

The Award of Funding under the Safer Streets Programme

Audit Report No.41 2014–15

Opening Statement by Acting Auditor-General

JCPAA Review 17 September 2015

1. Good morning Chairman and committee members.
2. The key message from the audit is that the Attorney-General's Department's approach to implementing the Safer Streets programme is out of step with the substantial work that has been undertaken by successive governments since 2007 to develop and improve the grants administration framework.
3. The audit identified a number of significant shortcomings in the department's implementation of processes for eligibility checking, application assessment and the subsequent provision of recommendations to the decision maker. As the funding round operated through a closed, non-competitive process, candidate proposals were not required to be ranked on the basis of merit. Rather, the task for the department was to be satisfied that only those eligible proposals that met the six merit criteria to a satisfactory level were recommended for funding.
4. The audit concluded that the merit assessment process was handled particularly poorly by the department. It recommended the Minister award funding to all but one of the applications assessed on the basis of it scoring applications highly against the published criteria. However, the department's own assessment records did not support the high scores it awarded.

5. In particular:

- assessments were completed without the department having obtained sufficient information from applicants, such as the number of cameras that would be installed for the amount of grant funding that was requested;
- instead of pursuing missing information, generous assumptions were made about the project (such as assuming it was located in a crime hot spot without obtaining any crime statistics or other evidence that supported this view);
- assessment work did not address all aspects of each criterion; and
- advice provided to the Minister did not outline key risks and weaknesses that the department's assessment work had identified.

6. There were also shortcomings in the terms of the funding agreements that have been signed by the department for to the approved projects. In a number of cases agreements have not adequately set out what the proposed project would deliver and where. This makes it difficult for the department to adequately oversee the delivery of the funded projects, or to assess whether those projects have been successful in preventing, detecting and deterring crime in crime 'hot spots'.

7. The audit team and I would be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.