



LOCAL GOVERNMENT, SMALL BUSINESS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr JP Lister MP—Chair
Mr AJ Baillie MP
Mr MA Boothman MP
Mr MPT Healy MP
Mrs ME Nightingale MP
Ms JE Pease MP

Staff present:

Ms M Telford—Committee Secretary
Mr Z Dadic—Assistant Committee Secretary

PUBLIC BRIEFING—BRIEFING WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF CUSTOMER SERVICES, OPEN DATA AND SMALL AND FAMILY BUSINESS

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Wednesday, 19 February 2025

Brisbane

WEDNESDAY, 19 FEBRUARY 2025

The committee met at 9.29 am.

CHAIR: Good morning. I declare open the public briefing with the Department of Customer Services, Open Data and Small and Family Business. My name is James Lister. I am the member for Southern Downs and the 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. We are very fortunate to live in a country with two of the oldest continuing cultures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, whose lands, winds and waters we all share.

With me today are the deputy chair of the committee and the member for Inala, Margie Nightingale; the member for Townsville, Adam Baillie; the member for Theodore, Mark Boothman; the member for Cairns, Michael Healy; and the member for Lytton, Joan Pease.

This briefing 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 potentially misleading the committee is a serious offence. I also remind members of the public that they may be excluded from the briefing at the discretion of the committee. I remind committee members that the departmental officers are here to provide factual or technical information. Any questions seeking an opinion about policy should be directed to the minister or left to debate on the floor of the House.

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 my direction at all times. You may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages. Please turn your mobile phones off or to silent mode.

I now welcome representatives from the Department of Customer Services, Open Data and Small and Family Business who have been invited to brief the committee on the work of the department.

KOCH, Mr Steven, Deputy Director-General, Customer, Department of Customer Services, Open Data and Small and Family Business

LAMONT, Mr Chris, Director-General, Department of Customer Services, Open Data and Small and Family Business

McCARTHY, Ms Natasha, Chief Finance Officer, Department of Customer Services, Open Data and Small and Family Business

NEWELL, Mr Craig, General Manager, Digital Customer (Smart Service Queensland), Department of Customer Services, Open Data and Small and Family Business

SPINA, Mr Andrew, Deputy Director-General, Data and Digital Government, Department of Customer Services, Open Data and Small and Family Business

CHAIR: Please remember to turn your microphones on before you speak and then off when you are finished. I invite you to provide an opening statement to the committee after which committee members will have some questions for you.

Mr Lamont: Good morning and thank you, Chair and committee members, for the invitation to present today. The Department of Customer Services, Open Data and Small and Family Business or, as we are now abbreviating it to, CDSB, was formed in November 2024 following the state election. The opportunity to lead a Queensland government department tasked with advancing customer service, data, digital and small business is a great honour. We look forward today to discussing how the department is supporting Queensland small businesses and, in a relatively short period, delivering improvements to customer service across Queensland.

CDSB provides critical support across government to enable agencies to operate core corporate functions and enhance the delivery of digital services. The department is responsible for driving the Queensland government priorities in data, digital technology and service; small and family business advocacy aimed at improving the regulatory environment and building economic capacity; making Queensland government services easier to access; and assisting agencies with more customer-centric service delivery and performance metrics.

Our commercial partners and internal and external stakeholders are vital to our success in delivering better outcomes for customers. Citizens, business owners and operators do not necessarily choose to deal with government. More often than not they are engaged with government because they have to. When that happens, they, like you and I, want a positive, seamless and consistent experience. This is particularly the case for small businesses, which are exceptionally time poor. In this space, the old expression 'time is money' is directly relevant. Removing unnecessary duplication and complexity and improving service delivery has provided very practical demonstrations of how to reduce red tape and improve service quality. Put simply, it allows businesses to get on with business and citizens to get on with life.

In terms of the structure of the department, we are organised broadly into two customer focused service areas: customer, small and family business; and data and digital government. We are, of course, supported by a corporate services team. Our customer, small and family business team design and deliver programs to unlock economic capacity and potential across the state. Small businesses comprise 97 per cent of Queensland's business sector and employ 40 per cent of the private sector workforce. They are a critical part of the Queensland economy and a cornerstone of communities. The team are being directed to focus on building economic capacity and potential across the state by developing targeted financial assistance, support programs and policy. We are designing new programs and initiatives, including the establishment of a dedicated small business concierge, to reduce the complexity and time often involved in accessing government services.

