



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2010-2011

(Reference: [Appropriation Bill 2010-2011](#))

Members:

MS M HUNTER (The Chair)
MR Z SESELJA (The Deputy Chair)
MR J HARGREAVES
MS A BRESNAN
MR B SMYTH

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

THURSDAY, 13 MAY 2010

Secretary to the committee:
Dr S Lilburn (Ph: 6205 0199)

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

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Privilege statement

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Amended 21 January 2009

The committee met at 9.36 am.

LE AM, MRS MARION, Vice-President, Grandparent and Kinship Carers (ACT) Inc

SMYTH, MRS JEAN ELIZABETH, Secretary, Grandparent and Kinship Carers (ACT) Inc

THE CHAIR: Welcome to this public hearing of the Select Committee on Estimates. Thank you to Mrs Le and Mrs Smyth for coming today to represent Grandparent and Kinship Carers (ACT). We have got approximately 25 minutes for our discussion. Before we begin, could you confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement? I believe there is a statement in front of you.

Mrs Smyth: Yes.

Mrs Le: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Before we proceed to questions from the committee, would you like to make a brief opening statement?

Mrs Smyth: In early 2009, the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support, OCYFS, called for nominations from grandparent and kinship carers in the ACT to form a kinship representative group to meet with OCYFS executives on an ongoing basis. Nine grandparent and kinship carers were appointed and the first meeting with the executive was held in April 2009.

The OCYFS executive members are Megan Mitchell, executive director and chair; Paul Wyles, director, care and protection; and Satnam Singh, senior manager, care services. The secretariat is the OCYFS carer liaison officer. The terms of reference are:

- (1) to identify systemic issues and develop resolutions to support kinship carers;
- (2) to provide comment on policy and procedures;
- (3) to facilitate information exchange, including current initiatives and legal issues;
- (4) to contribute to the Carer Connection newsletter.

It is intended that the meetings will occur on a quarterly basis. However, to date meetings have been held in April 2009, July 2009 and February 2010. The next meeting is scheduled for May 2010. The association advised OCYFS on 16 December 2009 that it has been incorporated and on 12 January 2010 Ms Mitchell advised the members of the kinship representative group that future quarterly meetings would be held between OCYFS executive members and the association.

In broad terms, the goals and objectives of the association are to provide representation, advocacy and support services for ACT grandparent and kinship carers. The association committee is made up of the president, Christine Carey; the vice president, Marion Le; secretary, me; treasurer, Don Smyth; committee, Fran Le Pavoux, Linda Dunlop and Karen Coe. In addition to the meetings with OCYFS executive members, the association has accepted an invitation to join the out-of-home care committee, which is jointly chaired by OCYFS and NGO

representatives. The co-chairs are currently the director, care and protection, and the senior manager of Barnardos. The committee members meet each month to discuss strategic policy and development and strengthen collaboration across the out-of-home care sector. All the funded out-of-home care providers are currently members.

Most recently, the association has been invited to join the practice partnerships group of OCYFS. In their own words, the practice partnerships group is a forum that brings together the key partners and practitioners who work at or near the coalface of the out-of-home care service sector. At the group's planning day in February, it was recognised that the association's representation would greatly benefit the work of the group and that it would reflect the importance of kinship care for children and young people. The group meets monthly and is chaired by the Institute of Child Protection Studies. Carers are referred to the association by the OCYFS carer liaison officer, by NGOs in the out-of-home care sector and by other carers.

As the existence of the association becomes known more generally, carers are also beginning to make their own direct approaches for support and we have recently begun fortnightly meetings for kinship carers at Barnardos. They provided us with a room there.

Mrs Le: Can I add to that just briefly? The president, Christine Carey, unfortunately is at a conference this week and so could not be here; so the two of us are tasked with this. Thank you very much for having us here.

I guess my role here today is to bring home a little bit of the personal matters that face some of the people who are looking after children under the so-called kinship care program. There are more children in the ACT in kinship care, we are told, than there are in foster care arrangements. And we know that the government is committed to the care and protection of children. Katy Gallagher's budget speech said that the government recognises "that it is essential to provide children in the care and protection system with a safe home". An additional \$5.7 million over four years has been provided to support the increasing number of children who need to be provided with out-of-home care. In 2009, there were 494 children in out-of-home care. We know that the majority of those children—and presumably that is the figure—are, as I say, in what is called kinship care placements.

In my years of advocacy in various places and positions, most notably I guess in the migrant and refugee areas, I have actually never come across a situation as serious as the one that I found myself flung into when I became a kinship carer. I have two children in my care who were in the child protection system. They were suddenly thrown into that because their mother had died and their father was arrested on some very serious charges. I received a telephone call to ask me would I be prepared to look after the two children—they are distantly related to my husband—and would I be prepared to turn up in court the next day.

I did not have a clue. I had two traumatised children on my hands. I did not have a clue where to go, what to do. And I know my way around the system. For someone as educated as I am to find it difficult, I could not begin to imagine how other people found it. The more I started to dig, the more horrible some of the stories are of what is happening not only to the children who are being pulled from pillar to post under the

child protection program but also to those people who are suddenly put into the position, usually when they are elderly, of caring for their grandchildren.

My daughter this morning—this is my show-and-tell with Emmanuel in a way—suddenly got called to do a job. She lives with me, with him. She said, “Mum, can you look after Emmanuel for about two hours while I rush off and do this job that has just come up?” I said, “I can’t. I am going to the Assembly—and it is very important—to give some evidence about children in kinship care.” And then I suddenly thought, “Hang on, wait a minute.” My immediate reaction was: no, I cannot, because I have a job to do.

We have women in our association, on our committee and beyond it, who suddenly were faced with this situation. One woman in particular was, at one day’s notice, told, “Your grandchild is being given into your care.” The baby, a four-month old baby, was delivered suddenly to her house. She was 54 years of age, married, with a secure government job and suddenly they turned up with this baby whom she had not seen because of the family situation of her son and his de facto—not a nappy, no food, dirty and soiled nappies and clothing. You can imagine the backgrounds of some of the children who go into child protection. That woman told me last night that the guilt remains with her to this day, even though that child is in her care and is eight years of age now.

The department becomes the parent of the children. From what I have seen—and I am very serious about this because, as a teacher of over 30 years, my focus has always been on children—the department is the parent of those children once they go under protection orders. The grandparents who suddenly have the children thrust on them become completely cut off from their society and from their family, often from their jobs. Many people have to do what I did this morning, suddenly take a baby to work and try to explain why this child is in their care.

On top of that, the reality is that they just have not got the capacity to care at that point, like that. The minute the child is in child protection, they do not even have the right to decide whether that child can go on a holiday with them, whether they can send the child to stay with a relative during the day, because it is the department who exercises all parental responsibility, which includes telling somebody, as in fact in that woman’s case at the moment, “We cannot let you decide who will care for that child during the school holidays.” So it is a very serious situation. They are just some of the examples.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that introduction. I want to pick up on the points you were making around the number of children in out-of-home care and that there are more in kinship care now. That has tipped over in recent times.

I understand that the department was going to help your organisation to incorporate. My understanding, when I got a briefing, was that that would include things like covering some costs. So I was alarmed when I read your community group survey to see that you had been having to cover the cost yourself of website development, incorporation, stationery and so forth. Could you tell us a little bit about that process? Was it your understanding that you were going to receive some financial assistance as well?

Mrs Smyth: It was our understanding but we are still waiting.

THE CHAIR: And what have been your discussions with the department on that? Have they indicated that they will be supporting that process financially?

Mrs Le: We have had some quite heated discussions. We asked what happened to the allocation in the budget of \$800,000 to—

THE CHAIR: This is in last year's budget?

Mrs Le: Yes, in last year's budget. I think it was in October that I brought that to a crisis point. Members of our association had a briefing session with you, Meredith, on that; thank you for your role in bringing that before the Assembly. But \$800,000 was allocated in the budget and, as far as we can see, it went nowhere. Only recently, in April, the procurement process was opened up. The procurement documents were only released last Saturday and now the funding is basically up for grabs and we have to go after that at the same time as everyone else. We were told that automatically we were eligible for the department to assist us with funding of up to \$40,000. We were told that right at the beginning, but that has never happened.

MR SMYTH: Who told you that you were entitled to the \$40,000?

Mrs Le: The departmental representatives. Megan, Satnam and the others said, "There's \$40,000 available if you would like to fund a library." We talked about the need to have some sort of kit for when children do suddenly get foisted unexpectedly. It is unlike foster care. Foster carers know that they are going to get children. They go through a system. They are trained and they know, and then they get a pack of goodies for when a child comes into their care, even on just a small interim basis. With the kids that I had, we were given a little pack, a school bag when they were taken from school and put into this interim care. Foster carers get all of that. Kinship carers get nothing. So we were saying: "There should at least be nappies. You should be giving them a kit with nappies and whatever." The department said: "That's a good idea. We could use some of the \$40,000 to put together those kinds of kits." When we had the meeting in October, I said: "Wait a minute. The situation is so serious out there that we need to really be looking at what has happened with the rest of this money."

THE CHAIR: This year, as you said, there has been more money allocated to out-of-home care. I would like your thoughts on where you think that money needs to be spent.

MR SMYTH: Before we move on to what is probably a new topic, can I ask about the procurement documents?

