

Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit

AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORTS Nos 34, 37 and 41 (2014-15) ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Human Services

Topic: Scheduled milestones for the implementation of the Welfare Payment Infrastructure Transformation Programme

Question reference number: QoN 1

Member: Mr Pat Conroy MP

Type of question: Hansard page 7

Number of pages: 1

Question:

ACTING CHAIR: When is that new computer platform due?

Mr Tidswell: The first year is only the start-up year in that sense. I do not have that detail in front of me, but it is over a seven-year program of work and activity and tranches of work, and this year is really a start-up and procurement year.

ACTING CHAIR: Could you take on notice those scheduled milestones for the implementation of that platform?

Mr Tidswell: Yes.

Answer:

The Welfare Payment Infrastructure Transformation (WPIT) Programme is an important long-term investment. It is a multi-year Programme, with Tranche One commencing on 1 July 2015. Tranche One is expected to run for approximately 18 months.

The WPIT Programme is being segmented into a number of tranches. Tranche One involves detailed business planning and identifying vendor partners to allow for planning and co-design for future tranches. Tranche One will also see four project deliverables implemented to improve digital capabilities.

By its completion, the new system will be focused on the customer and will take full advantage of real-time data monitoring and analysis to deliver significant benefits to government, taxpayers and welfare recipients.

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AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORTS Nos 34, 37 and 41 (2014-15) ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Human Services

Topic: Channel Strategy

Question reference number: QoN 2

Member: Mr Angus Taylor MP

Type of question: Hansard page 9

Number of pages: 1

Question:

Mr TAYLOR: I have one follow-up question: is the coordinated channel strategy, which is talked about in the report, going to be a public document? Where is that process up to?

Mr Tidswell: We have received quite a comprehensive report—I forget how many pages, but it is more of a telephone book than a 'back of the envelope' job. We are working with the consultants on the recommendations and moving forward. I do not have a date at this stage for when we will be finalising our response to that and moving that forward, but the aim is that that will be the plan and the pathway moving forward. We will take on notice the timing for production and information in that area, but it is aimed to be that this is what we are going to do in respect of moving more people on.

Mr TAYLOR: So it will be a public document?

Mr Tidswell: I have alluded to certain things—I will take that on notice.

Mr TAYLOR: Yes, okay.

Answer:

The Channel Strategy is currently going through final clearance processes within the Department.

Once the internal clearance process has been completed, the Strategy will be provided to the Secretary, then subsequently to the Minister for clearance.

The Department will consider making the document publically available after it has been cleared by all of the key stakeholders.

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AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORTS Nos 34, 37 and 41 (2014-15) ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Human Services

Topic: Staffing in service centres

Question reference number: QoN 3

Member: Acting Chair

Type of question: Hansard pages 10-11

Number of pages: 2

Question:

ACTING CHAIR: Can I just canvass one issue quickly and then we will wrap up. At the start of the discussions I tried to get a picture of what is happening with your customer service centres, and you made a valid point in that you have to be careful that you are not comparing apples with oranges. What is a fair benchmark to actually understand your transition? I am looking for an understanding over time of the average staff number in a customer service centre?

Mr Tidswell: I would have to take that on notice. We have ones that just have two or three staff, through to some of the bigger sites. I will have to come back on averages.

ACTING CHAIR: What I am interested in—and please take it on notice, I do not expect you to have the answer now—is to get a picture over time of reductions, comparing apples to apples. I am not asking you to compare the average number of staff in a country town Centrelink with that in a major capital city. What I am trying to say is: for the same locational generality are we seeing a reduction of FTEs in the actual customer service centres? I acknowledge that both sides of government have been doing this. I am trying to get a picture of the reduction in staff as people are diverted to other channels.

