

Asbestos Taskforce chief Andrew Kefford to head reform of Land Development Agency

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Asbestos Taskforce chief Andrew Kefford has been appointed to head the government's reform of its Land Development Agency.

Mr Kefford has been appointed deputy director general for "land development governance" in the chief minister's economic development directorate, where he is tasked with restructuring the land agencies.

In the wake of a series of controversies and a [highly critical report from auditor-general Maxine Cooper](#), Chief Minister Andrew Barr [announced in September](#) he would split the Land Development Agency in two.

Mr Barr will leave responsibility for developing new suburbs in the hands of the existing agency, but move responsibility for "urban renewal" projects into a separate agency. The new [urban renewal authority](#), which is yet to be named, is to be responsible for the development of Northbourne Avenue and the City to the Lake project, which was the target of Dr Cooper's audit.

The agencies would have separate boards.

A government spokesman confirmed the appointment, saying Mr Kefford would help develop governance arrangements for the new "urban renewal and greenfields authorities", using his experience with the Asbestos Taskforce, and as the former commissioner for public administration.

No decisions had been made on who would lead either of the new authorities, he said.

Mr Barr has said legislation to split the agency would be introduced in mid December, debated in February and take effect from July 2017.

Karen Doran is heading the Asbestos Taskforce on a three-month secondment from the chief minister's department. This year, she has acted as Mr Dawes's deputy, and as coordinator-general of urban renewal, and was executive director of the economic and financial group.

Mr Kefford has led the Asbestos Taskforce since it was established in 2014 to deal with the legacy of Mr Fluffy asbestos, which was pumped into the ceilings of more than 1000 Canberra homes through the 1970s. It was removed in a government clean-up in the late 1980s and early 1990s, but was discovered to have remained in wall cavities and sub-floors. As a result the government decided to buy and demolish every home.

Mr Kefford's task at the head of the \$1 billion scheme, has been one of the most complex faced by any public servant in recent years.

The taskforce has had to negotiate with the more than 1000 families to buy what were often long-time family homes. Its panel of demolition companies are now almost halfway through the hazardous job of demolishing the houses. He has had to respond to health fears of families, with the health impact being studied by researchers at the Australian National University, and with the refusal of some home owners to take part in the scheme.

The scheme has left many owners angry, not only because they were effectively forced from their homes, but also because they were allowed to renovate over recent years despite the dangers, and now because the government is now re-selling the cleared blocks and seeking to maximise the money it makes from them.