Our digital customer team, also known as Smart Service Queensland, delivers digitally enabled, multichannel support for Queensland citizens and business. Smart Service Queensland manages contact centre services through 13QGOV, which operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They manage the website qld.gov.au, card and concession services, 85 counters across the state through the Queensland Government Agent Program, known as QGAP, as well as three Queensland government service centres. We are working with our customers and government agency partners to devolve and fast-track the integration of services and delivery channels for a better customer experience.

Our data and digital government team, which includes CITEC, advise on and invest in digital transformation and collaboration across government. Our key deliverables of this division include the provision of essential corporate services such as payroll for public servants across 47 Queensland government entities. The team also provides an active role in combatting cyber attacks and advancing the safe and effective adoption of AI, and plays an important role, obviously, in the ICT procurement category as well. Importantly, the department is collaborating with other agencies to leverage opportunities from the application of open data. An example of this collaboration was recently announced and launched in the form of the Open Hospitals portal. Initiatives of this type have the potential to improve public policy and service delivery across government. Data will guide key investment, resource and design solutions for this department.

In terms of other areas of focus for the department, I thought it may be of interest to briefly highlight the key role the department plays in disaster events such as the impacts in the recent North Queensland weather event still being felt in many communities and, indeed, experienced firsthand by constituents of this committee. The department has played an important supporting role in responding to the North Queensland flood event. The role has included providing support services and designing grants to help small businesses recover and we are also assisting in processing personal hardship assistance payments to individuals and families on behalf of lead agencies. We provide 24/7 call centre operations, including support for the SES line, and support ICT arrangements for regional recovery and coordination centres.

Finally, people are our most important asset in this department. While I have not yet met all of them, those I have met have shown real passion, which is making a difference across the new department. As the work of the department gains momentum, I look forward to sharing with the committee further examples of the improvements we are making. In conclusion, I again thank the committee for the opportunity to introduce the executive and present to you today.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Director-General. We will go to questions. Deputy Chair, do you have any questions for the witnesses before us today?

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Yes, I do. Thank you for coming and thank you for presenting information to us. Obviously this is a new department and we are all gaining an understanding of what it is you do and how everything fits together. I am interested in the Open Hospitals portal and the real-time data. I am seeking some clarification around how that works in terms of when a patient is considered to be waiting. I have had some conflicting feedback from my constituents around it aligning with their actual experience when they arrive at hospital. Could you explain that to me a little more, please?

Mr Lamont: The metric calculates the median waiting time the patients experience in the preceding 120 minutes or last two hours. It is median, not average—that is an important point to understand. 'Waiting time' refers to the difference between the triage and the commencement of the earliest meaningful treatment. That is another component of it. The median waiting time displayed in minutes indicates that, obviously, in the last 120 minutes, 50 per cent of patients who have been triaged commenced meaningful treatment within this timeframe. It could be longer for some and shorter for others.

Mr HEALY: Chris, I am sorry to jump in. Are you saying from the time they walk into the emergency department and they get assessed by a medical practitioner—a doctor or nurse or somebody who does an assessment? It is from that time?

Mr Lamont: No. It is from the time that they actually see—they admit and the first time they see someone.

CHAIR: I think we need to keep this together. Member for Inala, you have the call.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: It is about the 120 minutes preceding the time, so it is not real-time in terms of what it is in any given window; it is the two hours leading up to that period?

Mr Lamont: Two hours prior to; that is correct.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: That certainly is not the understanding that has been communicated to me by the public. They thought real-time is what it is now. Obviously, it does not really matter to them what the wait was two hours ago. It matters to them what the wait is going to be now and for the next hour. Can you explain what the plan is to make that a little easier for people to understand?

Mr Lamont: I would have to defer to my Health colleagues around what their intentions are. This department has played the role in supporting the portal and the framework that is online. Decisions around business rules as to what is measured and when remains an issue for the Department of Health.

CHAIR: Director-General, are there difficulties and complexities that build the more instantaneous you want the data to become? Is it the case that it is not a simple thing to have an instantaneous reflection of the exact status of a system, second by second, on a website?

