

# **Oversight of the Queensland Family and Child Commission**

**Report No. 16, 56th Parliament**

**Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee**

**July 2018**

## **Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee**

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## Abbreviations

Act	<i>Family and Child Commission Act 2014</i>
Annual Report	Queensland Family and Child Commission Annual Report 2016-17
Commissioner	Mr Phillip Brooks
committee	Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee
DJAG	Department of Justice and Attorney General
Principal Commissioner	Ms Cheryl Vardon
<i>Recommendation 28 Supplementary Review report</i>	<i>Recommendation 28 Supplementary Review: A report on information sharing to enhance the safety of children in regulated home-based services</i>
Royal Commission	Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse
QCPCOI	Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry
QFCC	Queensland Family and Child Commission
SCAN	suspected child abuse and neglect
SO	Standing Orders
<i>When a child is missing report</i>	<i>When a child is missing: Remembering Tiahleigh—A report into Queensland’s children missing from out-of-home care</i>

## Chair's foreword

The Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee (committee) has oversight responsibilities for the Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC). This report provides information regarding the performance by the QFCC of its functions under the *Family and Child Commission Act 2014*.

The committee met with Ms Cheryl Vardon, the Principal Commissioner of the QFCC and Mr Phillip Brooks, Commissioner of the QFCC on 11 June 2018. The committee also reviewed the QFCC's Annual Report 2016-17 (Annual Report) which was tabled on 29 September 2017.

On behalf of the committee, I thank the staff of the QFCC who assisted the committee throughout the course of its oversight of the QFCC for the 2016-17 financial year period. I also thank the Parliamentary Service staff.

I commend this report to the House.



Peter Russo MP  
**Chair**

## Recommendation

The committee recommends the House notes the contents of this report.

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## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 This report

The committee prepared this report as part of its statutory oversight responsibility for the QFCC, with primary focus on the 2016-17 financial year.

### 1.2 Role of the committee

The committee is a portfolio committee of the Legislative Assembly which commenced on 15 February 2018 under the *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001* and the Standing Rules and Orders of the Legislative Assembly.<sup>1</sup>

The committee's primary areas of responsibility include:

- Justice and Attorney-General
- Police and Corrective Services, and
- Fire and Emergency Services.

The committee also has oversight responsibilities for the:

- Electoral Commissioner
- Information Commissioner
- Ombudsman, and
- QFCC.

### 1.3 Purpose and functions of the QFCC

The *Family and Child Commission Act 2014* (the Act) established the QFCC on 1 July 2014.

The purpose of the QFCC is to promote the safety, wellbeing and best interests of children and young people and improve the child protection system. The Act sets out the functions of the QFCC which include:

- oversight of the child protection system
- promotion and advocacy regarding the responsibilities of families to protect and care for, and the safety and wellbeing of, children and young people particularly those in the child protection or youth justice system
- to provide research, assistance, capacity building and leadership for agencies involved in the child protection system
- to review, analyse and evaluate systemic policies and practices relevant to the child protection system
- to inform and educate the community, and
- to report to the Minister about matters relating to its functions.<sup>2</sup>

The Act also sets out the ways in which commissioners are to perform functions, including:

- (a) engaging with, and taking into consideration, the views of children, young people and their families

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<sup>1</sup> *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001*, section 88 and Standing Order 194.

<sup>2</sup> *Family and Child Commission Act 2014*, s 9.

- (b) ensuring the interests of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders are adequately and appropriately represented
- (c) respecting and promoting the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities to protect and care for their children and young people
- (d) being sensitive to the ethnic or cultural identity and values of children, young people and their families
- (e) consulting with relevant agencies and advocacy entities, and
- (f) working cooperatively with relevant agencies and helping build their capacity to meet the needs of children, young people and their families.<sup>3</sup>

#### **1.4 Committee's responsibilities regarding the QFCC**

Schedule 6 of the Standing Orders (SO) provides that the committee has oversight responsibility for the QFCC. The Act is silent on the role and functions of the committee.

