



# Accommodation Services Employee Engagement Strategy

Report for the Department of Human Services

October 2018

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## 1. The context for the engagement work

Earlier this year the State Government announced that it would deliver on its election commitment to gradually withdraw from providing Accommodation Services.

The Government committed to consultation with clients, guardians and families, employees, unions and NGO providers to decide how the move will be planned and implemented. The Department engaged the following partners to assist in the consultation to recommend strategies that would contribute to a transition strategy:

- The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI) to consult with clients, guardians and families
- KPMG to consult with the NGO sector
- OzTrain to consult with the Accommodation Services employees

The State Government articulated specific objectives for the process:

1. Continuity in quality client services and supporting client choice
2. Retention of skilled and experienced employees in the disability sector
3. Growth of the local South Australian NGO sector.

The employee consultation deliverables for OzTrain are:

- i. Develop a strategy to consult with staff and employee associations including an education piece in concert with the department.
- ii. Implement said employee consultation piece
- iii. Draft by 15 October and a final draft by 26 October.

The scope of OzTrain project is as follows (quoted from tender document):

1. Strategy

*Devise method to educate and engage with employees and collect information required to develop transition strategy, within the existing industrial landscape.*

2. Education and listening posts

*Education process needs to include a myth-busting element, addressing some of the recurring concerns of employees, as well as shed further light on what:*

- *has happened in similar changes interstate*
- *working for an NGO is like*
- *has happened in other areas of the department where government has transitioned out of service delivery, for example in Domiciliary Care and in CYS.*

*This education piece is intended to run with simultaneous listening posts to capture staff concerns and responses to the recent change of direction. A report on the information collected in listening posts will also enable future enable further information to be tailored to employee requirements.*

*The listening posts will seek to capture employee input on how to achieve the three government stated objectives (set out above) in the transition approach – i.e. how staff see that clients should be supported to continue receiving quality client services (and what quality looks like) and how we can support client choice in any changes. If employees and clients want to stay together in the same house what is the best way to make that happen?*

3. Deliver report (draft 15 October, final 26 October)

*The report needs to convey an understanding from a staff perspective on how they think we need to retain skilled and experienced employees in the sector, i.e. what is it that employees want to see in the transition? For example:*

- *How important is it that the new provider is not-for-profit?*
- *What support do staff need to do their best work?*
- *What are the factors which would influence an individual's decision to want to remain in the public sector, or not?*

## 2. OzTrain's Methodology

When considering how best to approach the task we took into account a range of factors including:

- The short time frame in which we had to make contact with and engage around 1,400 staff
- The dispersed nature of the staff – working across approximately 200 houses, and five metropolitan and two regional offices, making it difficult for staff to be brought together for large face-to-face events
- Other communication challenges such as:
  - One, often very slow, computer in each house
  - Support workers with varied skills and confidence in engaging with information through computers and mobile technology
- Engaging with a staff body in an environment where they have been told the service they provide will be closed down and moved to the NGO sector, resulting in a mix of fear, anxiety, uncertainty, anger etc. among staff, and with this some scepticism regarding a consultation process
- An industrial context that resulted in the unions advising staff they could reverse the government's decision.

Taking these factors into account, OzTrain decided on the following approach:

1. We put together a team of three experienced OzTrain consultants to do telephone interviews with 85 employees over September 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>. Each of these consultants had either operated as a Director or Senior Communications Manager within government during their career. We targeted a mix of support workers (including night shift workers), shift supervisors, administration staff and managers. Calls were made to houses or relevant city or regional offices. These calls provided an opportunity to 'take the temperature' of Accommodation Services staff, explore their understanding of the change announced by the Government, and to discuss possible content for the October workshops (see below).
2. We ran ten listening posts over four days (September 20<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>), spending two hours at a time in each of the five metropolitan offices (twice in each office). At the listening posts an OzTrain consultant was available to speak with any staff wanting to find out more about the change and share their views on the situation. Around 90 staff took advantage of this opportunity, meeting individually or in small groups with the OzTrain consultant for anywhere between 10 minutes and an hour. These informal discussions provided an excellent

platform for staff to share their thoughts and provide input to possible content for the October workshops.

3. Fourteen three-hour workshops were then run for staff from October 3<sup>rd</sup> through until October 16<sup>th</sup>. These aimed to involve as many staff as possible – eleven were run across 3 metropolitan locations (including one in the evening), one was held in Kadina and two in Mt. Gambier. In total approximately 450 staff attended. The first three workshops were delivered to shift supervisors and managers. This enabled us to trial the workshop design and make necessary adjustments based on feedback before running it with the support workers, as well as giving us a chance to touch on the leadership responsibilities of supervisors and managers operating in an environment of major change.

We knew from the interviews and listening posts that staff would need significant opportunity within the workshop schedule to air their concerns and uncertainties. We were also aware that the union members among the support workers and shift supervisors were being advised by the union that the decision to move the service across to the NGO sector could still be reversed with appropriate industrial action. Within such an environment we sought to find the appropriate balance between the educative expectations of our engagement, and the need to provide staff with a forum to have all their anxieties and frustrations heard, acknowledged and documented.

