

**2022**

**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**REPORT NO.4 OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON ECONOMY AND GENDER AND  
ECONOMIC EQUALITY  
INQUIRY INTO ANNUAL AND FINANCIAL REPORTS 2020-21 - GOVERNMENT  
RESPONSE**

**Presented by  
Mr Andrew Barr MLA  
Chief Minister**

## **Introduction**

On 16 September 2021, the Legislative Assembly passed an amendment to the 2 December 2020 Resolution of Establishment (clause 3(A)), referring the Annual and Financial Reports 2020-21 to the seven Standing Committees (the Committees) for inquiry and report by 31 May 2022.

The 2020-21 Annual and Financial Reports were reviewed by the relevant Standing Committees, and each Committee held hearings and reported separately.

The below Government Response addresses the recommendations which relate to the 2020-21 Annual and Financial Reports.

The following Annual and Financial Reports or sections of Annual Reports, were referred to the Standing Committee on Economy and Gender and Economic Equality (the Committee):

- Chief Minister and Treasury and Economic Development Directorate;
- Worksafe ACT;
- ACT Long Service Leave Authority;
- ACT Insurance Authority;
- Cultural Facilities Corporation;
- Access Canberra; and
- Gambling and Racing Commission.

## **Response to Committee Recommendations**

### **Recommendation 1**

The ACT Government should report to the Legislative Assembly by the final sitting week of 2022, its plan about how to increase aggregate demand in the CBD and major town centres following the whole-of-government policy of Working from Home (WFH) / flexible work arrangements.

#### **Government Response – Noted**

The ACT Government is committed to supporting hybrid working arrangements for its employees. The way we work has fundamentally changed and there is unlikely to be a return to pre-COVID working arrangements.

CBR Switched On, ACT's Economic Development Priorities for 2022-2025, highlights as one of its three missions the importance of being a city of wellbeing and liveability and being a city that 'gives back time' to attracting and retaining the workforce we need to grow. The continuation of hybrid working arrangements are a component of this strategy to make Canberra an attractive place in which to live and work.

The ACT Government provided extensive support to the business community throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and continues to work with the business community on economic recovery.

The Government will continue to invest in CBD rehabilitation and revitalisation as well as continuing to diversify the ACT economy.

In March 2022 the ACT Government released CBR Switched On, the ACT's Economic Development Priorities 2022-2025. Priorities identified in CBR Switched On support the continued wellbeing of Canberrans, while building a more diverse, resilient and prosperous economy by focusing on:

- Developing a city of wellbeing and liveability
- Continuing our efforts to be city of environmental responsibility and action
- Growing our knowledge-based economy through innovation and responsible investment

For example, the ACT Government will pursue knowledge-based economic growth by attracting responsible investment that aligns with the opportunities our city presents, the values that we represent, and the ease with which they can do business. This is achieved by prioritising investment in markets and products that build on our strengths as the knowledge capital and embody the government's commitment to climate action, the environment, sustainable development and the circular economy.

By attracting investment, developing infrastructure and networks that encourage cross sector collaboration, we will see greater innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship. Evidence that this approach is working is demonstrated by the ACT State Final Demand growing by 6 ½ per cent since COVID first arrived, with a budgetary baseline forecast of 2½ per cent for 2022-23.

## **Recommendation 2**

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government commission an independent report into the effectiveness and impacts of Working from Home (WFH)/ flexible work arrangements, focussing on:

- Productivity;
- Internal impacts;
- External impacts;
- Workplace culture;
- Recruitment; and
- Intended and unintended consequences.

### **Government Response – Noted**

The ACT Government will continue to evaluate flexible working arrangements to inform workforce planning and future work strategy.

The large-scale transition to WFH/flexible working arrangements was affected to protect the workforce and the community at the beginning of the COVID-19 health crisis.

The ACT Government continues to invest in flexible working options for its workforce. The 2022-23 Budget included funding to continue the Flexible Work Program and refurbish existing office space in Gungahlin to create a flexi hub to support new ways of working, building on the funding provided for flexi hubs in Tuggeranong and Belconnen through the 2021-22 Budget. This program will allow ACT Public Service employees to commute to a flexi hub located in their nearest town centre.

The ACT Government is undertaking a range of in-depth research to learn from and evaluate the effectiveness and impact of work from home (WFH) and flexible work arrangements.

## **Recommendation 3**

The Committee recommends that the COVID-19 Local Business Commissioner should continue engagement with business, industry representatives and local traders on COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 issues.

### **Government Response – Not Agreed**

As noted in his evidence, the COVID-19 Local Business Commissioner has performed two key functions in this role: (i) supporting commercial landlords and tenants to negotiate in good faith regarding commercial leases as a result of the financial impact of COVID-19 on business, and (ii) assisting with the business support package. Both of these measures have now ceased and the need for a Commissioner role to address COVID-19 business impacts has diminished.

Engagement with business, industry representatives and local traders on COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 issues will continue as the Better Regulation Taskforce implements measures under its agenda to make Canberra a place where it is easy to start up, run and grow a business. In

particular, the agenda will see the development of options for a concierge model to implement a dedicated and proactive business support team. The agenda will also result in the improvement of web resources for business including continued development of the Business Hub website as a seamless online point of entry for business.

Accordingly, the role of COVID-19 Local Business Commissioner has ceased as planned on 31 July 2022. Since the role of COVID-19 Local Business Commissioner was first established, the ACT Government has appointed a Minister for Business and Better Regulation.