Under SO 194A the committee's oversight responsibilities with respect to the QFCC are to:

- (a) monitor and review its performance of its functions
- (b) report to the Legislative Assembly on any matter concerning the QFCC, the QFCC's functions or the performance of the QFCC's functions the committee considers should be drawn to its attention
- (c) examine the QFCC's annual report tabled in the Legislative Assembly, and comment, if appropriate, on any aspect of the report, and
- (d) report to the Legislative Assembly on any changes to the functions, structures and procedures of the QFCC, the committee considers desirable for the more effective operation of the QFCC or the Act.

#### **1.5 Commissioners**

The Act provides that there are to be two commissioners for the QFCC. One of the commissioners is to be appointed as a Principal Commissioner and at least one person who acts as a commissioner must be an Aboriginal person or a Torres Strait Islander.<sup>4</sup> The Act provides that a commissioner may hold office for a term of not more than three years.<sup>5</sup>

The Commissioners are subject to the direction of the Minister.<sup>6</sup> Their functions include:

- ensuring the QFCC performs its functions effectively and efficiently, and
- making recommendations to the Minister about the performance or functions of the QFCC or the commissioners or that assist the Minister in the administration of the Act.<sup>7</sup>

The Principal Commissioner has additional functions to control the QFCC, and to record, analyse, research and report on information about child deaths.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Family and Child Commission Act 2014*, s 23.

<sup>4</sup> *Family and Child Commission Act 2014*, s 11.

<sup>5</sup> *Family and Child Commission Act 2014*, s 13.

<sup>6</sup> *Family and Child Commission Act 2014*, s 22.

<sup>7</sup> *Family and Child Commission Act 2014*, s 18.

<sup>8</sup> *Family and Child Commission Act 2014*, s 19.



Ms Cheryl Vardon was appointed as Principal Commissioner in October 2015. Mr Phillip Brooks was appointed in October 2017 as Commissioner. Mr Brooks is a descendant of the Bidjara Tribe, the Kairi Tribe, and the Ducabrook clan located in Springsure, central Queensland.<sup>9</sup>

## **1.6 The committee's process**

In conducting its oversight functions of the QFCC, the committee adopted the following process:

- examined the Annual Report (see section 2)
- provided questions on notice to the QFCC
- received and published the QFCC's response to the questions on notice, and
- held a public meeting with the QFCC (see section 3).

The committee provided questions on notice to the QFCC on 1 May 2018. The responses, received on 1 June 2018, are published on the committee's webpage.

The committee held a public hearing on 11 June 2018 with Ms Vardon and Mr Brooks.

The transcript of that hearing is also available on the committee's webpage.

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<sup>9</sup> Queensland Family and Child Commission, Response to questions on notice dated 1 June 2018, p 8.

## 2 Review of Annual Report 2016-2017

This section highlights the key aspects of the Annual Report examined by the committee together with the relevant responses from the QFCC to questions on notice concerning the Annual Report and related matters.

### 2.1 Overview

The Annual Report was tabled on 29 September 2017.

The Annual Report assessed the Office's financial and non-financial performance against the objectives set out in the 2015-19 Strategic Plan and the 2016-17 Service Delivery Statements. The Annual Report meets reporting obligations under the Act and the *Financial Accountability Act 2009* and highlights key achievements of the Office.<sup>10</sup>

### 2.2 Commissioner's Report

In her report, the Principal Commissioner noted, among other things, that the QFCC:

- has increased its focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island children and families
- has done a great deal of work in breaking down barriers to employment, in determining priorities for services and in designing community-based approaches to meeting challenges and making the most of opportunities, and
- has been working with its partners, within and outside government, to deliver a range of initiatives aimed at helping and making changes for vulnerable children and their families, including the cyber-safety "Out of the Dark" project, the "Talking Families" campaign and a range of information kits, posters and other resources.<sup>11</sup>

### 2.3 Child protection reforms

The Annual Report also provided an update on the status of the implementation of the 10 QFCC-led recommendations from the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry (QCPCOI) – *Taking Responsibility: A Roadmap for Queensland Child Protection 2013*.<sup>12</sup> All of these 10 recommendations have either been delivered or are on track for delivery.<sup>13</sup>