THE CHAIR: Certainly.

MR SMYTH: How did you become aware that the procurement documents had been posted on the web?

Mrs Le: That is a very interesting question, Brendan; thank you for it. I attended a meeting two weeks ago, along with Christine as the president, with Megan and with Frank Duggan from the department. We were told that the procurement documents would be released before the end of May. They had a discussion with us about whether or not we would be eligible to apply for that funding. I said: “We might miss it. Will you let us know when they’re actually going to be released?” As far as I am aware—you are the secretary; have you received anything?

Mrs Smyth: No.

Mrs Le: I read the *Canberra Times* every Saturday, from cover to cover, to see what everyone is doing, and I saw documentation that said, “Okay, go to the website.” When I got to the website—that was a week ago—it said, “Actually, the documents won’t be available until the 8th,” which was the next weekend. I went to the website. The documentation still was not ready, and I downloaded it this morning. I think it was posted on the 11th. But we did not receive any formal notification, even though we are the only association officially representing grandparent and kinship care, as far as I am aware, at the moment. That promise of us being officially notified so that we would know did not happen, and I had to find it in the *Canberra Times*.

MR SESELJA: When were you told that you would be eligible for that \$40,000?

Mrs Le: In October, that was mooted when we—

MR SESELJA: So October last year?

Mrs Le: questioned them, because, believe me, as I said, that was a very heated meeting. I said: “Where is that \$800,000? We want to know what’s happened to it.” They said: “There’s \$40,000 there that we could still assist you with. If you put in something to us, as the department, we could allocate some money for a library or”—

MR SESELJA: Why was the meeting heated?

Mrs Le: Because of the answer, actually, that was given to Meredith and the Assembly that this money had been basically allocated, and that money had already gone to certain groups. The only group that we are aware of that got any funding was in fact Marymead, and that is good. Twenty thousand dollars had been allocated to Marymead, but as of the time of Meredith’s question, and followed by other questions from Mrs Dunne, nothing had been allocated. It is my belief that the only reason it went up for procurement—and I am sorry, because I really appreciate that the government tried to put this money out there—was because of the pressure that our association was putting not only on the department but through the political processes.

MS BRESNAN: They did not give you any indication in that meeting about what had happened to the rest of that money, whether it had been allocated or not allocated? There was not any sort of explanation about that—and given, as you said, the answer which was given in the—

Mrs Le: They did, and I took the notes and that is why it became heated. To be honest, I accused them of having Ms Burch mislead the Assembly. I told them that in the

situation I had been in before, when I had attended estimates committees and so on up on the hill, this sort of thing would not be tolerated and that, because she had only just come into the position, she should not have been given the briefing that she apparently was. I cannot find the document. Yes, here it is. In answer to the question that Ms Hunter asked on 12 November, the minister, Ms Burch, said that “the government’s commitment of \$8,000 over four years for a carers-grandparents support service”—

MR SESELJA: \$800,000?

Mrs Le: \$800,000, sorry—“includes the creation of a position to provide support and advocacy to kinship carers, grandparent carers and foster carers; \$60,000 for a 0.5 full-time equivalent”. I said: “Where did that money go? Where has that been allocated?” They said, “That’s actually the person in the department that we have shifted sideways to liaise with you.” I said, “That’s not good enough.”

The next one was “approximately \$40,000 recurrent funding to be provided to an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific organisation to support kinship and grandparent care”. I said, “Who’s that group and how are you making the decision as to how to provide it?” “Approximately \$40,000 recurrent funding to be provided to the kinship carers advocacy group”. That is us, so I said, “When are we getting that?” That is when they said, “If you ask us for some library books.” Seriously, we do not need library books. We need a funded organisation. We need an office. We need someone who can take the calls. Now that people know we are out there, we are getting calls. We cannot deal with these cases. We are all volunteers. We are all trying to work, yet we are spending so much of our time on just taking calls from people.

I have been going to court and assisting people in court sessions because they do not know their way around and they are lost in it. The reaction from the department at the level of the caseworkers has been very good. They are really pleased to have people like us on board. The other week, the registrar of the court thanked me in front of everybody and said: “Thank you very much for coming here with this lady. The sessions are much easier.” The grandmother is often the kinship carer and she is faced with the warring parties who want the child or do not want the child and all of that emotion, it is much better to have us there.

I said: “Where is that? What is that advocacy?” “Oh well, that’s our library books.” We still have not got them; we would not want them. Anyway.

The next thing was “approximately \$40,000 recurrent funding to be provided to an organisation to support grandparent and kinship carers”. I said: “Who’s that organisation? What are you telling the minister? This is something that was allocated in the budget, it came out of the ALP 2008 election promise, and here we are, on 12 November 2009, and nothing has happened.” So it was heated, I can tell you. I said, “From this point on, I will go to the minister.”

The next one was “recurrent funding of \$20,000 provided”—the only thing that had been provided—“to the Marymead grandparents support program and the contract has been executed”. That was the answer to the question. Now here we are today, in May, and they have just called for the tenders. I do not think that is the way any government

department should be behaving.

MR SESELJA: Did you go to the minister?

Mrs Le: We attempted to. Because I have met Ms Burch on other things, I met her and said, “Look, I’d like to come and see you about this.” She said that, yes, she would love to see me about multiculturalism and so on. I said: “No, this is about something far more important, in my book. It’s about the future of the children of this territory, a huge number. So can I come?” She said, “Yes, sure, ring up and make an appointment.” I rang and I sent two emails, I think, and no response. Then I went to somewhere else and again there was no response. At that point we decided that we would approach the opposition and have some further questions asked. Just recently, because of something else that went on, Ms Burch did speak to us, and we appreciated it. Three of us went and gave her a full briefing. But I do not think that she is totally across what that department does or does not do.

I think it is very serious. I would go as far as saying it is mismanagement. We are trying to fix something on a systemic level that we are not able to cope with ourselves because we are all working. There needs to be some sort of inquiry. For one thing, they cannot even tell us the number of children in kinship care. If you ask them, the latest figures that they handed are figures from the out-of-home placement activity report, which incorporates figures for March 2010. This is from the department:

The data does not represent all out-of-home care placements, for example, kinship care, after hours places and planned transition into residential placements. These can be arranged independently and supported by care and protection workers and are under-represented in this report.

This report is about foster care. I do not know what the Chief Minister thinks is happening with this money that is being allocated or what Katy or anybody else thinks, but the reality is that the department cannot even give us figures as to how many children are in kinship care at any one point. They took it on notice and said they would get back to us, and that was in March.

MR SESELJA: And they have not got back to you?

Mrs Le: No, not on those kinship care figures; not at all.

MRS DUNNE: Mrs Le and Mrs Smyth, do you have a feel for how many families are providing kinship care and how many children are involved in an anecdotal—

Mrs Le: The new figures are that there are 400 and something children in care, but again we are not sure; because of privacy constraints, we cannot get access to the figures or even the names of all the people. And we are reluctant to get out there and ask people to come, because we do not have the facilities to cope: we do not have funding; we do not have an office. What I do understand at the moment—and correct me, because sometimes I am wrong on figures; I might be wrong on a lot of things but I am often wrong on figures; I am dyslexic with figures—is that there are something like 150 children in care without caseworkers at the moment. That is our understanding. Can you imagine that? “Caseworkers” means people who go and have

a look at the children, talk to the parents. That is the figure we have been given. I do not know if that is accurate, because I am the kind of person who likes to see statistics on paper.

MR SESELJA: Who has given you that figure?

Mrs Le: Again, the department.

Mrs Smyth: Yes, the department. That came up at the practice partnership's meeting which I attended yesterday. And the department is below 50 per cent of its staffing for caseworkers at the moment.

MRS DUNNE: You were told that yesterday, Mrs Smyth?

Mrs Smyth: I was. I was told that yesterday, yes.

MR HARGREAVES: Could I just ask a question on that 494, Marion? I think you said 494 earlier on. We are talking general figures, so I am not going to worry about that. But is that your understanding of the total kids in care—and you do not know the breakdown between foster and kinship? Is that what we were looking at?

Mrs Le: Again, with all respect, we do not really know. They keep telling us it is 400 and something children, but then, when they—

MR HARGREAVES: Is that in care, though, Marion?

Mrs Le: In care, but we do not—

MR HARGREAVES: In total care, though? So you do not know the breakdown?

Mrs Le: I would assume that is what it is.

MR HARGREAVES: Yes.

Mrs Le: We do know that the figure goes between 50 and 80 per cent of children in care on any one day, and of course it fluctuates—that between 50 and 80 per cent of those are in kinship care.

MRS DUNNE: When you said that the figure of about 150 children did not have caseworkers, is that 150 children in care or 150 children who are in kinship care—or don't you know?

Mrs Smyth: It would be kinship care, wouldn't it, because—

Mrs Le: Again, there is where we cannot get. Whenever we ask for the breakdown—I do not even know if they keep those statistics. I am quite happy to table this. You will see that there is a whole lot of, you know, gender of children that are in care, but then at the back they list the organisations. If you understand the way it works, under foster care the children are cared for through an organisation like Marymead and the others and then sent out to foster carers. In our situation, there is no organisation in between,

so it falls straight onto the kinship carer.

MRS DUNNE: So the department interacts directly with each kinship carer rather than through a medium?

