has been enormously beneficial. From the days where we used to call the court directly during peak hour, you'd be on hold for some time, whereas the Service Centre can appropriately triage and funnel out that bottleneck in the mornings to make sure that our questions are addressed promptly on the same day.

– Jasmine Pisasale, Director, Slades and Parsons Criminal Law⁹

The Service Centre impact on court user experience is most evident in their strong contact service metrics. Figure 20 | Service Centre enquiry response metrics presents the Service Centre as an exceptionally high quality of service provider. In particular, the low abandonment rate indicates that most people routed to

⁹ Quote sourced from MCV and provided as secondary data in addition to stakeholder interviews conducted, which is why the individuals are identified.

the Service Centre receive the administrative support and access to information they need. Webchat services were implemented in 2022 and have received similarly positive feedback, with most interactions rated as 'good' or 'great' and more than half of webchats successfully resolving user questions.

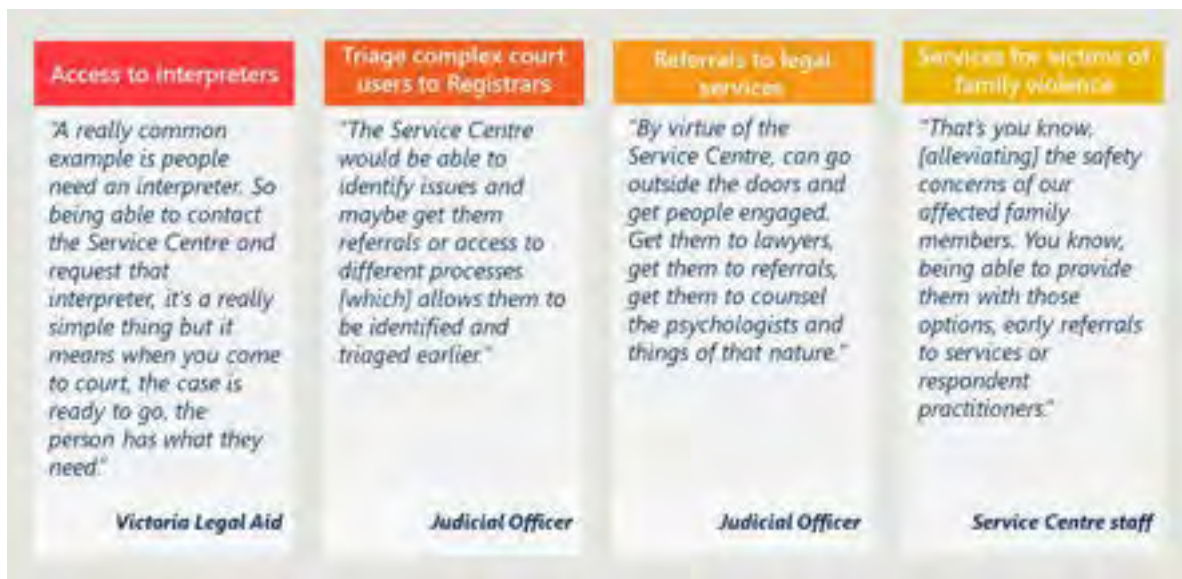
Figure 20 | Service Centre enquiry response metrics



Additional benefits to court users and across the MCV

Referrals to other court services help some users navigate the court system. Public court users may require support to navigate their court interactions, due to language barriers or other factors. The Service Centre provides court users with information about legal services, which helps court users access the supports they need, improving matter readiness. Figure 21 highlights examples of services commonly referred to court users through the Service Centre and B.2 provides a full list of MCV referral arrangements in place.

Figure 21 | Examples of service referrals commonly provided to court users



The Service Centre also provides additional benefits to the MCV more broadly. MCV recognises a further four substantial benefits experienced, as presented in Figure 22.

Figure 22 | Benefits for the MCV workforce



RECOMMENDATION 2A

Enhance monitoring of total enquiry demand at a system and court venue level in real time. Call data is already sufficient for this purpose. MCV can also readily update its dashboard to include direct-to-court calls, alongside the data picture for calls received by the Service Centre. Additionally, MCV should commence data collection for direct-to-court email enquiries using a solution such as targeted mailboxes or upgrading email contact software system.

RECOMMENDATION 2B

Improve insight on user needs and preferences through more new data capture and monitoring needs. Some data items to consider tracking include repeat callers; type of contact (professional stakeholder or court user); enquiry type; hearing day to non-hearing day split.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Divert more demand away from the courts to the Service Centre so that court-based registry services can focus on those justice services that require their expertise. To do so, MCV might explore opportunities to route more emails to the Service Centre by default (for example, through having separate inboxes for different enquiries) or to shift away from emails as a primary mode of enquiry (for example, through promoting online submission and webchat). This way the Service Centre would be responsible for triaging emails back to courts as needed, rather than the other way around. The Service Centre could also investigate opportunities to improve triage to better delineate between hearing-day calls that require a registrar and those that do not (for example, 'what time should I arrive for my hearing?' and 'Can I bring a support person?') so that it handles more of the latter enquiry type.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Continue to invest in the KMS which is driving process standardisation for MCV. Ensure that the KMS is remains accurate and up to date as best practice court procedures evolve.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Continue to evaluate the performance of the Service Centre. MCV could continue to analyse court timeliness metrics by performing outcome evaluations at the court user or matter level, rather than court level. Alternatively, MCV could evaluate Service Centre performance with metrics not related to timeliness. Metrics could relate to responsiveness, accessibility, confidence in the courts, and user experience.

4.3 Funding and delivery

KEQ 3 TO WHAT EXTENT IS THE SERVICE CENTRE DELIVERED WITHIN ITS SCOPE, BUDGET, AND EXPECTED TIMEFRAMES?

4.3.1 Expanded scope delivered ahead of schedule and within budget

MCV launched the Service Centre in March 2022 to relieve pressure on registry staff and to assist to reduce the pending caseload. It has far exceeded its implementation objectives since this timeframe.

Effective statewide coverage; far exceeding budget commitment to service ten courts

In March 2022, the Service Centre was established as a proof-of-concept service responding to criminal jurisdiction enquiries diverted from a small number of court locations. In July 2022, the Service Centre received two-year government funding to expand its public enquiry and administrative service to support ten headquarter courts across the criminal and civil jurisdictions (see Figure 23). In July 2023, the FVCC was integrated into one holistic 'MCV Service Centre' servicing all three court jurisdictions. This integration included the transfer of staff and central service responsibilities for the IVO jurisdiction.

