



**Government
of South Australia**

Minister for Human Services

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Our ref: MCOR/0067
Your ref: 7128164

Ms Nat Cook
Member for Hurtle Vale
PO Box 158
WOODCROFT SA 5162

Sent by email: Tristan.rust@parliament.sa.gov.au

Dear Ms Cook,

Freedom of information application

I refer to your application under the *Freedom of Information Act 1991* (the Act), received by the Office of the Minister for Human Services on 12 October 2018 seeking access to:

Copies of any and all documents (including but not limited to physical and electronic material) regarding Ministerial agenda item "Screen and backlog" from 11 April 2018.

Unfortunately, a determination was unable to be made within the 30 days, therefore it is considered to be a 'deemed refusal' under section 19(2)(b) of the Act. However, our office has continued to process your application outside of this timeframe. Section 19(2)(a) of the Act provides that an agency can release documents outside of the thirty-day timeframe, and this is still taken to be a determination under the Act.

Four documents have been identified as falling within the scope of your application and I have determined to release one document in part and three documents in full.

Document one contains the mobile phone number of a departmental employee and I consider that the release of this information would be an unreasonable disclosure of information related to the employees' personal affairs. I have therefore determined it to be exempt pursuant to clause 6(1) of Schedule 1 of the Act.

If you are dissatisfied with my determination, you can seek an internal review by writing to the Minister for Human Services as the Principal Officer of the agency. Your request should be sent within 30 days of your receipt of this letter.

In accordance with the requirements of Premier and Cabinet Circular PC045, details of your FOI application, and the documents to which you are given access, may/will

be published on the agency's disclosure log. A copy of PC045 can be found at <http://dpc.sa.gov.au/what-we-do/services-for-government/premier-and-cabinet-circulars>.

If you have any questions in relation to this matter, please contact Amanda Hockings, Office Manager, on telephone 8463 3388 or by email at amanda.hockings2@sa.gov.au. If you disagree with publication, you will need to advise the Office Manager within two weeks of the date of this determination.

Yours sincerely



Amanda Hockings
ACCREDITED FOI OFFICER

18 / 12 / 2018

SCHEDULE OF DOCUMENTS – MCOR/0067

Freedom of information application from the Ms Nat Cook seeking access to *Copies of any and all documents (including but not limited to physical and electronic material) Copies of any and all documents (including but not limited to physical and electronic material) regarding Ministerial agenda item "Screening and backlog" from 11 April 2018.*

No	Author	Addressee	Date	Description of document	Determination	Reason
1.	Department of Human Services	Minister for Human Services	11/4/2018	Briefing – Screening Detailed Assessment	Release in Part	Exempt – Clause 6(1) – Personal Affairs
2.				Attachment 1 to Briefing	Released in Full	
3.				Attachment 2 to Briefing	Released in Full	
4.				Attachment 3 to Briefing	Released in Full	

- substantial delays in recruitment in 16/17 at the same time as the annual period of high demand
- introduction of a new IT system and changes to work roles which slowed productivity as staff learned new skills
- changes in business processes which re-aligned functions and required people to learn new skills
- decision to prioritise and resource applications that can be finalised up to Senior Assessment Officer determination authority over those requiring detailed assessment and a more senior determination authority.

At 26 March 2018, there were 1334 applications requiring detailed assessment. Immediate and effective intervention to actively reduce the backlog is required. This will require a range of parallel but congruent strategies to attend to the immediate issue of the backlog plus sustained effort over the coming months to also address the root causes of the problem.

DISCUSSION

The department has established a Backlog Project which will commence on Monday 9 April 2018 and aims to address the backlog by 29 June 2018. The project plan is provided at attachment 1.

Stage 1 of the project will be a case audit conducted from 9 – 20 April 2018 to review each case in the backlog to determine whether it can be cleared with limited further consideration or, whether a summary or detailed briefing is required. Stage 2 will run from 23 April – 29 June 2018 and will progress the cases to completion. Attachment 2 provides the indicative timeline.

The key strategy is to establish a temporary backlog team to specifically address the backlog. This will ensure that business as usual continues uninterrupted. The backlog team will comprise the most skilled and experienced current employees and be supplemented by additional temporary employees identified through redeployment processes, material affected employees from Disability and/or Domiciliary Care and/or temporary agency staff. This approach will provide the best skill mix, ease and speed of recruitment, and minimise down time for training and development.

