

CITY BEAT

# Public Trustee employees claim they have been left in the dark about plans for sweeping change

A union is now going in to bat for Public Trustee workers who claim they can't get any straight answers about a dramatic shake-up of the deeply-troubled agency.

Anthony Marx, The Courier-Mail

Subscriber only | February 18, 2020 6:50am



Acting Public Trustee Samay Zhouand.

## IN THE DARK

The deeply-troubled Public Trustee of Queensland has long been screaming out for reform.

But now that sweeping changes are imminent, there's a truckload of unhappiness spilling forth from aggrieved staffers in the Brisbane headquarters and across the state.

Employees allege they have been largely kept in the dark about the proposed organisational shake-up unveiled this month.

Their union is now involved, with membership increasing dramatically as some insiders suggest industrial action is a distinct possibility.

All this comes after City Beat spies report that internal units at the PT have recently had budgets slashed and been told to halt any spending on "hardware" unless it's essential.

[Public Trustee turmoil continues with latest sacking](#)

[Major shake-up inside the Public Trustee](#)

[Trustee 'burned through parents' savings'](#)

## SEEKING ANSWERS

Acting Trustee Samay Zhouand, who took the helm last year after the ouster of his longstanding predecessor Peter Carne, hired external consulting outfit Bushell & Cornish to review the agency and their report lobbed just before Christmas.



Acting Public Trustee Samay Zhouand

In a series of meetings with workers in the past few weeks, PT top guns showed employees diagrams of the changes but gave them no copies and forbade them from making their own.

The PT then demanded that any feedback should be submitted in less than a week for the scheme, which is allegedly focused on beefing up frontline services.

But, if that's the case, why have at least four new senior management positions been created at the same time that a slew of temporary staff contractors were let go in late December? What's the business case for the upheaval?

[Public Trustee project blows out to \\$65m](#)

[‘Energetic’ new leader poached from Premier’s office](#)

[‘Toxic’ agency shake-up after mystery suspension](#)

Staffers claim these and other such questions have gone unanswered.

Among the changes, we understand, is the abolition of what's called “The Office of the Official Solicitor,” which employs about 30 legal eagles, quite a few of whom have now joined the union to protect their interests.

Meanwhile, a “Transformation Team” comprised of Treasury operatives appointed by Zhouand has already set up shop in the PT's head office on Queen Street to oversee the reorganisation.

That's despite a consultation process now under way, making quite a few cynical operatives wonder whether their feedback will carry any weight at all.

## LACK OF TRANSPARENCY

To gain a bit more clarity and certainty from the PT, Together union lead organiser Sean Waugh has submitted a detailed list of nearly 30 questions for management after winning an extension of time for the feedback.

He's hoping to get some answers this week and they can't come soon enough.

A recent meeting of members saw them vote unanimously that the PT's response to questions so far has been “inadequate”.

Waugh noted in an email that members have “expressed disappointment at the lack of transparency, contradictory information and evasive answers to the important questions tabled”.

“There is no doubt...that management have created more questions than answers and we cannot progress until further information is provided,” he said.

We hear that Zhouand hopes to have all these changes bedded down by June 30, well ahead of the state election in October. But that seems like an awfully ambitious target for an organisation with 600-plus staff.

PT spin doctors declined to respond to a list of specific questions lobbed by City Beat yesterday.

Instead, we got this:

“The Public Trustee puts customers at the centre of all that we do, and we are always looking at ways to improve our service delivery. This is particularly important as we seek to deliver on our human rights obligations.

“The proposed realignment is being undertaken in consultation with our staff. Their views will be important in shaping our final proposal. There are no redundancies expected as part of this process.”