#### **Recommendation 4**

Feedback from business, industry representatives and traders about government policy and initiatives should be made publicly available along with a government response detailing how the ACT Government will incorporate this feedback into policy considerations and outcomes.

#### **Government Response – Noted**

The ACT Government releases What We Heard and/or Consultation Reports following formal engagements on key policies and initiatives and will use best endeavours to ensure business stakeholders are advised how their input has been incorporated into other initiatives.

#### **Recommendation 5**

The Committee recommends that an external review into fraud, harassment and sexual harassment across the ACTPS be conducted, with a report back to the Legislative Assembly by the final sitting week of 2022.

#### **Government Response – Noted**

The Professional Standards Unit closely monitors matters referred for misconduct action to identify themes and/or systemic issues arising from investigations or identified behaviours. Investigation insights and observations are used to develop early intervention strategies including prevention and awareness packages across the ACTPS. Insights and observations are also provided to the impacted directorate/s and more broadly across the service at the earliest opportunity to ensure risk mitigation strategies are strengthened where required.

A Senior Executive Responsible for Business Integrity and Risk (SERBIR) Community of Practice has been established, led by the ACT Integrity Commission. The Community of Practice meets throughout the year to:

- identify current and emerging corruption risks facing the ACT public sector;
- share information and updates on current and proposed corruption prevention initiatives;
- counter threats to the integrity of the ACT public sector, and
- strengthen the respective integrity systems of all member agencies.

### **Recommendation 6**

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government should commit to a periodic evaluation of programs, grants and other funding given to organisations to assess whether they are achieving desired outcomes, particularly programs with economic development aims.

#### **Government Response – Noted**

The ACT Government has a long-standing commitment to the evaluation of policies and programs, including grants, as outlined in the ACT Evaluation Policy and Guidelines and the Framework for Administration of Grants in the ACT. The Framework for Administration of Grants was refreshed in 2021 and CMTEDD plans to refresh the ACT Evaluation Policy in 2022. These guidelines seek to ensure agencies plan for and are well placed to evaluate grants as part of their core business.

Programs with economic development aims are regularly evaluated. For example, the ACT Government has committed to table a review of the implementation of the Business Support Grant program and Small Business Hardship Scheme in the Legislative Assembly within the 2022 calendar year.

A number of other audits and reviews regarding these programs have been undertaken or are planned. The outcomes and findings of these reviews will inform the implementation of future grants programs across Economic Development.

Beyond internal evaluation processes and those conducted independently through contracting arrangements, the ACT Auditor-General conducts performance audits assessing the quality of the management of public resources under the *Auditor-General Act 1996* (ACT) in line with the program published by the ACT Audit Office in June each year.

### **Recommendation 7**

The ACT Government should develop a workforce plan to increase female representation at WorkSafe ACT.

#### **Government Response – Agreed**

Since becoming a prescribed territory authority on 1 July 2020, WorkSafe ACT has undertaken workforce planning with a particular emphasis on increasing female representation in the inspectorate through targeted recruitment. WorkSafe ACT's workforce plan includes the gradual increase in its number of inspectors over the out years, particularly in 2023-24. As reported in the 2020-2021 Annual Report, across the board WorkSafe ACT has achieved a 50/50 split of male and female officers. However, the inspectorate lacked this diversity, with 10 females and 28 males (26.3% female) on 30 June 2021. By the end of June 2022, the representation of women in the inspectorate will have marginally improved to 33.3% (15 females and 30 males).

In July 2022, Worksafe ACT advertised a bulk recruitment round for at least 10 WCO6 inspectors and interviews are planned for early October 2022. A range of strategies have been put in place

to increase the diversity of applicants, including encouraging female applicants. These strategies include using photographs of female inspectors when advertising roles, developing position descriptions and advertisements which focus on the broad range of industries WorkSafe ACT regulates and choosing a wide range of advertising channels to ensure the advertisements are seen by a diverse range of candidates. WorkSafe ACT participated in the Women's Return to Work Mini Expo, run by the Office for Women, to encourage female applicants. The WHS Commissioner will also attend the Women in Male Dominated Occupations and Industries event at the National Workers' Memorial in September 2022. In the 2023-24 financial year, WorkSafe ACT plans to establish a female centred trainee and entry level inspector program.

### **Recommendation 8**

The Committee recommends that all public art be covered by CCTV surveillance/ security.

### **Government Response – Noted**

The installation of CCTV for public art security purposes will be considered on a case-by-case basis subject to identified need, a cost benefit assessment and other crime prevention options including the implementation of environmental design measures. CCTV cameras already cover high risk sites including, Owl (Bruce Armstrong, 2011) in Belconnen and various artworks in City Walk.

### **Recommendation 9**

The Committee recommends that a permanent fund be established to ensure the longevity of the "Supporting Public Art for and by women" initiative.

### **Government Response – Noted**

Funding will be considered in the context of future budget processes. The ACT Public Art Guidelines require new commissions and acquisitions to promote diversity, equality and social inclusion in its design and commissioning. This aligns with the Statement of Ambition for the Arts which requires that future public artworks, and artists and creatives commissioned to make them, reflect the diversity of the ACT, in particular women and Traditional Custodians.

### **Recommendation 10**

The Committee recommends that for future arts infrastructure funding initiatives, concurrent and ongoing arts program funding should be provided to better support artists.

### **Government Response – Noted**

Funding will be considered in the context of future budget processes. The Statement of Ambition for the Arts commits to the development of a new funding model for ACT arts organisations. This will provide a framework for the Government to provide operational and programming funding to arts organisations and facilities to deliver quality creative experiences for artists and audiences.