Mrs Le: Yes, that is right. That is why the caseworker is so important on one level. But there is another problem there because, while there are caseworkers who deal with the children, there is no-one allocated to deal with the actual grandparent. Imagine Jean and her husband. They have got two children in care—in kinship care—and they are elderly. I have got two children in care; I am elderly. Aren't we all? It is difficult, especially when it comes to respite care, where foster carers get allocated respite care. Someone said to me last night—when they heard that we were coming here, someone rang and said, “Look, how about this?”

Can I indulge and raise another problem about this? I am saying that we need money. These people need money. A grandmother, after she and her husband took care of their grandson, eventually found herself a single parent—because, believe it or not, most men cannot cope with this. Most of the people caring for children in kinship care are grandmothers, and most of them are single now. But we still do not have the figures on that. We cannot get any figures. I started in this. I said, “Okay; give me the breakdown of how many children there are in kinship care, how many are being looked after by grandparents and how many are looked after by aunts or distant relatives like me? How many? What is the breakdown?” We cannot get it.

Anyway, she became a single parent. This is a high-flying public servant and consultant. Her husband found the stress of the situation of the department too much and left her. With the resultant huge financial strain that a marriage break-up at this time of life imposes, she got a better paying job to support herself and her grandson and entered into another mortgage to put a roof over their heads. This high paying job also comes with responsibilities, and she needs to travel interstate at times. In fact, this is supposed to happen next week. Her sister, a full-time employed person, is willing to take time off work to care for the grandson while she is away.

The department informs her—remember that the department is the legal parent. They place the child in the grandmother's care, but they give her no rights and no room to move. The department informs her that her sister may get \$50 per day to pay for her time. The sister has taken unpaid time off from her work on the potential basis that she might get \$50 a day, while respite carers through the private sector, who would be strangers to the child, get paid \$22 per hour. At this point in time, the woman, the grandmother, still does not know whether the department will pay anything for respite care. She needs to travel on 6 June for a week. In addition, despite asking three months prior to the school holidays for some respite assistance during school holidays, she received no response and no respite assistance.

The department is the child's parent, but there is no help there when people are like that. And Jean and her husband have a horror story about asking time and time again for assistance. A lot of the children in care are damaged. They are traumatised. They need really serious psychological counselling and assistance and there is no real support there for the grandparents.

MR HARGREAVES: Can I just ask you for clarification, because I think you might have gone too fast over some numbers here. I think the numbers are a very big concern here. You said, I think, that if the respite was in the private sector it would be \$22 an hour. But didn't you also say that with this particular case that you are quoting, this case value you are quoting, the sister was offered \$50 a day? Have I understood that correctly?

Mrs Smyth: Yes.

MR HARGREAVES: If it was \$22 an hour, it would be a heck of a lot more than \$50 a day.

Mrs Le: That is right; exactly.

MR HARGREAVES: I thought we went over that a little quickly, and I just wanted to make sure because it is very important.

Mrs Le: That is correct, John. And the problem is that if you compare it with foster care—and let me say that we are absolutely appreciative of everything foster care is doing. People in our association have been foster carers. I have not been a paid foster carer, but I have looked after 14 children—without realising, by the way, that there was any funding available for anything. But yes, you are right: \$50 a day—she might get, maybe.

MR HARGREAVES: May.

THE CHAIR: Mrs Le and Mrs Smyth, you have raised some very important issues this morning. We unfortunately do have another group following. I just want to go back to the committee. Are there any follow-up questions that need to be taken at this time?

MR SESELJA: I have something just quickly. Ms Burch will be coming before this committee during the estimates hearings. We have heard a lot from you, and there are some concerns around the department and communication and some of what has been said. Is there anything else in particular that you would like this committee to be questioning Ms Burch about in relation to kinship carers?

Mrs Le: It is my belief, and it is the belief of our entire committee, that what needs to happen is not the piecemeal funding out there—on that procurement process, if there is somebody else out there who can do the job, great, but we do not believe there is. Everywhere we go, people are glad that we are involved. What I would like to ask is this. Where is this allocation under the new budget? Where is the money going? How is that going to be directed and how long is that going to take to be allocated? And what would be the position of the minister in looking at funding a full-time office—advocacy office, kinship carer office or whatever—where people can come and get assistance. I think that is a very real thing. Forty thousand here or piecemeal stuff there is not going to fix this problem.

Do you know how serious I think this is? I spoke out about children in detention, and I said that that was abusive. I believe that what is going on here—this is very strong,

and I will stand by it—is abusive. I believe it is systematic and institutionalised abuse. And people do not even see it any more. They are so used to it that they do not see it. It is systemic and it is abusive. It is abusive of the people who are caring for the children. I do not feel myself abused, because I went to court and got orders over the children very quickly. I knew my way through the process, and I am not blood related so I do not have all the emotional baggage that comes with that. But it is abusive. It is very abusive of the carers. It is very, very abusive long term of the children.

I would just add one more thing on this. Go to the courts, as I did the other week with one of the grandparents. There were some young women there on drugs. The boy that was before the court was also on drugs; he is now in jail. He has just turned 18. He came through the child protection system. Those young girls in the courts there—clearly away with it—are all on child protection orders. When I ask the department what is happening about them—they are under the care of the department, but they are living down in these flats, Allawah flats or whatever they are called—and the department does not have the caseworkers to follow up on them. And these kids are appearing before the courts. What is going on here?

There is not enough care when they are this high, like the babies that come into care. There is horror story after horror story. As a teacher, I look at the end result, what is happening now. But this process is institutionalised child abuse and it is abuse of the carers. It can be fixed. There are some very, very good people in that department, but the turnover—again we cannot get the figures—of workers in the department is enormous. Most of the people working there now have come in—as I can tell from their accents and so on—under the migration policy of bringing people in to work in the child protection unit. There are some very, very good people there, but the whole department needs a shake-up. That is my view.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for appearing today. We will send you a transcript if you would like to look that over. If there are any corrections, please send it back.

Short adjournment.

WILLIAMS, MR TERRY, Chair, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body

THE CHAIR: Mr Williams, thank you for coming in today to represent the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body. We have allocated around 30 minutes for the discussion this morning. I apologise for running a bit behind. Could you please confirm for the record that you understand the privileges implications of the statement that is before you?

Mr Williams: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Before we proceed, would you like to make a brief opening statement?

Mr Williams: Yes, I would, as Chair of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body for the ACT. We have been in office now for just on two years. The first year of our formation was basically to get a concept of what we had to do in terms of our obligations under the legislation. It has taken us about a year to get that organised. We have established ourselves as a committee to represent a number of areas of government. That means that we take on portfolio responsibilities. Each one of the seven of us has dual portfolio responsibilities—a primary and secondary role. Some of us have taken on a third responsibility.

In a sense, the elected body has taken on the role of being responsible to the community by looking after and commenting on a number of policies under individual portfolios held by ministers. For example, my portfolio responsibility is the Chief Minister's Department, education, training and employment, plus health and a few others. We have to keep ourselves abreast of policies, changes to legislation and the implications of legislation in relation to program and service delivery.

Also in the process we have our own responsibility to maintain our income, which means that we have to work like everybody else. In most cases our responsibilities take us away from work for up to three days a week. The representatives of the elected body have to get agreement from their employers to participate in this program. Let us not take this away from anything that the elected body has put forward and will put forward in the future.

We are determined to ensure that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice of the ACT is heard through a number of pieces of paper. You have in front of you a copy of a report on outcomes from an estimates-type hearing held in August last year. There are around 27 or 29 recommendations in that. We would hope that the government agencies would respond to those recommendations or the findings that are highlighted in this document.

To date, even though we presented the document to the Chief Minister several months ago, there is yet to be a reply to the findings. We are still waiting on that. It might take another year. In not replying, or not providing a swift reply to this document, there are implications right across the board. They are budgetary implications. As to the funds that have been put into the budget at the moment, all I can say is that, truly, the

allocation of funds directed to Indigenous people in the ACT is horrific. We hope that the response from government to our recommendations and findings will result, hopefully, in an increase in the allocation of budget expenditure to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs.

In saying this, the information that is contained in that report is not something that we have made up. We hold at least two to three community meetings each year and this afternoon at 4 o'clock we are holding another community meeting at Gungahlin. We will report back to them on our progress so far and we will take on any recommendations and do anything that we can to act as advocates for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in the ACT.

In a sense, that is the feeling of the elected body at the moment. We have almost a year to go. We will more than likely close down in nine months because we have to go for re-election, or there will be new elections put forward in May next year. We hope that this first elected body will be able to set a cornerstone for whoever else comes in under this process. We hope that they will be able to carry on some of the fundamental things that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the ACT require. That is just an opening address. It is a fairly swift overview but not a complete overview of what we have been up to. Let us say that there are some wheels in motion and responses are required.

THE CHAIR: Mr Williams, I noted—I think it was in a media report—your response to the ACT budget that has just been brought down, your disappointment that your first report and many of the recommendations had not been addressed in this budget at all. One area that I wanted to focus on, because it is also your portfolio area around education, was around funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people transitioning from high school. Do you think there is enough support there and, if not, how would you like to see money spent? What sorts of programs do you think would be effective in being able to transition young people from high school into employment, further training or on to years 11 and 12?