The QFCC is also a joint leader for two of the actions stemming from the Queensland Government's May 17 report titled *Changing Tracks: An action plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families*. These actions are to:

- analyse current investment in sector capacity and workforce capability to help inform future investment to build the child and family sector, and
- to develop an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural capability strategy with mainstream child and family service organisations.<sup>14</sup>

The QFCC made two submissions to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (Royal Commission). In December 2016, the Principal Commissioner gave evidence at the Royal Commission in relation to online safety, reporting of child harm and special measures for child witnesses in criminal justice proceedings.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Annual Report, inside cover page.

<sup>11</sup> Annual Report, p 1.

<sup>12</sup> The QFCC was established in 1 July 2014 as a result of the Queensland Government's response to this report, Annual Report, pp 2 and 5.

<sup>13</sup> Annual Report, p 5.

<sup>14</sup> Annual Report, p 5.

<sup>15</sup> Annual Report, p 7.

The QFCC has also made two written submissions to Queensland Parliament in relation to the following legislation:

- Domestic and Family Violence and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016, and
- Bail (Domestic Violence) and Another Act Amendment Bill 2017.<sup>16</sup>

The QFCC also:

- provided a submission to the Queensland Law Reform Commission on a Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme
- published research on help-seeking behaviour in the context of domestic violence, with a focus on risk and protective factors in Indigenous families
- implemented a policy to support employees experiencing domestic and family violence, and
- rolled out a *Recognise, Respond, Refer: Domestic Violence and the Workplace* online training course for all staff.<sup>17</sup>

Additionally, the QFCC has three actions in the Queensland Mental Health Commission's *Queensland Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol Strategic Plan 2014–2019* and subsequent action plans.<sup>18</sup>

## 2.4 Systems reviews

During 2016-17, the QFCC completed and progressed a number of system's reviews, including:

- *When a child is missing: Remembering Tiahleigh—A report into Queensland's children missing from out-of-home care (When a child is missing report)*

This report was released on 11 July 2016 following the death of Tiahleigh Palmer. The review identified a number of system inadequacies and made 29 recommendations.

In a response to a question on notice in this regard, the Principal Commissioner also provided the following additional information to the committee:

*Agencies have reported that all 29 recommendations made in the When a Child is Missing: Remembering Tiahleigh report have been delivered. The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) has undertaken to provide ongoing oversight of the transition of these recommendations into agency practice. The QFCC is currently undertaking a review of how the changes introduced by this report are functioning and to identify systemic improvements in responses to children missing from out-of-home care in the two years since the report was issued.*

*This review is expected to be completed in the second half of 2018.*<sup>19</sup>

- *Recommendation 28 Supplementary Review: A report on information sharing to enhance the safety of children in regulated home-based services (Recommendation 28 Supplementary Review report)*

This report was the result of a supplementary review undertaken by the QFCC as a result of recommendation 28 of the *When a child is missing* report. The *Recommendation 28: Supplementary Review* report was released on 20 February 2017 and made 17 recommendations. Of the 17 recommendations, the Principal Commissioner advised that two had been completed and the remaining 15 recommendations had commenced.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Annual Report, p 7.

<sup>17</sup> Annual Report, p 7.

<sup>18</sup> Annual Report, p 7.

<sup>19</sup> Letter dated 1 June 2018 in response to Questions on Notice from the QFCC to the committee, p 1.

<sup>20</sup> Letter dated 1 June 2018 in response to Questions on Notice from the QFCC to the committee, p 2.

- *A systems review of individual agency findings following the death of a child*

The QFCC prepared a report at the request of the Premier following the death of Mason Jet Lee. The report, *A systems review of individual agency findings following the death of a child*, was released on 10 April 2017 with one recommendation, being to establish a contemporary child death model for Queensland.