Figure 23 | [REDACTED]

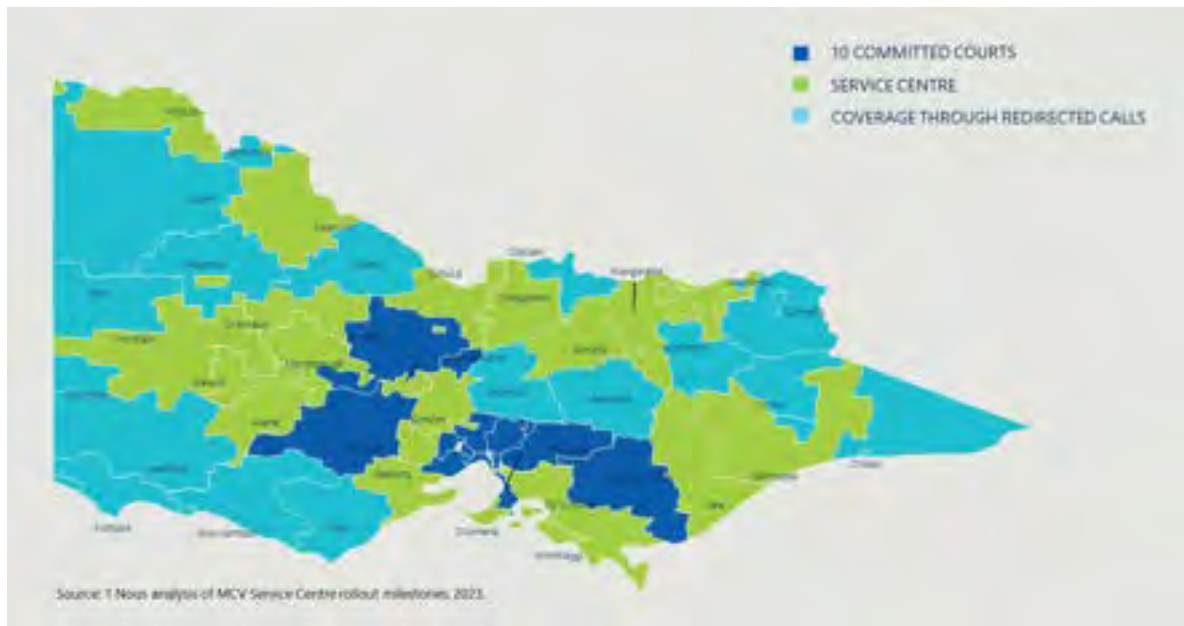
Courts	2021-22 (Pilot)	2022-23		2023-24	
Bendigo	Crim	Crim, Gen		Crim, Gen and Civil	
Broadmeadows	Crim	Crim, gen		Crim, Gen and Civil	
Sunshine	Crim	Crim, gen	+ FV service Integration	Crim, Gen and Civil	+ FV service Integration
Werribee	Crim	Crim, gen		Crim, Gen and Civil	
Heidelberg	Crim	Crim, gen	+ FV service Integration	Crim, Gen and Civil	+ FV service Integration
Melbourne		Crim, gen	+ FV service Integration	Crim, Gen and Civil	+ FV service Integration
Ringwood				Crim, Gen and Civil	+ FV service Integration
Frankston				Crim, Gen and Civil	+ FV service Integration
Latrobe Valley				Crim, Gen and Civil	
Dandenong				Crim, Gen and Civil	+ FV service Integration

In the [REDACTED], MCV committed to roll out the Service Centre to ten courts for criminal, civil, and general enquiry responses. The Service Centre has vastly exceeded this roll-out target. As of October 2023, the Service Centre services:

- 37 courts for criminal enquiries
- 36 courts for civil enquiries

MCV is yet to expand to the remaining of MCV's 51-court network are small and regional courts and often closed to the public. Instead, MCV are prioritising expansion of the IVO service to higher volume courts, which is viewed as the most efficient allocation of resources. On the days these satellite courts are closed to the public, the court users may be transferred to the Service Centre via redirection through their headquarter court. In effect, the Service Centre is therefore providing service value to every single court across the State, per Figure 24.

Figure 24 | Intended vs actual coverage of the Service Centre (Criminal and Civil)

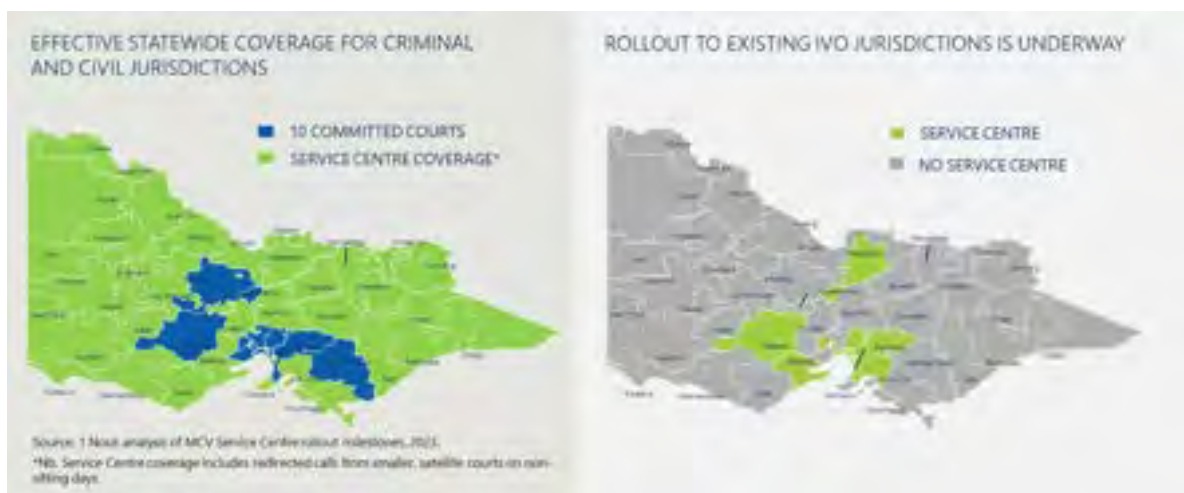


FVCC integration one year ahead of schedule, even with expanded rollout

By July 2023, the Service Centre integrated all ten courts serviced by the FVCC into the Service Centre, meeting its commitment to integrate six of the ten courts by June 2024. Integrating IVO matters from all ten courts, rather than six, enabled complete service alignment across all three jurisdictions with consistent staffing structures and servicing practices. As a result, MCV experienced enhanced staffing and service delivery benefits a full year ahead of the planned schedule.

Significant opportunity remains for MCV to continue to expand the IVO service offering to all Victorian courts. Figure 25 presents the progress of the Service Centre rollout for the IVO jurisdiction compared with the Criminal and Civil jurisdictions.