As a result the workshop running sheet was divided into two main sections:

- The first half as a combination of broader contextual information for staff along with the opportunity to respond to the new information. This information was provided in a way that sought to construct a story within which the staff could locate the change. The topics covered were:
  - What's going on?: The roles of the Government, the Department, TACSI, KPMG and OzTrain and the development of the change plan;
  - Why is the change happening?: The story of the broader national and international move to take supported accommodation out of government and into the community;
  - What's happened interstate: A brief summary of some of the key features of the change that has taken place (and which continues) in NSW, Victoria and the ACT;
  - An introduction to the NGO sector: In the context of a lot of staff negativity about the NGO sector, a brief introduction to how two NGOs talk about themselves and the work they do in the supported accommodation space. We produced a 9-minute video with two NGO Chief Executives talking about their organisations.

- The second half provided a structure within which participants could offer their individual ideas about the way staff can best be communicated with and supported, and have input to the change process from this point forward. To help staff organise their thoughts and suggestions we invited them to sort their input into the following categories:
  - What principles do you want to underpin the way we go forward together?
  - What do you think you will need to do to be an active part of this change process?
  - What will be the best way to get information to you?
  - How do you want to be involved and communicated with?
  - Do you want some kind of staff group to act as a reference group for the process?
  - What training/support would be helpful?
  - What would you like to learn about or know? And what would be the best way to deliver this for you?
  - Anything else you want to tell us?

Staff wrote their ideas on post-it notes and put their responses under the appropriate headings on the wall.

### 3. The Findings

As set out in the Methodology section of this report, the views of more than 600 staff were sought through a mix of phone interviews, listening posts and workshops. The questions, concerns and ideas gathered through this process have formed a key part of the foundation on which we have constructed the employee engagement strategy. We have used our professional experience and judgement to analyse the staff input and shape a strategy that addresses their thoughts and also represents what we know is high quality employee engagement practice.

Following is a summary of key themes that arose to varying degrees across all groups (support workers, shift supervisors, managers, administration and specialist groups) - staff...

- don't have confidence that the Department will act on recommendations in the OzTrain report – they think this consultation has been a 'tick the box' exercise and the way forward has already been determined
- don't believe OzTrain will necessarily represent staff views in their report – consultants will tell the Department what the Department wants to hear
- feel conflicted about actively participating in an engagement process when United Voice is telling members that the decision to move the accommodation service out Government can be reversed

- want to understand why the Government believes that the changes are in the best interests of the clients and their families
- don't want to be told it's 'business as usual' – want to start preparing for change and getting the information they need to make informed choices
- are concerned that morale across the service is low - staff feel let down by the decision to drop the idea of forming a public corporation after so much work was put into preparing for that
- worry in particular about their high-need clients and the capacity of NGOs to provide the care required
- believe they will be worse off in terms of salary and conditions in an NGO
- fear that patterns of work (e.g. shift rosters) and flexibility in the workplace that has been built up over time will be lost in the NGO sector
- want to clearly understand their options – (i) if they go to an NGO, (ii) if they want to stay in Government, (iii) if they want a redundancy package
- generally have many, many questions (from macro to micro), and want to know when these questions can be answered – the sooner the better, regardless of how long the change process is going to take
- have a variety of views about how information and ideas can best be communicated across the service – popular options include house emails, personal emails, sms, printed information, a simple and reliable online site where information is posted and discussion/Q&As can take place, regular face-to-face information sessions, a staff reference group, visually through diagrams and flowcharts where this is possible
- wonder what additional skills and knowledge they might require to be well positioned for any change
- want to know how NGOs with the necessary capacity and values will be identified
- question how houses will move across to NGOs – e.g. what say will the clients and families have, will houses move independently or will NGOs be allocated groups of houses?
- claim that maintaining processes and standards across the service during the change process is proving to be difficult as staff leave and are moved around to cover gaps, and roles are left vacant
- fear that the special relationships they have formed with clients and families over many years are under threat
- think that there are particular groups/teams in Accommodation Services (e.g. administration staff, COMPASS) that are likely to be overlooked when change is being discussed and information distributed
- are at times frustrated by the complexities the NDIS has brought into their lives and the lives of client and their families
- want to have a clear idea of proposed timetable

The Employee Engagement Strategy takes into account this wide range of factors, addressing the staff *wants and needs* such as:

- i) feeling well informed regarding their options at the point at which they need to make a decision about their future
- ii) having access to important communications in a variety of formats
- iii) getting the training and support they need throughout the process
- iv) understanding the areas where their voice can shape the direction the change takes
- v) developing a balanced understanding of the NGO network

#### **4. The approach to engagement relevant in this context**

The combination of phone calls, listening posts and workshops have enabled direct consultation with approximately 600 staff. While this means that there are many staff who have not yet participated, it is a sufficiently large sample to provide a good sense of the approach most likely to bring positive results from this point forward.

Not surprisingly there is a wide range of views across the large, diverse staff body. However a broad, underlying sense of uncertainty, anxiety and in some instances anger is undeniable. Building and implementing an engagement plan when staff are positive about the direction of the organisation is one thing – doing so when the organisation is closing its services is quite a different matter.

While the Department has emphasised that the change will be implemented gradually over a number of years, staff are searching for answers to both broad and very specific questions now. The approach will need to be one that recognises where staff are currently in their thinking, and acknowledges their desire for information within a context where many of the outcomes are unknown and the process is likely to be drawn out over an extended period.

