

2012

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

**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE
STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS
Review of Auditor-General's Report No.7 of 2010:
Management of Feedback and Complaints**

TABLING STATEMENT

**Presented by
Ms Katy Gallagher MLA
Chief Minister**



Katy Gallagher MLA
CHIEF MINISTER

I am pleased to table the Government's response to Report 17 of the Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Public Accounts of August 2011, which was a review of the Auditor-General's Report 7 of 2010 – Management of Feedback and Complaints.

The Auditor-General's performance report assessed the mechanisms Territory and Municipal Services had in place with regards to receiving and dealing with complaints. The audit report also measured how well Canberra Connect performed in the role of dealing with feedback and used the Ombudsman's *Better Practice Guide to Complaint Handling* as a reference point.

Canberra Connect is a central point of contact between the ACT Government and the community. Avenues for contact include Shopfronts, a telephone contact centre and an on-line presence.

The Auditor-General found that TAMS had sound frameworks in place including a good information management system that had the potential to expand to deal with feedback and complaints at a whole-of-government level. The Auditor-General found there was room for improvement in a few areas, including the availability of policies, procedures and guidelines to staff and the community; ensuring the approaches to handling feedback were consistent across the service regardless of who received the complaint; and how feedback was monitored and analysed over the longer term.

Overall, the Auditor-General's inquiry indicated that there was capacity for the Government to further utilise the information provided via feedback and complaints mechanisms to improve business practices and service delivery.

The Public Accounts Committee made four recommendations in its review of the Auditor-General's report. I note that Mr Corbell, who was the Minister responsible at that time, tabled a response to one of those points on 25 October last year. This was a progress report on implementation within TAMS. The full response I am tabling today agrees with each of the other recommendations of the Committee.

First, the Government has agreed that a whole-of-government policy on the management of feedback and complaints is to be developed. Indeed the Head of Service tells me that one has already been drafted and after a period of consultation will be finalised shortly. The policy augments existing systems with the higher level principles pulled from the Ombudsman's *Better Practice Guide* as a way to provide a stronger foundation from which procedures can be advanced.

The Government has also provided a full response to the ACT Ombudsman's ten-point plan to improve ACT Government service delivery, as requested. The response supports or notes all of the Ombudsman's recommendations.

Additionally, with regards to whole-of-government approaches to complaint handling at the practical level, I am happy to report that the Strategic Board recently looked at the possibility of consolidating the whole-of-government feedback process and it was agreed that a 'One Service' approach was needed. To this end, Canberra Connect has established a triage system to receive, prioritise and direct complaints on behalf of the service. It is still in an

implementation phase, but I am told that at this early stage we have had a positive response and the procedures appear to be working well.

Apart from the procedural issues though, the Government recognises the broader cultural issues that were alluded to by the Auditor-General and Ombudsman. To be agile and well-placed to handle emerging issues, the Public Service must be attuned to feedback, recognising it as an opportunity for improvement rather than becoming defensive. While there are pockets in the service that demonstrate best practice with regards to complaint handling, and other pockets have well developed and effective feedback mechanisms in place, the Government will bring these exemplars together and build on their expertise as a way to spread a consistent model covering practice and attitudes across the service.

I thank both the Auditor-General and the Committee for their input on this issue.

ENDS

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Management of Feedback and Complaints

**Presented by
Ms Katy Gallagher MLA
Chief Minister**

Tabled on 14 Feb 2012

Introduction

The Auditor-General's audit on Management and of Feedback and Complaints was to assess the mechanisms in place in the former Department of Territory and Municipal Services (TAMS), including Canberra Connect which was a business unit within TAMS at the time of the audit. The Commonwealth and ACT Ombudsman's *Better Practice Guide to Complaint Handling* was used as a reference point for the audit.

Earlier this year, the former Ombudsman, Mr Allan Asher, issued a 10 point plan specifically aimed at improving ACT service delivery.

This Government Response addresses the recommendations of the Public Accounts Committee's review of the Auditor-General's report, Government Submission, and further briefings from the Auditor-General. The Government has agreed with all recommendations.

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government develop and publish a whole-of-government policy for the management and feedback of complaints.

Government Response

Agreed.

