Analysis of Survey feedback on the nine focus areas proposed to guide the Review

Broad public and stakeholder consultation has occurred on nine focus areas proposed to guide the Review of the Tasmanian State Service (the Review). The focus areas make up the Terms of Reference to provide broad parameters for the Independent Reviewer. The consultation survey sought an indication of stakeholder and public views on the scope of the Review.

The feedback received included comments related to specific amendments to the wording of the focus areas, as well as broader insights related to the focus areas that will inform the Independent Reviewer.

Who did we hear from?

A total of 171 responses were received. Of these 168 people provided feedback via the survey.[1] The majority of respondents were employees of the Tasmanian State Service (TSS). Others included private sector employees, not-for-profit employees and the general public. Several organisations also provided feedback via the survey including TasCOSS, the Australian Nursing & Midwifery Federation and the United Workers Union. Three organisations provided feedback via written submissions - the Community & Public Sector Union (CPSU), the Australian Medical Association Tasmania (AMA) and the Health and Community Services Union (HACSU).

General comments

The majority of comments discussed how the Review should be conducted or what aspects should be looked at in relation to specific focus areas rather than commenting on the focus areas themselves. Some feedback focused on the wording of the Terms of Reference and the changes requested were frequently about changing the language to be less ambiguous and more specific.

What did they say?

Focus Area 1: Promoting public service change and innovation that delivers public policy and service delivery to improve the client experience and meet the needs of governments and the community

There was broad support for Focus Area 1 with 91.4 per cent of people saying the focus area should guide the Review.

Fifty six people commented on Focus Area 1. Thirty two per cent of comments suggested specific amendments to the focus area, double the next highest amount of suggested changes for any focus area.

Some (14 per cent) commented said they did not understand the intention of the Focus Area 1, with others suggesting the wording was ambiguous and needed to be more specific. Fourteen per cent of survey respondents raised concerns about the emphasis on 'clients' and 'government needs' over 'community needs'.

Some respondents (21 per cent) noted that systems, processes and service delivery could be improved while 13 per cent felt that improvements could be made through the use of technology. There was also a focus (13 per cent) on changes being based on evidence and/or need, and that change should not happen for change's sake.

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[1] Before the survey closed on 31 January 2020. Noting, that not all respondents completed the survey in full.

Focus Area 2: Identifying opportunities to deliver government services, programs, projects and other initiatives more efficiently or effectively, including information technology platforms

There was broad support for Focus Area 2 with 93.2 per cent of people saying the focus area should guide the Review.

Sixty four respondents also provided comments on Focus Area 2. Fourteen per cent of respondents suggested various specific, but minor, amendments to wording. In particular, comments focused on what was meant by the term 'efficiency', with some thinking this could be looking to privatise government services. Some respondents wanted a focus on improving outcomes.

There was a strong focus on technology in responses to this focus area. Eleven per cent thought cyber security needed to be included. The use of technology (17 per cent of comments) and ICT solutions (22 per cent of comments) were frequently raised. Thirteen per cent of respondents highlighted the continuing need for face-to-face interactions or noted that not everyone has access to technology and the internet.

Twenty per cent of respondents commented that the TSS is inefficient and eight per cent think it is resistant to change.

Focus Area 3: Identifying ways to promote collaboration and partnerships including to support more flexible movement between the private and public sectors

While there was broad support for Focus Area 3 with 72.8 per cent of people saying the focus area should guide the Review, this was significantly less than the support shown for most other focus areas.

Fifty five respondents provided comment on Focus Area 3. Sixteen per cent of respondents who commented recommended a range of amendments to the focus area, with several being confused or having concerns about what was meant by the term 'movement between the private and public sectors'. Some felt it was already possible for people to move between the sectors.

Forty nine per cent of respondents provided comments specifically about public sector - private sector partnerships and 27 per cent of respondents expressed concerns about the risk of conflicts of interest in such partnerships. A further 11 per cent were concerned about the possible privatisation of public services. Eleven per cent of respondents noted that movements between the public and private sector could affect employment conditions. Some concern was expressed that any partnerships may risk undermining government transparency, accountability and efficiency.

Thirteen per cent of respondents thought internal TSS collaboration could be improved. Five respondents (nine per cent) discussed improving collaboration with non-government organisations (NGOs) and suggested that NGOs should be specifically included in the wording of the focus area.

Focus Area 4: Achieving greater economies and efficiencies in TSS administration, including opportunities to streamline bureaucracy and services where suitable

There was broad support for Focus Area 4 with 89 per cent of people saying the focus area should guide the Review.