Staff will need to be engaged by a process which maps out the way forward with clear timelines for actions and agreed methods of communication, and which is demonstrably shaped by staff input. If the process allows feelings as well as ideas to be expressed, and honours those feelings, trust will be built. Providing information and answers in good faith and in a timely fashion and being upfront when questions cannot be answered by explaining why, will build faith in the way it is managed in the long run. It will be an incremental process requiring patience, resources, high quality oversight and transparency.

## 5. The principles that underpin the proposed engagement process

### *Principles for communicating with staff*

#### *1. Build trust so they believe it is worth engaging*

There is a perception among many staff that their views are not valued in the decision-making process, that decisions are made behind closed doors and that subsequent consultation is generally tokenistic. They need to regularly experience being heard, see their views documented, and then where appropriate experience that their input has had impact and influence. They need to see that the questions which matter to them are carefully considered, and that answers are provided as soon as possible. And where answers are not yet available, which is likely to be the case in many instances, an explanation of why this is so needs to be provided, along with an indication of when this might change. Trust will be built slowly, through a consistent and conscientious effort to demonstrate that their input can shape the way forward.

#### *2. Use your supervisors*

Shift supervisors are a critical point in communication and engagement – they associate strongly with the support workers they oversee, while at the same time being based in the offices and having the opportunity for contact across the management structure. They are key to having support workers informed of developments in a consistent and cohesive way, and an investment will need to be made in ensuring the shift supervisors play this constructive leaderships role rather than defaulting to a perhaps more natural position alongside their support worker colleagues.

#### *3. Watch your language*

Whilst it is easy to drop into management-speak, particularly when communicating with multiple stakeholders for a variety of purposes, wherever possible translate messages into plain English.

For example, the term “business as usual” was offered by management to both remind staff of the need to continue to provide support to clients, but also to reassure them that nothing would happen quickly and without their input. However, the term inflamed many staff who do not feel there is anything about this situation that feels “usual”.

At one of the workshops staff asked if it was possible to change terms such as “materially affected”. As one man told us, “it makes me feel like a bit of old rag, and I

don't know what it means". Where terms can't be changed for legal reasons, it should be immediately followed by a plain English definition.

#### *4. Surface the feelings*

It is critical that a managed outlet is provided for the feelings staff are experiencing during what is a stressful process. The simple act of providing a safe environment in which people can share their concerns helps to form the foundation for a culture where staff begin to take actions to address their concerns through asking questions and seeking information, rather than sitting back feeling frustrated and powerless.

It will also be important to support staff who confront the level of anger and fear evident at least in the early days of the engagement.

#### *5. Picture it up and provide variety*

Communicating with staff in ways that maximises the likelihood they will engage with new information is going to be critical. For example, many staff during the workshops responded very positively to diagrams, rather than text. A number commented on the value of getting information in video format. Others need text that they can read in their own time and analyse. Some only respond to face-to-face contact. Careful thought will need to be given to providing critical information in a variety of formats and distributing it in a way that enables the really important news to stand out.

### ***Principles for managing the change***

#### *1. Responsibility rather than checks*

Keeping staff motivated during times of change is challenging. Maintaining their sense of autonomy and responsibility is key to maintaining motivation. It can be tempting to set up additional processes and procedures to make sure all staff are checking in and 'signing off' on important new information. But this can have the opposite effect, causing them to feel micro-managed and swamped with bureaucracy. Staff need to take on an element of responsibility to keep themselves informed – if the quality of the information being provided is consistently high and it's easy to find, staff will make the effort.

#### *2. Test your ideas*

Demonstrate a willingness to get feedback whenever it is realistic. Let staff know when their input has resulted in revision and change – it will build trust and, in the longer term, ownership.

Design processes where strategies can be considered by staff who have the enthusiasm and skill to offer advice about how effective they will be. This principle is

the key reason for our recommendation of the establishment of a Staff Reference Group.

### *3. Walk towards the conflict*

Respectful discussions where people with different views share those views and listen carefully to the perspectives of others are critical elements of healthy workplaces. In difficult times it can be tempting to avoid controversial topics in meetings and ignore the 'elephant in the room'. This leaves critical issues unresolved and pushes discussions into corridors and lunch rooms, from where rumours and 'worst case scenarios' develop and spread. Modelling a willingness to surface tricky issues and talk them through builds a culture when healthy disagreement is valued. If people feel heard and respected change can progress positively even though not everyone is getting their way.

### *4. Project management skills*

Navigating staff consultation and engagement through this change is extremely complex. It is a project in its own right and will require management by people with the skills required to:

- manage the flow of communication, and shape the way messages are best sent
- translate "ground truth" for executive management in order to shape strategy
- coordinate the range of activities and business that will inevitable occur at multiple levels throughout the organisation
- follow the project through.

Although the staff who worked with us through this eight-week period were unconditionally positive and helpful, even for our small project we communicated with:

- a part time comms manager
- a part time KPMG consultant
- an additional staff member brought in part way to assist with coordination
- a Director and Executive Director of Accommodation Services
- two different experts on industrial relations
- an executive with oversight during the Group General Manager's two week absence
- a field leader to support the workshops
- an administrative support officer who assisted with the arrangements for workshops.

Skilled, available, consistent project staff will be critical to success.

### *5. Transparency*

Many staff have reached a point where their default assumption is that decisions have already been made, any input they are asked for is really just to tick a 'consulted with staff' box, and that important information is being withheld. The only way to change this is for senior leaders to address questions and concerns directly, where possible face-to-face. Where questions can be answered, provide the answer. Where they cannot be answered, say so, explain why and talk about when an answer might be possible. Regular exposure to this level of transparency gradually changes views.