The Chief Executive and the Director of the Screening Unit, Ms Kelly Tattersall, conducted a whole staff meeting with the Screening unit on 6 April 2018, to engage them in the project and to seek their views on any further strategies that can be considered. A number of suggestions were made by staff which will be explored further.

Key messages regarding the backlog project have been developed with DHS Communications and Engagement – attachment 3.

Correspondence is being prepared for the Public Service Association to advise them of the establishment of the team and the intended recruitment methods.

The project will be governed by the Executive Leadership Team Screening Sub-Committee. The Sub-committee will meet weekly to monitor progress and to ensure that the backlog is being effectively reduced and that the performance of the business as usual activity is maintained.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The backlog team will deliver up to 15 additional temporary FTE at an approximate cost of \$300,000 which will be funded from existing Screening Unit resources. A budget allocation of \$300,000 has been provisioned in 2018-19 should the continuation of the backlog team be required.

OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

In addition to establishing a backlog team, an outsourcing option is also being explored. An outsourcing option may enable external agencies such as administrative law firms or forensic psychology firms to be contracted to undertake screening assessments either to assist with the current

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backlog or at other times of peak demand to avoid future backlogs occurring. The Crown Solicitor's Office is providing advice on the outsourcing strategy. Early advice is that there may be legislative barriers to external providers accessing data systems such as the C3MS child protection system. These matters will be fully considered in the context of where in the screening process external resources may be most usefully applied.

Division			
Executive Director	Kathryn Jordan/...../.....
		signature	
Chief Executive	Tony Harrison/...../.....
		signature	

ATTACHMENTS

1. Backlog Project Plan
2. Indicative timeline
3. Key messages

Contact Officer:	Kathryn Jordan, Executive Director, Strategic projects [REDACTED]
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Background

The DCSI Screening Unit provides background screening services to government and non-government employers, volunteer co-ordinators and individuals. Screens are relied on by employers to determine the suitability of employees and volunteers in roles working in services to children and young people, aged care; disability services and with vulnerable persons.

Of approximately 140,000 applications per year, 93% of assessments are completed within 30 business days. Where a detailed assessment is required due to the presence of risk factors in an applicant's history, a backlog of 1334 detailed assessments @ 26 March 2018 has accrued.

The backlog began to accrue in late 2016 due to a number of once-off circumstances that occurred in tandem including:

- substantial delays in recruitment in 16/17 at the same time as the annual period of high demand
- low staff morale and resilience arising from a sustained period of review and change and leading to a decline in attendance
- introduction of a new IT system and changes to work roles which slowed productivity as staff learned new skills
- changes in business processes which re-aligned functions and required people to learn new skills
- decision to prioritise and resource applications that can be finalised up to Senior Assessment Officer determination authority over those requiring detailed assessment and a more senior determination authority.

Objectives

The key objectives of the project are to:

- complete 100% of the outstanding detailed assessments in the backlog whilst ensuring quality screening determinations are made.
- enhance the capability of screening unit staff by enabling them to take a lead role in addressing the back log, supported by additional short term resources.
- enable the screening unit to 'clear the slate' ahead of the implementation of changes to the screening regime arising from new legislation.
- Provide an opportunity for the screening unit to trial a broader range of disciplines, experience and skills in the decision making process.

Benefits

The key benefits are that DCSI staff supported with additional resources to address the backlog, applicants receive a screening determination, individuals are enabled to commence or return to work, agencies can deliver their services to their staffing capacity, citizens receive the services they need and DCSI receives positive feedback for completing outstanding assessments.

Scope

The scope of the project is limited to the 1334 detailed assessments @ 26 March 2018 currently identified in the backlog.

Strategies

1. Fill all vacancies in the regular FTE establishment
2. Implement improvements to decision making thresholds and processes and introduce key performance indicators.
3. Establish a dedicated backlog team comprising skilled and experienced ASO7 and ASO5 screening unit staff to conduct case audits and progress outstanding assessments. The team will comprise existing experienced employees, redeployed, materially affected and/or temporary agency staff.
4. Insource additional short-term existing senior employees from across government with relevant skills to undertake determinations.
5. Explore outsourcing the preparation of assessment briefing information to a private law firm or other relevant organisations such as those with decision making or regulatory functions.

Key Assumptions

Key Assumptions

- Screening unit has sufficient financial resources to fund the strategies solutions
- Screening unit processes are sufficient to service current and new applications including detailed assessments once the backlog is addressed
- Quality will not be compromised to expedite processing.

Key Risks & Issues

Risk

The focus on detailed assessments negatively impacts on the 30 day KPI.