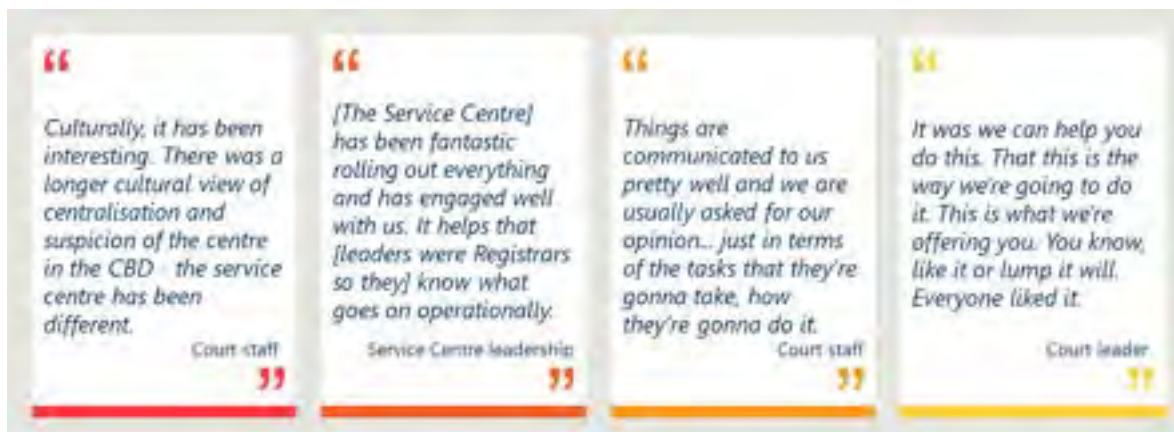
Figure 25 | Comparison of Service Centre coverage for Criminal and Civil, and IVO jurisdictions



Genuine local engagement facilitated strong support for the rollout

Court staff appreciate the highly consultative approach of the Service Centre, who engage with prospective courts one-on-one to support the onboarding process. The Service Centre seeks input from courts to understand local needs and responds by offering courts a standardised menu of services. The positive reception to this approach is reflected in the quotes from court leaders and staff we spoke to, with a selection of representative comments set out in Figure 26.

Figure 26 | Stakeholders views of the execution of the Service Centre rollout



Expanded scope of activities made possible by lower demand profile

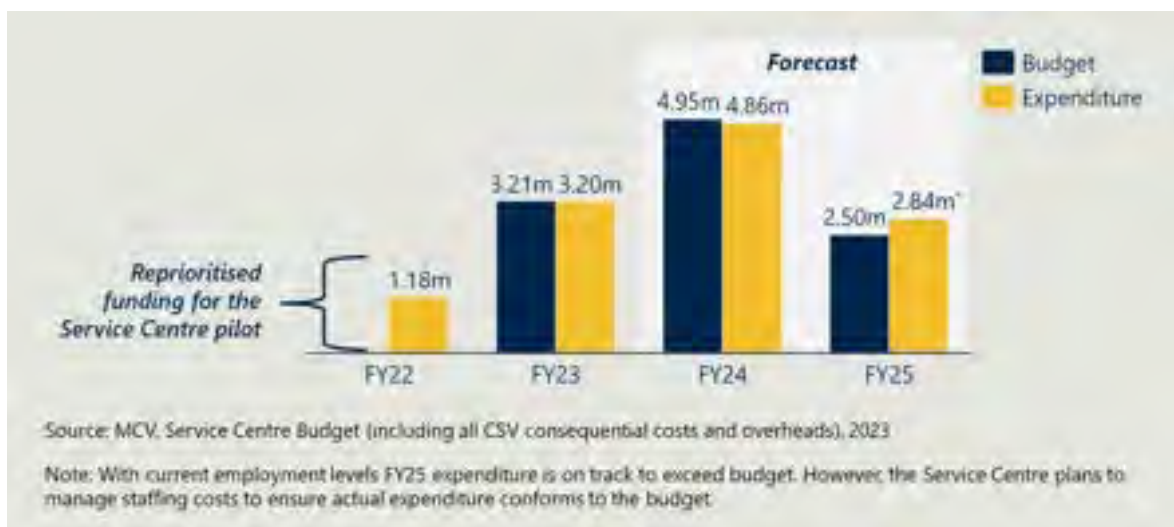
The Service Centre increased their scope to offer significantly more e-registry services to courts. MCV committed to establishing a centralised enquiry function only, including two new service channels in webchat and outgoing SMS. MCV delivered on this commitment early and expanded to e-registry services. See Appendix B for a full list of e-registry services provided and Figure 17 as indication of the volume of e-registry services completed by the Service Centre.

Service Centre expenditure is on budget

MCV directly received \$10.66 million in service operating funding to deploy the MCV Service Centre in the 2022/23 State Budget¹⁰. The lapsing nature of the funding which lasts 2.5 years requires the MCV to report back to Department of Treasury and Finance Victoria in 2024. This followed an internally reprioritised proof of concept investment of \$1.18 million over the prior 6 months to onboard and operationalise new staff, introduce new contact systems and undertake network changes to facilitate the triaging of calls to a central location, as part of a pilot Service Centre. Figure 27 shows how past and forecast expenditure compares to budget.

¹⁰ Total funding, including CSV consequential costs is \$11.7 million.

Figure 27 | Service Centre expenditure and forecasts



4.3.2 Effective governance and risk management practices

The MCV Service Experience Project Control Group (PCG) is the relevant governing body for the Service Centre. As outlined in the Terms of Reference for the PCG, the group oversees the operations and expansion of central and digital contact services at the MCV. The PCG has 13 members and meets bi-monthly.

The controlled staggered rollout to court venues minimises Service Centre initiative risks. By incrementally adding court venues, MCV can maintain a consistently high level of service, evaluating service quality as each court is integrated.

Appropriate risk management procedures are in place for enquiry level risks to ensure information shared with court users and system stakeholders is accurate. CSOs are trained to follow the escalation process in response to public enquiries that are beyond their knowledge, or which indicate a risk may be present which is better handled by a more senior officer. Initially, they consult the KMS to find the most appropriate response and, if still uncertain, escalate the matter to a team leader or registrar if a quasi-judicial action is required.

The KMS is consistently updated to address any identified gaps in best practices for responding to public enquiries. The central KMS team holds editing rights for the system and accepts written requests for content additions, ensuring that only approved material is published to Service Centre staff (and now statewide). Additionally, each court has direct communication with the Service Centre to ensure queries are answered in consideration of each court's context, on the occasions where a local practice is appropriate.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Prioritise any further expansion of the Service Centre to the IVO courts with the highest abandonment rates given the time sensitive nature of this enquiries.

4.4 Efficiency

KEQ 4 HAS MCV DEMONSTRATED EFFICIENCY AND ECONOMY IN RELATION TO THE DELIVERY OF THE SERVICE CENTRE?