Mr Lamont: I probably can observe from other jurisdictions more than I can from Queensland, given I have been here seven weeks. There is always a competitive or operational tension between recording data and providing treatment. I think there is an importance in actually saying, 'Let's provide as much as we can, as efficiently and effectively as possible, but let's not have clinicians'—I will not speak for them—in the medical service focusing more of their attention on recording as opposed to treating.' That is a balance that the Department of Health will have to work through. I think what we have seen in other jurisdictions is that the open data provides choice, provides solution and actually shapes policy and service delivery going forward, so I think over time this portal, this tool and this approach will actually drive not just service delivery but important policy in this space as well.

Ms PEASE: Going back to the portal, I would like to get some clarification. You said that there is work to be done. When you type in a location, how does it determine where to go?

Mr Lamont: I am not sure it tells you how to go.

Ms PEASE: For example, I have constituents who have come to see me with regard to finding out wait times. We have heard that they are in the past. They are not real-time; they are historical wait times. If I type in 'Wynnum', for example, they are telling me that I have to go to the RBWH, which is not our nearest hospital. How is it determining that? What is the algorithm to determine that that is the location? Is it determined by wait time?

Mr Spina: On the algorithm which is there, my understanding is that it is geolocating if you are providing that information where you actually exist and providing information about hospitals that are actually close to you. I do not think it is a recommendation of which one to attend. It is intended to provide that information.

Ms PEASE: I just did a test of that because a constituent raised that with me. I typed in 'Wynnum', which is my location, ticked it off and it said 'Royal Brisbane' again.

Ms McCarthy: It must be picking up on where you are.

Ms PEASE: It is picking up my location rather than what I am typing in.

Mr Spina: With the director-general's consent, I think this is an item where we would need to collaborate with the Health colleagues to get an accurate answer around that particular scenario you just outlined.

Ms PEASE: You talked about Smart Service Queensland and the cyber attacks. What work are you doing in that? Are they cyber attacks on the government websites or, given that your department also covers small and family businesses, is it looking at cyber attacks for those people as well?

CHAIR: We should be mindful that this is a public hearing and we are being broadcast. If there are any considerations regarding the security of the state, please confine your answers to that which is suitable for the public forum.

Mr Lamont: Certainly the focus of the components of this department in the past has been on protecting state owned assets, but in recent times that has been changing to look at support provided to small business, which we understand is an emerging issue. I might hold for the next question. Certainly the focus has been in a historic sense on protecting Queensland government assets and some moves towards providing assistance to small business.

Ms PEASE: There is some great data out there, particularly with regard to the recent report that was launched by the federal government around the impacts of cyber attacks on small business and the cost to them.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Chris, you just talked about assistance to small businesses through your department. Can you elaborate on what changes you are focusing on at the moment and whether there would be some legislative changes to help facilitate this?

Mr Lamont: As I mentioned in my opening, more recently the focus has been on recovery and assistance under the DRFA to assist small businesses with the flood recovery in North Queensland. To give you an example, in relation to cat C, the team were very quick off the mark in providing recommendations to the QRA, and obviously they feed into the Commonwealth government around cat C financial assistance for those businesses directly impacted, and that confirmed funding of up to \$25,000 for affected businesses. Subsequent to that, we worked on a cat D funding proposal for indirect assistance. That tends to be loss of income arising from a flood event, business interruption, disconnection et cetera. That is yet to be approved, but we have worked very quickly to get that support designed as well. There are, of course, the three primary grants programs that we have across the portfolio for small business in the Business Growth Fund, the boost grants and the Business Basics grant. In terms of legislative change, I am not familiar at this stage with any directly proposed legislation in this space, but I might defer to Steve Koch to see if there is anything that is in the pipeline.

Mr Koch: In terms of legislative changes and the acts that this portfolio administers, one of the acts we are looking at undertaking future work on is the Retail Shop Leases Act, and then in the coming years there is also a review that is due for the Small Business Commissioner Act. They are the two main assets in the Small and Family Business Division that we administer within this portfolio.

Mr BOOTHMAN: From memory, in terms of the Retail Shop Leases Act, that is something that we heard at previous committee hearings needs to be looked into. I do appreciate that.

Mr HEALY: Director-General, welcome back to Queensland. Welcome to everybody. It is good to see everybody has jobs now and is settling in. I have a quick question, and I appreciate that the state budget has not been done. In your opening statement you made a remark around the digital investment and you mentioned a few other entities. From a budget perspective, has anything been identified yet? It is a big area and there is a black hole. Coming from the private sector, I know how much money we used to spend on it. I think from a budgetary perspective you would need a significant amount of capital to navigate your way through that. Where do you stand at this stage?