Mr Williams: I think we need to concentrate on the primary school area and years 8 and 9 transitioning through to high school to years 10, 11 and 12. That is necessary. The retention rate is not good. It is below average. I might just add that, as an organisation which advises government on policy, we are not able—and I will emphasise this—to gather any statistics which we could apply to the development of programs and initiate any further assistance to the departments in the delivery of services. I have been told a number of times that the reason is that the target group is too small and they cannot gauge what the deficiencies are. I think that is a lot of hoo-hah. For us to be effective we need to have some idea of what is happening. It is right across the board. I think Aboriginal—

THE CHAIR: I am sorry, can I just ask you a question? Surely all forms in ACT schools have got a box that says, “Are you an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?” Not everyone may identify it, but that information is collected. They will not release that information to you?

Mr Williams: There is nothing on health. We cannot get any figures on health. We cannot get any figures on housing. We cannot get figures on juvenile justice. We

know that 60 per cent or 70 per cent of the kids out at that new lockup centre—

THE CHAIR: Bimberi, yes.

Mr Williams: are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. We know that because we go and count the heads. But we do not know who is going through the justice system. Nobody tells us what is happening with our kids. Nothing is there to tell us what is happening with our women and there is nothing there that tells us about our men. There is no system there.

I might also say that the soon-to-be-agreed justice agreement in the ACT mentioned a whole swag of different programs. There is no new money. You are saying to us, “Look, we’re going to be doing this.” You have not been able to have an effect now with the money you have got. How can you tell me that you are going to have a bigger effect or change the effects with the same amount of money? I do not think so. You can spend money and do things with it, but you cannot increase or decrease the events if you do not put more money in to develop the process.

We are saying that, even with this new justice agreement which is going to be tabled very shortly, there is no new money. There is nothing in there to say, “There’s the prevention.” What about the legal aid? What about all the other bits and pieces? How can we get the services to the people? It is prevention in a sense, but the representation has to be there. Representation in court might keep the kids out of jail; it might give them something else. But what they are doing now is choofing straight off to the clink.

THE CHAIR: I note one of the recommendations in your first report to the ACT government was about this issue—improved collection of data so that you can see what is going on with people and where there might be particular pressures or needs for services. Did you get any response from government on that recommendation?

Mr Williams: None at all. What we have been told, basically, is that the size of the research is too small. They cannot do a comparative analysis because the target group is too small. We have all done research. You can still determine an outcome regardless of the size of the target or the audience groups that you are researching. To elaborate on that just a little, there is nothing there for Aboriginal housing. I was talking to one of the providers just last week. He said he has got a waiting list of 1,000. I can only take it at face value that the service provider has 1,000 people on his list. If that is the case, even if we spent \$20 million on Aboriginal housing in the ACT it might only give us 40 homes.

The thing about the whole process is that one thing leads to another. I noticed that last week the Chief Minister and the former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner had signed off on a health policy. What is in it? How do we gain from those sorts of policies? How do we gain from those agreements? There is nothing in there that says, “This is what we need.” Just to look at one thing—Asperger’s and autism amongst our kids in the ACT—where is the speech pathology in the schools? It could apply to every child in kindergarten and primary school. Where the hell is it?

Research is being done in New South Wales, just across the border, that highlights the process. There is shared responsibility between the universities, the community and the education system where they actually apply speech pathology within the school system. It is not 100 per cent, but it works. Perhaps we could look at those sorts of things. They are the little bits and pieces. What do we know about Asperger's and what do we know about autism within the Aboriginal community? You cannot gauge that. I know of four or five kids myself. Those are the sorts of things. One thing leads to another. With this new agreement that has been struck on health, we need a cornerstone to start with. Health may be the approach that we can take. I think accountability in this process is required. This thing has been signed outside. What input have we got as an organisation to say, "This is what we need to do to improve this"?

THE CHAIR: When you refer to the agreement, are you talking about the closing the gap agreement—

Mr Williams: Closing the gap. The gap is only getting wider.

MR SESELJA: Were you consulted about that?

Mr Williams: No.

MR SESELJA: Have you had any discussions since with representatives of the government?

Mr Williams: I have seen the paper; that is about all. If I had had any comments to make on that I would have said, "There are a number of things we need to do if we are going to look at health, and the first is accountability." How is accountability going to be practised if we are going to have healthy outcomes? How is that going to happen? In terms of sustainable needs-based funding and operations, where are those going to come from? There is nothing in this budget that talks about Aboriginal health. There will probably be nothing in the next budget either. But there is a way to get through this. It needs to be shared responsibility with the commonwealth and the territory. Let us explore those concepts.

At this stage there is nothing there, apart from what we have got there—that we need some liaison officers in the hospital, which we recommended as a short-gap measure to ensure that we got other things in place. But the first move was to assist our people when they come into the hospital by at least signing the form and saying that they are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders. They really do not know how many people have had triple, double bypasses at the hospital. We cannot fix it unless we know.

THE CHAIR: You put forward a recommendation about Aboriginal liaison officers at Canberra Hospital. Do you feel that has been fulfilled, recognised, in this budget?

Mr Williams: No, it has not been recognised. What has been covered in this budget is the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services in general services. In terms of \$600,000, it does not tell me that we have got one full-time Aboriginal worker. What this budget shows is that we have got a liaison officer at \$45,000 a year over four years. What sort of salary is that? What do we do with that? What can we do

with that person? How does that lead an organisation to look at and represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within their service? Is it a part-time position? That is good.

MR SMYTH: Just following up on the recommendations, particularly on health—you have not got it, but at page 209 of budget paper 4 on health there are a number of dot points under the priorities for the coming year. I will refer to two. The first is about continuing to implement the national partnership programs—hospital and health workplace reform and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health programs. The second dot point states:

continuing work to improve health and wellbeing within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

By the sound of it, you are saying that you are not aware of what is happening and you cannot get the details.

Mr Williams: Absolutely. They are commonwealth-assisted programs. Winnunga Nimmityjah will be assisted through that. That is fine; I have got no problems with that. Maybe what we should also be saying is, “We’ve got one on the south side. A lot of people still live over on the north side, let’s do that.” But let us also remember that Winnunga Nimmityjah does not just service Aboriginal clients. It is starting to service everybody. We do not have a dedicated service anymore. We do not have a service that is disciplined to service Indigenous people. Assimilation is good, but I think assimilation has sent us back to 1967.

MR SMYTH: Your recommendation 2 is that the ACT government implement a whole of government Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment, retention and development strategy. You might not be aware that on page 37—

Mr Williams: Yes, that fell off the table some time ago. We will be meeting and holding a discussion tomorrow with the Commissioner for Public Administration. I am sorry—I have forgotten the commissioner’s name—about this program. I do not know what the content at this stage is, so I cannot comment on that, but let me say that in relation to the public sector recruitment and career development strategies I did co-write the first one in Australia, so they need to be aware that I do know about it, and that was written for the New South Wales public service back in the 80s.

MR SMYTH: Again, you have not got your papers, but on page 37 of budget paper 4, in the Chief Minister’s output, one of the things that apparently will be produced this year is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment strategy. You were not aware of that?

Mr Williams: One of the things we made a recommendation on almost immediately when we were elected was that to increase the health, education and all the other outcomes of our people they need to be employed, through either direct employment, through public and private sector agencies, or engaged in enterprise. So there are three connections there. It is either public or private sector or owning our own businesses. They can be supported, but they still cost money.

To me, if there were things that we were going to introduce here, especially in the public sector, it would be to develop the qualifications of our people to the highest possible standard, and that means engaging a cadetship program to refer people to university. You can be selective. You do not have to take the first person that walks through the door. But, yes, let us engage those people through the process. Let us get them educated. It is becoming so expensive these days. Going back to do a PhD or a master's is sometimes unattainable simply because we have not got the money to do it. We can put it on our bill and pay it back later, but they are the sorts of things. Apprenticeships and traineeships are fine. There is nothing wrong with those. But what we need to do is to consider the retention of expertise within the public sector system if there is going to be change.

MR SMYTH: Is enough being done to encourage Indigenous commercial entities—organisations like Billabong that are attempting to provide independence and opportunity? Is there enough support in the budget for organisations like that?

Mr Williams: There is no support. Most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations are 90 per cent funded through the public sector. It does not give much room to move outside to become entrepreneurs. If you do move outside to become entrepreneurs, you lose a lot of ground. So you can either be one or the other. Say, with Billabong, with the housing process, if they have got 40 or 50 houses, why don't we give the opportunity to the people who are renting those houses, who have been renting them for the last 20 years, an opportunity to purchase? That is equity. It is equity for that family to have some sort of ownership of some property which is of some value—maybe not a lot, but at least that ownership gives them equity to explore other things.

They are the types of problem. As I said earlier, if we were going to look after this process of housing within the ACT, \$20 million is going to just touch the surface. And that is just taking care of families. That is not looking after our elderly people or the people who are homeless or all those other people that are included in accommodation. The process needs to be looked at. If we do it right, and if the government can get it right, in a process that allows for sort of budget operations, we need to explore how we can get cost-sharing arrangements with the feds in relation to the problems that are occurring in the ACT.