4.4.1 Exceptional contact response metrics may indicate excess capacity

Service Centre metrics indicate an extremely high level of service that exceeds benchmarks from the Australian Tax Office, banks and the Australia-wide average. Call wait time and abandonment rates are so low, they indicate the Service Centre has excess capacity, with CSOs at times waiting idly for incoming public enquiries. This could mean that Service Centre has significant capacity to take on much more court work, including further expansion towards statewide IVO services as well as a greater range of administrative services from court venues. This additional capacity is reflective of a service which is still in rollout and not yet in its 'refine and mature' stage (see Figure 13).

Figure 28 | Comparison of Service Centre abandonment rate against benchmarks



Source: 1. MCV analysis 2. Nous analysis of MCV Service Centre dashboard data, 2023. 3. Australian Customer Experience Professionals Association (ACEPA), Australian Contact Centre Industry Best Practice Report 2023.

However, Erlang calculations suggests that the Service Centre is staffed efficiently. The calculation, which is subject to assumptions and limitations, suggests a typical call centre with equivalent enquiry volume would require more CSOs than the Service Centre employs. For Criminal and Civil enquiries, assuming 2023 average volumes and handling times, the Erlang model suggests the Service Centre typically needs 23.8 agents¹¹. In comparison the Service Centre's Criminal and Civil team has 24 CSOs who work a mix of part-time and full-time across 18 position numbers. Interpretation of the Erlang calculation is indicative, and subject to some limitations:

- In addition to CSOs, the Service Centre employs 14 FTE in Registrar and leadership positions. These staff are not compared against the 23.8 agents outputted by the Erlang calculation.
- The assumed handling time for emails and webchat may overstate the number of agents typically required. There is no data to substantiate the estimate for handling time of emails and the Erlang

¹¹ Calculated using callcentretools.com. Incoming contacts include calls, emails, and webchats. Weighted average handling time is calculated at 7.7 mins using 2023 average handling time for calls, 'Handle' for webchat from Genesys data and an assumed 5-minute email handling time, which is consistent with MCV calculations for the average registrar capacity hours saved. It is also assumed the Service Centre is open five days per week for eight hours per day and has a required service level to answer 80% of calls in fewer than 20 seconds.

calculation assumes that webchats are handled sequentially, which is unlikely to be accurate in practice.

- CSOs also perform some other activities such as criminal initiations which is not accounted for in the Erlang calculation.

RECOMMENDATION 7

MCV should carefully weigh the costs and benefits of running a leaner staffing model and accepting a poorer public experience (worse call performance metrics) in the next phase of operation. The Service Centre could use enquiry volume modelling using a desired service quality to inform resourcing levels.

4.5 Risk

KEQ 5 WHAT WOULD BE THE IMPACT OF CEASING THE SERVICE CENTRE AND WHAT STRATEGIES HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED TO MINIMISE NEGATIVE IMPACTS?

4.5.1 Cessation would be a retrograde step

Likely compromise access, digital service choice, and responsiveness objectives

Ceasing the Service Centre will make it more difficult for court users to contact court staff and receive the same time to support their matter or person readiness for court. If the Service Centre is disbanded, all enquiries that would be directed to the Service Centre would return to court venues, who have weaker performance in call wait times and abandonment rates, metrics which would only further deteriorate. As a result, MCV would answer a lower proportion of public enquiries, decreasing Victorian's access to justice, and impacting not only MCV but also other courts that MCV service enquiries for, including the Children's Court of Victoria and higher jurisdictions outside of Melbourne CBD. As shown in Figure 28, the abandonment rate at the Service Centre is materially lower than MCV courts. Stakeholders also provided strong evidence for unacceptably long call wait times, reporting that calls would often go unanswered.¹²

"Previously emails were not being answered and phones were not being picked up."

Court staff

The Service Centre provides a superior digital contact experience when compared to court registries. MCV recognises the Service Centre can offer a higher quality of service than registry staff because they do not have the added pressures of in-person hearing day servicing and justice support demands. The Service Centre staff believe their dedication to handling public enquiries enable a more professional service which

¹² Long wait times are not captured in the NEC call data which covers the 12-month period between November 2020 and 2021. The mismatch between the data and the qualitative evidence may be explained by the following:

The 12-month period where the NEC call data was collected may be anomalous and lower than the normal wait time levels. One likely hypothesis is that during the COVID lockdowns, many operational courts staff could not perform their regular duties and would answer calls from the public while working from home.

The data source may not be accurate. For example, 8200 calls are reported to have a zero second call wait time.

Time spent on hold does not contribute to call wait time in the data. Court staff shared it is common to place a user on hold for up to 15 minutes.

they assert is appreciated by court users. Consultations with court staff highlights instances of poor service quality which supports this view.

"I'd be on the phone, but I'd also be serving someone at the counter at the same time."

Court staff

Court staff also reported it was difficult to craft responses to emails and other items with the constant interruptions of phones ringing. If the Service Centre is ceased, the court users who would otherwise be handled by the Service Centre are likely to have a worse experience interacting with MCV.

Undo the widespread support cultivated to date for service model innovation

Unwinding the Service Centre would be met with significant resistance from MCV. The Service Centre is ubiquitously supported across MCV, and particularly by court staff, who appear to overattribute the Service Centre for reducing the call volumes to their courts. Court staff could be concerned unwinding the Service Centre will cause call volumes to revert to unmanageable levels seen during the pandemic. Consultations with court staff highlight how their wellbeing was materially harmed when they are over capacity. Similarly, court staff reported high amounts of abuse from court users. Winding down the Service Centre could culturally harm the organisation and will be regarded as a backwards step for MCV.

"If it didn't continue it would be a huge step backwards for the service we provide".

Court staff

Reabsorbing enquiries at local courts will be operationally challenging and may require additional registry staff at local venues

Some court venues would need to increase their registry staff to perform the currently outsourced services. Court venues with the highest volume handled by the Service Centre, such as the headquarter courts, will require the most additional resourcing. The courts would need to backfill vacant positions (an ongoing challenge for MCV already) or create new roles in the same manner. Some positions may be filled by the existing but limited registrar qualified Service Centre staff, noting this may require relocation to regional courts not necessarily equally spreading staff to critical areas in need.

Court locations may be constrained in sourcing required staff to meet demand. If court venues cannot hire the required additional staff, existing registry staff will be stretched or not able to respond to enquiries. Registry roles, particularly in regional locations, are difficult to fill. In consultations, a Senior Registrar reported carrying up to seven vacancies for almost one year. Additionally there may be ongoing difficulties accommodating new staff in heritage listed court buildings. MCV should seek to avoid overworking their registry staff in the event the courts cannot fill positions required to meet demand that is currently handled by the Service Centre.

RECOMMENDATION 8

Should a decision be made to cease the Service Centre, MCV should:

- Employ a change management process to reduce negative outcomes from cultural challenges, and
- Consider a staged approach to re-absorbing the volume of enquiries across MCV venues as this will not be easy to reabsorb rapidly.