CHAIR: We must bear in mind that the officers before us are here to speak about operations and structure and the activities of their departments. Certain things regarding policy and budgetary matters are a political matter for the government. I will give you latitude to answer—

Mr HEALY: It is very wide. I am not looking for detail—just where you stand at this stage.

Mr Lamont: For committee members who are experienced with the term machinery-of-government change, MOG, it is an experience. We are finalising a transfer arrangement, so it would be premature for me to make any detailed budget confirmations at this stage. We are hoping to finalise the MOG transfers by the end of February/early March and then we will be trying to lock down a finalised budget for the department.

To your point, Mr Healy, this department plays an important role in coordinating budgets as well as providing procurement advice and project management advice for a number of other agencies. I think there is an important distinction between the digital spend, for want of a better term, that this department makes and then the broader role we have in advising other agencies and departments.

Mr HEALY: That is other departments within government that you will be working with?

Mr Lamont: That is correct.

Mr HEALY: You are the key lead in this space?

Mr Lamont: I would not say 'key lead'. Certainly there are a range of committees across government. We provide procurement advice and almost a form of program assurance advice for various projects across government. From what I am advised, TMR, Health and Education in a number of instances manage their own ERP and related platforms when it comes to digital and data, but we do support agencies outside those. At times we also support TMR, Health and Education.

Mr BAILLIE: You mentioned the recent rain event and your involvement in some of that recovery effort. Are you able to go into any more detail—I am a former small business owner/operator myself—on what assistance is open to small businesses and also your involvement in helping residents access funding?

Mr Lamont: I will start again with the small business component. The cat C funding for direct impacts for small business up to \$25,000 is available now. For the affected LGAs—and from memory there are eight, but I might get Steve Koch to confirm that. In terms of the assistance and support we are also providing, we have a survey in field and that survey is used to identify areas of need and the quantum that businesses are experiencing in terms of losses, whether it be direct loss in an infrastructure or asset sense or an indirect loss in a revenue sense because of business closure. We continue to track that, which is important intelligence for not just state government agencies but also federal government agencies. I mentioned the cat D component. Like I said, we have made a submission on that. We are awaiting a decision. That is that indirect assistance that we hope will be announced shortly to support businesses across the area.

In terms of individual assessments—and I will pass to Craig in a second—Smart Service Queensland mans call centres and provides assistance online, via telephone and through various chat arrangements to support people who might be applying for an individual grant or assistance. Then they triage as required, either SES calls—the support of the SES—and if there are extenuating circumstances, back to QRA. I might ask Craig to elaborate on that.

Mr Newell: As the director-general outlined, we provide a range of support to individuals. In terms of some of the more commonly known aspects that we support, we take SES calls on behalf of the whole state, working with Brisbane City Council when it comes to any events in this region. We also support the Community Recovery Hotline and a range of housing services including the Homeless Hotline. In addition to that, we provide support online through emergency alert processes and we provide advice and work really closely with our agency counterparts in providing support for those services.

Since the event kicked off around 30 January, we have employed an additional 200 people to staff the increased volume that we get through our contact centre. It is something we are quite practised at and do quite often. It does provide us challenges, though, in terms of a real peak in activity. Once again, we are supporting our colleagues in communities by taking those inbound calls. If there is processing required, we work with them and they will take up the processing. We also support outbound if we need to follow up on applications that are incomplete or customers need other support in completing some aspects of that.

Since 3 January until seven o'clock this morning we have taken 19,500 calls in this event. We have also started doing community chat. If you go online to those applications you will see a little chatbot there. We aim to help people while they are there filling out and seeking information online. That helps them get the task done quicker. It also helps them complete the task where they want to while online.

We run the QGAP network. Through the event we had some closures in Ingham, but that site got up and going fairly quickly. We have supported both the Townsville and Cairns housing service centres; they were unable to open for a while, so they redirected customers to us.

Ms PEASE: You talked about the two acts that you look after: the Small Business Commissioner Act and the Retail Leases Act. What position are you at with regard to those amendments that will enable the Small Business Commissioner to have greater control over engagement and more forcible activity?