The ACT is no different from a small town out in the bush. We have got buses and we have got shopping centres, and I think that is about all we have got. But it is still no different from living in a place out in the bush, in a small town of 4,000 or 5,000. The population of those communities out in the bush is on the increase. There will always be the transition from small communities to larger communities, and the larger communities need to have an infrastructure that has the capacity to undertake that influx or transition of people from where services are not being provided or withdrawn.

MS BRESNAN: I just want to go back to the issue of data. You said that the process you used to put together the report was like an estimates-style process. I am just wondering, when you put that question to department officials about data—something I have actually asked department officials about as well—what answer they gave you. Did they just have that answer, “Well, it is too small a number”, or—

Mr Williams: No, the response was, “Well, we use Australian Bureau of Statistics data.”

THE CHAIR: And that is why the number is too small, which brings me back to what I said earlier: that does not stop them. There is data collection on population at schools, at hospitals and so forth, but they simply seem to be just going back to ABS data each time, which is an issue.

MS BRESNAN: But they do collect data. That happens. We know that happens. So basically are they just not willing to give you that information?

Mr Williams: They cannot tell us because they have not been able to drill down the information. It is simple. How do you drill it down? How do you drill it?

THE CHAIR: Mr Williams, we are coming up for our time this morning. I just want to go back to your first report to government. When did government indicate that they were going to respond to this report, given that I think you gave it to government in around January—earlier this year, anyway?

Mr Williams: I do not know.

THE CHAIR: All right. So there has been no indication of when they will respond?

Mr Williams: There is an indication that it has been compiled. The elected body, when it was originally formed, had a secretariat of two. We now have a secretariat of one, because it does not look like the other position is going to be filled, and 75 per cent of the responsibility for gathering the information is left with our secretariat. I do not think our secretariat was designed to collect data on a whole department for whole of government. It should be the responsibility of some other organisation. Who that is—

THE CHAIR: Why have they reduced your secretariat resourcing? They have not told you or given you a reason why?

Mr Williams: Budget restraints. There has been a cutback in public sector spending, and staff usually go; the first thing is to get rid of staff. If a position becomes vacant, do not fill it. I worked in the public service in the ACT—but not the commonwealth—for 20 years and I understand those sorts of things. But I thought that at least one area would be safe, and it would be this body that—

THE CHAIR: I just asked that because the Chief Minister obviously has a strong commitment to the elected body and it was given resourcing. I am wondering why that resourcing has been cut, considering what he said to be a strong commitment.

Mr Williams: The full complement of the resources have been—

MR HANSON: While we are talking about resourcing, there is \$100,000 in the budget for a genealogy study, whilst they are cutting back on the delivery of services and staff. What are your views on that?

Mr Williams: That is fine. But the elected body is structured—I am not really sure whether you understand it—so that it gives advice to government on policy and service issues. It is not there to give government advice on multicultural activities. But that question needs to be raised with the Ngunnawal elders council and they are fully qualified to respond to that. To me, I think it is a great idea. If there are \$100,000 over the next couple of years, let us use them. But that does not provide a service to the community. It provides an understanding of the people here—the actual, traditional carers of this land. I neglected to say when I first sat down that I do acknowledge the traditional owners of the country, the Ngunnawal people, and respect elders past and present.

That is, fine, Jeremy. There is money there, but it is for other things. It is not a thing that would deliver services or an outcome for a total community in relation to—

MR HANSON: I raised that because I have had a bit of criticism raised to me by other members of the Indigenous community that it seems that, whilst they are calling out for resources, they are spending more time trying to work out this whole sort of Ngunnawal versus Ngambri versus Nagarigo type issue, and we are missing out on services, and more broadly what they are saying is that we are seeing a lot of rhetoric from the government, particularly from Mr Stanhope, about Indigenous issues but that does not match with the delivery of services on the ground. Would you agree with that?

Mr Williams: Whatever happens in the local traditional culture is outside what the elected body is to do.

THE CHAIR: My understanding is that that is a request from the Ngunnawal elders.

Mr Williams: In any case, anything cultural referred to the elected body is then referred directly to the elders council. So in a sense even if we get something, like the renaming of cemeteries and all these other bits and pieces, if that is required, then we need to refer that across, especially if it is language and other bits and pieces that go with this. We refer that directly to the Ngunnawal elders council and of course we support anything that they put forward. So in a sense it is one of those things.

To ensure that services are provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in this community, there needs to be a lot more done. Strategically, there is nothing out there that tells me, unless I pull this together and say, “Right, this is what we want.” If I put dollars on this, is the ACT government going to go, “Shock, horror, that is nearly 40 per cent of our total budget for service delivery”? But we need to consider how we may be able to draw money out of the commonwealth.

The intervention program in the ACT has done some good stuff. It has not rolled out everything it is supposed to, but let us look at how we may be able to manipulate the legislation that the feds did to provide money to the ACT. What I am saying is that we are not going to let you actually take over controlling our dollars. We do not want to go back to those old mission manager days.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for coming in this morning, Mr Williams, and

giving evidence to the committee. A transcript will be sent to you and if you have any corrections please send them through to the secretary.

Mr Williams: I just want to say one more thing. Somebody mentioned the services to make a difference. There is a questionnaire being developed now that I will test at the community forum this afternoon about service delivery within the ACT. You get negative responses basically on that.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Williams.

Mr Williams: Thank you for your time.

Short adjournment.

RYAN, MS CHRISTINA, General Manager, Advocacy for Inclusion

THE CHAIR: Welcome to this public hearing of the select committee on estimates. Thank you, Ms Ryan, for attending today and representing Advocacy for Inclusion. I am afraid we are running behind time. We had allocated about 30 minutes for our discussion this morning. Could you confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement that is before you?

Ms Ryan: Yes, I do, thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Would you like to start with a brief opening statement?

Ms Ryan: I am here as the general manager of Advocacy for Inclusion, which is an advocacy organisation based in the ACT providing services for people with disabilities. We provide individual advocacy, systemic advocacy and self-advocacy training for people with disabilities, who comprise approximately 17 per cent of the ACT population. Those figures do differ but that is about the figure.

Despite the ACT having a high level of income, general health and wellbeing and higher education outcomes, the picture for people with disabilities is still fairly poor here. Exclusion takes many forms, but it is largely contributed to by the substantial difficulties many people experience in accessing quality appropriate mainstream and specialist services.

The Institute of Health and Welfare last September issued a report which highlighted the chronic lack of support for people with disabilities across the entire disability population. It provided evidence that even those people who are able to access support still do not get it at the level that they need. Half of the disability population has more than one disability; it is not just a job lot thing. And even those people with single disabilities cannot get the support that they need, so the complex needs are very much suffering with all of that. So people are not able to live with the dignity and independence that all of our policy and community rhetoric talks about.

So inclusion is still very far from reality. Many people with disabilities can live their entire life supported and attending social events fully separate from the rest of the broader community. There is a fairly large group of people out there in that category. Our community needs to think about how it considers people with disabilities. Are they occasional participants in the community or do we want to recognise that the rhetoric about an inclusive community has to be supported with some substantial action?

Lack of support results in a large proportion of the disability population not having employment or education opportunities. That is where a lot of focus goes, but we need to maybe think a little bit differently. It has a direct impact on people's ability to earn income and, of course, their ability to live independently and be taxpayers. Apart from the human rights implications, this costs the broader community a lot more. It costs a lot to keep people dependent. Dependent people need more services.

An inclusive community will encompass services across the broad spectrum of life to include all services. It will allow people with disabilities to engage in employment,

education and social events. By focusing on an inclusive community, the reliance on this parallel world of specialist providers will reduce. People who have friends and colleagues are more likely to have natural supports than when isolated and only ever being in contact with paid support.

We have to remember that the ACT has a Human Rights Act, but we also work under Australia's obligation to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This means that our budget should be mindful of aligning with the UN convention rather than countering it by reducing disability to particular diagnostic areas as we call them. It is not about what your label is; it should be about the barriers. Labelling is known as medicalisation, and it is quite demeaning to people with disabilities.

We made several recommendations in our budget submission—which I think you may have with you; I am not sure—across several areas. We particularly are keen on data collection. I heard you talking about that with Mr Williams. We do not know what the level of mainstream service use is by people with disabilities—from libraries to health centres to the swimming pool or what. We do not know, because data is not collected. We need that data collected.

We really need some ongoing funding for community-based disability awareness training. Once again, this appears in the forward strategies document from Disability ACT, but we are yet to see any real outcomes. It was certainly not supported in the last four-year plan.

We would have liked to have seen an increase in the acquisition of the accessible buses, although we acknowledge that they have simply maintained the current level of acquisition, which is substantial.

As a member of the wheelchair taxi consortium, we are advocating the provision of a non-profit service for wheelchair-accessible taxis with salaried drivers. Submissions to that will be finalised by the end of next week, and we are a part of that group.

We would like to see the government supporting inclusive housing options for people through social housing providers. That is more of that mainstreaming approach again. We acknowledge that the ACT government is supporting the pay equity campaign for the SACS sector, along with the federal government, and that is quite important. Disability workers are some of the poorest paid in the community sector, and we think that is reflected in some of the quality of service provision.

Something that we are particularly disappointed that the budget did not contain was any support for parents with disabilities to retain their children. There is a large level of child removal from parents with disabilities. There are no statistics kept by Care and Protection on this, which is very concerning. This is a national problem; it does not just occur here in the ACT. We are firmly convinced that we could do something here in a very localised way that might provide some leadership for the rest of the community around the country.

