

MINUTES – Employee Consultative Group and Work Health and Safety Committee Meeting

Thursday, 16th December 2021

GovTeams

Meeting Opened: 10.35 am
Meeting Closed: 11.40 am
Meeting Facilitator: Tim Abrahams - Ministerial and Parliamentary Services
Department of Finance (Finance)

Present:

- Kate Jenkins
- Kate Lee
- Bryden Toner, Office of Dr Mike Freelander MP
- Thomas Moorhead, Office of Senator the Hon Kim Carr
- Alison Byrnes, Office of the Hon Sharon Bird MP
- Georgia Goldsworthy, Office of the Hon Anthony Albanese MP
- Katherine Gurbiel, Office of Ms Madeleine King MP
- Colin Lees, Office of Adam Bandt MP
- David Mejia-Canales, Office of Senator Lidia Thorpe
- Michelle Hutchinson, Office of the Special Minister of State
- David De Silva, Ministerial and Parliamentary Services
- Tim Abrahams, Ministerial and Parliamentary Services
- Jillian Flinders, Ministerial and Parliamentary Services
- Georgia Weichert, Ministerial and Parliamentary Services
- Ellen Laenen, Ministerial and Parliamentary Services
- David Sandbach, Ministerial and Parliamentary Services

Apologies: Apologies have been received from Kate Sutherland, office of Ms Lisa Chesters MP, and Nicole Arnold, office of Trent Zimmerman MP.

Agenda Item 1 – Welcome

- Mr Abrahams welcomed representatives to the briefing and delivered the acknowledgement of Country.

Agenda Item 2 – Presentation from Ms Jenkins

- Ms Jenkins provided an overview of the findings and recommendations of the recent Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces (the Report) and encouraged representatives to review the Report if they have not yet done so.
- The summary included:
 - an overview of the review process from its announcement on 5 March 2021 to the Report to the Government by 30 November 2021
 - an outline of the demographics of the participants and organisations who contributed to the review
 - key drivers and risk factors identified such as workplace politics, social conditions, long and irregular hours, varying employment structures and conditions
 - acknowledgement of the WHS laws and various policies and how they apply

- an overview of statistics relating to instances and trends of bullying, sexual harassment and sexual assault in Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces.
- Ms Jenkins highlighted five shifts in the framework for action and noted key recommendations, in particular:
 - the establishment of a leadership taskforce with shared accountability
 - ensuring diversity, equality and inclusion through physical infrastructure and child care systems
 - the need for more tailored HR focus and support such as policies and procedures in relation to performance management, job descriptions, misconduct, professional development pathways, and advice systems for termination delivered through an independent office
 - the establishment of codes of conduct for both Parliamentarians and MOP(S) Act employees as well as a guideline that outlines a consistent standard of behaviour across all parliamentary workplaces
 - a new independent parliamentary standards committee.
- Ms Jenkins spoke to the phases of implementation of the recommendations over the next 24 months advising that a particular priority is to ensure the incoming cohort of Parliamentarians following the election receive induction and support to achieve targets relating to ensuring a safe and healthy workplace.
- Mr Toner queried what steps would be undertaken to ensure recommendations under diversity, equality and inclusion are addressed, specifically in relation to the pay gap. Ms Jenkins noted that it should be addressed through applying principles of 'best practice' and actions should be put in place. Discussions are required to ensure that the workplace is welcoming. Targets should be set, actions implemented, and outcomes reported for accountability in relation to all aspects of diversity and inclusion, not just gender balance.
- Mr Toner also queried the timing for the establishment and operation of the OPSC noting that it will require legislative reform. Ms Jenkins advised there was no specific deadline however it is recommended to occur within the vicinity of 6-12 months.
- Mr Moorhead and Ms Goldsworthy queried how the OPSC would be modeled in terms of design structure and staffing resources. Ms Jenkins advised that the Report considered all options and recommended a similar model to the PBO. Ms Jenkins commented that it needs to understand how Parliament operates, how working within Parliament operates, and is trusted as safe, secure and independent. Staffing will be drawn from HR and Learning and Development backgrounds, likely sourced from both within Finance and externally. Ms Jenkins further advised that the OPSC will have a consultative committee and will report to officers and work closely with Parliament.

Agenda Item 3 – Close

- Mr Abrahams thanked Ms Jenkins, Ms Lee and representatives of the ECG and WHS Committee for their participation and closed the meeting.