Mr Lamont: There are two components there. In terms of the shop leases act in Queensland, there is a statutory review process that we would need to embark on. That will be either this year or early next year; I think that is the intent. The direction in respect of the Small Business Commissioner was issued by the government as part of the 100-day plan to focus on red-tape reduction and dispute resolution. That was available and a direction that was expressed in the statement of expectations and responded to by the commissioner in a statement of intent. Both of those documents are online and they are already in accordance with the act. I do not believe the Small Business Commissioner Act, although I will check with Mr Koch, is due for a statutory review at this stage. I think that is yet to occur.

Ms PEASE: My understanding is that the act does not provide for any particular capacity for the Small Business Commissioner to get involved in dispute resolution; it has to be referred out.

Mr Lamont: Legislation for the small business commissioners across the country—and I am probably more familiar with the New South Wales legislation—does not provide express authority to hear mediations in B2B—business-to-business—disputes. That said, because it is a voluntary process and a mediation process, businesses can still access those services and choose to be bound by any agreements that are developed through mediation.

Ms PEASE: What about Queensland?

Mr Lamont: It is the same deal.

Ms PEASE: In Queensland regarding the Small Business Commissioner it is a referral process rather than an actual engagement process?

Mr Lamont: It is a referral process under the act for shop leases, but if parties have an expressed dispute they can both agree to participate in mediation.

Ms PEASE: Yes, I am aware of that. You mentioned that in the 100-day review there were significant processes that had been talked about around enabling the Small Business Commissioner to get involved in mediation, whereas in actual fact, from what you have just said to me, the mediation is a referral process.

Mr Lamont: Only under the Retail Shop Leases Act. To the extent to which, again, I said consistent with other jurisdictions, the parties want mediation and there is an identified dispute, they can go to the Small Business Commissioner. My understanding of the statement of intent and expectations is that the commissioner and the commissioner's office have been asked to focus on mediation. That could come through a range of sources, both shop leases and, like I said, two parties B2B in dispute.

Ms PEASE: Again, for clarity, the position of the Small Business Commissioner does not actually engage in the mediation; it is a referral process.

Mr Lamont: I am not sure I understand that.

Mr Koch: Under the Small Business Commissioner Act, there is a referral process regarding the retail shop leases, but the commissioner does support in those cases a mediation process. The commissioner had an arrangement with a number of mediators that she and her office can engage to assist in that dispute mediation as well.

Ms PEASE: A referral process—that is exactly right.

Mr Koch: Yes. There is definitely that dispute mediation. The commissioner's annual report last year—

Ms PEASE: Yes, I have read the report and seen the statement.

Mr Koch:—highlighted the performance under that mediation process as well.

CHAIR: Mr Newell, thank you for being here today. I represent a country constituency and QGAP offices are very important. This is not just about QGAP but also about Smart Service Queensland. How do you interact with the agencies that you represent in terms of adherence to policy, understanding their operations and what is on the table? I refer to difficulties that arise from time to time. I imagine you have some sort of formalised round table with other agencies. Can you tell me a bit about that?

Mr Newell: There are 85 QGAPs across the state. Approximately two-thirds of those are run by other agencies on our behalf. We administer the program in terms of systems, supporting them and advice around the services they offer. The other third is often local councils and other support groups. We have a small team that supports those QGAPs in the processes to ensure they are maintaining quality for those areas. There is a subsidy program in terms of their funding and support

to be able to take the extra time to deliver those services. QGAP services have been around for a long time. It is well supported within the communities. We continue to find opportunities to improve that service offering, working really closely with both the individuals and host agencies where they are not the individuals doing that. We work closely with councils.

CHAIR: Continuous improvement is what I am getting at. It is ongoing work, liaising with the agencies you represent—transport, licensing of various types and all of that.

Mr Newell: Yes. The primary agency operating are TMR services. They are the highest demand generally throughout those areas. That enables them to offer a broader range as well. In each of those sites you will have the councils, the police and other agencies—often the Magistrates Court as well—supporting them to provide those services. Often it is transport related. It is a very effective program in terms of getting to the most remote areas. Hence there are 85 across the state.

CHAIR: I certainly appreciate mine. Thank you.

Mr HEALY: Mr Newell, thanks for the work that your department has been doing, particularly in the far north and the north, where it has been very much needed. Before having the privilege of being a member of parliament and the enormous privileges that go with it, I was the chairman of a not-for-profit housing community organisation. In your department, in your area of responsibility, you talked about engaging with housing groups and other community groups. At a time of natural disasters, communication is a key fundamental and challenging point, trying to get data through not just to consumers but also to organisations. Has your department had any challenges communicating as a result of the natural disasters themselves?