These are just some of the critical areas that we think need attention to move forward within the human rights framework. As I said, we acknowledge that some work has

been done on a few of them, but the really critical need is for growth funding. Over many years, the level of unmet need in the disability sector has been acknowledged. It has been talked about at the state level; at the federal level there have been Senate inquiries. There have been all sorts of things. Yet it does not seem to be being addressed. There is still that incredible level of unmet need that the AIHW report from last September outlines. There has to be a plan on how we address this, and it must be framed within human rights principles which focus on barriers rather than on specific disability types. The real key is to work on supporting the independence of people. This budget did not quite do that. There were only one or two initiatives; they were specific disability funded and the support for independence was not part of it.

Additionally, the funding of advocacy services is quite poor in the ACT in comparison to other states. There is no specific support for consumer representation for people with disabilities. This is something that I and other advocacy groups are currently working on talking to government about. It is quite critical. It means that people with disabilities are unresourced when they speak to government, but they are also unresourced to gather their thoughts and come to a collaborative view. There is some work being done on this by the four advocacy organisations in the ACT, two of which are unfunded, in partnership with the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services. There is a little bit of work starting in that area, and we are very hopeful that that might do something.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Ryan. I want to pick up on the issue raised around taxis. This has been an issue that has been going on for many years. I had thought that there was some progress being made around better access to and reliability of the taxis that have been given licences to provide this service. You are indicating now, it seems, that it has failed or it is not working and that therefore people would like this idea of a not-for-profit service with salaried drivers. Could you let us know a bit about that.

Ms Ryan: I do not want to pre-empt too much the submission we will be putting into the review—and I am not speaking for the consortium here; I feel I need to clarify that—but the feeling of people who rely on wheelchair-accessible taxis is very much one of despair. Over a couple of decades, the system has been tinkered with substantially. It is currently rated by consumers as dysfunctional at best; they are the words. We are basically sick of it. There is a real concern that it is seen as discretionary rather than as a vital service. The support for the taxi subsidy scheme is not adequate for many people. They have to plead and beg for an extra five or 10 vouchers midyear to be able to attend education or employment opportunities. I know of a few recent cases of people wanting to resume study but having to abandon it; they were not able to attend reliably because they could not get taxis at the times. Of the 26 licences, we know that there are about six, on average, that operate wheelchair services at the moment. That has been the case for at least about 18 months.

There are quite a number of difficulties in the system. One thing I can say that the consortium is concerned by is that tinkering might be what is continued with. We are sick of tinkering. We want something that might actually do the job, something that will actually provide a service, something that recognises that for people who are unable to use public transport there is a need to go places. When I talk about inclusion, I think it is that kind of community attitude stuff that we are still not quite there on.

People do not quite get that you are not getting a taxi for fun; you are getting a taxi because you have no other way of leaving your house. So there are some critical things in the taxi service.

We also know that it costs the government substantial sums of money to be doing some of the things that it is doing, and they have not worked. So in that context we are concerned at the kind of bottomless pit.

THE CHAIR: What would be an example of that?

Ms Ryan: There are things like what we call the public holiday bribe to get taxis to actually operate on public holidays and the double the lift fee bribe that applies at the same time. This is only on key days and within times on those days. They have to bribe taxi drivers to work. That costs money. There was a micromanagement kind of amount that was granted to the taxi network to provide micromanagement so that taxis would actually arrive for people. That was abandoned, as I understand it. I do not know if anyone is currently using that, but that was \$100,000 at the time. That sort of money is being given for a service that was not provided. It worked for about eight weeks when it happened, and that was about three years ago.

There are some real chunks of money like that being thrown into the system to try and fix what is effectively a dysfunctional system. We really think that one of the big barriers to this is the continuing desire to make a profit out of what is a fundamental service for people who have no money. The people relying on it have no money; they are using their pension money to get taxis. Even with the taxi subsidy scheme, it can amount to \$100 a week in personal travel costs.

MR SMYTH: Just on that, how much would it cost, who would pay and who would run it?

Ms Ryan: As I say, I do not want to pre-empt the taxi inquiry or the review that is currently going on and what we will be saying to that. But our suggestion is that it becomes a part of ACTION. That is what we think it should be. We have some things around that that are part of our submissions.

MR DOSZPOT: I have a supplementary question, Ms Ryan. Regarding the number of taxis that are actually in use—we are given figures as to the number of plates in use—do you have any feeling for how many taxis are available for people with disabilities at any one time?

Ms Ryan: I would say it is about six. The real difficulty we have is that 11 of the 26 plates are fitted to taxis that most of us cannot fit in—and I mean most. Very few people can. You have to be a 12-year-old with a very small chair to fit in them. So they are basically useless and they do not even bother taking wheelchair calls. This means people are reliant on the very few taxis, the lesser number of taxis, that are actually large. At any given time, a couple of those are going to be off the road for various reasons. Of course, drivers must have a willingness. We know that there are only about three or four drivers that do about 70 per cent or 80 per cent of all the work. So we are struggling with some attitude stuff there.

There are some things that the consortium talks about in its submission which I will not go into in too much detail here. One of the things that we have been quite concerned about is the licence plate concession and how that acts as an entry point for people. The regulatory system is not necessarily policing them doing what they have not paid a licence fee for.

MR DOSZPOT: As you are aware, we have had a number of complaints which we have discussed. Is there any recommendation regarding what the regulatory services should do? That is not your role.

Ms Ryan: The taxi consortium is coming up with a model of operation. That is what we are choosing to do. As I said at the outset, we are fundamentally just a little bit over tinkering with the current system. There have been huge amounts of work and energy—and I must acknowledge John Hargreaves's efforts in this regard—over many years in all sorts of ways. I refer to setting up a second network, setting up the micromanagement grant, setting up huge amounts of extra funds in the system, and trying to regulate to a point where recently just about all of the taxis were taken off the road for a whole weekend while some were assessed as being unroadworthy. A lot of tinkering has been going on repeatedly over a couple of decades. It is not a new problem. What we are seeing is that the service is actually worse than it ever was.

MS BRESNAN: I have a question in relation to your submission, about the UN convention and about applying that social model that comes through that in terms of the way that service provision is provided. Last year in estimates, Disability ACT advised that they had employed a human rights lawyer to ensure that disability services were human rights compliant. Have you had any feedback on how that has progressed, given that I think we have still got a lot of issues around it? Have you actually been engaged by them and involved in looking at that process?

Ms Ryan: We do all talk. We are all quite friendly and collaborative; I must emphasise that. As you might be aware, in partnership with several other advocacy groups, we would like to see a human rights audit of Disability ACT services. There are some areas that we are concerned about, but it is mainly because you really can have one service that is controlling the entire life of people, and we think that is concerning and we want that investigated.

This stuff is actually about the way budgets are structured. It is not necessarily about service provision, which is sort of at the pointy end. All services are provided through certain standards. There are the disability service standards, and we understand that they are pretty much followed across the board, although some services are better than others. Disability ACT have done a fair amount of work on that and they are quite responsive to concerns when they are raised, so that is good. But the concern we have is that when money is allocated, when programs are being planned or when priorities are being looked at, it is being done through that human rights framework, through the social model of disability. Is it actually about addressing barriers in the broad sense or is it about cherry picking specific disabilities because they currently have a very loud voice? Of course, many of the people that both ourselves and ADACAS advocate for do not have a voice other than through us and ADACAS. So it is very difficult for them to be heard unless carers and family get pretty active.

We note that there was some money for carers' advocacy in the budget. I need to emphasise that that was not for disability carers; it was actually for a broad range of other carers. So there are still some real gaps in that. But the concern we have is that the voice of people is not being supported, to be heard. When there are difficulties for people, they might end up on a waiting list with ourselves or ADACAS for some months or they might simply be told that we cannot support them at all because it will never get to the top of our list. So there are some concerns there.

In other states, I understand that the states partially or fully match the FaHCSIA funding that we get for our individual advocacy work. That is all funded by the feds; it is not ACT money. In the ACT, there is no matching of that money at all, so there is no individual advocacy support. There is also no consumer representation financial support at all. So we do not have anything like the Health Care Consumers or the Mental Health Consumer Network, both of which are very good examples of how consumers can become more vocal in the mix. So we are unable to contribute in a really consistent and meaningful way to how government is framing its program, other than in an ad hoc manner. We need a more consistent way of doing this.

MS BRESNAN: When you look at the budget, a lot of the disability funding is going in through the HACC program as well and it is just kind of keeping pace. Do you think because there is that very high end focus instead of, like you said, focusing on these social aspects, that that impacts on the rest of the funding that goes into disability services?

Ms Ryan: I think it might, and I understand there are some moves with Bill Shorten around HACC funding nationally. I do not know the details so I cannot tell you but you might be able to find that out. HACC funding is part of it and, as I say, a vast number of people cannot get the level of support they need, if any, out of HACC funding. It is very difficult; you might get a couple of hours when you need 10, if you can get it at all. Suddenly, the hours might be reduced. You have to be in pretty dire straits to qualify in the first place. So there are some serious gaps there.

