



Mark Speakman
Attorney General

MEDIA RELEASE

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CHILDREN'S COURT PRESIDENT TO HEAD NSW LOCAL COURT

The new Chief Magistrate of NSW will bring an extraordinary mix of leadership skills gained both in judicial office and private practice when he takes charge of the Local Court next week.

Attorney General Mark Speakman has named the current President of the Children's Court of NSW Judge Peter Johnstone to replace the longest serving Chief Magistrate of the Local Court of NSW, Judge Graeme Henson AM.

"Judge Johnstone will bring a significant breadth of experience to his Honour's new role. Our state is fortunate to have the services of judicial talent of his Honour's calibre to lead the Local Court," Mr Speakman said.

Earning his law degree at the University of Sydney, Judge Johnstone commenced articles in 1971. He was admitted to practice in 1973. Just four years later he was made partner of one of Australia's largest law firms (then known as Dawson Waldron), rising to become National Chief Operating Partner in 2001.

Judge Johnstone gained his first judicial experience in 1997, being appointed as an Acting District Court Judge. His Honour became a full-time judge of the District Court in 2006 and since 2012 has led the Children's Court of NSW as its President.

"This wealth of leadership experience, including as head of a jurisdiction crucial to steering young people away from a life of crime, will be invaluable as Judge Johnstone becomes responsible for the busiest jurisdiction in Australia. So too, his previous roles as a part-time NSW Law Reform Commissioner and Deputy Chair of the Medical Tribunal of NSW," Mr Speakman said.

"The compassion his Honour has shown to vulnerable children and families in the Children's Court, is indicative of his approach to the administration of justice in this state. Judge Johnstone helped establish and expand the Youth Koori Court, which has been instrumental in helping to change the lives of young Indigenous offenders."

The Attorney General paid tribute to outgoing Chief Magistrate Graeme Henson after 33 years on the bench and 15 years as head of the Local Court.

"I'm particularly grateful for Judge Henson's strong leadership, his work navigating the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and his support of working towards gender parity in the Local Court," Mr Speakman said.

An Acting President of the Children's Court will be announced shortly. Judge Johnstone will commence in his new role from Monday, 6 September.