Mr Newell: Given we are a multichannel organisation—both chat, inbound and outbound voice and through our websites—generally we are able to facilitate services relatively easily. There have been some disruptions certainly physically in some of the QGAPs, as I mentioned, at the sites there. Generally we are able to back it up with our other channels and support communities in that way.

Mr HEALY: The reason I ask is that we get a lot of feedback from people saying that trying to collect data and get relevant data is a challenge. It is usually from their point of view, not from the point of government. It is nice to know that at this stage everything is working well at our end.

Ms McCarthy, it is a long way to come from across the road. Is there anything you would like to contribute to today's discussion? You have to say something at some stage. The budget has not come out. You are the finance officer. How is your day going?

Ms McCarthy: Thank you, member, for the comment and the question and for the opportunity to contribute today. I find it a privilege to be part of a new department very much focused on delivering key government election commitments. The privilege of establishing a department from the base up is a wonderful opportunity and a lot of work. As the director-general mentioned earlier, we have been very much focused—obviously, as we establish a department this is very important—to get both our financial and FTE, employee resources, in to build up the department. We are almost in the final stages of that now.

There is a lot of important work underway at the moment in terms of making sure we build a strong internal control framework and sound governance arrangements. As part of that, we have our financial delegations and contract delegations in place now which ensure we have that sound control framework and we continue to contribute to the government's initiative of respecting Queenslanders' money. By having those sound controls in place, we can ensure we achieve value for money.

All of this work I am privileged to be part of. There is a lot of work to come. We have systems to put in place. Whilst we have the parts coming in from various other agencies to form our new department, we have to navigate those challenges of disparate systems at the moment. Certainly we have a strong plan in place for that transition. We are all working collectively together to make that happen.

Mr HEALY: Terrific. Seeing as it is a very new department and it is all being put together and we have not had a budget, we look forward to seeing you further down the road from our end to ask further probing questions.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Can you explain what the FTE is comprised of within the department?

Mr Lamont: I will pass to Ms McCarthy. I understand that currently we have 2,009.5 FTE. You might ask how the 0.5 comes about. It is a mix of full-time and part-time arrangements. That is the current establishment.

Ms McCarthy: Yes, the director-general is correct. Our current actual full-time establishment is 2,009.5. As rightly pointed out, many staff have part-time arrangements et cetera. Hence, it is not a round number. Our full-time establishment is a combination of the resources that are transferred in

as part of the machinery-of-government changes effective from 1 November. Resources have come in from Transport and Main Roads in terms of the Queensland Government Customer and Digital Group; resources have come in from the small business division from the former department of employment, small business and training; and also some staff have come in from the corporate services division of the former department of energy and climate. That does make up our FTE establishment. Did you want any further breakdown?

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Yes. I am interested in the numbers in each area. What percentage fall into local government versus small and family business versus open data et cetera?

Mr Lamont: I can help you there. We do not have local government. If we break down the 2,009.5, there are 458.2 in customer and small and family business—once again, I do not like using fractions; 1,439.6 in data and digital; and 111.7 in corporate services. That will give you 2,009.5.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Do people work remotely or are they all in Brisbane? How is that structured?

Mr Lamont: It is a mix. As I mentioned in the introduction, we have service centres and contact service centres. Some people work from home. We have a surge capacity, obviously. Mr Newell talked about the 200 additional staff who have been appointed. We also have people in regions to provide that support.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: I note that in the explanation of your roles and titles there is no mention of volunteering and volunteers.

Ms PEASE: It is not under this portfolio.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: I know that it is not under your portfolio. You work closely in that space during natural disasters et cetera. Can you explain to me a little bit about the relationship there?

Mr Newell: Certainly we support a range of services that support volunteers in terms of the blue card and yellow card process. We support those. Through community recovery—and this is top of mind during the current event—if people need some level of support that goes beyond financial support, we provide a referral process to make sure they get to the right place, whether that is in government or within NGOs in the community. A lot of those will be volunteer organisations that we would get people to.

Mr BAILLIE: On the volunteering front I think the SES was mentioned earlier, that you are supporting the SES. I am wondering how that support eventuated and how that plugs into what you do.