The Principal Commissioner advised the committee that this report is currently with the Government for consideration.<sup>21</sup>

The QFCC also provided a further report to the Government in September 2017 which outlined an implementation and transition proposal for a revised external and independent model.<sup>22</sup>

- *Blue card and foster care review*

In September 2016, the Premier asked the QFCC to lead a comprehensive examination of the blue card and foster care systems in Queensland to identify any improvements that were required. The review examined current legislative frameworks and operational practices to identify any gaps and inefficiencies in meeting the safety needs of children.

On 7 September 2018, the Premier tabled the following QFCC reports in Parliament:

- *Review of the Blue Card system* report which included 81 recommendations
- *Review of the Foster Card system* report which included 42 recommendations, and
- *Report on Terms of Reference 5: Strengthening Capacity Across Queensland's Child Protection System*

The QFCC advised the committee that:

*Responsibility for the implementation of the Blue Card Services Review sits with the Department of Justice and Attorney General (DJAG). As per recommendation 78 of the review, DJAG has established a reference group comprising of government and non-government members, including the Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC). This group is responsible for overseeing the progress of the recommendation.*<sup>23</sup>

In relation to the 42 recommendations of the *Review of the Foster Care system* report, the QFCC further advised the committee that:

*Partner agencies have commenced work on implementing half of the 42 recommendations made in the Review of the Foster Care system, including five recommendations which have been completed by the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women.*

*The remaining recommendations have a planned commencement and implementation plan pending the release of the Queensland government response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sex Abuse recommendations. This is in accordance with recommendation 42 of the Review of the Foster Care system which requires implementing agency plans to be revised on the release of the final report of the Royal Commission.*

*As per recommendation 42 of the Review of the Foster Care system, the QFCC has established the QFCC Reviews Strategic Oversight Group to oversee the ongoing implementation of all recommendations from the Review of the Foster Care system*

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<sup>21</sup> Letter dated 1 June 2018 in response to Questions on Notice from the QFCC to the committee, p 3.

<sup>22</sup> Letter dated 1 June 2018 in response to Questions on Notice from the QFCC to the committee, p 3.

<sup>23</sup> Letter dated 1 June 2018 in response to Questions on Notice from the QFCC to the committee, p 4.

*report. This group meets quarterly and has senior representatives from all implementing agencies.*<sup>24</sup>

- **Suspected child abuse and neglect (SCAN) team system review**

The QFCC has been asked to lead a system and practice review of the suspected child abuse and neglect (SCAN) team system. In addition, in December 2016, the Child Protection Reform Leaders Group endorsed a proposal for the QFCC to facilitate the development of options for a contemporary model of information sharing.

The Annual Report noted that consultation had identified that a focus shift from the SCAN team system to a contemporary model for information sharing was required. Feedback was being sought with the aim being to pilot a conceptual model in 2017-18.<sup>25</sup>

The QFCC provided the following status report in response to a question on notice from the committee:

*The Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect (SCAN) Team System Review commenced in February 2017. Professor Dorothy Scott from ACIL Allen Consulting was engaged to undertake the review. Oversight was provided by a Senior Executive Advisory Group, with membership comprising representatives from seven government agencies.*

*The review confirmed the fundamental role of the SCAN team system and considered a number of alternative systems to support collaboration. A report, endorsed by the Senior Executive Advisory Group, was provided to the QFCC in July 2017. It was agreed that the existing model was adequate with the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women to retain responsibility for the SCAN team system.*

*A state wide communique was provided to all agencies to forward to their staff outlining the review process and next steps. The final report was provided to Child Safety as the lead agency with responsibility for continuous improvement in the system.*<sup>26</sup>

## **2.5 Queensland's performance in achieving state and national protection goals**

The Act requires the QFCC to include information on the following in its Annual Report:

- state and national goals relating to the child protection system
- Queensland's performance over time in comparison to other jurisdictions, and
- Queensland's progress in reducing the number of, and improving the outcomes for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the child protection system.

Appendix D of the Annual Report sets out an overview of Queensland's performance in relation to these three areas.<sup>27</sup>

## **2.6 Policy Advice**

The QFCC provided advice and recommendations to parliamentary committees and to other agencies through 24 submissions. These included submissions on a number of proposed Bills, including the:

- Youth Justice and Other Legislation (Inclusion of 17 year-old Persons) Amendment Bill 2016
- Public Health (Medicinal Cannabis) Bill 2016
- Limitations of Actions (Institutional Child Sexual Abuse) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016

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<sup>24</sup> Letter dated 1 June 2018 in response to Questions on Notice from the QFCC to the committee, p 4.

