

Public Trustee of SA lied to clients and inquiry finds

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PUBLIC Trustee staff failed to pay client bills on time, denied a dying man extra pocket money and lied to families about their accounts, an inquiry has found.

The inquiry into the Office of the Public Trustee, tabled in Parliament yesterday, also found staff are bullied and sometimes ignore important work.

In one case recounted to the inquiry a man with six weeks to live was denied extra pocket money for a trip to Victor Harbor even though there was \$10,000 in his account.

He was told the money would be needed for funeral costs.

In other cases, families were told there was no money left in their accounts when later investigations found up to \$20,000.

The report says "significant changes must be made" to improve the service provided to clients and make 13 recommendations.

These include conducting client satisfaction surveys, hiring more staff to improve customer service, sending three-monthly financial statements to clients and drafting guidelines to allow clients to use their savings when "deemed appropriate".

It also calls for a follow-up inquiry in two years.

Other evidence given to the inquiry included:

LONG delays returning phone calls and sometimes no response at all.

FAILURE to pay bills for some clients resulting in late fees and.

STAFF putting correspondence in the bin or hiding "difficult" correspondence in drawers.

Opposition Finance spokesman Rob Lucas said all members of the review committee were "appalled" by the evidence.

"The committee received shocking evidence of bullying and mistreatment of staff by other staff which had not been properly managed," he said.

"Complaints made by staff covered many issues including the 'bizarre sexual proclivities' of one manager."

Public Trustee Mark Bodycoat told the inquiry changes were already being made.

Attorney-General Michael Atkinson said the new Public Trustee had "improved customer relations and also workplace relations in the Office".

"Public Trustee has already carried out some of the recommendations of the parliamentary inquiry," he said.