New and inexperienced employees or contractors make poor assessment decisions

Speeding up the assessment process may reduce the quality of detailed assessments.

New staff may have varying levels of comfort with the risk based approach to screening.

Existing staff may be concerned about more changes to their work.

There may industrial issues regarding the strategies.

Mitigation

Additional resources and will ensure a focus on business as usual.

Employees and contractors will be assessed, trained and monitored against performance standards.

The determinations manager will provide quality assurance.

Appointees will be fully trained in making risk based assessments and will be supported and monitored in line with required performance standards.

Effective communication will keep employees well informed and engaged in the project.

Industrial consultation will be undertaken as required



Governance

Overall governance for the project is by the existing Executive Leadership Team Screening Sub-Committee.

Executive Leadership Team Screening Sub-Committee:

Chair: Tony Harrison

Members:

- Kelly Tattersall
- Andrew Thompson
- Michael Homden

Meeting frequency: monthly

Steering Committee:

Chair: Kathryn Jordan

Members:

- Kelly Tattersall
- Lyn Byrne
- Mia Toscano
- Marianne Stergiopolous

Meeting frequency: Weekly

Reporting

- Weekly reporting to Steering Committee
- Monthly reporting to the ELT screening sub-committee

Key Stakeholders

The public workforces.	Expects suitable persons are in the paid and voluntary
Minister for Communities and Social Inclusion	Is publicly accountable for delivery of an effective screening regime.
Chief Executive, DCSI	Is responsible for delivery of an effective screening regime.
Chief Executives of other agencies	Require employees and volunteers to be screened in a timely way.
Screening unit leaders and staff	Responsible for implementing an effective screening regime to the required standards.
Individuals requiring screening	Require timely screening to enable their participation in the paid and voluntary workforce.
Media	The status of screening is of general public interest.

Indicators

Month by month detailed assessment data for 2016 and 2017 showing:

- the number applications lodged
- the number and % completed
- the number and % not completed
- over 30 days and in 30 day increments
- the age of the oldest outstanding assessment

Backlog data:

- Assigned / unassigned
- breakdown by Gvt and non-gvt agency—number and %
- by over 30 days and in 30 day increments
- by screening type
- by new application or renewal
- by no new information since last risk assessment /screening clearance
- by no briefing required
- by issue (what is holding up the detailed assessment?) ie:
 - awaiting SAPOL process
 - awaiting HR process
 - awaiting further information from applicant
 - relevant history received (is CH, SP etc) and awaiting action

Screening Unit Staff:

- Number of temporary / permanent staff
- FTEs assigned to detailed assessment
- Vacancy rates in employees undertaking detailed assessments
- Absentee rates
- Overtime
- Productivity—assessments per employee per day/week/month
 - target and actual
- FTE allocation by assessment stage
- Productivity by assessment stage:
 - Assessments completed per employee per day/week/month - target and actual
 - Work related injury claims over time
 - Employee attrition rate
 - Employee attrition rate
 - Pulse survey

Staff in other agencies:

- New candidates unable to commence roles by agency by screening type
- Existing employees unable to work by agency by screening type
- Existing employees stood down with or without pay:
 - number by agency by type
 - cost to agency for salaries whilst being paid to stay home