4.6 Ongoing funding

KEQ 6 WHAT ONGOING FUNDING IS REQUIRED AND WHAT EFFICIENCIES COULD BE REALISED?

MCV did not require financial analysis of the ongoing funding need for the Service Centre as part of this evaluation as it was being undertaken in parallel for a budget bid. However, we note the importance of ongoing funding for the Service Centre if it is to realise a series of horizon opportunities.

4.6.1 Target early intervention opportunities

The Service Centre holds promise as an early intervention initiative which reduces the downstream impacts and costs of a less timely and accessible justice system. However, evidence connecting the Service Centre's direct impact to direct early intervention outcomes is challenged by a number of current limitations, most notably its recency as a maturing and still expanding service and the restrictive case tracking data available until the case management system is operational. As the model matures, the MCV will be better placed to collect outcomes data and target opportunities to demonstrate and enhance the impact of the Service Centre on early intervention outcomes.

Table 5 presents a series of opportunities for the MCV to improve data collection and target early intervention.

Table 5 | Early intervention opportunities

Function	Early Intervention link	Data collection	Opportunities
Service need identification and connection	Connection with appropriate services (for example, VLA, interpreter services) improves a person's experience and readiness for court, improving court timeliness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service needs identified (most common service needs identified that lead to referrals). Service uptake (proportion of people who receive the services once referred). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve identification through expanded triage of service needs. Improve connection through more integrated referral processes and links with service providers.
Coordination	Coordination between services prior to hearings means that the courts and legal representation are better prepared, improving court timeliness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reasons for adjournment to identify future targets for intervention. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand role of Service Centre in coordinating between services.
Access to information	Better informed court users better understand their obligations and are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reasons for adjournment to identify future targets for intervention. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase communication of commonly sought information.

better able to navigate the legal system.

- What information court users are seeking most (categorising common webchat queries and pages visited on the website).

- Pre-court engagement to facilitate access (e.g. providing links to further information).

4.6.2 Horizon opportunities as model matures

The modernisation of MCV service delivery is expected to continue and will place different demands on Service Centre and registry staff. As the digital transformation progresses, expected and potential changes may reshape the role of the Service Centre and the enquiries they service. Anticipated changes include:

- As the case backlog stabilises, there are fewer pending matters for court users to enquire about. The backlog has rapidly decreased since the pandemic and is expected to return to pre-covid levels in 2024.
- The Case Management System (CMS) rollout to criminal matters will increase self-service capabilities for professional court users. The CMS criminal jurisdiction is on track to be rolled out in 2025. Additionally, criminal initiations will be automated by the CMS which will further free up capacity of Service Centre and registry staff who are currently performing the data entry task.
- A website redesign is envisaged as a way to streamline enquiry volumes by promoting self-service for court users. The redesign is not currently funded.
- The opening of Wyndham Court in 2025, along with possible expansions of other modernised courts, will impact total enquiry demand, though the direction of the impact remains uncertain.

An expanded Service Centre that acts as a true digital 'front door' to MCV

A larger scale Service Centre could take on an increased role in registry and enquiry response services. Currently the Service Centre and local registry staff are addressing similar enquiries differentiated by whether they are made on the day of hearing or not. Potential efficiency could be realised through more efficiently triaging and streaming enquiries so that only more complex enquiries go to registry staff. It is helpful to view both groups in one system and responding to the same pool of demand until more nuanced data collection enables differentiation.

Figure 29 provides an example of a standard model, which connects users to a response that suits their needs.

Figure 29 | Integration of MCV support for court users by level of complexity



If the Service Centre continues in an expanded form, the following activities should be considered:

- **Extend pre-court engagement services.** There is potential to extend pre-court engagement services beyond the IVO jurisdiction and outbound SMS in the criminal and civil jurisdictions. Court staff highlight the opportunity for pre-court engagement to improve matter readiness for the court user as well providing an opportunity for the court to receive early access to information about the court user's circumstances. For example, pre-court engagement could avoid an adjournment if it is identified the court user requires an interpreter.
- **Accept payments via webpage and CMS for fines and fees.** Court staff view payment processing as a significant pain point and would prefer the function be centralised. In consultation stakeholders identified challenges in the governance and establishment of these services. Despite this, online payments are a mainstay of similar e-registry services in other states.
- **Increase role in coordination.** As part of establishing the new Wyndham court, MCV is proposing to trial a coordination tool to improve communication between involved Victoria Police and legal stakeholders. The Service Centre could play a critical service support role should this coordination tool show efficiency value sufficient to expand statewide.

Alternative service models could maintain service delivery with reduced funding. Different models would still provide options for MCV to reroute demand to deal with external shocks such as court closures due to fires or flooding. If funding for the Service Centre is reduced, the following models should be considered:

- **Outsourcing the Service Centre functions could be more cost effective.** Specialised contact centre operators often benefit from economies of scale because they handle enquiries for many clients, reducing the cost per enquiry. These operators also have the flexibility to adjust resources according to fluctuations in demand. However, relinquishing direct control over the public enquiry and e-registry functions may compromise service quality.
- **The Service Centre could be run a leaner staffing model.** With less staffing relative to enquiry volume, the quality of service would likely fall, resulting in average wait times and abandonment rates to increasing towards industry benchmarks.

Appendix A Methodology detail

In Appendix A, we present the following items:

- A.1 Key evaluation questions
- A.2 List of stakeholder engagement activity
- A.3 Difference-in-difference analysis
- A.4 List of documents reviewed.

A.1 Key evaluation questions

The KEQ domains used in this evaluation are consistent with the domains required by the Department of Treasury and Finance Victoria. We have used the mandatory requirements for evaluation of lapsing programs in the Resource Management Framework.¹³

Table 6 | KEQ and sub-questions by evaluation domain

Domain 1. APPROPRIATENESS AND JUSTIFICATION	What is the evidence of a continued need for a holistic Service Centre?	To what extent has MCV demonstrated an ongoing need for the Service Centre? To what extent is MCV best placed to provide this service?
Domain 2. EFFECTIVENESS	To what extent is the Service Centre making progress towards its objectives and expected outcomes?	What were the stated objectives and expected outcomes of the Service Centre? To what extent did the Service Centre achieve its intended outcomes? What are the factors that promote or inhibit success of the Service Centre? To what extent is the Service Centre aligned to whole of court objectives and state government priorities (for example, case management system transformation)?
Domain 3. FUNDING / DELIVERY	To what extent is the Service Centre delivered within its scope, budget and expected timeframes?	What was the original scope of the funding to deliver the Service Centre? Was the Service Centre delivered in line with the original scope, budget, and timeframes? Were the governance and risk management practices fit-for-purpose?
Domain 4. EFFICIENCY	Has MCV demonstrated efficiency and economy in relation to the delivery of the Service Centre?	Is the Service Centre being delivered in the most efficient way possible? What changes could be made to improve the efficiency of the Service Centre?
Domain 5. RISK	What would be the impact of ceasing the Service Centre and what strategies have been identified to minimise negative impacts?	How would ceasing the Service Centre impact the service received by court users? How would MCV exit from delivering the Service Centre and what strategies have been identified to minimise this impact?
Domain 6. ONGOING FUNDING	What ongoing funding is required and what efficiencies could be realised?	Does the initial funding allocated reflect the true cost required to deliver the Service Centre? What are the expected changes in funding needs if further funding was provided? If further funding were provided what level of efficiencies could be provided? What opportunities are there to enhance the impact of the Service Centre?

