

Question on Notice
No. 34
Asked on 12 February 2019

MR D PURDIE ASKED MINISTER FOR POLICE AND MINISTER FOR CORRECTIVE SERVICES (HON M RYAN)—

QUESTION:

With reference to funding of Crime Stoppers Queensland—

Will the Minister (a) commit to funding the ongoing operation of a Queensland call centre (b) guarantee there will be no disruption to the current operation despite the budget shortfall (c) advise if the Department has undertaken any modelling on, and provide details of, the current and predicted number of unanswered calls to Policelink if Crime Stoppers were to close?

ANSWER:

The Crime Stoppers contact centre was operated by the Queensland Police Service (QPS) until 2015, at which time it was transferred to Crime Stoppers Queensland Limited (CSQ). The decision to transfer the contact centre back to the QPS was a decision of the independent Board of Directors of CSQ. I have been informed that the decision was made by the Board of Directors on 1 February 2019.

I understand the Board of Directors assessed that the operation of the contact centre by CSQ has not proven to be viable financially, even while in receipt of significant annual Queensland Government funding.

The Queensland Government's financial support for CSQ, over and above any contracted services, has been extensive. The QPS allocated to CSQ \$500 000 per annum in 2015–16, 2016–17 and 2017–18. QPS provided the 2017–18 allocation early, in January 2017, as a result of a request from CSQ for emergency funding support to continue operations. In July 2017, the Department of Premier and Cabinet made a \$150 000 contribution to further support CSQ's operation of the contact centre.

In October 2017, the Department of the Premier and Cabinet wrote to CSQ advising that the Queensland Government would allocate a further \$1.75 million to CSQ to support CSQ's operation of the contact centre. The \$1.75 million comprised \$250 000 to support the operation of the contact centre from 31 December 2017 to 30 June 2018, and \$500 000 per annum for 2018–19, 2019–20 and 2020–21 (that is, to 30 June 2021).

The letter advising CSQ of the \$1.75 million allocation clearly stated the funding was provided on the condition that CSQ review its business model for the contact centre, with a view to ensuring the sustainability of the centre independent of government funding as soon as possible, or by the funding cessation date of 30 June 2021.

I further understand that the contact centre was designed to support a centralised national contact centre for calls from other state jurisdictions across Australia and other potential service users, such as the Federal Government – users who have not subscribed since the contact centre began in 2015. Without the buy-in or financial support from the other states, the Federal Government or other sources, I am informed by the Board of Directors that the contact centre is just not viable to be run for Queensland alone.

The community can be reassured, however, that the integrity of the existing service will be maintained following a decision to transition the contact centre back to the QPS, where it resided up until 2015. QPS, through Policelink and its 387 dedicated full-time staff, mainly civilian, receive more than one and a half million community contacts per year, and have the capacity to absorb the calls currently directed to the Crime Stoppers contact centre. I have been assured the Crime Stoppers dedicated phone number and guaranteed anonymity will be maintained. The operation of the contact centre by QPS is consistent with the approach taken with other states and territories.

I can also advise that the closing date for Policelink's Customer Service Officers advertised vacancies was extended to allow CSQ call takers the opportunity to apply for positions within Policelink. CSQ call takers were advised of this. QPS and Policelink continue to liaise with CSQ to ensure a smooth and seamless transition of the contact centre function to QPS.

It is predicted that the Policelink call volume, which includes the additional Crime Stoppers calls, would see an overall increase of less than 5% per year in calls received. Call rates are continuously monitored with strategies implemented to boost call taking resources during peak times.

It is important to note that CSQ will continue its important work of supporting its many activities in the community.

It is also important to note that when Queenslanders call the Crime Stoppers hotline (1800 333 000), their calls will be answered and their anonymity will be maintained. It is irresponsible to assert otherwise because by doing so risks the public's confidence in the Crime Stoppers hotline.