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JUSTICE, INTEGRITY AND COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr MA Hunt MP—Chair
Mr MC Berkman MP
Mr RD Field MP
Ms ND Marr MP
Ms MF McMahon MP
Mr PS Russo MP

Staff present:

Ms F Denny—Committee Secretary
Ms H Radunz—Assistant Committee Secretary

PUBLIC HEARING—OVERSIGHT OF THE OFFICE OF THE INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Wednesday, 25 March 2026

Brisbane

WEDNESDAY, 25 MARCH 2026

The committee met at 9.00 am.

CHAIR: Good morning. I declare open this public oversight hearing. My name is Marty Hunt. I am the member for Nicklin and chair of the committee. I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today and pay our respects to elders past and present. With me here today are Peter Russo MP, member for Toohey and the deputy chair; Michael Berkman MP, member for Maiwar; Russell Field MP, member for Capalaba; Natalie Marr MP, member for Thuringowa; and Melissa McMahon MP, member for Macalister.

This hearing is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament and is subject to the parliament's standing rules and orders. Only the committee and invited witnesses may participate in the proceedings. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath or affirmation but I remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence. I also remind members of the public that they may be excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee. These proceedings are being recorded and broadcast live on the parliament's website. Media may be present and are subject to the committee's media rules and the chair's direction at all times. You may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings and images may also appear on the parliament's website on or social media pages.

BOOTH, Mr Paxton, Deputy Integrity Commissioner, Office of the Integrity Commissioner

WAUGH, Ms Linda, Integrity Commissioner, Office of the Integrity Commissioner

CHAIR: I now welcome officers from the Office of the Integrity Commissioner. Good morning. Would you like to make an opening statement before we start our questions?

Ms Waugh: Yes, I would like to. You may recall from my appearance last year that I reported an increase in work across operational and non-operational areas of the office in 2023-24. This trend continued into 2024-25. In 2024-25 we reported further increases in our statutory function work, including an 84 per cent increase in advice work, a 73 per cent increase in delivery of training and education sessions, and a 56 per cent increase in recorded lobbying activities. This is an ongoing trend since 2022. I note, however, 2024-25 is likely a stand-out year for two reasons: one, there was a state general election; and, two, we were doing considerable non-business-as-usual corporate work as we commenced operation as a statutory body.

The state election saw a change in government in October 2024. This will always lead to increases in advice requests, in meetings and in delivery of training and education presentations as new ministers and assistant ministers, chiefs of staff and ministerial advisers are appointed, along with some new government and board appointees. This flowed through to our lobbying work, where we also saw an increase in lobbying activity. 2024-25 was also our first year operating as a statutory body and we continued our program of work in transition and change which I spoke about last year. In 2024-25 we undertook some major and resource-intensive work. We developed our policy framework and associated policies. I note that previously we adopted in large part the corporate policies of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, which was the department we were in. It is a sizeable piece of work for a small office that continues to this day to develop and implement our own suite of policies and procedures.

We strengthened our risk management and accountability measures, we migrated our website from a non-standard system to a modern content management system and we continued to work to identify potential shared service providers, to engage with those that we selected, and commenced our preparatory work to transition our IT, HR, payroll and finance services, all of which have occurred in this financial year.

In addition to those things, we also had a focus on a few key projects. We developed and rolled out mandatory foundational training for all registered lobbyists in May 2025. We ran four sessions, with two in-person and two online. This foundational training covered the act, the code and all of the compliance obligations for registered lobbyists. We updated and republished the Queensland lobbying Brisbane

register user guide and we commenced a review of the lobbyist code of conduct. That involved developing and publishing a consultation paper which called for submissions and conducting many meetings with submitters and stakeholders.

As we had a big program of work and a high workload in 2024-25, there were some delays or slowdown on some other key projects—in particular, identifying and implementing a case management system, enhancing the Queensland lobbying register, which is a significant IT project, and the redevelopment of our website. We are making good headway on those important projects this year. Importantly, in 2024-25 we secured a budget uplift for 2025-26 and beyond—additional funding of \$7.12 million over four years and \$1.87 million thereafter. It converted five temporary positions to permanent positions and gave us three additional permanent roles. This increase to funding was critical for our operation as a statutory body and to properly discharge our functions in the face of increased workload.

