

## Question on Notice

No. 639

Asked on 25 May 2021

**MR T NICHOLLS** ASKED THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE, MINISTER FOR WOMEN AND MINISTER FOR THE PREVENTION OF DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE (HON S FENTIMAN) –

### QUESTION:

Will the Attorney-General advise if the Minister is aware that 1149 financial administration complaints were made to the Public Trustee from 2017 to 2019 and if so, what action is the Minister taking to ensure the interests of these clients are protected?

### ANSWER:

Protecting Queenslanders, especially vulnerable Queenslanders, is a priority for the Palaszczuk Government.

Recently the Public Advocate undertook a review of the work undertaken by the Public Trustee. The Public Advocate's report *Preserving the financial futures of vulnerable Queenslanders: a review of the Public Trustee fees, charges and practices* found that many of the Public Trustee's customers appear to receive a high level of service for very little or no cost. However, the report has also identified some opportunities for improvement in the way the Public Trustee engages with its customers.

The report makes 32 recommendations which are broad ranging and relate to the Public Trustee's fees and charges, community service obligations, investment practices and legal services. The majority of the recommendations are primarily the responsibility of the Public Trustee to implement. The Public Trustee has provided a comprehensive response to the Public Advocate's report, and that response can be found in the appendices to the report.

A review of the Public Trustee's fees and charges is already underway and many other reforms have already been implemented or are being implemented through the Public Trustee's customer-first agenda, which I expand upon further later in this response. The government accepted in principle the majority of the recommendations in the report and will also now undertake further consultation with stakeholders.

I can advise the Member, the Department of Justice and Attorney-General will continue to work on the implementation of a Public Trustee Board that will provide oversight and direction to the Public Trustee. The Board will also increase transparency, accountability and enhance public confidence in the services delivered by the Public Trustee.

I can assure the Member and Public Trustee clients, the Public Trustee is committed to ensuring that the services it provides to the people of Queensland are relevant and that its customers are satisfied with that service. The Public Trustee values all complaints and ensures that the complaints management process is fair, equitable and easy to understand.

In September 2020, the Queensland Audit Office (QAO) released its report of the Performance Audit – Responding to complaints from people with impaired capacity.

QAO reported that across the three years of 2017, 2018 and 2019, there were 1,149 complaints in relation to financial administration services. Most complaints were rated as minor across those three years as follows: 63% per cent in 2017; to 77% in 2019 and 84% in 2018. The report also noted, the number of complaints decreased by 21% from years 2018 to 2019. The Member may be interested to know that the Public Trustee provides financial administration services to more than 10,000 adults every year and makes many decisions each day regarding their financial matters.

The QAO Report made six recommendations to enhance the accessibility, effectiveness and responsiveness of the Public Trustee's complaints management system.

In response to the recommendations of the audit, the Public Trustee has already made a number of changes to enhance the information it provides to its stakeholders, particularly those with impaired capacity, about complaints management, as well as ensuring that complaints are responded to within expected timeframes. Information on the complaints process has been enhanced by the publication on the Public Trustee's website of Easy English materials and a short animation to assist stakeholders in understanding what happens when they make a complaint. Complainants may also now make their complaint using an online complaints form.

The Public Trustee has also implemented the Customers First Agenda, which is an ambitious and industry-leading program of work to ensure that Queenslanders can continue to have confidence in the Public Trustee.

The Customers First Agenda is already making a change for the better as evidenced by the recent customer satisfaction results which exceeded all targets, despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Public Trustee has established the Customer Advocate Office to provide a voice for customers inside the organisation, which is an Australian first among state trustees.

The Public Trustee is also in the process of implementing an independent complaints review mechanism to provide customers with greater confidence in the Public Trustee's practices, and this will also be an Australian first among states and territories.