

Communication the biggest problem for QLD Trustee and Guardian, says public advocate



The customer advocate has handed down a review into the QLD Trustee and Guardian system. (AAP Image/Dan Peled)

The Public Trustee of Queensland's customer advocate has tabled a review into the state's trustee and guardian system, following a [damning Four Corners report in 2022](#).

The customer advocate examined whether the Trustee and Guardian was meeting its legal and moral obligations to promote a "customer first" approach to guardianship.

They found a number of systemic failings within the organisation, including not creating important strategic decision-making frameworks, and guidelines not being enforced.

Customer advocate Melissa Rodgers said the organisation's biggest failing was communication with the people it is supposed to serve.

"The Public Trustee's customer service standards outline that voicemails should be returned in 3 business hours and emails responded to in 2 business days. There is currently no way to report on compliance with these standards," she said.

"It should also be noted that the three external reviews all mentioned that, while there was evidence of consultation with each customer on some decisions, there were other decisions that lacked similar evidence.

"Dissatisfaction with communication features in other internal analysis of complaints data."

Rodgers recommended a system for accessing information about assets managed by the trustee be considered, to give customers easier access to their own information, and improve their communication across the board.

While the report doesn't explicitly discuss the cases raised by *Four Corners*, at least one recommendation appears to be drawn directly from one of the case studies.

Public Trustee client Peter Ristic accused the organisation of charging him more than \$13,000 for realty fees on three empty lots of bushland with little commercial value.

As the result of an independent review by PwC in October 2022, the Public Trustee imposed a moratorium on charging realty fees.

Rodgers said it was unclear whether other customers had been charged like fees in the past, recommending the Trustee investigate further.

"The realty fees were a source of complaint in one of the external reviews, she said.

"Prior to the external reviews, the Public Trustee repaid one customer realty fees, which were high given the complexity of work undertaken.

"The external review also recommended that the Public Trustee inquire whether other customers were charged realty fees in **similar circumstances.**"