Lastly, as I look back on what we achieved in 2024-25 I can take only part of the credit. The bulk of that belongs to the small group of people who work in my office and who consistently deliver high-quality and timely work and drive our results operationally and corporately. I will leave it there, but thank you for the opportunity to give this opening address. Paxton, my Deputy Integrity Commissioner, and I are happy to take your questions.

CHAIR: May I thank you and join you in thanking your staff for the wonderful work you have done over the last year. I noted in your report that you introduced measures to inform affected stakeholders about changes to the definition of 'opposition representative' which clarify that communications between a registered lobbyist and a shadow minister or shadow assistant minister may constitute lobbying activity. Can you expand on what measures you introduced and how the new definition applies?

Ms Waugh: Previously the definition of 'opposition representative' was the leader and deputy leader of the opposition and the staff in the opposition leader's office. That amendment expanded 'opposition representative' to include spokespersons and assistant spokespersons, so shadow ministers and shadow assistant ministers. The way that we dealt with that was we communicated with those who were affected, so the opposition, and informed them of the changes. We also communicated with all registered lobbyists about the change and when that would commence and we updated the lobbyist code of conduct to reflect that change in definition.

CHAIR: In terms of the communication that you made to those stakeholders, is that in person or email? How was that done? Was there training?

Ms Waugh: It was done in writing, by correspondence.

Mr RUSSO: With the significant changes that your organisation may have faced becoming an independent statutory body, are you able to tell the committee what significant challenges there were for the organisation?

Ms Waugh: I would say many. I was an independent statutory office but my staff were the staff of Department of the Premier and Cabinet, so that meant all of those governance responsibilities that you find under the Financial Accountability Act or the financial management standard rest with the department. A key thing in terms of the changes we have to deal with and the things we have to implement is that all of those obligations that now sit with the department or an agency now apply to us as a statutory body, so we are responsible for our financial statements and we are responsible for having the governance requirements in place that are required of all entities—having the strategic plan and whatnot. I think what made it a little bit more complicated for us was that it also coincided and probably formed part of separating the provision of all of our corporate services from the department. In addition to getting ready to operate as a statutory body, we were looking at two really significant projects—one to transfer our HR, payroll and finance services to a new provider and the other to transfer our IT and records management to a provider. All of that was happening during that year. We are an office of 18 people so that is a considerable amount of work to manage, but we did. The team did great.

Ms MARR: Thank you for the work that you do. I do want to acknowledge how impressed I am that you acknowledged and thanked your staff. I think it is a really important part of having a great team. In your report you were talking about opportunities to better meet stakeholder needs. Can you explain to us what benefits are expected from the upcoming upgrades to the Queensland lobbying register and also the website?

Ms Waugh: I will take the website first. The website is quite old and it was developed on an old platform, or an old system. Also remember that there is a transactional component to our website which is the registered lobbyists. They are transacting through the website into the register. I would like to see better organisation of information that is really driven by what we know people are looking for on our website and also focusing our content areas around our stakeholder groups. If you are looking for a particular thing, a fact sheet—we have tidied it up. We have made small incremental changes, but it can be a little bit challenging to find exactly what you are looking for. I think it will be very user focused. That is the direction I would like to take the website in.

We have traditionally, like most organisations, focused on resources that are in writing—fact sheets, website content. We are really keen, and we have started this work, to look at where our stakeholders would benefit from having, for example, video explainers. I can talk you through what a registered lobbyist is and how it works, but there is probably a lot of merit in doing it faster and in a way that is more easily consumed by a stakeholder seeing that sort of content. That is what I will say on the website.

On the lobbying register, we got a new register in 2024. We had some significant changes in May 2024, which was when the new chapter 4 lobbying regulation commenced. It changed quite a few things around the registration process and information that is required. Like any new IT platform, as you operate it you start to see what is good about it but also where it could be enhanced. We have been making some incremental enhancements. Some of those are for our users; some of those will be for registered lobbyists, to make it easier for them; some will be for stakeholders who are looking at the register; and some are for us, the administrators. A key thing, for example, is that it has been a little bit clunky to get internal reporting out of. We need that to do our compliance work. Some of these enhancements will contribute to improving that process. I might just ask my deputy, who has been the lead on the project, if there is anything to add to the enhancements.