<sup>25</sup> Annual Report, pp 11-12.

<sup>26</sup> Letter dated 1 June 2018 in response to Questions on Notice from the QFCC to the committee, p 5.

<sup>27</sup> Annual Report, p 12.

- Adoption and Other Legislation Bill 2016
- Health (Abortion Law Reform) Amendment Bill 2016
- Child Protection (Mandatory Reporting—Mason’s Law) Amendment Bill 2016
- Criminal Code Amendment (Protecting Minors Online) Bill 2017
- Domestic and Family Violence and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2017, and
- Bail (Domestic Violence) and Another Act Amendment Bill 2017.<sup>28</sup>

The QFCC also provided:

- evidence, through public hearings and submissions, on out-of-home care and criminal justice to the Royal Commission
- a submission to the Queensland Law Reform Commission on a domestic violence disclosure scheme
- advice and recommendations on a Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services options paper—*The next chapter in child protection legislation in Queensland*
- advice and recommendations to the DJAG on sexual abuse civil litigation and redress, and
- a submission to the Queensland Mental Health Commission on its discussion paper, *A Renewed Plan for Queensland: Reviewing the Queensland Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol Strategic Plan 2014–2019 to Improve Mental Health and Wellbeing*.<sup>29</sup>

## 2.7 Research

The QFCC also has responsibility for developing and co-ordinating a research program to inform policy and practice in the child protection system. The Annual Report details the research agenda and initiatives for QFCC.<sup>30</sup>

In relation to research plans of the QFCC, the committee was advised:

*The QFCC will continue to translate research knowledge into accessible information for policy makers and practitioners to assist them in helping vulnerable Queensland children and families. The QFCC’s Knowledge and Resource Hub will continue to provide easy access to important research papers and reports. Additionally, we will continue to conduct Research forums, where influential government and non-government stakeholders attend to hear key researchers present on their research findings, including regional research roundtables, where smaller groups explore place-based solutions to issues inspired by the latest research.*<sup>31</sup>

## 2.8 Child Death Prevention

The QFCC also has responsibility for maintaining a register of child deaths in Queensland, identifying patterns or trends and reporting annually. The QFCC is also responsible for making data held in the register available for research, public education, policy development and program design.<sup>32</sup>

In relation to child death prevention, the QFCC advised the committee:

*In the majority of fatal assault and neglect deaths, the perpetrator was a member of the child’s family. This points to focussing prevention efforts on responses to child abuse and neglect and domestic and family violence.*<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Annual Report, pp 14-15.

<sup>29</sup> Annual Report, p 15.

<sup>30</sup> Annual Report, pp 17-19.

<sup>31</sup> Letter dated 1 June 2018 in response to Questions on Notice from the QFCC to the committee, p 11.

<sup>32</sup> Annual Report, p 19.

<sup>33</sup> Letter dated 1 June 2018 in response to Questions on Notice from the QFCC to the committee, p 7.

In relation to the new child death register, the QFCC advised the committee:

*In 2018-19 the QFCC will develop a new child death register to replace the existing register through capital approved by the Government. The Child Death Register provides researchers and government agencies with a valuable, contemporary evidence base that is used to develop safety and injury prevention activities and also monitor the effectiveness of prevention activities.*<sup>34</sup>

## **2.9 Partnering and engagement**

The QFCC Advisory Council provides guidance on the work of the QFCC and expert insight into the issues affecting children, families and the sector. It met four times in 2016-17. An independent review of the Advisory Council was recently completed. The review report is currently being considered.<sup>35</sup>

The Community Partnership Group was established with peak body organisations to help the QFCC to improve the child protection system. This group met four times in 2016-17.<sup>36</sup>