Answer:

- a) The total headcount of ongoing and non-ongoing employees (including Intermittent and Irregular employees) in Service Centres as at dates specified:

Total Headcount of Ongoing and Non-Ongoing Employees within Service Centres as Total Percentage of DHS Workforce				
Year	As at 30 June 2013	As at 30 June 2014	As at 30 June 2015	As at 31 July 2015
% of Total DHS Workforce	12,179 (34.0% of Total DHS Workforce)	11,431 (32.9% of Total DHS Workforce)	10,681 (30.6% of Total DHS Workforce)	10,733 (30.6% of Total DHS Workforce)

Since 30 June 2013 the number of Service Centres delivering face to face Centrelink and Medicare Services has seen a reduction from 463 at 30 June 2013 to 376 at 31 July 2015. This has primarily been a result of the expansion of the one-stop shop approach to increase the range of services available from a single location and reduce the cost and duplication of service delivery.

Broadly the percentage of DHS staff working across the Face to Face Service Delivery network has remained stable, noting the overall reduction in the number of Service Centres.

To provide staffing numbers apportioned by location and services provided is difficult to accurately articulate as staff are moved between sites and across service delivery channels depending on operational demand which is reflective of the agility required.

By way of a regional example, the total headcount of ongoing and non-ongoing employees (including Intermittent and Irregular Employees) in Service Centres in South Australia as at dates specified is as follows:

Total Headcount of Ongoing and Non-Ongoing Employees within Service Centres located in South Australia*				
Year	As at 30 June 2013	As at 30 June 2014	As at 30 June 2015	As at 31 July 2015
Headcount	713	655	687	691

*Including Broken Hill

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AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORTS Nos 34, 37 and 41 (2014-15) ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Human Services

Topic: Call volumes and online services

Question reference number: QoN 4

Member: Mrs Jane Prentice MP

Type of question: Written

Number of pages: 1

Question:

Why have the department's expectations for a reduction in call volumes from moving to online service delivery not been met?

Answer:

A number of factors contribute to the department not experiencing a reduction in call volumes since more services were transitioned to the online channel, including:

- the extent of unmet demand in the telephony channel – as more customers access services online, customers who previously could not enter the channel can do so;
- technological factors – for example customers having the ability to automatically redial one of the department's telephony queues which generates a large number of call attempts; and
- increased complexity of the payments and supplements the department provides which can result in people contacting the department several times through multiple channels.

The Welfare Payment Infrastructure Transformation (WPIT) programme, which started on 1 July 2015, is a long-term project being undertaken by the department. The current system is more than three decades old and incompatible with modern technology. The 1980s technology was built for an era of paper records and is incapable of taking full advantage of the digital age.

By its completion, the new system will be focused on the customer and take full advantage of real-time data monitoring and analysis to deliver significant benefits to government, taxpayers and welfare recipients. It will save customers time and effort by offering smarter and easier online end-to-end services and will streamline processes and make it easier for customers to interact with the department online.

Customers will start to see some of the benefits of the WPIT programme in the first 18 months. Service enhancements in this period include the introduction of digital in-channel customer support and the ability for customers to monitor the status of their claims in real-time. It is envisaged that these improvements will reduce the need for customers to contact the department by telephone.

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AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORTS Nos 34, 37 and 41 (2014-15) ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Human Services

Topic: Calls getting engaged signal and productivity of telephony staff

Question reference number: QoN 5

Member: Mrs Jane Prentice MP

Type of question: Written

Number of pages: 1

Questions:

What has the department done to address the issue of calls being unable to enter the network, and does the department consider this a priority matter to address?

What measures has the department taken to improve the productivity of the existing call centre workforce?

Answer:

The department is addressing the issue of calls being unable to enter the network and considers this a priority.

A key strategy employed to reduce instances of callers receiving an engaged signal is the prioritisation of telephony over non-essential off phone or processing activities. However, during peak periods demand can exceed supply.

The department has cross-skilled staff in both processing and telephony to maximise the number of staff available in peak periods. Training and support materials also help ensure staff are equipped to provide customer outcomes in a timely manner.

The department is undertaking a number of activities to optimise the number of staff available to undertake telephony and maximise flexibility, particularly during peak periods. These include focusing on real time management of demand by moving staff between processing and telephony, limiting off-phone activity and the introduction of further training support to strengthen performance.

In addition, permanent ongoing APS3/4 positions have been advertised.