Mr Booth: By way of example, one of the improvements we would like to see for functionality for registered lobbyists is an enhancement when they are using their mobile devices to access the register and input lobbying activity. At the moment it does not optimise in terms of the way it is set out on the screen from a PC to a mobile device. We want to make a change so that when they access the lobbying register they can enter it when they are on the road, so to speak, and it is easier for them to do that activity and keep their records up to date.

Ms MARR: It allows them to be on top of it as well. Thank you. I am looking forward to hearing how that goes in your next report.

Ms McMAHON: Continuing on with the work with lobbyists, I note that there are expected changes with the review of the Queensland Registered Lobbyists Code of Conduct. Can you outline how there is any change of business or change of activity either for your organisation or for lobbyists as a result of that review?

Ms Waugh: We are still going through the consultation process. Until I finish that consultation, there is not a lot that I can say. I do not think there would be any significant administrative impact. Where we might make a change to require a certain thing, on the other side we may be saying, 'But on this thing you do not need to record this as a lobbying activity,' for example. I think the real benefit of the review will largely come from making things a bit clearer. Last time I was here, I spoke about how the code has standards of conduct but also very procedural things in it which makes the code quite long. We got a lot of feedback from submitters in support of this: 'Keep the code to be really about conduct standards, and where there are steps or procedures that we follow have those in a directive.' I have already issued a directive, for example, in relation to training—and this will feed into the website project—but when they come to the website, all of their key compliance obligations will be sitting in one spot.

Mr FIELD: Thank you for acknowledging your staff. I have always said that you are only as good as the people you have working for you. It is great to see the staff get acknowledged more regularly. You are saying that following the election the requests increase and you are always busy after an election. Given that was 16 months ago or so, have the request numbers now reduced or do they normally reduce? Once they do—I assume they do—are there any steps taken to improve the timeliness of those complex requests?

Ms Waugh: Yes, that is the normal pattern. If there is a state election or if there is a cabinet reshuffle, this is particularly tied because there is a lot of mandatory obligations for ministers and assistant ministers. For example, they have to meet with me annually. If they are a new minister, they have to meet with me within one month. You will see a spike in advice requests and all of the associated activities probably more so when there is a change of government, because you have whole ministerial

offices that are new. We did all sorts of training, including induction programs that were run by DPC, but we also offered training for office staff—more granular training that was longer for these new advisers. There was definitely a spike.

Probably what you will notice in our report next year is that our timeliness probably dropped a bit as we managed this peak workload. You are right to ask whether when that drops off there is a corresponding improvement in timeliness and the answer is, yes, there will be. We always give priority to advices. That always sits at the top of our priority list. If we have periods, as we did in that year, when we cannot really manage in terms of the advice work and presentations work or much else, we will put other projects on hold.

Mr FIELD: Does it also happen in reverse leading up to an election? Do you have peak requests leading up to an election as well as after an election?

Ms Waugh: Going off the top of my head, I do not believe so. A possibility is that—and I would need to look at the data—in those numbers there might have been an increased number of requests relating to post-separation advice matters as people exit, because it is available to ministerial advisers, chiefs of staff and whatnot. I suspect there was probably an increase in that particular subgroup.

Mr BERKMAN: Along similar lines to the member for Capalaba's question, I was struck by the statistics in your opening statement around the increases in the advice, education and lobbying work for that financial year. Accepting the reasons for the spike around the state election and your expectation that will subside, what do you anticipate for the rest of the activities? Is there likely to be a continued increase in the training and educational demands and the rest of the lobbying work that the office does?

Ms Waugh: Yes. One thing that I think is interesting about the numbers is: if you look at the numbers across a 10-year period, say the last 10 years, there is a big spike which is actually when local government councillors and general managers were able to seek advice. That really gave it a 100 per cent, 200 per cent, 300 per cent increase in advice requests. Then it drops down. Then from about 2022 it starts to increase again. I suspect what we will see is that those numbers will go down but only back to the level of work we were doing prior to the election. I do not expect they will drop to what was occurring, say, in 2021 or 2021-22.

Why is that happening? I think there is probably greater awareness as to who is a designated person. Members of parliament, ministers and assistant ministers know they are designated persons, but one thing that became clear to me in my first year was that there were board members who were statutory office holders who were not aware that they are designated persons. When you look at the numbers in this report and when you see the numbers in the next report, what you will notice is that the statutory office holder group is getting larger and larger—the biggest it has ever been—and this is tied to our awareness-raising activity and some of the training and education priorities that we have. My focus is equally to raise awareness around ethics and integrity issues. I have that part of the work that I am doing, but I think when you are delivering that sort of messaging and training it makes more people come and seek advice.