HACC funding does have eight or nine per cent growth attached to it each year from the feds. I think that is quite important to acknowledge. We do not have a similar growth funding in disability. HACC funding is around the increasing number of aged people in the population, that growth, so that is recognised. Of course, with the level of unmet need in disability, we have never actually got up to parity to even think about moving forward. We are still covering our tracks from historically a very large gap. This really does keep people dependent. It keeps them isolated. It keeps them away from the community and therefore invisible. When people are invisible, it is very easy to forget that they need that support.

MR SMYTH: You mention in recommendation 7 moving towards the Barkuma model out of South Australia. What makes that something that we should follow?

Ms Ryan: It is the only one we know of in the country. But it is a small program. I think it is run by St Vincent de Paul down there, and it is specifically targeted at parents with intellectual disabilities. It is about ongoing, fairly interventionist support for their parenting. It is something that just does not happen anywhere else. One of the reasons that children are removed from parents with disabilities is because the

children are considered to be either at risk or being actively neglected because their parents forget to feed them or they forget to do their homework with them or they do not know about the games they should play with their three-year-old.

Not every parent knows that stuff; let us acknowledge that. But what is actually being seen is that, if a parent is supported, they will retain their parenting relationship. So families have been kept together through such a program. We think that is quite important. There are actually a lot of children in Care and Protection out-of-home care for pretty much their entire childhood because there is no real support.

I have raised this with both Jenny Macklin and Bill Shorten federally. They have said, “We’ve got these family support programs.” Most of them are designed for broader family support; they are not specifically for parents with disabilities. So there is no intention that they should be ongoing. They have usually got a six to 24-month mindset about them. It is all very well to support someone for a short period but some people with disabilities struggle to retain information or struggle to remember. So it is not much use giving them support for the first six months of a child’s life and then walk away. It does nothing. So we actually have a lot of advocacy around Care and Protection matters. That stuff is quite soul-destroying.

THE CHAIR: Ms Ryan, we are running out of time. We were supposed to break at 11 o’clock. I know that we do have the Tuggeranong Community Council coming up next, and I think members need a five-minute break. There may be some questions that will be put on notice. A copy of the transcript from the hearing today will be sent to you and, if there are any corrections, could you please send them through to the secretary. Thank you very much for appearing today.

Ms Ryan: Thank you.

Meeting adjourned from 11.16 to 11.26 am.

JOHNSTON, MR DARRYL, President, Tuggeranong Community Council

THE CHAIR: Welcome to this public hearing of the Select Committee on Estimates. I would like to thank Mr Johnston for appearing and representing the Tuggeranong Community Council. We have about 30 minutes set aside for today for discussion. Could you first please confirm for the record that you understand the privileges implications of the statement you will find in front of you?

Mr Johnston: Yes, I did read that.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to start with a brief opening statement?

Mr Johnston: Yes, thank you. Firstly, I wish to thank members for allowing the Tuggeranong Community Council to address the Select Committee on Estimates in its inquiry into the ACT budget. The ACT budget appears to be a bit of a mixed bag for Tuggeranong. It contains many positive and welcome initiatives but it also has a sting in its tail.

On the bright side, the Tuggeranong Community Council welcomes, among other things, funding for the expansion or refurbishment of the Tuggeranong Health Centre, a new bus station at Erindale, expanding CIT training services at Tuggeranong, new park-and-ride facilities and bike-and-ride facilities, a feasibility study into the duplication of Ashley Drive from Erindale Drive to Johnson Drive and a pedestrian link across Drakeford Drive to improve safety for students to access the new Kambah super school.

The sting is that it appears that Tuggeranong residents have been slugged with the highest percentage increase in general rates, with an average hike of around 6.5 to seven per cent. This compares to South Canberra at 0.51 per cent, North Canberra at 2.07 per cent, Gungahlin at 2.99 per cent, Woden Valley at 3.67 per cent, Belconnen at 3.76 per cent and Weston Creek at 3.86 per cent. Residents in my own suburb of Chisholm will be hardest hit, with an average increase of almost nine per cent or an additional \$103 to the yearly rates bill. I am concerned the increases in general rates will have a significant impact on many Tuggeranong families and individuals who are already doing it tough with recent rises in their weekly grocery bills and monthly home loan repayments.

My understanding is that the amount of rates payable comprises a fixed charge and a valuation charge for each rateable property calculated using the average of the unimproved land value for the last three years. I recognise that property values in Tuggeranong have increased but in recent years and indeed months we have experienced a global financial crisis, we have seen the property bubble burst and we have had several interest rate rises. This is an issue that also concerned the ACT Ratepayers Association, with President Peter Jansen quoted in the *Canberra Times* on 5 May as saying that rates have been going up about 30 per cent greater than the consumer price index for the last four years.

Meanwhile, charitable and social welfare organisations in Tuggeranong already report a significant increase in demand for services from families and individuals suffering hardship. One major charitable organisation that works in the Tuggeranong

community, St Vincent de Paul, assisted a total of 4,540 people in 2009, compared to 3,669 the previous year and 3,065 in 2007. The level of assistance it provides those in need has increased from just over \$90,000 in 2008-09 to \$126,000 in 2009-10.

Other charitable and community welfare organisations tell a similar story. For example, Communities@Work reports a 20 per cent increase in the last 12 months in the number of individuals and families to whom it has provided emergency relief, while the Salvation Army in Tuggeranong reports an increase of between 25 and 30 per cent in those it has assisted.

The ACT budget contains several million dollars in funding to tackle climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Canberra. Those measures are welcomed by a more educated and environmentally aware community. However, I am concerned that the budget gives little recognition to the major source of air pollution in Canberra, that of burning wood for domestic heating. The budget contains only \$100,000 towards a wood-heater survey and educational awareness campaign. While any effort to reduce wood-smoke pollution in Canberra, and indeed Tuggeranong, is welcome, high air pollution figures clearly show that past community education campaigns have failed to reduce or even eliminate neighbourhood wood-smoke pollution.

Therefore, I question whether this is just more money, and excuse the pun, that will go up in smoke. I believe that, due to the topography and regular inversion problems, the Tuggeranong Valley should be classified a special case, and I again encourage the ACT government to seek federal government assistance, as was given to Launceston in Tasmania, to enhance the wood heater buy-back scheme and undertake an extensive community education program that focuses on the health impact of wood-smoke pollution on the community.

The Tuggeranong Community Council supports plans for park-and-ride and bike-and-ride facilities in Erindale. However, it is concerned that the current road network around Erindale will not be able to cope with the additional traffic that these facilities will generate, particularly during morning and afternoon peak hours.

The council believes that, if additional traffic and commuters are to be encouraged to Erindale to use park-and-ride and bike-and-ride facilities, then the existing road network needs to be dramatically improved, including the duplication of Erindale and Ashley drives and improvements to the flow of traffic on McBryde Crescent. The council also believes that smaller satellite park-and-ride and bike-and-ride centres should be established at Lanyon Marketplace and Calwell shopping centre to act as commuter feeders to both Erindale and Tuggeranong. Thank you very much.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Johnston. One of the things that you mentioned in your opening statement was the Erindale and Tuggeranong master planning plans that were put together. Are there any particular needs or issues that you think are important and that need to be picked up in those planning processes? You touched on a few in your opening address but I just wanted you to add to that.

Mr Johnston: I think consultation is one of the bigger ones. I know that the consultation process has included organisations such as Communities@Work but, since taking on the role as President of Tuggeranong Community Council, I have not

been engaged in any consultation around these plans. And as far as the park-and-ride and bike-and-ride plans for Erindale are concerned, one of my members has indicated to me that there has been little or no consultation with the shopkeepers around that Erindale area.

MR SMYTH: Just on that, are you aware of the integration of this announcement of the park-and-ride facilities with the master plan? Is it the chicken before the egg? Are you aware that they will be done in conjunction with each other, or is one being done—

Mr Johnston: No, I am not aware of that, because, as I said, I have not been involved in any consultation in regard to either the Tuggeranong master plan or the Erindale master plan, although I am aware that there are plans underway for both Tuggeranong and Erindale.

MR DOSZPOT: Are you aware of any talk about where the nearest bus interchange will, for instance, come into play on this whole Erindale activity?

Mr Johnston: No. I have spoken to one of our members that has an interest in that Erindale area as a land owner or a property owner. He even asks where will the bus interchange go, where will the park-and-ride facilities be established.

MR DOSZPOT: I have had similar requests from business owners in the area and my understanding is that nobody has been consulted. I think you just confirmed that. If I understand correctly, there has been no discussion with the Tuggeranong Community Council, as a representative of the Tuggeranong community, regarding any prior discussion to this announcement being made.

Mr Johnston: No.

MS BRESNAN: Thank you, Mr Johnston. One thing I was going to ask you about—and I think it probably works into the appropriate location for park-and-rides and a new interchange in the Tuggeranong area—is the current express services that are offered to the Tuggeranong area. We know that they are not adequate at the moment. I am just wondering what you think needs to be done in order to address that and whether there should be other locations considered for park-and-ride facilities. I know Calwell has been raised as a particular location. There is one already at Mawson. Are there other locations in the Tuggeranong area that would address that issue as well?

