

**Disclaimer: This is guidance material only and does not replace reading the legislation. For further information refer to the legislation. Please check the website for updates and other information.**

## Government Officer: Roles and Responsibilities

### At a glance

- A government officer is an employee of a GSF Agency, the head of a GSF Agency, a statutory officer who exercises functions in relation to a Public Service agency or anyone else prescribed to be a government officer in the regulations (for example, this **could** include certain classes of contractors).
- The requirements of a government officer are not materially different from those that apply to public servants under the existing legislative framework, but will now extend to all government officers under the GSF Bill.
- The delegation provisions within the GSF Bill enable the Minister, Treasurer, and Accountable Authority to delegate and subdelegate a broader set of functions, which can impact government officers.
- The GSF Bill also includes three guiding values: accountability, integrity, and transparency.

### Who is a government officer?

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A **government officer** is an employee of a GSF Agency, the head of a GSF Agency, a statutory officer who exercises functions in relation to a Public Service agency, or anyone else prescribed to be a government officer in the regulations (section 2.9).

Where a person exercises head of agency functions arising under the *Government Sector Employment Act 2013* in respect of individuals employed in Public Service agencies, that person will be a government officer (section 2.9(1)(c)).

The term **government officer** replaces, and expands on, the following roles:

- Officer of an authority
- Accounting officer

### Who is not a government officer?

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The GSF Bill specifies that the following are **not** government officers:

- A Governor, Lieutenant-Governor or Administrator of the State
- A Minister, member of the Executive Council or a Parliamentary Secretary
- A member of the Legislative Council or Legislative Assembly
- A judicial officer within the meaning of the *Judicial Officers Act 1986* (including staff of the Judicial Commission of NSW employed under that Act)
- An officer or employee of either House of Parliament or under the control of the President or Speaker (or both)
- A person employed under the *Members of Parliament Staff Act 2013*
- A member of the governing body of a GSF Agency who is not employed by the Agency or any other GSF Agency
- A volunteer, consultant or contractor of a GSF Agency (unless prescribed)
- A person working for a GSF Agency by way of secondment but who is not employed by a GSF Agency
- Any other person prescribed by the regulations not to be a government officer

## Roles and Responsibilities

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The requirements placed on a **government officer** in the GSF Bill are not materially different from those that apply to public servants under the existing legislative framework. The GSF Bill builds on these requirements, and extends them to *all* government officers, including those not covered by existing public sector legislation – for example, employees of State owned corporations.

A government officer should be guided by the values and principles in the GSF Bill (section 3.7):

- **Accountability:** take reasonable care so that use of government resources and related money is efficient, effective and prudent.
- **Integrity:** place public interest over private interest and not use their position or information improperly.
- **Transparency:** ensure that any real or perceived conflicts of interest are effectively avoided, managed and disclosed.

The above are broadly consistent with values and principles in the *Government Sector Employment Act 2013* that apply to public servants, while expanding both their content and scope of application.

A **government officer** may perform functions, such as authorising expenditure on behalf of the State, as a delegate. Under the GSF Bill, there are a broader range of functions that can be delegated, or subdelegated, to government officers by the responsible Minister and the Accountable Authority for the relevant GSF Agency.

Treasurer's directions may also confer administrative functions on **government officers**.

### What a government officer cannot do under the GSF Bill

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A government officer does not have authority to spend government money unless in receipt of a delegation or subdelegation that authorises the expenditure. It is incumbent on the government officer to ensure that the expenditure of money for the State or a GSF agency is in a way that is authorised

A government officer cannot make a gift of government property unless the property was acquired for use as a gift, the gift has been authorised by the Treasurer in writing, the gift is made in accordance with Treasurer's directions or the gift was authorised by or under any law.<sup>1</sup>

### A government officer can be liable for loss

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A government officer is a 'person handling government resources' under the GSF Bill, and the civil recovery provisions apply to them. A government officer:

- Incurs a debt to the Crown if they contravene provisions around the gifting of government property and where the contravention was dishonest or the result of misconduct or a deliberate or serious disregard of reasonable standards of care.
- Incurs a debt to the Crown if a loss of government resources or related money has occurred and the person caused or contributed to the loss by misconduct or a deliberate or serious disregard of reasonable standards of care.<sup>2</sup>

A debt incurred is recoverable by the Treasurer,<sup>3</sup> but proceedings can only be commenced with the concurrence of the Attorney General (or his/her delegate).

For further information on the civil recovery provisions, refer to Part 9 Division 9.4 of the Bill.

### Need more information?

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Refer to:

- Attached checklist for detail on relevant sections of the Bill.
- Delegating roles and responsibilities fact sheet.

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<sup>1</sup> s 5.6.

<sup>2</sup> Including by way of deficiency, destruction, or damage.

<sup>3</sup> Unless it is waived (s 9.18(4)).

Email the Legislation team at [Legislation@treasury.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Legislation@treasury.nsw.gov.au).

## Attachment A – Checklist of Sections in the GSF Bill

The table below references the roles and responsibilities of a government officer under the GSF Bill.

Responsibility	Bill Reference
Must comply with Treasurer's directions	Sec 3.4
Should take reasonable care so that the officer's use of government resources or related money is efficient, effective and prudent (Accountability)	Sec 3.7
Should: (a) place the public interest over private interest, and should not use the officer's position (or information acquired in exercise of the functions of that position) improperly for financial or personal gain (Integrity)	Sec 3.7
Should: (a) ensure that any real or perceived conflicts of interest are avoided or effectively managed, and (b) disclose to the appropriate entity, as soon as possible, any direct or indirect material conflict of interest of the officer that relates to the affairs of the GSF Agency (Transparency)	Sec 3.7
Must ensure that expenditure of money for the State or GSF Agency is in a way that is 'authorised'. Expenditure will be "authorised" where it is done (i) in accordance with a valid delegation or subdelegation, or (ii) authorised by any other law.	Sec 5.5 Div 9.2
Cannot make a gift of government property unless the property was acquired for use as a gift, the gift has been authorised by the Treasurer in writing, the gift is made in accordance with Treasurer's directions or the gift was authorised by or under any law	Sec 5.6
May have delegable functions delegated to them, by the Treasurer, a Minister, the Secretary of a Department, GSF Agencies, Accountable Authorities or other government officers. (See also the Delegating roles and responsibilities fact sheet)	Sec 9.8, 9.9, 9.10, 9.11