

Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

BUDGET ESTIMATES – 3 JUNE 2015 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Human Services

Topic: Telephony Services – staff training

Question reference number: HS 12

Senator: Moore

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Question:

Senator SIEWERT:Does anybody that rings up ever told that they can go and look it up themselves on the computer?

Ms Campbell: We often encourage people, so that they do not have to wait next time, to use digital services. Again, we see digital services as a positive thing. People can find the information they want in their own time.

Senator SIEWERT: I understand that. Telling people for future reference—that is fine. Are people, once they get through, told to go and look it up digitally rather than being given it there and then, once they are on the phone?

Mr Tidswell: I have no information that that occurs. Our aim is to try to tell people that there are other solutions, without telling them, 'You shouldn't have come through to us and we're not going to answer your questions.' We do not do that. We deal with the inquiry and move it forward. What we are really trying to showcase to people is that there are alternatives for a lot of the calls; not all, but for a lot of the calls. They are pretty good alternatives, and more people are taking them up. Our role is to try and help people cross that digital divide if it is an issue for them. Increasingly, it is not. We have gone out of our way to try and do that, in that sense. I have never heard of it; I have not had a complaint where somebody has said to me they have been told they have not got an answer and to go and search a website. I would not be comfortable with that service outcome at all.

Senator MOORE: Mr Tidswell, have you particularly told staff not to say that?

Mr Tidswell: I do not think it is in our scripts to do that. Our scripts are really about—

Senator MOORE: That is not my question, Mr Tidswell. This is not an unusual statement from people in the community, and I am surprised that you have never heard of it. In terms of the discussion with the community, one of the things we have been told is that sometimes people feel—again, I am not a witness to these conversations—as though they have been told to go away and look at a computer and check it out themselves. I take all the arguments you have put about encouraging people to use alternative systems. I am saying that this is something we hear not irregularly, having regard to the concerns of people that contact our offices. It would be useful to know whether there is something in the training so that, in the midst of encouragement to use alternative methodologies, you could learn better ways of actually saying that.

Mr Tidswell: I will take that on notice. Certainly, we encourage our staff to sell the digital service options, but it would not be in a way that is described here. We will take it on notice and look at our training and provide that information.

Senator MOORE: That would be great. Thank you.

Answer:

Staff receive training in the self-service options available to our customers. A component of that training is to educate the customer and attempt to transition them to self-service where appropriate. In the event that a customer contacts the department for business that they are capable of completing through self-service, the Service Officer would resolve the enquiry and educate the customer on the self-service options available to them. In some circumstances it may be appropriate for a Service Officer to assist the customer in navigating the self-service options through a Customer Online view.