### *6. Manage messiness*

Acknowledge that any process is going to have moments of confusion and uncertainty as the best way forward is discussed and negotiated. Mistakes will be made, new questions will arise. It will not be a neat linear process. But a clear roadmap along with honest answers provided in good faith will create an environment where bumps in the road will be accepted and navigated.

### *7. Don't let the plates fall*

There will be many engagement elements running at once, with multiple intersections and shared components. For example:

- Providing the training and support staff require to position them to make decisions in their own interest and to support the interest of their clients
- Supporting learning options for individuals and groups e.g. a better understanding of the NGO sector and how it operates, or their options should they choose to stay in government
- Maintaining consistent and effective communication across the service
- Maintaining strong service delivery and internal Accommodation Services processes during a time of change

To keep all these elements running and supporting each other, skilled and dedicated staffing will be required to focus on keeping things moving and addressing the plates should they begin to 'wobble'.

In particular we have seen in many engagement processes over the years that political pressures and requests have resulted in staff taking their eye off the staff engagement ball, usually resulting in problems and calls for additional resources that may not have been required.

## 6. The framework for managing staff engagement

*A framework creates an organisational environment in which people think and act for themselves, yet collaborate to achieve common goals and objectives. The following checklist will provide a useful reference point for the engagement strategy project team throughout the change process.*

Check principles and culture



Check felt needs and purposes at each stage



Regularly clarify roles



Provide skilled and resourced project management



Surface the feelings and questions



Respond to questions and concerns



Develop creative responses and tools



Check ground truth regularly



Decide what to measure



Stocktake and build the next stage of the strategy

## 7. Stakeholder wants and needs – and strategies for response

In response to the questions and ideas provided by the staff through the consultation process OzTrain developed the proposed model to achieve the outcomes the Department is looking for from the engagement strategy. While there are issues that are common across all stakeholders, it is worthwhile considering each key stakeholder group independently, and how best to address their particular wants and needs.

### *Staff in houses*

Support workers form a significant majority of the Accommodation Services workforce, and their questions and concerns cover the full range outlined in the previous section of this report. In particular support workers:

- are sceptical that their views are of any interest to the Department or that they can have any impact on the process from here
- doubt that the way communication takes place will change in any way as a result of this consultation
- believe that the option of moving to an NGO will be negative for them in every regard
- worry that they don't have the skills and experience required to get a good employment outcome from the change process, whichever decision they make

In response, the engagement strategy we have designed recommends:

- getting started as quickly as possible, to show support workers their voices have been heard
- incorporating multiple new ways of communicating with staff, again demonstrating that their suggestions have had an impact
- providing opportunities to engage with the NGO sector for those staff who want and need to better understand how the sector works so they can make an informed decision about the direction they take
- helping them understand the professional strengths they have, and the areas where they will benefit from increasing their skills and knowledge
- including training and development options relevant to their needs
- providing opportunities for them to opt to become more involved in the change process
- setting out a timetable of events so they can develop a picture of the way forward

The OzTrain team noted that the mood and response from regional staff was generally more positive than in the city, and that regional staff, many of whom already work part time in some capacity with local NGO's, were more ready to

embrace the change and had formed pictures and stories for themselves about what their future, and the future of those they supported, might look like.

### **Shift Supervisors**

Supervisors are a critical piece in the communication puzzle, being the direct link between the support workers and management. Challenges facing this group include:

- significant variations in capacity and experience across the supervisors given turnover in recent times
- a tendency among supervisors to see themselves as operating alongside support workers rather than having a responsibility to oversee their performance and lead them through the change
- a lack of information about, and understanding of, the change process, limiting their engagement with support workers about this issue

To address these issues the engagement strategy:

- provides regular opportunities for the supervisors to come together to be updated on developments and share their experiences
- offers targeted training opportunities through leadership development programs
- recommends the development of special information packs for supervisors to encourage consistent distribution of key messages and support the supervisors to have meaningful interaction with the support workers reporting to them
- provides opportunities for supervisors to be seen by support workers leading components of the change process

### **Managers**

Managers share many of the concerns of staff across aspects of the change process. Their particular challenges include:

- leading unsettled staff with diverse concerns and needs through a long and complex change process
- uncertainty about the likelihood that there will be a demand for them in either the NGO sector or Government departments when the time for change comes
- concern that they will not be able to meet the expectation among their teams that they will provide access to relevant information and responses to critical questions

The engagement strategy takes these factors into account by:

- recommending a small dedicated internal change management team be formed to establish and maintain the systems and process needed to provide the answers and information staff are calling for
- delivering manager leadership development programs, and group coaching in leading change
- providing forums where managers can regularly engage with supervisors face-to-face

### ***Specialist Groups within Accommodation Services***

Whilst it is easy to focus on the main groups (support workers, shift supervisors, managers) that will be the centre of attention through the change process, there are smaller teams and groups within Accommodations Services that must be constantly supported and engaged during the change. This includes administration staff across the service, and teams such as COMPASS, which has a focus on providing clients with activities and community engagement. These teams have specific questions and concerns which often are not addressed in the mainstream change process.