Fifty six respondents provided comment on Focus Area 4. There was broad support for achieving greater efficiency (48 per cent of respondents) and 30 per cent thought procedures and processes could be improved. However, 38 per cent of respondents expressed concern that achieving greater efficiencies would lead to a reduction in the TSS's capability or capacity. Nine per cent were concerned it could lead to job losses and another nine per cent were concerned it could affect the wellbeing of TSS employees.

Thirteen per cent of survey respondents expressed scepticism that the goal of this focus area is achievable.

Focus Area 5: Examining the feasibility, effectiveness and efficiency of further decentralisation of government services

There was broad support for Focus Area 5, however, it was the least supported of all the focus areas with 30.3 per cent of respondents saying that this focus area should not guide the Review.

Fifty seven respondents provided comment on Focus Area 5. Concerns frequently related to the term 'further decentralisation' and what was meant or implied by this. There was a mix of interpretations including whether this term refers to geographical movement of government services or how such services are delivered. Others did not understand the use of the term. Comments were made with respect to whether any decentralisation of services would be worth the cost given Tasmania's small size. The better use of technology was noted as a requirement to support any decentralisation. The evidence base and an assessment of past decentralisation was raised.

There were some comments as to whether this focus area was too broad and outside the scope of a structural review including the parameters of the *State Service Act 2000*. It was also suggested that the decentralisation of government services could be the subject of a separate review.

Whole-of-government IT was considered by some respondents as inefficient and costly to agencies.

Focus Area 6: Facilitating areas of cultural change within the TSS (e.g. promoting risk-based decision making, promoting innovation, improving accountability and identifying ways to enhance performance)

There was broad support for Focus Area 6 with 87.9 per cent of people saying the focus area should guide the Review.

Sixty respondents provided comments. Seven respondents (12 per cent) provided specific suggestions for amendments to the focus area. Twenty per cent of respondents stated their support of the focus area's aim. Twelve per cent of respondents discussed improving accountability and seven per cent discussed managing underperforming staff. Five respondents (8 per cent) noted widespread changes would be needed to achieve the outcomes proposed and six respondents (10 per cent) commented that they think the TSS is resistant to change.

Focus Area 7: Identifying ways to help develop the long-term capability of the TSS

There was broad support for Focus Area 7 with 92.1 per cent of people saying the focus area should guide the Review.

Forty three respondents provided comment on Focus Area 7. Five respondents (12 per cent) suggested specific changes to the Focus Area but each suggestion was different. Twenty eight per cent of

respondents believed greater long term and/or strategic planning was needed and 19 per cent thought increased funding and resources were required.

Fourteen per cent of respondents identified improving the professional development of employees as a solution while nine per cent thought improving staff retention and career progression opportunities would help. It was suggested that increasing diversity also be included.

Focus Area 8: Implementing enhanced workforce management processes across the employee life cycle, including opportunities to implement improvements to how the TSS manages and recognises employee performance

There was broad support for Focus Area 8 with 85.4 per cent of people saying the focus area should guide the Review.

Sixty three respondents provided comments. Seven respondents (11 per cent) suggested specific changes to the focus area to focus on development and recognition of employees. Twenty two per cent of respondents thought that improved incentives and recognition for high performing staff were needed.

Eight per cent of respondents specifically disagreed with the need for this focus area while five per cent appeared not to understand the aim and intent of the focus area. Seventeen per cent of respondents mentioned the current management of underperforming staff was an issue.

Ten per cent of respondents thought that Human Resource responsibilities should be outsourced and 11 per cent believed that promotion policies and practices needed to be improved. A common reason given for both issues was the perceived 'nepotism' in current hiring practices.

Focus Area 9: Attracting, developing and retaining a skilled public sector workforce with the capacity to meet emerging economic, social and technological opportunities and challenges

There was broad support for Focus Area 9 with 93.4 per cent of people saying the focus area should guide the Review.

Fifty respondents provided comments, with a similar percentage to the overall response rate disagreeing with the need for this focus area.

Suggestions on what should be considered under this focus area included: developing the capacity to manage the challenges of climate change; improving recruitment practices and procedures; increasing wages and improving work conditions; improving professional development and training and effectively managing underperformance.

Additional Comments

Some respondents raised the membership of the Reference Group, and considered that a separate 'reference group' should be established that consists of all public sector unions bodies in Tasmania. Specific language that referred to 'wages policy' being out of scope of the Review was also raised, as was maintaining permanent employment and the TSS remaining as a single employer being specifically out of scope.