## **2.10 Education**

In 2016, the QFCC conducted an online survey completed by 200 stakeholders in the child and family support sector to identify why families would or would not seek out or take up support services. The survey identified that the key barriers for seeking help included the stigma involved and the fear of being judged or having children removed. The survey also identified concerns about access to services especially for families with special needs, those who are culturally and linguistically diverse and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. The QFCC undertook a *Talking Families* advertising campaign during December 2016 to April 2017 focussing on the concept that “one conversation or service can make a difference”. The QFCC also produced a range of information resources and practice tools on child protection during 2016-17.<sup>37</sup>

## **2.11 Supporting First Australians**

During 2016-17, the QFCC was involved in a number of activities aimed at improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island families and young people, including a statewide listening tour, community engagements and regional visits. One of the areas of focus for the QFCC during the last financial year involved conducting regional meetings about the blue card review and workshops to explain the blue card and Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal processes. The QFCC also engaged with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families as part of its mandate to monitor progress towards reducing Indigenous overrepresentation in the child protection system. The QFCC commissioned research to better understand help-seeking behaviour in the context of domestic violence, with a focus on risk and protective factors in Indigenous families. The QFCC also conducted a research forum relating specifically to the safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.<sup>38</sup>

## **2.12 Budgetary matters**

The QFCC advised the committee of the following in relation to a question on notice regarding budgetary matters:

*The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) was established on 1 July 2014 with a small core budget (\$8.534 million) and limited-life funding (\$2 million) provided as an outcome of the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry (QCPCOI). Additional funding (core and*

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<sup>34</sup> Letter dated 1 June 2018 in response to Questions on Notice from the QFCC to the committee, p 11.

<sup>35</sup> Annual Report, pp 25-26.

<sup>36</sup> Annual Report, p 27.

<sup>37</sup> Annual Report, pp 38-41.

<sup>38</sup> Annual Report, pp 42-46.

*limited-life) has been provided over recent years to support the QFCC to deliver its broad legislative mandate.*

*The QFCC's budget is a modest investment to ensure that the almost \$1 billion spent on child protection and family support services each year is delivering the desired social and economic benefits for Queensland. The QFCC's budget represents less than \$12 per child living in Queensland, and just 1.6% of the funds allocated to child and family support each year.*

*The QFCC's total funding for 2017-18 is \$12.893 million. This included \$700,000 one-off CBRC funding, a \$342,000 deferral from the prior year and a one-off \$50,000 injection from the Department of Justice and the Attorney-General to conduct a Youth Detention project.*

*The QFCC's budget for 2018-19 is expected to be less than \$12 million. The reduction is primarily due to the cessation of \$1.1 million limited-life funding. The State budget will be handed down on 12 June 2018.*

*An additional \$2.312 million (QCPCOI related) funding ceases at the end of 2018-19, which will result in a reduction of seven temporary Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff.<sup>39</sup>*

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<sup>39</sup> Letter dated 1 June 2018 in response to Questions on Notice from the QFCC to the committee, p 9.



### 3 Oversight meeting with the QFCC

In her opening statement, the Principal Commissioner noted how the remit of the QFCC relates to all children in Queensland:

*One point I would like to set out at the beginning is that the Queensland Family and Child Commission promotes the safety, wellbeing and best interests of all children and young people in Queensland. That is quite significant. Of course, we focus on vulnerable children as a priority and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, but our remit is for all children. There are something like over one million children and young people in Queensland aged between zero and 18 years, which is a figure that we hold in our heads on a daily basis. That is our privilege and our responsibility. We do this by identifying and advocating for improvements to the child and family support system. We are quite unique in that.<sup>40</sup>*

The Principal Commissioner also noted another unique aspect of the QFCC's role:

*The other unique part about our remit is that we do not deal with concerns about individual children. We focus on systems—how they interact and how children can be harmed if systems fail them. We are quite unique in our evidence based approach and customer focused model. We follow through on collaboration with our stakeholders—children, families, the child and family non-government sector and government departments—and we recommend solutions for some of the most sensitive, critical and complex issues, which no single department could do alone. We do that through the good relationships that we have established right across government. Because of the work of the QFCC over recent years, I think we have had a significant impact on the safety and wellbeing of children in Queensland.<sup>41</sup>*