To address this situation the engagement strategy:

- tasks the proposed internal change management team with identifying these groups and planning a tailored ongoing support program
- recommends the establishment of a staff reference group, on which smaller specialist groups can have representation
- introduces an online platform where special interest groups can have representation and seek answers to their particular questions

### ***Project Managers and Executives***

These stakeholders have responsibility for oversight of the change process with Accommodation Services and also across the Department. They must deal with the political aspects of the change process and spend time with their attention focused beyond the Department as well as within. People in these roles can feel disconnected from the activities and 'temperature' on the ground.

Responding to this, the engagement strategy:

- suggests regular forums which executives and project staff can engage with staff face-to-face
- establishes a coordinated approach to communication that will be see key high-level messages distributed in the most effective ways
- recommends a staff reference group, which will be an excellent mechanism for senior staff to test ideas and hear from staff from across the service

- suggests phone interviews and listening posts to ‘take the temperature’ at selected points in the process

### **Unions**

OzTrain remained in close contact with both United Voice and the PSA throughout the engagement and data gathering process. Their representatives attended most of the workshops. This transparency has meant that the unions have not disrupted or interfered with the engagement and data gathering process, and in fact on several occasions actively supported the OzTrain team by encouraging staff to participate, and by endorsing at least the intentions of the team’s process.

The *employee engagement strategy* model is designed and presented in a way that can be shared with the unions so they can remain informed about the engagement process throughout.

### **Non Government Organisations**

NGOs interested in the opportunity to take on houses currently managed by Accommodation Services will want to understand more about the attributes and interests of the current staff, and their expectations should they go to work in the NGO sector. These organisations will also want ways of informing Accommodation Services staff about how they operate and their expectations should services move across to them.

The proposed engagement strategy:

- suggests continued discussion with the NGO sector to explore the setting up of a familiarisation program for staff interested in better understanding how NGOs operate
- raises the possibility of the staff reference group preparing a letter setting out their values and the issues they think are critical if a successful set up of services in the NGO sector is to take place – there is the option of sharing this letter with the NGOs if appropriate

### **Clients and their families/guardians**

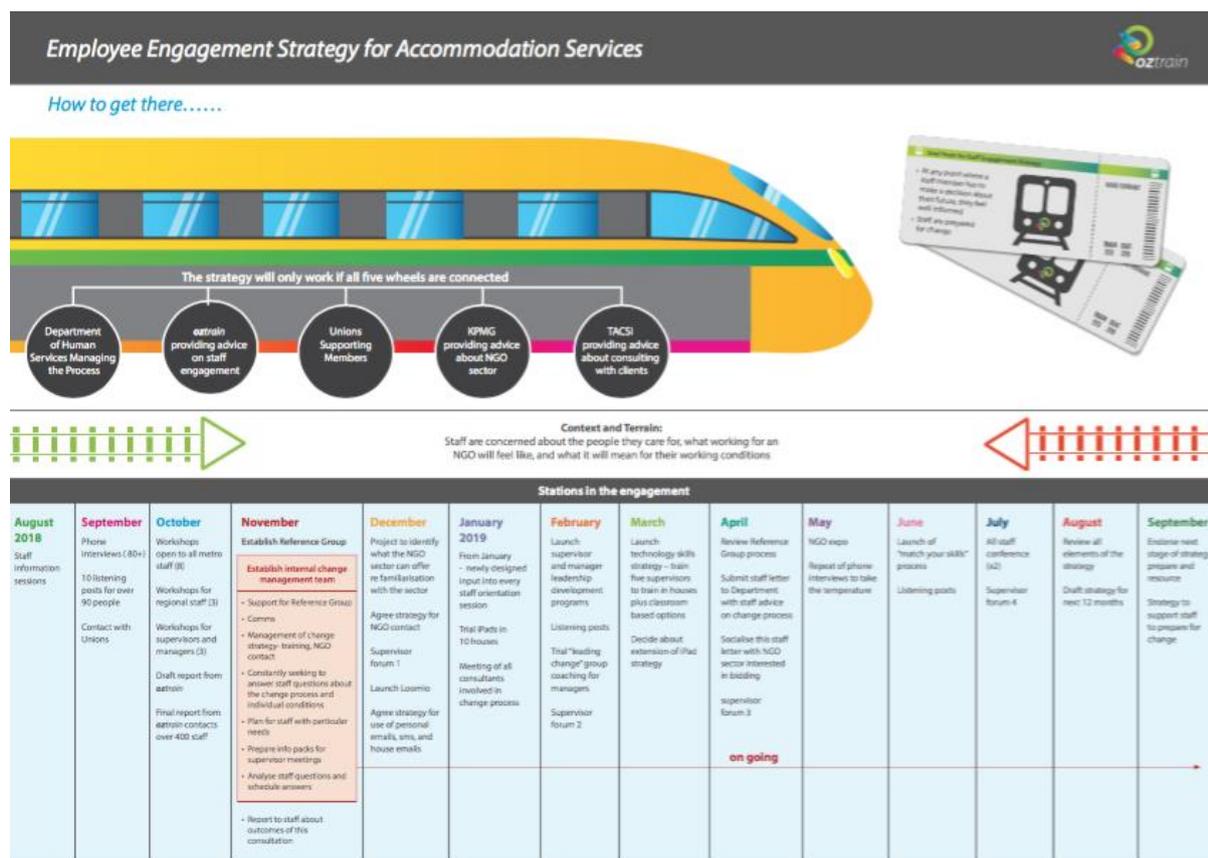
There is concern among staff that the interests of clients and families will not be taken into account through this process, and that it may result in actions such as clients being separated from their long-term support worker. In addition, in the absence of clear information, there is the possibility that staff add to client and family concern by sharing rumours and expressing their own anxieties.