Mr Newell: I have fortunately been around long enough to remember before we had a role in supporting the SES. The relationship there was that every SES had to take their own calls locally. Since then, things have advanced quite a bit. There is an online booking process and there is a single number. That single number comes through to us. Our primary role is to triage those calls. First of all, we assess whether they do need support. Sometimes they are life-threatening so they go straight through to triple-O. We will either assist them in making a booking to get support for non-emergency and/or pass them on to the local SES. We get them to the right spot to make sure they get the support they need.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Going back to the comments you made in your opening statement, when it comes to services to help local small businesses and you have open data, how does this all work? How can local small businesses actually benefit? Being part of the tourism capital of Australia on the Gold Coast, we have a lot of small businesses. I am curious to see how my local businesses and all businesses can benefit from it.

Mr Lamont: The first thing I would state is that there is considerable open data, not just provided by the Queensland government and supported by this department but across the board. ASIC, ATO et cetera have some very good open data that is available with respect to, obviously, business closures and business openings, which many small businesses actually utilise to determine their investment strategies and planning strategies, so I think that is important.

The other issue is that the three grants I mentioned in particular are informed and will be informed by the use of open data to program where we should be focusing eligibility or particular criteria to support businesses in need. In terms of other areas, we are yet to advance anything further in this department at this stage, but I will say that in policy design we expect it to be a feature and to assist small businesses in applying for grants to have information that is available online and through trusted reliable sources. Unfortunately, in many grant applications you see claims of open data or claims of fact which can be contested, so to provide a common set of first principles and a single source of truth will assist small businesses.

Ms PEASE: In your opening statement you talked about 97 per cent of businesses in Queensland being small and family businesses. I grew up in a small business family. My mum had a small business and I had a small business, so I recognise the value and importance of them in our communities. They are often the first people that we get our jobs with. They are always the first ones to make a donation. I note that one of the things you talked about was red-tape reduction. What are you looking at with regard to that? What red tape is there that can be removed that ensures businesses are still safe, families and small businesses are still safe and the people who work with them are safe? What can we look forward to with that?

Mr Lamont: I think it would be appropriate for me to comment that the minister has written to the 120-odd local chambers of commerce around Queensland to get their ideas in a bottom-up approach because, as I have learned in previous roles, sometimes the best ideas actually come from businesses themselves and not government. I think it is an important process to hear from them.

As I also mentioned, though, you do not necessarily have to have legislative change to make improvements that actually cut red tape. I am most recently from New South Wales. Some of the work that Service NSW did, particularly in the area of grant application and their support during COVID, made things possible online, particularly during that period where gathering in a collective was not advisable or actually prevented. It is about providing more information online; providing a single source of truth, as I mentioned before with the open data; making it easier—as I mentioned, time is money—to do as many things online as possible if they want; or having assistance available when they need it. I think that will be a focus that you see from this department.

Once again in my experience, when you talk red tape, you tend to get a theme that is not specific to an issue or a case in an exact sense, so it is not, 'Remove section 26 of the XYZ Act.' It tends to be where they plug in to government and who they plug into. Most small businesses do not understand the discrepancies or differences between departments and agencies. I often say that the ATO has a special place in the hearts and minds of small business, but after that it is just government. I guess the extent to which we can play a role in triaging and supporting through 'no wrong door', to assist them to get to where they need to go, will in itself be a measure to reduce red tape.

Ms PEASE: Further to that, you talk about being online. What about for those businesses that maybe do not have capacity to be online? There are a lot of small businesses where English is not their first language, First Nations people, internet access—all of those things where there are barriers to access. How are you going to cope with that situation?

Mr Lamont: I think the department has some really good results already through Smart Service Queensland. They essentially are providing an omnichannel support framework for businesses and citizens now through portals, through chat, through—

Ms PEASE: Still online, though.

Mr Lamont: But they can still phone. They can still make a call and talk to a real person. I think that is important. We do have three in-person service centres that we manage.

Ms PEASE: You said you had how many service centres?

Mr Lamont: Three, plus the QGAP.

Ms PEASE: Where are they located?

Mr Newell: We have three QGSCs—Queensland government service centres. They are not restricted to a certain agency service delivery. They are broad, like the QGAP. One is in Charlotte Street here, co-located with our colleagues in TMR. There is one in Maroochydore and another one in Cairns. In Maroochydore and Cairns, they are predominantly supporting housing services; they are a big client group there.