¹³ Department of Treasury and Finance Victoria, [Resource Management Framework 2023-2024](#), 2023

A.2 List of stakeholder engagement

Table 7 shows the stakeholders who were engaged for this evaluation over the period 30 August 2023 to 30 September 2023. This list does not reflect stakeholders who were not available to be interviewed during this consultation window.

Table 7 | List of stakeholders by MCV staff category

Name	Role
MCV Judicial Officers	
Justice Lisa Hannan	Chief Magistrate of Victoria
Tim Bourke	Deputy Chief Magistrate
MCV Executives	
Simon Hollingsworth	Chief Executive Officer
Jane Craig	Executive Director, Specialist Courts & Programs
Melissa Martino	Executive Director, People & Innovation
Melinda Stuart-Adams	Executive Director, Family Violence
Simone Shields	Executive Director, Court Operations
Richard Hodge	Director, Innovation & Service Experience
Jake Hawley	Executive Director, Strategy & Corporate Services
MCV Court staff	
Tanya Turner	Principal Registrar
Alyson Neilson	Senior Manager, Court Operations (Metropolitan Courts)
Lee Arbaci	Senior Manager, Court Operations (Regional Courts)
Mark Baker	Senior Registrar (Barwon South-West region)
Joseph Shields	Senior Registrar (Broadmeadows)
Mark McCutchan	Senior Registrar (Dandenong)
Stuart Pope	Senior Registrar (Frankston)
Darren Stebbings	Senior Registrar (Gippsland region)
Michelle Sculley	Senior Registrar (Grampians region)
Carolyn Paterson	Senior Registrar (Heidelberg)
Patrick Cummins	Senior Registrar (Hume region)
Michael Conway	Senior Registrar (Loddon Mallee region)

Name	Role
Matthew Dalton	Senior Registrar (Melbourne)
Jaime Longhurst	Senior Registrar (Moorabbin)
David Howard	Senior Registrar (Ringwood)
David Christie	Senior Registrar (Sunshine region)
Emily Holland	Senior Manager, Innovation & Service Experience
MCV Service Centre	
Lisa Grey	MCV Service Centre Manager
Sanya Cecala	Operations Manager (Criminal)
Jessica Hynninen	Operations Manager (IVO)
Rebecca Stanfield	Team Leader (IVO)
Sienna Morel-Shields	Team Leader (Civil/Criminal)
Mary Lioupas	Client Service Officer (Civil/Criminal)
MCV system stakeholder	
Kate Bundrock	Director of Summary Crime and Therapeutic Justice, Victoria Legal Aid

A.3 Difference-in-difference analysis

Target outcomes for the Service Centre were evaluated using difference-in-difference analysis, which utilises the staggered implementation of the Service Centre to look at the difference in outcomes between courts with the Service Centre and similar courts waiting for it to roll out.

Difference-in-difference is a quasi-experimental method for determining the extent to which changes in an outcome may be attributable to an intervention when a randomised controlled trial is not possible. The approach isolates the effect of the intervention by comparing outcomes over time for groups that received the intervention and comparison groups without the intervention. Both groups must be similar enough to be expected to have parallel outcome trends in the absence of the intervention.¹⁴ See 'The Effect' by Nick Huntington-Klein for a detailed breakdown of the method implemented¹⁵.

The difference-in-difference approach is accepted by the Department of Treasury and Finance as meeting the requirements of the Neyman-Rubin Causal Model for determining the causal effect of an intervention.¹⁶

Data source

The evaluation uses MCV court matter data captured in Courtlink and aggregated by court, fortnight, and matter type (Criminal or Civil). Criminal matter data is available from January 2018 to August 2023 and Civil matter data is available from October 2022 to August 2023.

Outcomes

Two outcome measures were included in the analysis:

- Adjudgment rate: Number of adjournments divided by the number of court matters heard multiplied by 100.
- Finalisation rate: Number of case finalisations divided by the number of case initiations multiplied by 100.

Comparison selection

Difference-in-difference analysis requires courts with the Service Centre to be compared to similar courts without the Service Centre. It relies on the assumption that the outcome trends of both courts would be parallel without the Service Centre. To ensure meaningful comparisons, court pairs were narrowed down from every combination of MCV courts using the following conditions:

- Comparison periods must be greater than 90 days for criminal courts and 60 days for civil courts.
- Both courts must be metropolitan courts or both must be regional courts.
- Both courts must be headquarter courts or both must be non-headquarter courts.
- Pairs must have parallel trends over for the four-year leading up to the comparison period. To determine if a pair passed the parallel trends assumption, we ran the difference-in-difference test on each court pair using a one-year dummy comparison period immediately prior to the comparison period. Court pairs with a p-value greater than .05 were assessed to have passed the parallel trends assumption.

¹⁴ Australian Centre for Evaluation, [Quasi-experimental methods](#), 2023

¹⁵ N. Huntington-Klein, [The Effect, Chapter 18 – Difference-in-Differences](#), 2023.

¹⁶ Department of Treasury and Finance, [The Resource Management Framework Part 2 of 2](#), 2022

- No court may belong to more than one pair as the treated or comparison court for each type of court. Where there were courts that could belong to multiple pairs, those with the most parallel trends before Service Centre implementation were selected.

Table 8 presents the four pairs of criminal courts and two pairs of civil courts that met these criteria.

Table 8 | Court pairs included in difference-in-difference analysis

Court type	Intervention	Comparison	Comparison start	Comparison end
Criminal	Bendigo	Ballarat	11 March 2022	19 July 2022
Criminal	Heidelberg	Frankston	8 April 2022	27 September 2022
Criminal	Ringwood	Dandenong	20 May 2022	16 September 2022
Criminal	Seymour	Wangaratta	24 November 2022	19 June 2023
Civil	Ballarat	Bendigo	21 February 2023	16 May 2023
Civil	Frankston	Broadmeadows	7 April 2023	16 May 2023

Results

Using a linear regression model for each comparison, 95 per cent confidence intervals were calculated for the effect of the service on each outcome. No effect was detected for any comparison in either adjournment rates or finalisation rates.