The engagement strategy aims to minimise the risks during the change for clients and families by:

- supplying information for staff in a timely fashion, reducing levels of anxiety
- encouraging any consultants that may be involved with different stakeholder groups (such as clients and families, staff, the NGOs) through this process to share information and make sure there is consistency of the messages being conveyed

## 8. Potential Program Elements

As outlined in the above section, all of the various roles and teams within Accommodation Services have particular needs and wants. We have set out a diverse range of activities and initiatives to address these needs and wants. The summary of the potential *employee engagement strategy* has been provided along with this report as an info-graphic. Below is a reduced-size image of this summary info-graphic. This section of the report provides more detail on the activities and initiatives suggested for the next twelve-months.



We decided on a twelve-month plan for a number of reasons including:

- In the other Australian jurisdictions that have moved accommodation services out of Government, the planning/preparation process has taken at least 12 months
- By presenting a 12 month plan for employee engagement, the Department will be addressing the staff concern regarding the absence of a clear pathway forward
- It is unrealistic to develop a detailed strategy past this time frame, given political decisions will be made that will further shape the change process, and that learning from the next twelve months must shape the steps that follow.

Following are the activities and initiatives we recommend make up the employee engagement strategy, presented in the order suggested in the plan.

## November

### Report to staff about this consultation

There is scepticism among staff regarding the likelihood of the input and ideas they have provided during September and October leading to an engagement strategy that reflects their contribution. To address this scepticism it will be important to quickly let staff know about the key findings and recommendations of the report, and to set out the actions and initiatives the Department plans to put in place in the upcoming months.

This information release could include a version of the info-graphic employee engagement strategy provided with this report, adjusted to reflect the elements the Department decides to incorporate. Providing a written summary of the report along with the visual representation of the plan for the next 12 months will increase the likelihood that a wide range of staff will connect with the information.

### Establish an internal change management team

Designing, implementing and monitoring the range of engagement activities and initiatives will require a significant level of resourcing. There will need to be at least two Department staff dedicated to rolling out the various elements of the plan. Their responsibilities will include:

- Providing support for the reference group
- Analysing the mass of staff questions, sorting them into themes and categories, and then scheduling the systematic provision of answers
- Providing a forum for new questions about the change process and individual conditions to be asked as they arise, and ensuring answers are provided
- Setting up a system of communication with staff that highlights key information and provides this key information in multiple formats
- Management of elements of the engagement strategy e.g. staff familiarisation with the NGO sector, management training, the iPad trial etc.
- Preparing information packs for the supervisor forums
- Monitoring contact with staff roles/teams that are at risk of being bypassed by the mainstream change process
- Implementing monitoring and review activities such as the listening posts and phone interviews

If staff selected for this team work part-time it will be important to ensure they have at least two days each week at work together to enable information to be shared and planning to be coordinated.

#### Establish staff reference group

During the engagement process with the Child and Youth Services team the formation of a staff reference group was a critical factor in providing staff with a form of ongoing representation in the change process.

A reference group is not intended to be a decision-making group, but it is established in a way that the advice of the group is influential. It is in addition to, and not a replacement for, existing mechanisms within DHS. The role of the group may include the following:

- Provision of advice to the change management team and executive about the best ways to engage and inform staff, and act as a sounding board for engagement plans
- Provision of an additional vehicle for distributing messages or ideas to staff where appropriate
- Provision of a key source of “ground truth” about what’s happening with staff throughout the engagement process
- Advocacy for staff questions and concerns.

There are clearly challenges involved in putting in place a functioning reference group in Accommodation Services given the geographical spread of staff and the nature of the work. However staff in the workshops indicated they believe it is worth trying to get such a group up and running.

One way forward could involve:

- In November, share a page that explains what a reference group would do and what the level of commitment would be
- Invite volunteers to indicate their interest in joining
- If more than 20 people put up their hand, either:
  - develop criteria to select from the large group of volunteers (e.g. someone from each cluster of houses), or;
  - invite everyone interested to a Reference Group Meeting before the end of 2018 and work with the group to identify the criteria for selection, then select from there.

## December

### Identify what the NGO sector can offer re familiarisation, and agree on strategy

The OzTrain consultation found that staff generally do not trust and/or understand the NGO sector. There is a common belief that the support they provide clients is inferior to that offered in Accommodation Services, that they are less capable of supporting high need clients, that the pay and conditions are inferior, and that the shifts they get their staff to work impact negatively on both staff and clients.

Despite this negativity, the short NGO video prepared for and shown at the workshops was watched with great intent by all staff. Numerous staff indicated their interest in finding out more about how the NGOs operate so they can make an informed decision about whether it is an environment in which they could see themselves working in the future.

The NGOs themselves will be keen to provide opportunities for staff and clients to become more familiar with their organisation – the main question will be what forms the familiarisation activities can most effectively take. Already the Director of Accommodation Services has arranged placements for senior managers with various NGOs. So groundwork has been done – the challenge will be to design models of contact that will work for interested support workers and shift supervisors.