Mr HEALY: Tourism capital of Queensland.

Ms PEASE: You made me lose my train of thought. Chris, you mentioned a few times you have come from New South Wales which we are aware of.

Mr HEALY: He is actually from Townsville and moved down here.

Ms PEASE: Okay. In that role, have you done an audit in terms of what is being delivered in Queensland? You have raised what they do in New South Wales a number of times. Have you compared the two?

Mr Lamont: Only what I have seen in the last seven weeks. There are some differences. The service offering that is Service NSW has probably matured over the last 15 years and was tested through COVID. There are some differences. If I had to make an initial observation after seven weeks,

not as part of a formal review, I think there are more touchpoints in Queensland for small business and citizens through multiple agencies than there are in New South Wales. That is not to say the New South Wales system is perfect, but I think a lot of investment, a lot of thought, a lot of the consideration was to reduce the number of agencies that an individual or small business would actually deal with and to make the complexity or the triage not the customer's responsibility but Service NSW's responsibility, and that changed very much the dynamic for business and for citizens particularly over the last 12 years. Like I said, it has been a 15-year journey in New South Wales.

Ms PEASE: Has there been red-tape reduction in New South Wales?

Mr Lamont: It is a big question. It depends on how you define 'red tape'.

Ms PEASE: Let me redefine it. Would small business claim that red tape has been reduced in New South Wales?

CHAIR: I think we are starting to get into the realms of seeking an opinion from the good director-general, and I know we do not want to go there.

Ms PEASE: It is a genuine question, but that is fine.

Mr Lamont: How about I answer from a citizen's point of view? Once upon a time in New South Wales I would take the better part of a day off to get my licence renewed; now I do it online.

Ms PEASE: Same here.

Mr Lamont: To me, that is a manifest change. Service NSW office and the Service NSW solution during COVID were a real difference between businesses and citizens getting support in real time and not.

Ms PEASE: COVID really changed the way we operate, didn't it? There has been some talk around the on-time every-time payment guarantee for small businesses. How is that work progressing?

Mr Lamont: We have started work on that. The intention is to move to a five-day payment term for transactions under \$10,000. We are building up the policy on that now. We hope to bring something back to government shortly.

Mr HEALY: Director-General, with regard to red tape, you are right: 'red tape' is such a prostituted term and it covers so much. It is federal, it is state and it is regional—people do not get it. Once again, we live in a world where we are swamped with information but we are starved of intelligence. I think people need to have the capacity to work that out. In your opening statement, which I thought covered a whole lot and I thought was terrific, you identified that the reduction in red tape was one of your objectives. Am I to make the assumption that that is in your area of responsibility—that that will be your goal? There will be other departments that will have the same goals and objectives. This will be across all of government?

Mr Lamont: I cannot speak for all of government.

Mr HEALY: Sorry. This will be across departments?

Mr Lamont: I cannot speak for departments, either. What I can say is that we will look to reduce red tape as it applies to small business in particular but also in our procurement frameworks and how we run tenders. There are a range of things we are looking at in that space. I do want to make a distinction between regulatory legislative red tape and service delivery red tape. I think that is an important distinction.

Mr HEALY: Finally, is there a central point for you to report that data, suggestions or recommendations in relation to the perception of the reduction of red tape?

Mr Lamont: The minister has commenced a process. As I mentioned, he has written to all of the local chambers across the state, and the Small Business Commissioner is compiling the results of that.

Mr HEALY: They are the point of contact. Thank you for that.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: In terms of red tape, small businesses tell me that time is money, and one of the biggest problems they face with red tape is the time it takes from when you put in an application or one part of it along the journey to the end of it. Sometimes they can be waiting years, which can cost them. Are you tracking it, or is there any piece of work happening around that?

Mr Lamont: No, we are not tracking it specifically. The comments of the federal Productivity Commissioner, particularly as it applies to housing and construction, I think are insightful. We certainly expect to hear that through the results we get through the local chambers and the extent to which they have solutions. We will also be watching those very closely.

CHAIR: Thank you. I thank Ms McCarthy, Mr Spina, Mr Lamont, Mr Koch and Mr Newell for your appearance today. I am sure I speak for the committee in saying that we look forward to working with you in the time ahead. That concludes this briefing. Thank you to our Hansard reporters. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's webpage in due course. I declare this public briefing closed.

The committee adjourned at 10.25 am.