



Tasmanian Council of Social Service Inc.

TasCOSS Submission to the Review of the Tasmanian State Service

October 2020



**INTEGRITY
COMPASSION
INFLUENCE**



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About TasCOSS

TasCOSS' vision is for one Tasmania, free of poverty and inequality where everyone has the same opportunity. Our mission is two-fold: to act as the peak body for the community services industry in Tasmania; and to challenge and change the systems, attitudes and behaviours that create poverty, inequality and exclusion.

Our membership includes individuals and organisations active in the provision of community services to low-income Tasmanians living in vulnerable and disadvantaged circumstances. TasCOSS represents the interests of our members and their service users to government, regulators, the media and the public. Through our advocacy and policy development, we draw attention to the causes of poverty and disadvantage, and promote the adoption of effective solutions to address these issues.

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Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the *Review of the Tasmanian State Service (Review)*.

Tasmania's state service is an essential element of our system of government. It is also essential to the lives of all Tasmanians through the policies, programs and services it designs and delivers to the Tasmanian community. The state service's relationship with Tasmania's community services industry is crucial in determining the effectiveness of these programs and services and ensuring they meet industry expectations. It is also vital for addressing community expectations and the wellbeing and needs of Tasmanians facing poverty and exclusion. To achieve this, Tasmania needs a state service that acts impartially, equitably, transparently, and is accessible and responsive to community and industry needs.

TasCOSS is represented on the Reference Group for this Review and looks forward to making more detailed comments on specific aspects of the state service's mission, functions and working practices, as the Review progresses through its consultation phases. In this preliminary submission, we lay out the principles we wish to see a revitalised state service embody. While these principles predate the impacts of COVID-19, the pandemic has made the need for these principles more clear.

Key principles

Tasmania will be best served by a state service that is committed to two key principles:

1. Placing good governance at the heart of every decision

Good governance uses robust processes to guide and implement decisions that deliver results in accordance with the objectives set forward by all members of the community. Good governance promotes public trust; leads to better decisions; supports ethical decision-making; improves efficiency; and encourages decision-makers to be confident in their decisions.¹

In making decisions, state service members should be asking how they have upheld the keystones of good governance²:

- *Transparent*. How have we made this decision-making process and the decisions that result from it, clear to all members of the Tasmanian community?
- *Accountable*. How will we hold ourselves accountable to the Tasmanian community for the decision we have taken and for its consequences in the short, medium and long terms?
- *Law-abiding*. Are we certain that this decision abides by Tasmanian and Australian law and by standards of behaviour such as codes of conduct?

¹ http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/380427/Good_Governance_Guide_June_2018.pdf.

² Ibid.

- *Responsive*. How have we invited the Tasmanian community into the process of identifying what issues have to be addressed? How will we respond to consequences of this decision?
- *Equitable*. What does this decision do to reduce inequality and disadvantage in Tasmania? How have we assessed whether this decision will benefit people equitably and to ensure that its impacts, both positive and negative, are equitably distributed?
- *Participatory and inclusive*. What have we done to ensure that this decision is informed and guided by the Tasmanians who will be affected by it?
 - What have we done/will we do at the pre-planning, planning, decision-making and implementation stages to collect, analyse and consider the ideas and views of Tasmanians who will be affected by this decision?
 - How have we sought out the ideas and views of Tasmanians who have low literacy, who face transport barriers, who do not have digital access, who live with disability, who are on low incomes, who are members of Tasmania’s Aboriginal community, who come from different cultural perspectives, or who do not speak English as a first language?
 - How does this decision match up with the aspirations of Tasmanians that have been expressed in other surveys such as the UTAS Tasmania Project³, the City of Hobart’s Community Vision⁴ and TasCOSS’ Good Life model⁵?
- *Effective and efficient*. How are we ensuring that effectiveness is measured by the outcomes that matter to Tasmanians? Given that community engagement has been consistently identified as a key determinant of policy effectiveness⁶, what have we done to bring the community as far as possible into this process? In determining the efficiency of a decision, who might be disadvantaged by the definition of efficiency that we are using?
- *Consensus-oriented*. What have we done to try to ensure that all views and interests are accommodated in this decision? What views and interests have we not accommodated and how do we justify not accommodating those views?

2. Ensuring every Tasmanian can live a good life

Every Tasmanian should have the opportunity for a good life — the chance to do more than spend each day just getting by. TasCOSS’ Good Life project has identified nine key areas that Tasmanians have told us they consider essential to a good life (Figure 1).

TasCOSS is committed to ensuring that our policy and advocacy work addresses these key elements of a good life in Tasmania. Designing and delivering policies, programs and services that achieve these elements should also be the mission of a state service that is focussed on Tasmanians’ wellbeing now and into the future.

³ <https://www.utas.edu.au/tasmania-project>.

⁴ <https://www.hobartcity.com.au/files/assets/public/policies-before-09.19/hobarts-city-vision.pdf>.

⁵ The Good Life model emerged from consultations TasCOSS conducted with Tasmanians on low incomes around the question “What do you need for a good life?”.

⁶ See, for example, <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/community-engagement/why-community-engagement-important>.

Figure 1: Good Life priority areas



Building a good life that every Tasmanian deserves will require a Tasmanian State Service that is:

- *Engaged in whole-of-government policy formulation and implementation.* The key areas identified by the Good Life project are inseparable; they cannot be addressed effectively by organisations working in silos. Effective responses to Tasmanians' priorities will require multi-agency mechanisms that enable the integration of social, economic and environmental policy at the government and community levels and a state service workforce that can balance issue expertise with holistic thinking.
- *Committed to bringing communities into decision-making.* TasCOSS' regional consultations have shown the diverse and complex needs of communities around the state. Effective consultation mechanisms are needed to identify unique challenges faced by regional communities, to build community capacity to engage in decision-making and to develop solutions that reflect local conditions and resources – a place-based, co-designed approach.
- *Collaborative across sectors.* Participatory and inclusive governance extends to bringing in the expertise of other sectors as well as community members. The Partnership Agreement with the

Tasmanian community sector⁷ acknowledges that government agencies and the community services industry cannot achieve their respective goals without constructive working relations built on mutual understanding, respect and cooperation. The *Strong Families, Safe Kids Advice and Referral Line* and *Housing Connect* are two initiatives that take this principle and put it into action; more mechanisms, including secondments and sharing expertise across sectors, should be considered.

- *Responsible for good advice.* Good government depends on the state service being empowered and supported to provide honest, impartial and evidence-based advice. This includes investing in building staff capability, strengthening in-house expertise, collaboration across government and attracting and developing talented employees. Investment in state service capacity building will result in greater expertise, high-quality research and analysis to underpin evidence-based policy and stronger advice to government.

Next steps

TasCOSS looks forward to commenting in detail on the initial report of the Review, due to be released in late October 2020.

⁷

http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/219095/Partnership_Agreement_between_DHHS,_DPAC_and_the_Community_Sector_Tasmania.pdf.