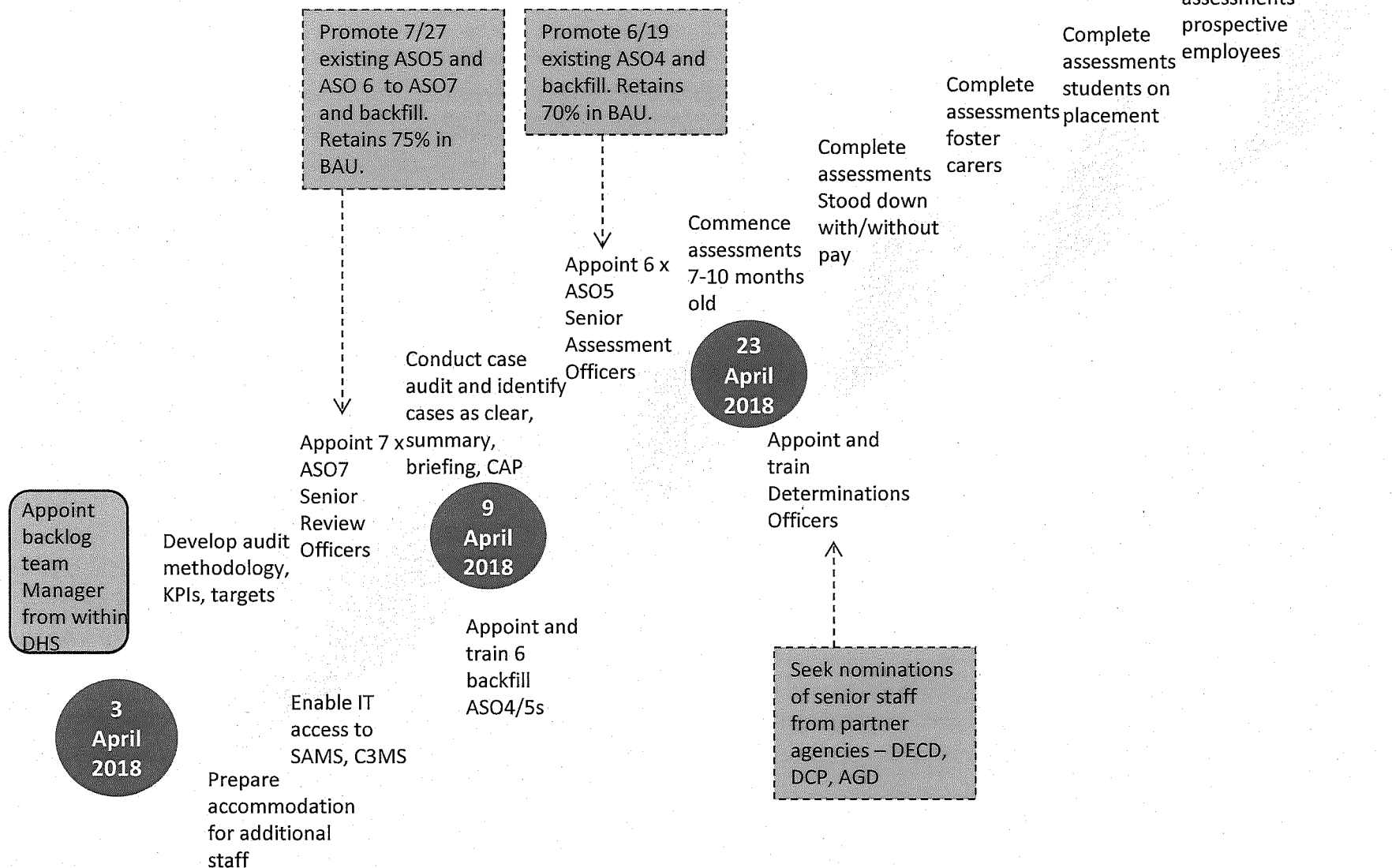
Complaints:

- Complaints related to delays in processing information - by lodger ie Ombudsman, employee, applicant, time to resolve

Public perception:

- Number of media mentions

Backlog Team Indicative Timeline



Detailed Assessment Backlog Project

Key Messages

Over the last 18 months the Screening Unit has been implementing a range of changes to systems, processes and staffing to improve the screening process and to make it more timely. New legislation has also been passed which will bring further changes in the future.

A lot has happened during this time including an increase in staffing numbers, a new IT system and associated changes to work roles and decision making processes. These changes have contributed to screening applications being processed quicker than ever before with approximately 95% of all assessments being completed within 30 business days. This a great achievement of which we should all be very proud.

With the successful focus on processing applications and despite our best efforts, a backlog of detailed assessments has accrued. We now need to address this backlog and complete these assessments as soon as possible so that organisations can recruit and employ the staff and volunteers they need to run their services.

The leadership team has identified a number of strategies to reduce the backlog including:

- Filling all of our vacancies and staffing to our full FTE establishment
- Implement improvements to decision making thresholds and processes and introduce key performance indicators.
- Establish a dedicated backlog team comprising skilled and experienced ASO7 and ASO5 screening unit staff to conduct case audits and progress outstanding assessments. The team will comprise existing experienced employees, redeployed, materially affected and/or temporary agency staff.
- Insource additional short-term existing senior employees from across government with relevant skills to undertake determinations.
- Explore outsourcing the preparation of assessment briefing information to a private law firm or other relevant organisations such as those with decision making or regulatory functions.

The main objective of these strategies is to completely address the backlog whilst ensuring quality determinations are made so the screening unit can have a 'clean slate' ahead of further changes to come through the new legislation.

It is intended that existing screening unit staff will have the opportunity to take a lead role in addressing the backlog and to be supported in this by additional temporary resources. This will ensure that the expertise of screening unit staff is acknowledged, valued and supported to meet day to day demands while the backlog is being addressed.