

## Senate Community Affairs References Committee

### DESIGN, SCOPE, COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS, CONTRACTS AWARDED AND IMPLEMENTATION ASSOCIATED WITH THE BETTER MANAGEMENT OF THE SOCIAL WELFARE SYSTEM INITIATIVE

PUBLIC HEARING 21 APRIL 2017

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Human Services

**Topic:** Ombudsman Report

**Question reference number:** QoN 152

**Member:** Senator Reynolds

**Type of question:** Hansard page 8

**Date set by the committee for the return of answer:** 8 May 2017

**Number of pages:** 2

#### **Question:**

Senator REYNOLDS: Can you advise the committee of the time line for implementing all the ombudsman's recommendations?

Mr Hutson: We have a view within the department that implementation of most of those recommendations has already commenced—and prior to the ombudsman completing his report. We would be happy to report to the committee on our progress and time lines in respect of each of those recommendations as to when they will be complete.

#### **Answer:**

Implementation of all eight (8) recommendations has commenced. More information on this is contained in appendix C of the Ombudsman's report. The report is publicly available at [http://www.ombudsman.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0022/43528/Report-Centrelinks-automated-debt-raising-and-recovery-system-April-2017.pdf](http://www.ombudsman.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0022/43528/Report-Centrelinks-automated-debt-raising-and-recovery-system-April-2017.pdf)

Approximately 50% of the actions required to implement these recommendations have been completed to date.

The continuous improvement arrangements put in place by the department have already resulted in a series of changes:

- letters are now clearer
- the whole design and layout of the online system has improved
- initial letters are now sent by registered mail, and
- debt recovery is now paused while a review is underway.

The Ombudsman noted the changes are positive and have improved usability and accessibility of the system.

The Department will continue to work towards the implementation of the recommendations with an anticipated completion by the end of August 2017.

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**PUBLIC HEARING 21 APRIL 2017**

**ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE**

**Department of Human Services**

**Topic:** Internal Concerns

**Question reference number:** QoN 160

**Member:** Senator Siewert and Senator Pratt

**Type of question:** Hansard page 16-17

**Date set by the committee for the return of answer:** 8 May 2017

**Number of pages:** 2

#### **Question:**

Senator PRATT: What concerns did either you, Mr Hutson, or you, Ms Williams, raise about this program internally, if any? You may not have.

Mr Hutson: That is not a question which I think we are in a position to answer in front of the committee. That is a conversation between ourselves and the internals within the department. What we did personally, individually, in respect of this matter is probably not really a question which is fair to ask us.

Senator SIEWERT: I understand what you have just said. Perhaps you could take on notice if staff did raise issues internally about the process.

Mr Hutson: Sure.

Senator PRATT: And we want the nature of those concerns.

Senator SIEWERT: Without identification.

Mr Hutson: Sure, okay.

Senator SIEWERT: Is that fair enough?

Mr Hutson: It is a fair enough question. We will identify, or attempt to identify, that within a parameter. The fact that a particular person might say to their manager—which would happen almost daily—I don't understand this. It doesn't make sense, and the manager explains it and we go on with business—

Senator SIEWERT: I understand. That is completely different—

Mr Hutson: If you are looking for people who have made formal representations within the department about the nature of this system, we will see what information we have about that.

Senator SIEWERT Thank you.

**Answer:**

The *Strengthening the Integrity of Welfare Payments* measure was announced as part of the 2015-16 Budget. The measure contained a suite of eight different elements designed to protect the integrity of the welfare system. One element of the 2015-16 Budget measure is Employment Income Matching which included the implementation of the online compliance system.

Risk assessments for the measure were completed in line with the Department's project management methodology. A comprehensive risk assessment was developed and used in the implementation of the measure. The development of the risk assessment incorporated feedback from staff involved in the policy, planning and implementation of the intervention. The areas of risk that were canvassed included areas such as customer communication and contact, management information, case selection, ICT capability and capacity and workforce management.