The Principal Commissioner observed:

*The key areas of focus are improving outcomes for all Queensland children; systemic oversight and evaluation; economic growth through building a strong and sustainable non-government sector and through keeping children safe and well.<sup>42</sup>*

The Principal Commissioner discussed how the QFCC has delivered at least five systemic reviews at the Palaszczuk government's request which have resulted in a total 184 recommendations that have all been accepted by the government.<sup>43</sup> A common finding in the reviews was the need for an improvement in the manner in which information is shared across government and non-government agencies. In this regard, the Principal Commissioner informed the committee about how the "Our Child" model has been developed:

*The 'Our Child' model, as it is called, was developed as an information-sharing portal designed to quickly and easily provide information and details about children in out-of-home care who have been reported missing. Information in this new database—and it sounds prosaic, but actually it is a big breakthrough—has been shared between Child Safety, Education and the Queensland Police Service since March this year. That simply did not happen previously without manual counts and without painstaking work.<sup>44</sup>*

In this regard, the Principal Commissioner noted that information sharing will be expanded early next year to include the Office of the Public Guardian, Queensland Health and Youth Justice.

<sup>40</sup> Public meeting transcript, Brisbane, 11 June 2018, p 1.

<sup>41</sup> Public meeting transcript, Brisbane, 11 June 2018, p 2.

<sup>42</sup> Public meeting transcript, Brisbane, 11 June 2018, p 2.

<sup>43</sup> Public meeting transcript, Brisbane, 11 June 2018, p 2.

<sup>44</sup> Public meeting transcript, Brisbane, 11 June 2018, p 2.

The QFCC is also leading an early evaluation of the child protection reforms following from the 2013 QCPCOI. Another significant part of the QFCC's work involves community education, for example, the "Seconds Count" initiative relating to keeping children safe around water, and the "Talking Families" campaign which involves helping parents and carers to seek early support before the pressure of parenting becomes too much.<sup>45</sup>

Questions from the committee during the public hearing focused on:

- the QFCC's undertaking to support parents in positive parenting practices across Queensland
- progress on the implementation of recommendations from the *When a child is missing* report and the *Recommendation 28 Supplementary Review* report
- whether the implementation of any of the recommendations from the *When a child is missing* report concerning the blue card system may have prevented the tragic outcome involving Tiahleigh Palmer
- the role of the QFCC during the Royal Commission
- the work being undertaken by the QFCC in respect of cyberbullying
- the work being undertaken by the QFCC around youth suicide and outreach in the community together with the need for follow-up after consultations for suicide involving young people, and
- a discussion of emerging trends with regard to children using devices and brain development.<sup>46</sup>

#### 4 Committee comment

The committee wishes to congratulate the Principal Commissioner, Commissioner and staff on their overall performance in 2016-17, especially given the extremely challenging issues being examined by the QFCC.

The committee also recognises the enormous body of work generated by the QFCC during the last financial year in the context of the QFCC's focus on the safety, wellbeing and best interests of all children and young people in Queensland.

Additionally, in the wake of the tragic deaths of Tiahleigh Palmer and Mason Jet Lee, the committee encourages the QFCC to continue with its important work pursuing improvements to the child protection system to make it safer for all of Queensland's children and young people.

In this regard, the committee appreciates the thoroughness of each of the systems reviews prepared by the QFCC during 2016-17. The committee also acknowledges that these reviews each involve key recommendations that upon implementation will have the potential to enhance the safety of children and young people throughout Queensland.

<b>Recommendation</b>
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The committee recommends the House notes the contents of this report.
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<sup>45</sup> Public meeting transcript, Brisbane, 11 June 2018, pp 2-3.

<sup>46</sup> Public meeting transcript, Brisbane, 11 June 2018, pp 3-8.

## **Appendix A – Officials at public meeting**

Queensland Family and Child Commission

- Ms Cheryl Vardon, Principal Commissioner
- Mr Phillip Brooks, Commissioner