The first step will be for the project team to visit sites to talk about what ideas sector organisations might have about how they can creatively be involved in this education process. A strategy that takes into account varying offers, and how to use them to enable staff to access them fairly will be critical. It is important that not only managers have the chance to experience something of NGO culture and approach.

### Supervisor Forums

As mentioned earlier, shift supervisors are a critical component in the Accommodation Services structure. They are the contact point between the support workers in the houses and the managers in the offices. This gives them the potential to provide the support workers with a strong connection to the change process, if they are up-to-date with the key information, understand their role in relation to change management, and have the skills required to engage effectively with the support workers.

Feedback at the workshops confirmed the potentially important role of the supervisors, but also indicated that currently they do not all necessarily have the knowledge and skills required to support the change process. Currently there is no event that brings the supervisors together on a regular basis. The nature of the supervisor engagement with the houses is extremely variable.

The engagement strategy recommends bringing the supervisors together every two months, starting in December, for change process forums. These will:

- emphasise the critical role supervisors have to play by making an investment in them
- provide an opportunity for key change messages to be conveyed by executive and senior management
- enable supervisors to share their experiences and questions, and compare notes with others
- provide supervisors with specially designed information packs to use with the support workers, containing key information and guided discussion points to use in the houses
- include brief training components on topics such as leading staff through change

### Launch Loomio

One of the communication mechanisms staff believe is important is some form of online forum where:

- questions can be posted and timely responses provided
- notes from meetings and forums can be uploaded
- discussion boards on specific topics set up
- information updates posted

For such an online forum to be popular it must be as user friendly as possible. Given the problems with the connectivity of the computers in the houses, it will also be helpful if the selected online platform can be accessed on mobile technology (both work and personal) and on personal computers.

The platform *Loomio* was used for a similar purpose for the Child and Youth Services engagement process, and was well suited to the task. Access can be restricted to Accommodation Services staff only, and its security has been checked and approved by the Department IT team. Loomio can become a significant component of a suite of communication instruments used during the change process.

### Strategy for the use of personal emails, sms and house emails

Feedback from staff through the workshops indicated that there is a broad cross section of preferences when it comes to how people want to receive information. The current process of nightshift staff checking the house email and printing documents works well for many. Others are keen to get information sent to their personal email addresses. Still others like the idea of getting text messages on their

phones to alert them to important updates available on the intranet and/or Loomio and/or email.

It seems likely that a range of options for staff to select from or opt into will be the best way forward. The success of this strategy will rely on an approach to information distribution which makes it clear to the recipients which of the updates involve critical change process information, and which belong in the category of day-to-day communications.

Staff are very keen on a reasonable level of information sorting. They quickly become frustrated when they are asked to consider information that is not relevant to their context. Blanket communication may make the Department feel confident that have sent out messages, but will frustrate staff and reduce the likelihood of connecting to the information.

## January 2019

### Newly designed input to all staff orientation sessions

In addition to preparing for the move of the service to the NGO sector, Accommodation Services must continue to provide a high quality service to the clients and their families throughout the change period. This is particularly challenging with higher than usual staff turnover and new staff coming into a potentially unsettling environment.

The new staff being brought in to maintain the required service delivery need to be brought up to speed with the current context as part of their induction to the service. This will require a specifically designed and regularly updated component within the standard new staff orientation program.

### Trial iPads in 10 houses

An option discussed during the workshops in response to the poor connectivity of the computers in the houses was to bring in a new, fast alternative. It is possible to safely secure an iPad in a convenient location and set it up to be used as a single purpose source of information on the change process. The use of a sim card rather than an internet connection means fast connection speeds, and the iPad can be programmed, for example, to access only the Loomio site, and highlight information updates and key communications.

During the workshops a number of support workers volunteered to trial the use of an iPad in their house, if the decision is made to test out this form of communication.

### Meeting of all consultants involved in the change process

At this stage it is unclear whether external consultants will be involved in the ongoing change process. A core principle of a successful employee engagement process will be the need to ensure all the parties involved stay in touch and communicate key developments, so that the engagement with the staff, clients and families represents the full, comprehensive picture of the change process. It will be helpful if at regular intervals any external consultants involved meet to share information and ensure they are taking a coherent, cohesive approach.

## February

### Launch Supervisor and Manager leadership development programs

Managers and Supervisors have indicated that they are interested in leadership development opportunities for a range of reasons, including:

- to help them lead their teams through the challenging change process the service finds itself in
- to potentially increase their personal options should they choose to stay in public service when the decision point comes
- alternatively, to increase their suitability for employment in the NGO sector.

Managers and supervisors who successfully complete an internal leadership development program could be presented with a certificate acknowledging their participation. In this way they will not only have acquired additional skills and knowledge but will also have tangible evidence of the learning they have done when approaching new market opportunities.

### Listening Posts

Along with a coordinated program of activities it will be important to regularly 'take the temperature' and hear the ground truth in the offices and houses. Listening posts are a good way of opening the door to the less vocal and outgoing staff so they can share their views and experiences.

### Trial 'leading change' group coaching for managers

It is worth providing an opportunity for interested managers to come together to share the challenges they are experiencing leading their teams through change. The session should be facilitated by an experienced coach who can both draw ideas from the group and share their own insights and suggestions. Group coaching works best with relatively small groups.

This initiative can be trialled with several groups, and the decision as to whether to continue with further sessions can be based on participant feedback.

