

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

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ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Human Services

Topic: Reviews and audits of the performance of the debt collection agencies

Question reference number: QoN 205

Member: Senator KAKOSCHKE-MOORE

Type of question: Hansard page 50

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Question:

Senator KAKOSCHKE-MOORE: I will not assume anything. Would the department conduct any audits or performance reviews of the performance of external debt collection agencies?

Ms Golightly: Yes, we do, very regularly. There are a number of different ones, actually, under the contract. There are a couple we do monthly, and then we do a formal quarterly review as well.

That is in addition to daily contact we might have with the agencies.

Senator KAKOSCHKE-MOORE: Can those formal quarterly reports be made public?

Ms Golightly: I would have to check whether there is actually a report, as such. They are face-to-face meetings where we review for that quarter various aspects of the agency's performance. I think I might have given evidence at an earlier hearing. For example, we do call recording and listen to a sample of those calls; we do surveys of customers; and we look at data about the number of contacts, making sure that that is all in accordance with the specifications of the contract. So we would go through all of that in our quarterly review. We do that face-to-face with each of the agencies at a fairly senior level. I can take on notice what would be available that we might be able to provide the committee.

Answer:

The Department conducts a number of audits and reviews of its External Collection Agents (ECA).

On a daily basis, the Department's External Collection Liaison Officer interacts with the ECA's operations teams, managing activities such as customer enquiries, matters that need escalation, system issues, and managing complaints.

On a monthly basis the Department:

- convenes a monthly Operations Meeting to review ECA performance for the month
- undertakes monthly call audits, to monitor call quality.

On a Quarterly basis, Departmental representatives meet with the ECAs face-to-face to review quality performance activities. Performance measures include, but are not limited to, quality and recovery outcomes process improvements. The quarterly meeting also reviews:

- complaints, including trend analysis;
- actions taken to locate departmental former recipients;
- staff training, and compliance with confidentiality and security requirements.

The Department conducts an annual audit of each ECAs physical security arrangements and their personnel security and privacy compliance during on-site inspections.

The Department conducts an IT security audit every two years. This includes an assessment of the ECA's IT security via an Information Security Registered Assessor Program (IRAP) assessment. This audit monitors the ECA's compliance with their contractual obligations such as:

- compliance with relevant controls within the Australian Government Information Security Manual (ISM) and relevant areas of the Protective Security Policy Framework (PSPF) which is provided to them by the Department;
- ensuring there is a secure data exchange between the ECA and the Department;
- ensuring the Department's data is not be stored by ECA outside Australia;
- ensuring the ECA supports the certification of their system in accordance with the Department's system accreditation standard.