

Division 32: Parliamentary Inspector of the Corruption and Crime Commission, \$697 000 —

Mr I.C. Blayney, Chair.

Mr J.R. Quigley, Attorney General.

Hon M. Murray, Parliamentary Inspector of the Corruption and Crime Commission.

Miss L. Markussen, Ministerial Liaison Officer.

Mr D. Emerson, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: I give the call to the member for Hillarys.

[5.50 pm]

Mr P.A. KATSAMBANIS: I welcome the Parliamentary Inspector of the Corruption and Crime Commission. I refer to significant issues impacting the agency on page 407 of budget paper No 2. It refers to the reappointment of the parliamentary inspector—congratulations for that. It also refers to the need to appoint two acting parliamentary inspectors. One has resigned and the other one's term expires on 31 December. What is the process for appointing an acting inspector to fill the resignation position; when is it likely to be advertised; and when does the Attorney General expect to have that position filled?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: As I recall, one of those positions became vacant on the resignation of the acting inspector to take a position on the bench as a judge. The inspector will give an outline of the recruitment process.

Hon M. Murray: It is a convoluted process because, of course, the office of parliamentary inspector is an office of the Parliament. It involves a process of calling for expressions of interest and then a process of a committee, chaired by the Chief Justice, that examines the prospective candidates. The recommendation is then made to the Parliament and it is considered. It needs bilateral support on all sides of the Parliament. The process involves the Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission and then a recommendation comes back to government directly and the appointment is made by the Governor in the ordinary process. We have the process underway. As the Attorney General said, we lost Craig Colvin, SC when he was appointed to the Federal Court of Australia. The current acting inspector is Matt Howard, SC, who is the President of the Western Australian Bar Association—so we have valuable service there. We are not in difficult circumstances. If I should be conflicted out or unavailable for any particular reason, Howard will take over. I expect that the process of appointment of a second backup acting inspector will be completed within another three months.

Mr P.A. KATSAMBANIS: Are most positions part-time or sessional positions? They are not full-time roles, are they?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I will let the inspector answer.

Hon M. Murray: They are available when called upon. They are not really part-time or any other time really. They are used when particular tasks arise. If I am unable to perform the function of parliamentary inspector for one reason or another, I can call upon them.

Mr P.A. KATSAMBANIS: I refer to a series of key efficiency indicators on page 409 of budget paper No 2. One of them is the average cost per investigation or case. I note quite a significant increase from what was budgeted for 2017–18 through to the actual cost in 2017–18, and an even higher figure for the average cost per case is budgeted for 2018–19. I note the explanation that essentially says that this figure is higher due to a reduction in the number of investigations undertaken in 2017–18 and expected to be undertaken in 2018–19. That is a relevant explanation, but what is driving the reduction in the number of investigations?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I refer to the inspector again.

Hon M. Murray: There is a short and simple explanation. The investigations are reduced in number by reason of the changes in the jurisdiction of the commission itself. The focus that has been derived from those changes is into serious and more systemic considerations. My office is already encountering and expects to continue to encounter not only a reduced number of claims that we need to deal with, but also claims of increased complexity. It is hard to make an estimate but I suspect that they will largely cancel out the capacity to make savings with the extra cost involved in disposing of the business.

Mr P.A. KATSAMBANIS: With the anticipated changes to the purview of the Corruption and Crime Commission to enable it to utilise the unexpected wealth provisions, does the parliamentary inspector expect that he has both the resources and the capability within his office to effectively oversee those new powers?

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A — Thursday, 24 May 2018]

p435b-437a

Mr Peter Katsambanis; Mr John Quigley; Chair; Mr Shane Love

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I will answer the first part. I can assure the member that having known Hon Michael Murray, QC for 30-odd years, he certainly has the capability. But I will let him answer as to the resources.

Hon M. Murray: Thirty years is a long time for somebody who can only remember last week! I think the resources will be adequate. We have managed to organise our affairs so that we can do the oversight role, make our recommendations, make our report to Parliament and give Parliament, we hope, the assurance that the oversight is effective. I do not anticipate that we will be in need of any further increase in resources in the foreseeable future.

Mr P.A. KATSAMBANIS: I am not quite sure whether I should say that I have exhausted my questions and I have exhausted everyone in the building, but I have no further questions.

The CHAIR: There is a first time for everything, member.

Mr R.S. LOVE: It is fascinating to learn a little bit about the role of the parliamentary inspector. I must admit that I have not taken a great deal of note of it before. When the inspector goes about seeking to evaluate the key efficiency indicators of the commission, how forensically does he go into the information that he is provided with? Does he just accept whatever he is given or to what detail does he get involved in trying to make sure that the information he is supplied with is, in fact, the truth?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I will refer to the inspector.

Hon M. Murray: It rather sounds like blowing one's own trumpet, but no, we regard our duty as being a thorough, independent investigation. It is very often a task that is performed by oversight of the work being done by the commission, and an evaluation of the effectiveness and appropriateness of the procedures it uses. But there is ample power in the act. I can be constituted to conduct an inquiry, and I do so occasionally with all the powers of the royal commission. That investigatory process is amply legislated for and we take very seriously the need to go behind the service and probe completely where the merits of the matter lie.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I think we have run out of time and that is a pity because I would like to explore it further. However, I do not want to keep the parliamentary inspector any longer than we need to.

The appropriation was recommended.

Meeting suspended from 5.59 to 7.00 pm