Table 9 presents the results of this analysis.

Table 9 | Difference-in-difference results for Criminal jurisdiction

Court type	Intervention	Comparison	Outcome	95% confidence interval	Interpretation
Criminal	Bendigo	Ballarat	Adjournment rate	(-5.3, 6.3)	No effect
			Finalisation rate	(-65.8, 38.9)	No effect
Criminal	Heidelberg	Frankston	Adjournment rate	(-5.6, 8.1)	No effect
			Finalisation rate	(-77.8, 29.7)	No effect
Criminal	Ringwood	Dandenong	Adjournment rate	(-2.8, 16.4)	No effect
			Finalisation rate	(-138.4, 10.6)	No effect

Court type	Intervention	Comparison	Outcome	95% confidence interval	Interpretation
Criminal	Seymour	Wangaratta	Adjournment rate	(-6.7, 8.5)	No effect
			Finalisation rate	(-72.4, 49.4)	No effect
Civil	Ballarat	Bendigo	Adjournment rate	(-31.4, 46.8)	No effect
			Finalisation rate	(-293.1, 41.2)	No effect
Civil	Frankston	Broadmeadows	Adjournment rate	(-8.9, 47.7)	No effect
			Finalisation rate	(-60.4, 54.4)	No effect

Figure 30 | Bendigo-Ballarat criminal court comparison



Figure 31 | Heidelberg-Frankston criminal court comparison



Figure 32 | Ringwood-Dandenong criminal court comparison



Figure 33 | Seymour-Wangaratta criminal court comparison

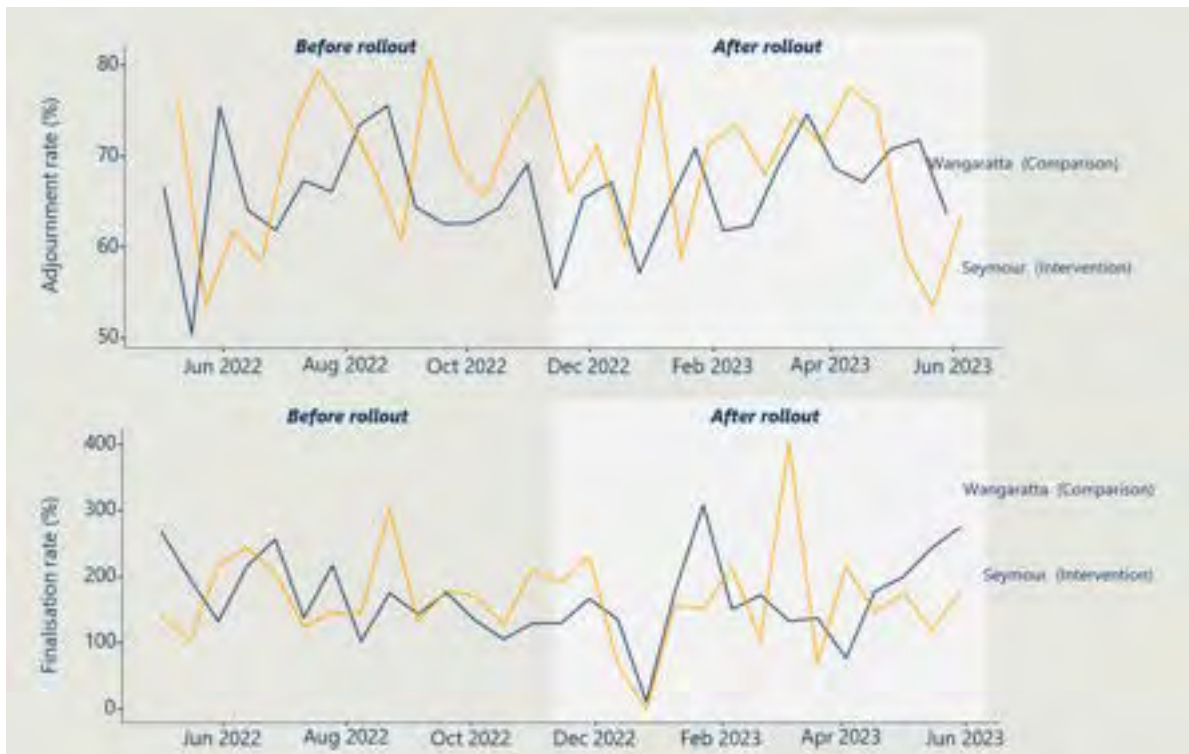


Figure 34 | Ballarat-Bendigo civil court comparison

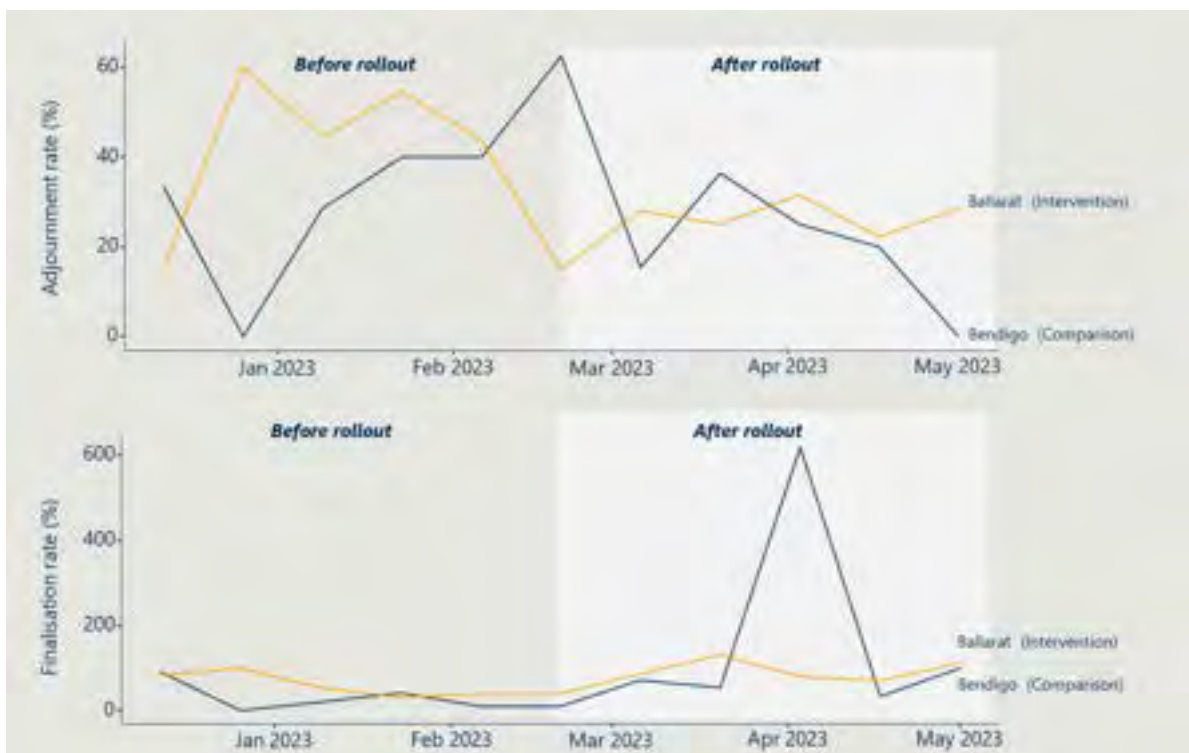
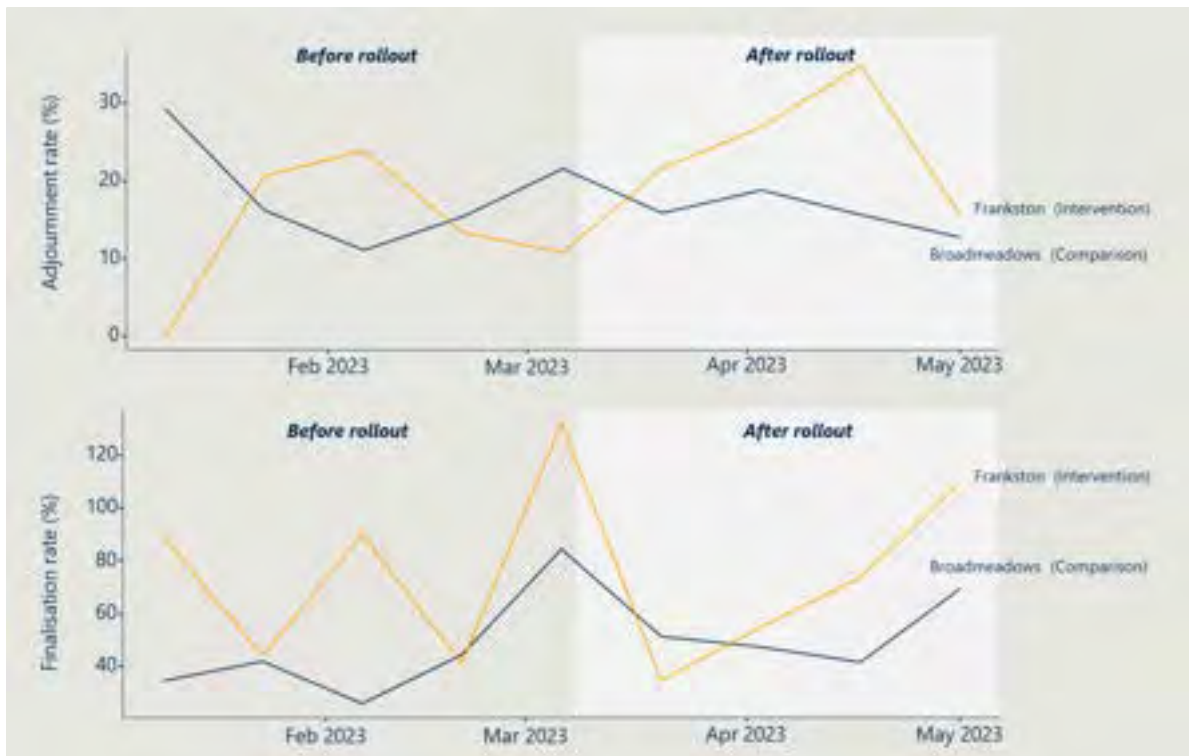


Figure 35 | Frankston-Broadmeadows civil court comparison



A.4 List of documents reviewed

Table 10 | Documents reviewed by Nous

Document name	Date accessed
MCV Service Centre service level agreement (version 1 – 2022/02/01).	8 August 2023
Dashboard – FVCC – Family violence contact centre monthly dashboard (version 1 – June 2023).	8 August 2023
Dashboard – MCVSC – MCV Service Centre Dashboard (version 1 – June 2023).	8 August 2023
Diagram – MCVSC – MCV Service Centre unit structure (version 3 – 2023/07/24).	8 August 2023
[REDACTED]	8 August 2023
Modelling – MCVSC – Service Centre future state modelling (version 2 – 2022/12/15).	8 August 2023
[REDACTED]	14 August 2023
MCV Service Centre Key Milestones (version 1)	14 August 2023
TOR – MCVSC – MCV Service Experience Project Control Group Terms of Reference (version 4).	23 August 2023
[REDACTED]	23 August 2023
FY23 Actual Working template.	29 August 2023
