UNFORTUNATELY, IT’S BUSINESS AS USUAL

It’s business as usual for the Government in child protection.

While some internal departmental changes have been made, others are still not implemented, despite the findings and comments of the Coroner.

Only 29 of 41 recommendations from the Tolhurst report into Intake services have been implemented. Given the crisis in the Intake services, this is very concerning.

Despite additional budgetary funding last year, there are still not enough child protection workers in the Child Abuse Taskforce in Alice Springs. Last year, there were 3 workers: it’s the same this year. The lack of an increase is indicative of the inertia of this Government in the area of child protection.

The Minister has made a number of statements in media interviews, but it’s clear that he’s happy to talk the talk, not walk the walk.

For instance, he said in February that he had given a clear direction to the Acting Director of the department to “use a broom and get rid of people that [sic] can’t deliver”. When asked how many had been ‘got rid of’, he did not know. Once again, lots of words, but little action.

Mr Vatskalis also talked about the lack of leadership in the Department in an interview in February. Since then, a CEO of the department has not been appointed to replace the discredited David Ashbridge, nor has a new Executive Director of Families and Children come to replace Jenny Scott.

Given that the system is in crisis, it’s astonishing that these key appointments have not been made.

Further, it’s clear that the Minister does not understand the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry into the child protection system.

Mr Vatskalis was asked why a number of recommendations made by the Coroner regarding legislative change had not been implemented. The Minister said that the Inquiry would consider these matters, and he would wait for the now delayed report from the Inquiry.

In fact, the Board is not charged with assessing whether existing legislation is adequate to provide child protection services, or to protect children.

Waiting for the Inquiry to report in September is not an excuse for this Minister’s failure to act.

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