

3 May 2021

Mr David Shoebridge
Committee Chair
Public Accountability Committee
NSW Legislative Council

Via email: public.accountability@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Mr Shoebridge

Request for Documents – Core Integrity bushfire grant programs

I refer to your letter dated 27 April 2021 requesting the Department of Customer Service (DCS) to provide the following documents in its possession, custody or control by 11.00am Tuesday, May 2021:

“All documents created by, sent to or received from Core Integrity relating to:

- a) the \$10,000 NSW Small Business Bushfire Support Grant,
- b) the \$50,000 NSW Small Business and Non-Profit Organisation Grants,
- c) the \$75,000 Emergency Bushfire Response in Primary Industries Grants Program in NSW, and
- d) any other grant administered in whole or in part by the Department of Customer Service.
(PAC request)”

The Secretary has asked me to respond on her behalf.

DCS has conducted a preliminary assessment of the documents that fall under this request and has begun collating documents. However, given the large number of documents that are likely fall within the request and the nature of those documents, DCS is not able to provide all those documents within the short timeframe provided.

To provide some context, I note:

- Core Integrity Solutions Pty Ltd (Core Integrity) was initially engaged to provide services to DCS from 12 - 18 May 2020.
- The arrangement was extended to provide further services from 19 May 2020 – 3 June 2020.
- Following a competitive Request for Quote process, Core Integrity was then engaged by DCS to perform investigative services related to the Service NSW Grant Administration Taskforce until 31 December 2020. This work included the formation of a Strategic Investigations Unit (SIU) in DCS.
- The contract with Core Integrity contemplated that the work of the SIU would be transitioned to an internal team in Service NSW.

- Transition of case files to the Service NSW internal team commenced in January 2021 and was completed in February 2021.
- The Service NSW internal team has continued to work on the investigations.

It is estimated that Core Integrity and Service NSW have investigated approximately 3,000 cases and have accumulated a significant volume of documents.

Many of the documents are likely to contain personal information and commercial-in-confidence information. Such information may need to be redacted from the documents. It is also expected that a claim for privilege may be available for some documents.

DCS is happy to work with the Public Accountability Committee (PAC) to prioritise the return of the documents to facilitate the conduct of the inquiry into the integrity, efficacy and value for money of NSW Government grant programs.

Identifying, collating and categorising the relevant documents will be a time and resource intensive task. It would be very helpful, and an efficient use of public resources, if PAC could provide DCS with more details of the sort of documents they are seeking, allow DCS to provide documents in tranches and allow an extension of the timeframe within which to provide the documents.

I note that your request is only addressed to DCS. Service NSW is an Executive Agency related to DCS but does not form part of DCS. Could you please advise whether you would also like Service NSW to conduct searches and identify any documents that would fall into the categories set out in your letter.

Yours sincerely

General Counsel, Department of Customer Service