MCV Service Centre Evaluation (2023/09/05).	6 September 2023
MCV Service Centre Evaluation Civil (2023/09/07).	6 September 2023
MCV Service Centre Evaluation CRM Finalisations (2023/09/07).	6 September 2023
MCVSC – Call Analysis (version 1).	6 September 2023
MCV Service Centre Evaluation FTE (2023/09/05).	6 September 2023
Genesys data (2023/08/29).	6 September 2023
Service Centre program documentation (version 1 – 2023/08/24).	6 September 2023
Net promoter score (version 1 – 2023/08/31).	6 September 2023
Webchat feedback provided (29/11/2022 – 31/08/2023).	6 September 2023
MCVSC – Est. of the MCV service centre & knowledge management system.	6 September 2023
KMS Usage report (version 1 – 2023/09/07).	7 September 2023
MCV Service Centre Daily login report (version 1 – 2023/09/07).	7 September 2023
State-wide operational users KMS daily login report (version 1 – 2023/09/07).	7 September 2023

Document name	Date accessed
MCV Service Centre onboarding program outline	12 September 2023
Genesys Call Routing Data Tables	18 September 2023
MCV Service Centre Financial Data (version 1 – 2023/09/18).	18 September 2023

Appendix B Service Centre functions

In Appendix B, we present the following items:

- B.1 List of e-registry services
- B.2 List of referral arrangements

B.1 List of e-registry services

Table 11 | E-registry services performed by the Service Centre

E-registry services
MCV Service Centre e-Registry Services
Adjournments for Self-Represented Accused
Applications for Infringement Extension
Case Management System support
Diversion enquiries
Family Violence Daily Coordination Tool requests
Initiation of criminal cases
Media Enquiries Level 1 Triage
National Domestic Violence Order Scheme requests
Online Magistrates' Court Triage
Victoria Legal Aid 'Help before Court' requests
Victoria Police Impoundment Unit requests
Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Order Recordings

B.2 List of referral arrangements

Table 12 | Referral arrangements in place at the Service Centre

Referral arrangements
Legal services
Victoria Legal Aid
Community Legal Centres
Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service
Other support services
Court Network
The Orange Door

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