

## Service Desks – Brief History

Founders of the Auckland Justices of the Peace Association in 1922 realised early on, that members of the public who were seeking the services of a Justice of the Peace would be well catered-for if an office could be established somewhere in the downtown area. Justices would be rostered to attend, and the proposal was designed to relieve pressure on Justices whose day-to-day business was being increasingly interrupted by people wanting their official services.

The Association wasn't a year old when it was suggested that a room or an office be allocated for this purpose. But the proposal was not followed through.

The proposition was renewed in 1934 when the Auckland Association established the first service desk in Auckland's Central Business District, situated in an office in British Chambers, High Street, near the (then) Magistrate's Court.



Former British Chambers, today 35 High Street, City

The Association organised the roster and paid the rent, but the enterprise closed after about 3 months because there was so little demand. In 1939 the Government was asked to allocate a suitable office for similar Justice of the Peace services: the request was turned down.

But present-day Service Desks thrive across the metropolis providing facilities for Justices to deliver, by far, the bulk of their Ministerial services to the community.

The revival of Service Desks began in the early 1990s when Justices began providing services in Citizen Advice Bureaux, an initiative which spread to suburban CABs and other premises. This move was assisted by a growth in neighbourhood gatherings of Justices, first called Cottage Groups (just 6 in 2006) but, encouraged by the Association, these morphed into Support Groups.

In that year it was generally accepted nation-wide, that Service Desks provided the preferred way to cater for public needs (as opposed to house-calls) and the Royal Federation, supporting their

establishment, offered \$100 towards the set-up costs of each new Service Desk with a maximum of 2 per Association each year.

Auckland Association moved to formalise Service Desks. It signed Memoranda of Understanding with existing Desks and, before it approved new ones it ensured an even spread across Auckland without duplication. Most of all, each Desk had to have the backing of the local Support Group to ensure sufficient Justices, preferably accredited, were available to be rostered, thus maintaining competent services.

In 2018 each Service Desk was issued a kit containing a comprehensive compendium equipping Justices with the “tools of trade”. In following years banners and street signs were distributed to better signpost the availability of Justices of the Peace.



Sign outside a CAB

In 2020 Service Desks closed during the lockdown which was imposed by the Government to curtail the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, but most reopened with precautions, once rules were relaxed. The Association provided clear-plastic screens and hand sanitiser to help keep Justices safe. Masks were worn.

Today's 24 Support Groups are integral to the establishment, administration and rostering of some 63 Service Desks, now found in a wide variety of public buildings such as CABs, libraries, shopping malls, District Courts and community centres.

Latest figures in Centennial Year show no reduction in the popularity of services provided by Justices of the Peace at the various venues across Greater Auckland.

The revival of the Service Desk, realising an idea first suggested in 1922 - the founding year - has turned out to be Auckland Association's undoubted success story in the latter years of its century of public service.

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