A whole-of-government policy has been drafted is being circulated to directorates for their views prior to endorsement by Strategic Board.

In researching what to include in the draft policy, it was found that there were several areas within the ACT Public Service that had well-established, appropriate complaints and feedback processes particularly in sensitive high client contact areas (eg Health). The whole-of-government policy is seeking to underpin those existing processes as well as require and provide guidance for future creation of policies to cover all directorates.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide the Standing Committee on Public Accounts with a written response to each of the ten recommendations made by the ACT Ombudsman as detailed in the Ombudsman's proposed ten-point plan to improve ACT Government service delivery – *Room for improvement*.

Government Response

Agreed.

A written response against each of the former Ombudsman's recommendations was done

as part of framing the draft whole-of-government feedback and complaints policy and is included as an attachment.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government report to the ACT Legislative Assembly by the last sitting day in October 2011 on the progress and effectiveness of the Territory and Municipal Services' Directorate's implementation of the Auditor-General's recommendation that have been accepted either in whole or in part. This should include: (i) a summary of action to date, either completed or in progress (including milestones completed); and (ii) the proposed action (including timetable), for implementing recommendations, where action has not yet commenced.

Government Response

Agreed.

The Territory and Municipal Services' Directorate tabled a progress report with these items on 25 October 2011 given the earlier deadline requested by the Committee.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensure that all directorates and agencies make sure that recommendations of the Auditor-General are appropriately monitored and addressed under the new ACTPS Directorate Structure and 'One ACT Public Service' identity.

Government Response

Agreed.

Current arrangements already provide for cross-directorate implementation of Auditor-General report recommendations where required. Agencies will continue to report on progress with implementing the Government's response to reports by the Auditor-General in their annual reports to ensure transparency and accountability.

ACTPS Response to the Ombudsman's Room for improvement: A proposed 10-point plan to improve ACT Government service delivery.

Proposal	ACTPS Response
1. Clarify the new government structure and its areas of responsibility	Completed: See Attachment A
2. Introduce a consistent complaint-handling structure across the whole of government.	Completed: through this Statement
3. Move away from a culture of denial and defensiveness to one that welcomes complaints and Ombudsman reports as a means of improving service delivery.	Supported: While not conceding a culture of denial and defensiveness exists across the ACTPS, the ACTPS accepts the experience of some complainants in dealing with elements of the ACTPS can be characterised in this way. Welcoming complaints as a tool for improving service delivery and policy design is a guiding principle of this policy statement. The ACTPS would welcome a positive, constructive and collaborative relationship with the ACT Ombudsman and his office as proposed in the 10-point plan. Directorates will provide information sought in accordance with relevant legal frameworks. The ACTPS looks forward to this openness being reciprocated through a "no surprises" approach where opportunity is provided to respond to proposed negative public commentary before it is released to ensure accuracy and inclusion of the ACTPS response.
4. Commit to ongoing training and career development for ACT Government employees, and greater involvement with agency strategic planning.	Supported.
5. Introduce consistent case management systems servicing ACT Government agencies.	Supported in-principle: Systems utilised by <i>Canberra Connect</i> have the capacity to be expanded to encompass all ACTPS Directorates. That said, a number of directorates have existing systems in place providing continuity and consistency of data

	and record keeping. The ACTPS Strategic Board has commissioned advice from the People and Performance Council on approaches to implementing this recommendation in light of competing resource demands, and the desire to develop better procedures for handling complaints before they are enshrined in system architecture.
6. Use plain language information in communication.	Supported.
7. Improve the approach to decision making by providing clear reasons and outlining avenues for review	Supported in-principle: while performance in this regard is always susceptible to improvement, these requirements already exist in many directorates' internal guidance documents.
8. Improve contract management by giving powers to the Ombudsman's office to oversee third-party service providers.	Noted: this is a matter for consideration by the Government in due course. Advice will be provided in combination with proposals to extend the reach of the Commonwealth Auditor-General into a similar space.
9. Ensure that officers/agencies responsible for maintaining carriage of service requests and applications are clearly identified.	Supported.
10. Introduce a program of regular inspections covering the broad range of conditions and services available at and via ACT Corrective Services.	Noted: this is a matter for consideration by the Government in due course.