Mr BERKMAN: It is the vicious cycle of education and advice. The funding boost goes some way to addressing that consistent increase in your workload over time, but it strikes me that it is still a small and mighty team doing an awful amount of work around the organisational changes as well as the core functions of the office. How do you anticipate that resourcing need changing over time?

Ms Waugh: I am delighted with the budget increase. It was really important for the activities we were doing but also to discharge our functions in the way that I think they should be discharged. A really good example is that we previously never had a compliance officer. We are a regulator but we did not have anyone to do the compliance work. Now we have that.

It is really hard to predict exactly what it will look like, because since 2022 there has been constant change. Either the legislation was changing or preparing to be a statutory body. Although I have, for example, a director of transition and corporate strategy to lead and assist Paxton and me in doing that work, it does suck in all of the staff. If you are writing policies and procedures, you need staff input. I think it will become clearer in the next year as that part of the work settles. I have talked about projects that are delayed. We will see how we go with that sort of shifting of resources and hopefully we can deliver on our full program of work, but I think there is an element that it is hard to know until you get to the other side.

CHAIR: In your report you note that you will 'focus on implementing a process to seek information from designated persons about their acceptance of advice'. Can you explain what that means and why it is important?

Ms Waugh: Yes. As with any public sector agency, it is really important that we have performance measures. Now that we have become a statutory body, it is even more important that we have effectiveness and efficiency measures for our SDS statement. It is quite difficult and challenging to do that, particularly on the advice side of the house. One thing we worked on and we thought would be a good indication of the effectiveness of advice is who is accepting advices. We never ask that question before I give an advice unless it falls into a particular category, which is called a significant ethics or integrity issue. There is no obligation and no requirement for me to follow up, and there is no obligation on the designated person to tell me whether or not they followed my advice. I think it serves a few purposes, but asking a designated person, after they have received their advice, had time to review and consider it, whether they have accepted it—and if they have not accepted it, what were the reasons—is helpful not only in telling us how we are performing but also gives us very important feedback on what we are doing in the advice function.

CHAIR: I think it would be a very brave person not to accept it!

Mr RUSSO: My question is along the lines of performance and objectives of the organisation. Complex matters I assume take longer. Is the organisation taking any steps to improve the timelines for how you deal with the matters, complex or simple?

Ms Waugh: Yes. I think one of the problems with us not having a case management, like doing spreadsheet management, is that it limits the information you capture and the categorisation of matters. That is exactly what we are doing: we are looking at categorising matters as simple and complex and assigning internal timeframes for us—for me and for the team—in terms of delivering those within agreed and appropriate timeframes.

The other thing I should say is that there is a little bit of flexibility and agility in how we perform the advice functions. Sometimes a person will come to me for advice and they will say, 'I am a board member and I do not have my next board meeting for eight weeks, so I am pretty relaxed as to the time.' I might get another request which is, 'I have to make a decision on a certain thing in five days. Can I have the advice within five days?' We will try to be, and I think successfully, responsive to those requests. Sometimes when there is a longer tail on an advice matter it is actually to do with the designated person's timeframe. If my staff were sitting here, they would be nodding furiously that we talk about timeframes around advice matters fairly consistently and constantly, and I place great importance on advice matters being delivered as quickly as possible without compromising quality.

Ms MARR: Looking at your report, there was increased activity with stakeholders. Have you had any feedback from the stakeholders about the education and awareness sessions that you delivered? That did take a lot of your time to implement that. Have you had any feedback on that?

Ms Waugh: I do not have any particular numbers with me, but we will put in our annual report where we get positive feedback. I would say that most of the time the feedback we get is positive. I am thinking if I have ever had negative feedback. Thinking about registered lobbyists and the foundational training, we received some fantastic feedback on that training from attendees. We also received some complaints about how long it was because it was 2½ hours. Generally, the feedback is very positive and we will get an email from the contact person, thanking us for the session. I cannot recall other than that any negative feedback about the presentations we have delivered.

Ms MARR: That is okay. I just wanted to see if it was accepted. Obviously it was very well accepted as well.

Ms Waugh: Yes.

CHAIR: Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner, thank you very much for your time today. You go with our thanks and no questions taken on notice.

The committee adjourned at 9.29 am.