## March

### Launch technology skills strategy

It is clear from the consultation with staff in this project that there are a significant number of staff, particularly support workers, who lack confidence and have limited skills in the area of information technology. Providing opportunities for interested staff to improve their IT skills and confidence is important for a number of reasons including:

- to ensure they can access the communications they will be receiving about the change process on the house computer, on an iPad or phone
- to feel confident that they will have the IT skills required by potential NGO employers
- to increase their options should they want to stay in the public service

Two training options can be considered:

1. A number of the shift supervisors are confident in the use of both computers and mobile technology. Five such supervisors could be put through a simple train-the-trainer program covering core technology skills and knowledge, and they can in turn visit their houses to provide basic on-site training. Using supervisors to do this has the added advantage of developing their training skills and building the overall engagement culture. As well, they will be in a position to provide informed advice about what else might be required to prepare staff in this area.
2. Appropriate classroom-based training programs can also be run for interested staff, with the relevant content identified through a simple needs analysis process.

### Decide on extension (or otherwise) of the iPad initiative

Based on feedback from participating houses, make a decision as to whether the iPad initiative should be extended.

## April

### Review the reference group process

It will be important to review the various engagement initiatives that have been put in place, to decide if adjustments are required or if it is not worth continuing with. The reference group will benefit from this sort of review.

### Submit staff letter to the Department providing advice on the change process

Throughout the workshop process staff expressed strong professional opinions on a wide range of matters such as:

- the organisational attributes required to provide high quality support to clients
- their views on how the clients and families can have a say in how the change process plays out
- the issues where they think staff can have the most valuable input.

Providing staff with the opportunity to identify, discuss and then document the issues they feel strongly about can be a very important part in the change process. It provides them with a voice and encourages an exploration of the views held across the staff body. The staff reference group is likely to be the coordinating force in the development and finalisation of the letter. The process can be facilitated so that the final version of the letter is an accurate, politically-attuned representation of the staff views.

### Socialise the letter with the members of the NGO sector interested in taking on DHS services

The staff letter will document a range of staff hopes, concerns and expectations regarding the NGO sector. It is likely it will include topics such as:

- a description of the values and organisational attributes staff believe suitable NGOs will need to have
- their hopes regarding the workplace pay and conditions that will be available for staff who choose to move to the NGO sector
- their views on the models, shifts and rosters that work best for staff and clients.

Hearing the staff voice on these matters will be potentially very valuable for NGOs, and it will set the scene for targeted and relevant information provision and engagement between Accommodation Services staff and the NGO sector.

## May

### NGO expo

The NGO expo concept has already been successfully implemented interstate. Having an event where interested NGOs can have a physical presence will provide a 'one-stop shop' where staff can come in an informal, relaxed atmosphere to speak with NGO representatives to ask questions and find out more about how the various organisations present their purpose, values and operational approach. The expo could include short presentations on specific topics by representatives of the NGO sector.

It may be necessary to have two expos offered in different weeks to maximise the options for staff working on different rosters and shift patterns. It may also be worth considering opening the expos to clients and families.

### Phone interviews

As mentioned earlier, throughout the implementation of the strategy it will be important to 'check the temperature' on the ground. The staff reference group will be one mechanism for this, listening posts another. However, there will be a significant number of staff whose views will not necessarily be picked up by these activities. Phone calls across randomly selected offices and houses will provide a broad sample of views about the thoughts and feelings on the ground

## June

### Launch of 'match your skills' process

As the change process moves forward, support workers in particular will want to know how their current skills and knowledge match up with the requirements of the NGOs. This process could see Department project management staff working with the NGOs to construct a list of the attributes and skills they most value in their support workers and supervisors. The shift supervisors in Accommodation Services could then be trained to have discussions with the support workers in their houses, identifying areas of strength and areas that would benefit from further development. This data could then inform decision-making about the training and development programs to be offered to staff as they prepare for the change.

## July

### All staff conference

Many staff attending the workshops expressed the view that creating opportunities to bring staff together to hear the 'big picture' story would be an important part of any engagement strategy. Accommodation Services' structure and responsibilities make it difficult to free up significant numbers of staff at the same time, but it will be worth the effort. To increase the possibility of staff attending it will most likely be necessary to run two 'all staff' conferences a week apart. These half-day events could have a mix of plenary and small group sessions, and include:

- a presentation by the Minister and/or Department CE
- an update on the work of the reference group by group members
- supervisors presenting on the iPad trial
- small group sessions on different components of the 'match your skills' process
- an overview on how the process is likely to move forward over the second half of the year and into 2020
- a lunch at the end of the conference to recognise and celebrate the progress to this point

The exact content of the conference can be confirmed closer to the event when there is a clearer picture of what will be most useful.

## August

### Review all elements of the strategy and draft strategy for next 12 months

A great deal of data will have been collected during the implementation process. It will be important to aggregate and analyse this data, as well as collect any additional information required, to make informed decisions about the way things should move forward. The reference group can be actively involved in the review process, and Loomio will be a useful platform on which to gather staff perspectives and suggestions more widely.

## September

### Endorse next stage of strategy, prepare and resource

Endorsement of the next 12-month engagement strategy will need to come from Department executives. The content of the strategy will need to 'ring true' for staff, and reflect a logical progression based on the successful activities and initiatives to this point.

*Prepared by Stephen Parsons and Denise Picton  
Oztrain  
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