

**2019**

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

**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE  
STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE  
REPORT NO 5**

**REPORT ON ANNUAL AND FINANCIAL REPORTS 2017-2018**

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

## **Introduction**

On Thursday, 25 October 2018, the 2017-18 Annual and Financial reports of all ACT Government agencies were referred to the relevant Standing Committees of the Assembly for inquiry and reporting.

The following annual reports, or sections of annual reports, were referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (the Committee):

- ACT Auditor-General;
- ACT Insurance Authority;
- ACT Ombudsman;
- Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate;
- Icon Water Limited;
- Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission; and
- Office of the Legislative Assembly.

## **Response to Committee Recommendations**

### **Recommendation 1**

2.15 The Committee recommends that the Revenue Office publish on its website easy-to-understand guidelines on rates deferrals, including the specific criteria for hardship consideration, in order to help people to more easily navigate the system.

#### **Government Response – Agreed**

The ACT Revenue Office website was updated with information on rates deferrals and criteria for hardship consideration on 13 February 2019 prior to the Committee handing down its report.

### **Recommendation 2**

2.16 The Committee recommends that the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate increase staff understanding of the rates deferrals process to better manage requests for the service.

#### **Government Response – Agreed**

Training to assist ACT Revenue Office staff identify ratepayers who may be experiencing financial hardship and who may be eligible for the rates deferral scheme was conducted by Care Financial Counselling Services on 5 and 12 June 2019.

### **Recommendation 3**

2.17 The Committee recommends that the ACT Government include information about rates deferrals on rates notices.

#### **Government Response – Agreed**

A review of the Rates Notices has been completed and information relating to the ability to defer rates will be included in rates notices issued from 1 July 2019.

### **Recommendation 4**

2.26 The Committee recommends that Treasury undertake modelling on the impact of economic downturn on commercial and residential property values, considering a range of scenarios and how this could have disproportional impacts on some property owners.

#### **Government Response – Noted**

Treasury continuously monitors and reports on economic conditions in the ACT, including on the commercial residential property market.

### **Recommendation 5**

6.13 The Committee recommends that the Government reconsider the provisions relating to the ‘gratuitous care’ of children under the proposed changes to the Compulsory Third Party Insurance Scheme.

**Government Response – Not agreed**

Under the Motor Accident Injuries scheme, all injured people will be provided respite and attendant care services that are assessed as reasonable and necessary either under defined benefits or as part of a common law claim.

Care must be provided by an appropriately qualified professional or a bona fide service provider. Benefits are not payable if the services are provided on an unpaid basis – for example where they are provided by a parent to a child. This allows for family members to be family members, and ensures injured people receive care from qualified professionals.

The legislation that passed the Legislative Assembly in the May 2019 sitting period largely reflects the details of the model chosen by the CTP Citizens' Jury (with some enhancements), including how care is to be provided.

**Recommendation 6**

7.40 The Committee recommends that Icon Water include in the annual report a clear definition of each operating mode of the Murrumbidgee to Googong pipeline and record the time and associated costs spent in each mode.

**Government Response – Agreed**

Icon Water has made information on its source water strategy and Murrumbidgee to Googong pipeline publicly available on its website and in its Business Strategy (Statement of Corporate Intent). Information will be included in the next Annual Report to be published in October 2019.

**Recommendation 7**

8.11 The Committee recommends that the Government continue to monitor staff responses to the transition to the activity-based working environment, and where necessary, implement measures to ensure that staff concerns with the new environment are taken into consideration.

**Government Response – Agreed**

An across directorate Workforce Transformation Group is delivering a transformation program that aims to support changes to workplace culture and adapt to a new physical environment in the new government office buildings. The governance group will monitor staff feedback during the transition process.

**Recommendation 8**

10.27 The Committee recommends that the Government reconsider how investment advice is provided to and considered by the Lifetime Care and Support Fund with a view to maximise efficiencies and minimise costs.

**Government Response – Noted**

To facilitate efficient cash and investment management services a centralised and unitised investment administration structure is provided by Treasury that includes a number of different investment options to meet the specific investment objectives of Directorates (e.g. Lifetime

Care and Support Fund and the Superannuation Provision Account) and Territory Authorities (e.g. ACT Insurance Authority), collectively 'Agency Investors'.

The centralised legislative, governance and control structure is established for a number of purposes including:

- Consistent application of the Responsible Investment Policy and investment governance;
- Single ACT entity with financial market presence;
- Legislative compliance;
- Economies of scale, efficiencies and systems; and
- Consistency around financial reporting and budgeting.

To maximise efficiencies and minimise costs, Treasury centrally establishes required advisory arrangements such as an external asset consultant and an investment advisory board. The advisory services provided to Treasury are for all financial investments managed through the centralised investment administration structure. Treasury subsequently provides advice directly to Agency Investors.

#### **Recommendation 9**

11.10 The Committee recommends that the Government work with the ACT Ombudsman to devise procedures that allow the Ombudsman to expeditiously review FOI requests in order to meet mandated response timelines.

#### **Government Response – Agreed in principle**

The ACT Ombudsman currently adopts a two-stage approach in responding to review requests under the *Freedom of Information Act 2016* (FOI Act). The first stage focuses on encouraging informal resolution of the request (eg assisting parties to reach an agreement regarding documents to be provided). If the request is not able to be resolved on an informal basis, the ACT Ombudsman will proceed to a formal review. This two-stage approach focuses on achieving a timely and effective result for the applicant and ensures the efficient use of resources by avoiding unnecessary formal reviews. The ACT Government is considering ways to better recognise this two-stage approach in the FOI Act, to provide a specific time frame for the Ombudsman to seek to resolve the matter informally before proceeding to a formal review.

#### **Recommendation 10**

11.21 The Committee recommends that in its annual report, the ACT Ombudsman differentiate public inquiries/contact from direct complaints.

#### **Government Response – Not for government**

**Recommendation 11**

15.15 The Committee recommends that the after-hours door at the Legislative Assembly's public entrance be used as an automatic door during business hours, ahead of any future reconfiguration of the entrance.

**Government Response – Not for government**

**Recommendation 12**

15.16 The Committee recommends that any future reconfiguration of the Legislative Assembly's public entrance ensure the entrance is more streamlined for people entering and exiting the building and more clearly promotes the purpose of the building.

**Government Response – Not for government**