

From: Peter Feerick
To: [Community Affairs, Committee \(SEN\)](#)
Subject: Re: Cashless Debit Card - Question taken on notice
Date: Thursday, 9 August 2018 10:46:43 AM

Hi Kathleen,

My response to the request for further information from Senator Sue Lines is as follows:

The three public 'consultations' or rather, information sessions which I referred to at Tuesday's public hearing were the firstly the Childers Chamber of Commerce session, with the indicated purpose of "only facilitating an information session for the community." [1] There was then the Bundaberg and then Hervey bay sessions. A key difference to the latter sessions were that the member for Hinkler, Keith Pitt, was actually present at the Childers one "to talk with the community". I only found out about the Childers session the day before due to a meeting with DSS representatives, and was initially told we were welcome to attend, but then informed it was for Isis shire residents only (Isis shire being the former local government area surrounding the town of Childers prior to council amalgamations), that it was a RSVP event, and there was confusion as to whether there was a fee or not, which was also indicated on the event page. [2] Since Keith Pitt asked if the Childers Chamber of Commerce would host the event, the DSS can obviously state that they did not charge for any event.

With regards to the Bundaberg public session, it was held on the 8th of August, between 2 and 4pm, and was even described as being the 'first official meeting for Hinkler'. [3] This was not a good time, as any parents needing to pick up children would miss most of the session even if they did try to attend. And anyone who was working part time may have been needed to take the day off, or simply miss out, as it was within regular working hours.

Upon arriving at the session and signing in (meaning the DSS should have accurate attendance numbers - although I would estimate 40-50 people), we were informed that we would be split into three groups, with different facilitators leading each group. Several of the group protested against this and suggested that everyone be initially told the same information, and then divided into groups, but this was merely taken on board as a suggestion for future sessions. As a result of this, conflicting information was given to different groups, including being told that you both will and won't be able to continue to pay off your credit card, that you do and don't have access to an extra \$200 per

month in cash on approval, that you can and can't do bpay, that "they cannot answer that question as they don't know who the card provider is", even though the name was printed on the back of the information sheet they handed out at that very same session. Most importantly, the local federal member Keith Pitt, was not present, and as a result, we were unable to express concerns to him, and unanswered questions at the session were not able to be followed up. In the words of Senator Doug Cameron, it raises the question of what concerns were raised during consultations, and what evidence is there of how those concerns were addressed?

I did not attend the Hervey Bay session, but logistically it was at a better time for parents, but still an issue for anyone working. People who did attend informed me that it was run in a similar fashion to the Bundaberg session, and like the Bundaberg session, conflicting information was given, and that people left that session more confused and concerned about how the card would operate and impact them than when they arrived. Additionally, regardless of if a person was working casual or part time and would be affected by the card, or someone who would not be affected by the card and wanted to learn more about the implications of the card, the reality is neither of these sessions were would have been suitable. More sessions needed to have been run in both towns, and at more suitable times for workers and those with other commitments to attend.

The end conclusion is simple. In no way, shape or fashion can it be concluded that these were community consultations. They were simply information sessions run by the marketing teams from the DSS who were responsible for implementing the Cashless Debit Card, not actually taking on board feedback and addressing community concerns. These sessions cannot be used to support claims by Keith Pitt or the DSS that the community was consulted, especially as they came after the claims of strong community support were made.

For an additional summary of the consultations as perceived by a member of the community, I also suggest reviewing the chronology of consultations and information in the first two pages of the opening statement submitted by Ms Sharon Feerick for the 2nd November 2017 public hearing for the prior amendment, the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Cashless Debit Card) Bill 2017. [4]

References:

[1] Newsmail article, Pitt to hold cashless card Q and A in Childers, <https://www.news-mail.com.au/news/pitt-to-hold-cashless-card-q-and-a-in-childers/3196380/>
Screenshot: <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1NELWJXH3DTNB1apugNnbbfw16zup0Gx4>

[2] Facebook, Childers Chambers of Commerce event attended by Keith Pitt, <https://www.facebook.com/events/729590857232512/>
Screenshot: <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1-zmXCxhk9sdAqjJ-rnCo6CTA-IT7m7f3>

[3] Newsmail, First official cashless card meeting for Hinkler to be held,
<https://www.news-mail.com.au/news/first-official-cashless-card-meeting-for-hinkler-t/3209604/>

Screenshot: https://drive.google.com/open?id=1r0FP_QTVsDNzGODbkGF-yfczGhgRfrsN

[4] Direct link to statement, <https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=7cf7327f-2fe0-442c-afd6-b9b594efae1f>

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