A consumer code for the new DOCS High Tech Call Centre

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The Council of Social Service of NSW (NCOSS) has asked Community Services Head, Carmel Niland, to establish a robust and enforceable Consumer Code of Practice for the Department's new Tele-service Centre (TSC).

The TSC, announced yesterday, aims to centralise all calls about child protection and family matters, from across NSW, through a new facility based at Parramatta.

"Handled soundly, the TSC can help DOCS better meet the above 70,000 reports, now being made to it each year," said NCOSS Director, Gary Moore.

"And from 1 July this year, new Child Protection laws will require much higher quality services to be provided, by DOCS, other Government agencies and community welfare organisations, to vulnerable children, young people and families in stress."

"An effective TSC could allow other resources to be used with more success. We have proposed a Consumer Code to DOCS for this new high tech facility."

"The Department must be able to answer calls concerning child protection matters swiftly. Staff in the TSC will have to be sufficiently skilled, and numerous, to enable quick, but proper judgements to be made about the severity of each case and required action."

"A viable referral protocol, which does not inappropriately dump clients on community welfare organisations, has to be negotiated."

"We believe that DOCS should make publicly available, each 3 months, statistics about the performance of the TSC. And the Consumer Code should have sanctions which automatically come into place, if DOCS breaches the Code."

"Consumer Codes for Human Service call centres are urgently required, as DOCS, NSW Health, Housing and other Departments contemplate their widespread introduction."

"NCOSS welcomes Minister Lo Po's statement that the TSC will also deliver more than 200 child protection workers, back into the field."

"We remain concerned, however, that efficiency gains, from measures such as the TSC, will be used to shore up the rumoured $30 million Budget deficit, which the Department has."

"It is likely that DOCS and community welfare agencies, will need extra staff, with better skills, to fully implement the objectives and requirements of the new Children and Young Peoples Care and Protection Act across NSW."

"The Minister should release any estimates, her Department has prepared," added Mr Moore.