

**HOME AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO
DEPARTMENT OF HOME AFFAIRS**

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY SPOKEN QUESTION ON NOTICE

Joint Public Accounts and Audit

03 March 2023

QoN Number: 1

Subject: Funding Minister identified in the grant opportunity

Asked by: Julian Hill

Question:

Chair: Just on the funding decisions, the Audit Report states that funding decisions for 4 out of the 8 processes were not made by the minister identified in the grant opportunity guidelines as having responsibility. And I'll just say, in saying that, that stuff happens in government; Ministers are busy, should not be impossible for them to pass responsibility for something from one minister to another, so I'm not in any way criticising the fact that that happens, I'm just trying to understand specifically what happened here, how was the appropriate decision maker for funding decisions identified, and was it an issue with a misidentification in the guidelines, or was there a change later in the process?

AGD: ...

Chair: The advice I've got but I'll ask the audit office, for Round 2 the decision maker identified in the guideline was the minister for justice but the decision maker in practice was the assistant minister for Home Affairs. In Round 3 the assistant minister for Home affairs was identified in the guidelines yet decisions were made by the Minister for Home Affairs, and in round 4 we've got it the other way around, the guideline said that the Minister for Home affairs would be the decision maker but the decisions were actually made by the assistant minister for Home Affairs. So that kind of contradicts...

AGD: ...

Chair: Let's accept that's the fact unless anyone is telling me it's not, how...why in three rounds in a row, the actual decision maker different from the published decision maker? I'm just trying to understand, were the guidelines wrong? Okay, that is one possibility, or was there a change within the department...government, someone was too busy, someone had more time, someone expressed...I don't care, I just want to understand because that's three occasions on a row where the decision maker was different from the one that was published.

Saunders: I think it is fair to draw the conclusion that we didn't have a Minister for Justice at that time, so on the face of it, it would appear that there was an error in the guidelines; but that is an inference I am drawing. On Round 2...

Chair: Round 2, it was Justice and ended up assistant minister, Round 3 it was assistant minister and then it was the full minister, Round 4, it was full minister and then ended up being assistant minister.

Saunders: We'll have to take that on notice, Chair.

Answer:

While the Safer Communities Fund (SCF) was administered by the Department of Home Affairs (the Department) at the time of *the Award of Funding under the Safer Communities Fund* Audit Report (the Audit Report), responsibility for its administration moved to the Attorney-General's Department (AGD) on 1 July 2022 as a result of Machinery of Government (MoG) changes. As part of this move, all relevant records including assessments, evaluations and applications regarding all six rounds of the SCF transferred to AGD.

The Department has implemented a number of measures to address the relevant recommendation (below) of the Audit Report.

Recommendation 1 stated "*the Department of Home Affairs clearly identify in grant opportunity guidelines the entity that is responsible for making funding recommendations, as well as the person responsible for making decisions about which grant applications will be approved*".

- On 6 April 2022, the Department published an update to the Department's Grants Procedural Instruction (PI) and grant guidance on the intranet to address this recommendation.
- The Department implemented a new process where grant guidelines must be submitted to the Chief Procurement Officer (CPO) for review, prior to seeking approval from the relevant delegate, including where the Delegate is the Minister. The CPO is able to determine if the recommendation has been addressed in the guidelines. The Department's Accountable Authority Instructions (AAIs) and PI were updated to include this process.
- The Department works with the Community Grants Hub within the Department of Social Services and the Business Grants Hub within the Department of Industry, Science and Resources to ensure this recommendation is implemented for all departmental grants programs, and provides awareness to departmental business areas through internal forums held bimonthly.