

# QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

## Legislative Council

ASKED BY: The Hon Meg Webb MLC

ANSWERED BY: The Hon Leonie Hiscutt MLC, Leader

### QUESTIONS:

Regarding the Right to Information Uplift Project scheduled to be complete by 30 June this year, can the government please provide:

#### QUESTION 1:

1. The actual current membership of the Steering Committee, beyond just listing of departmental positions;
2. Date of the Steering Committee's first meeting;
3. The number and dates of meetings of the Steering Committees for which quorum was secured, as well as those for which quorum was not secured;
4. Clarification as to whether the Steering Committee Meeting Minutes will be made publicly available (noting standard practice to redact any personal information), and if so when and how will those minutes be made public;
5. Date of commencement of the Project Manager's employment, and who secured that position;
6. Confirmation as to whether the training resource developer has been appointed, and if so when and who secured that role;
7. The number of requests from the public for information regarding the RTI Uplift Project since its commencement, and timeframe by which substantive responses to those requests were provided;
8. In light of a previous government response, provided on the 28 September 2024, that "the survey for RTI applicants' experience was open from 28 July 2023 until 1 September 2023", and that "a summary of key themes from the survey will be made available publicly", how many responses were received, and when will that survey be publicly released?

#### QUESTION 2:

9. A detailed breakdown of the expenditure of the \$500,000 allocated to the Project;
10. Details of any initiatives arising from the Project which have been implemented either partially or in full, including the degree that implementation has been successfully completed;
11. Confirmation that the last meeting of the Steering Committee was held on the 3rd of August 2023, and:

- a. if so, to also provide an explanation as to why the Steering Committee ceased meeting after that date; and
- b. If meetings have since recommenced, when they did so, and reasons for the intervening period during which meetings were not held.

## RESPONSE:

- Since March 2014, the Tasmanian Government has committed to improving the openness and accountability of government decision-making through what has become known as the Government's Transparency Agenda.
- One of the initiatives of the Transparency Agenda is the Government's commitment to improving the consistency of how information can be accessed under Right to Information (RTI).
- The objective of the RTI Uplift Project is to implement and deliver an improved right to information process across the Tasmanian State Service. This will contribute to improved government accountability and transparency by improving community access to government information. The RTI Uplift Project was established to facilitate improved access to information, through the provision of centralised training, building skilled RTI practitioners, and reducing key dependencies in agencies.
- The Project was initiated in 2022 as part of the Tasmanian Government's interim response to the Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings (COI). At that time, \$500,000 over two years was committed to support the significant uplift of RTI capability and practice in the public service. This funding recognised the government's existing commitment to improving access to information through its transparency agenda, with an aim of ensuring that victim-survivors had consistency in process and decision-making when it came to accessing their own information held by public authorities.
- The COI made a recommendation in its report (recommendation 17.8) which relates to reforming information sharing and access processes. The Government has agreed to all COI recommendations and has committed to delivering this recommendation by July 2026. Accordingly, the timeframe of the RTI Uplift Project has been realigned to include delivery of the COI Recommendations in the COI delivery timeframe to ensure information access is addressed holistically and in accordance with the Commission's recommendations.
- The Department of Premier and Cabinet is currently preparing advice on proposed next steps for the Project, taking into account reviews and reforms of operations suggested by recommendation 17.8 of the Commission of Inquiry Report, and recent commitments made to review RTI and Personal Information Protection legislation.
- This advice will be considered and deliberated upon as soon as reasonably practicable.
- In the meantime, Departments and Public Authorities remain committed to improving RTI processes, including recruiting additional staff, streamlining

processes, waiving fees for victim-survivor applicants and their representatives, and ensuring applicants receive appropriate clinical support if the information released may be traumatising.

- During 2023, a steering committee, whose terms of reference are available on the DPAC website, oversaw the RTI Uplift project. The first meeting was held on the 28 April 2023 and as at November 2023, the membership of the RTI Uplift Project Steering Committee comprised of:
  - Noelene Kelly (Chair) – Acting Deputy Secretary, Corporate and Governance Services, Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPAC)
  - Michelle Lowe, Director, Office of the Secretary – Department of Justice
  - Megan Hutton, General Manager, Legal Services – Department of Health
  - Paula Becker, Manager, Legal Services – Department of Education Children and Young People
  - Leah Dorgelo, Principal Officer Right to Information – Ombudsman's Office
  - Martin Gibson, Senior Policy Analyst – Policy Adviser, DPAC
  - Charlie Hamilton, Service Delivery Manager – Change Management Adviser, DPAC
  - Courtney Ingham – Manager Ministerial and Executive Services, DPAC
  - Carmen Kelly – Manager Policy and Projects, Ministerial and Executive Services, DPAC
- There have been five meetings of the Steering Committee and quorums were present at all meetings. The Steering Committee meetings were held on: 28 April, 25 May, 15 June, 6 July and 3 August 2023 and the minutes have been published on DPAC's Right to Information disclosure webpage.
- The Steering Committee will meet in the coming weeks to continue its discussion and in particular, the proposed next steps for the project when considering the continuation of this work will be part of the broader Government's implementation work for the COI recommendations.
- The Department of Premier and Cabinet is partnering with a training provider to develop materials that will be released to all State Service Departments. The dedicated training resources will provide a consistent approach to handling right to information requests for information across the Tasmanian State Service.
- A proposal by University of Tasmania to develop training modules for RTI delegates, which will include timing for development, delivery and implementation of training materials, is currently being worked on.
- Regarding the number of RTI requests, I understand there have been two RTI requests received by DPAC to date about the RTI Uplift Project, made by the same applicant. The information released has been uploaded to DPAC's RTI disclosure website.
  - The first request was responded to in 6 working days (released 8 May 2024). This was after DPAC initially corresponded with the applicant in late March 2024 about an intended active disclosure of the information and conducted third party consultation of the documents that were requested.

- Another RTI request was received by DPAC on 9 May 2024, which will be responded to in accordance with the RTI Act.
- Regarding the survey for RTI applicants' experience, I am advised that the survey received 17 responses from applicants across the Tasmanian community.
- The de-identified data from the RTI applicants' experience survey has been made publicly available and was published on the Right to Information Uplift Project website in June 2024.
- As previously stated, the 2022-23 State Budget provided funding of \$500,000 over two years to improve the performance of Tasmanian Government agencies in relation to Right to Information (RTI) improvements, as part of the interim COI response.
- To-date, I am advised that \$93,075 has been spent against the project. The majority of this (\$90,391.28) relates to employment expenses and superannuation costs, with the remainder attributed to professional development, recruitment expenses, and consumables.
- Advice from the Department of Premier and Cabinet is that development of the new training materials is expected to cost approximately \$100,000. Funding requests for the next steps will be considered as part of the upcoming 2024-25 State Budget.

The Hon Jeremy Rockliff MP  
**Premier**

Date: 14 June 2024