Mr Johnston: The indication that I am getting from talking to the community and talking to some of our members is that they would like to see an extension of the Redex service down to Tuggeranong. And in regard to the park-and-ride and bus-and-ride facilities, they welcome those but there is a belief that, as I said in the statement, they would like to see similar facilities established at the Lanyon Marketplace and Calwell, as well as Erindale. Lanyon and Calwell act like satellites for Tuggeranong and satellites for Erindale.

My personal view is that, if that was to proceed, that would take a lot of pressure off Erindale and Tuggeranong and we may not have as many traffic problems around that Erindale area.

MR HARGREAVES: In the context of the Lanyon Marketplace, I agree quite furiously on that, because it is actually the collection point of the three Lanyon Valley suburbs. Do you think that there is already a sort of a de facto park-and-ride system there anyway at the moment? There is no charge for parking in the Lanyon Marketplace car park. It is very rarely empty. Yet I know that there are not that many people going into the actual marketplace itself in the middle of the day, because I have been there many times, as you have. Do you reckon there is a sort of de facto one happening there anyway?

Mr Johnston: I think you will find that is the case. I think you will find that it is the same case with Calwell. It is exactly the same case with Chisholm. I live in Chisholm. I know for a fact there are people who park their cars at Chisholm, at the car park at the back of the Chisholm shops, and jump on a bus and head in to town. Yes, they would already be de facto park-and-ride facilities at Lanyon. If it was at Lanyon, I would say the same for Calwell and Chisholm.

MR DOSZPOT: If I can come back to—

MR HARGREAVES: Sorry, Mr Doszpot. Can I just follow up on this little thing, then I have only got one more question, and then over to you.

At the Mawson park-and-ride there are bike rack compartments, bicycle compartments. Do you think that if we had those sorts of things installed at the Lanyon Marketplace, Calwell, Chisholm and Erindale that would actually encourage people in the collection suburbs around those particular places? With Chisholm, for instance, you have got Gilmore, Chisholm, Macarthur and Fadden. Do you think that would encourage people to leave their cars at home and put their bikes in the bike compartment and lock it up or put it on the bus?

Mr Johnston: I believe anything like that would encourage people to leave their cars at home, as long as the bus services in those areas, being offered from those points, were clean, efficient, reliable and matched the times that they wanted to go to and from work.

MR HARGREAVES: Is the reliability of the buses an issue or is it just that the timetabling is not necessarily suitable? In other words, do the buses turn up late, do they turn up early, and therefore people are not happy with that, or is it because the timetabling is not—

Mr Johnston: I think it has a lot to do with timetables.

THE CHAIR: I just want to follow on from that with a question. You have said that a lot of people are parking at Calwell, at Lanyon Marketplace and also at Chisholm, so do you think that there would be enough people who would support a Redex type service from down south going into Civic, which would be every 15 minutes—a rapid sort of service or an Xpresso style service?

Mr Johnston: If it was on offer, it was well-advertised, publicised, promoted, and the community was given an opportunity to comment on or provide feedback or input to

those services, I would say yes.

MR HARGREAVES: Are you saying that—

MR DOSZPOT: Mr Hargreaves, I think you said you would let me continue from this point.

MR HARGREAVES: Okay, sorry.

MR DOSZPOT: Just on that whole question of the connecting roads to Erindale, all of these bus services—increased frequency or whatever upgrades are done—depend on the connecting roads being also upgraded. Erindale Drive between Sulwood Drive and Sternberg Crescent needs also major upgrades to enable the frequent flow of buses. Erindale itself has obvious issues with the buses coming in and out of that constrained area at the moment. Are you aware of any discussions with the government regarding any upgrades to the roads that I have just mentioned?

Mr Johnston: I am aware that the budget contained money for a feasibility study into the duplication of Ashley Drive from Erindale Drive to Johnson Drive. That is welcome; that is a welcome start. As far as Erindale Drive is concerned, no, I am not.

MR DOSZPOT: I have had ongoing information that ACT roads have indicated that they will not upgrade the stretch of road that I have just mentioned between Erindale Drive, Sulwood Drive and Sternberg Crescent, so there seem to be already decisions given prior to all this happening. I am just wondering whether your community council will be looking into that.

Mr Johnston: We actually have a meeting with Tony Gill next week and one of the issues that I will be raising with him is a duplication of roads around Tuggeranong, because when Tuggeranong was first laid out, 30 or more years ago, the population was next to nothing and since then we have had a dramatic increase in population and many of the roads around there remain single lane that were originally planned to be built as dual carriageway. A lot of those roads that are single lane are actually roads that feed in from areas like Woden and the Monaro Highway into that Tuggeranong town centre.

MR HARGREAVES: I use the Sulwood Drive road that Mr Doszpot is talking about, between Erindale Drive and Athllon, every day of the week, at a ghastly time of the day, I tell you, and I have not seen it as being a screamingly upsetting journey. Have you had representation from people in the area about things like Sulwood Drive being a rat race or overpopulated with cars or anything like that? Have you had people complain to the council about that?

Mr Johnston: It is certainly raised and is mentioned. It was raised in the document that we presented to the ACT government called *Talking Tuggeranong* when I met with the Chief Minister on 3 March. We canvassed the community, we canvassed community groups and organisations in the Tuggeranong valley and asked them to contribute to this document and one of the major things that came out of it was transport overall in Tuggeranong. When I say “transport”, I am talking about cars, I am talking about bicycle paths, I am talking about bus services and future transport

needs—things like a light rail system or something like that. When we canvassed the community yes, transport was a major concern, and roads.

MR HARGREAVES: What about that specific stretch of road, though?

Mr Johnston: No, but it would have been incorporated in the comments generally from the community when we were talking about roads and the duplication of roads.

MR DOSZPOT: I think you must be travelling at a different time, Mr Hargreaves, because I have enormous problems—

MR HARGREAVES: Mate, I travel in peak hour because I come to work every day.

THE CHAIR: Mr Johnston, with any future design of roads would you see it important that that would take into account not just cars using the roads but buses and bike paths and footpaths and all those parts of transport that are not just about car use?

MR DOSZPOT: Madam Chair, just on that—

THE CHAIR: Sorry, I have just asked Mr Johnston a question.

MR DOSZPOT: I am sorry.

Mr Johnston: Sorry, when we are talking about roads generally?

THE CHAIR: It was about if the council sees it as important to include all of those aspects of transport when looking at duplicating a road or upgrading a road?

Mr Johnston: Yes, we do but, when we talk about transport as a community council, one of the things that I want to push is future transport needs down in Tuggeranong—not only cars, not only buses. Let us look towards the future because when it comes to planning, and particularly planning in Tuggeranong, I do not think much forethought is given to future transport needs—when we need to consider things like light rail or something like that.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Doszpot?

MR DOSZPOT: Madam Chair, I was simply going to add a comment to what you were making, and I am totally at odds with what Mr Hargreaves has said. With traffic coming off Sulwood Drive, coming down Erindale Drive, there is a roundabout, after which point the road goes off into Gowrie. From that point on there is an absolute traffic jam. I do not even know how a bus will negotiate that one-lane traffic that everything is going into. So there is a lot of planning to be done.

Mr Johnston: That is an issue, if you are talking about making Erindale the prime bus-and-ride or bike-and-ride centre or a prime bus-and-ride and bike-and-ride centre in Tuggeranong, putting aside Tuggeranong town centre itself. I was driving through there this morning when I dropped my daughter off at MacKillop college. I could not move down McBryde Street. I came back along Erindale Drive and it was bumper to bumper along there because of that roundabout where you have got Ashley Drive

coming in and Erindale Drive coming in. You go up the hill heading up on to Yamba Drive. It was bumper to bumper from that very top roundabout all the way back. And then you have bumper to bumper all the way back down Ashley Drive, over the roundabout to Isabella Drive and all the way back down to Johnson Drive. I know because I had to drop my other daughter off at the senior campus of MacKillop.

MS BRESNAN: Yes. That is what Mr Doszpot said. I think that is why having that Erindale master plan is so important—

Mr Johnston: Yes.

MS BRESNAN: if you are proposing to put quite a major change—

Mr Johnston: More traffic and more buses in there.

MS BRESNAN: It is already very narrow when you look at the shopping area. So they really do need to look at what is going to happen. Hopefully, that process—

Mr Johnston: More buses, more cars in there.

MS BRESNAN: will bring about—

MR SMYTH: One party at the last election did promise to upgrade that section between—

MR DOSZPOT: Mr Hargreaves is obviously travelling between 11 and 12 o'clock, I think—

Mr Johnston: That is why we say that if you have park-and-ride and bus-and-ride facilities in Erindale, if you also consider looking at making Calwell and Lanyon satellite types of park and ride and bus and ride, that may take a bit of pressure off Erindale.

MR SMYTH: But the roads have to be upgraded.

Mr Johnston: But the roads have still got to be upgraded and the traffic has still got to be sorted out.

THE CHAIR: Are there any further questions for Mr Johnston?

MS BRESNAN: I do have a question. The survey which you provided to me highlighted some of the keys issues, and environment was one of them. I know you have already mentioned the wood smoke issue. Are there other key environmental issues for the Tuggeranong area or is the wood smoke one what you see as the main issue?

Mr Johnston: I think that is the primary one at the moment. In our *Talking Tuggeranong* document, which I believe we gave you, there were other environmental issues raised and one of them was the issue of stormwater and the establishment of ponds in the Tuggeranong valley to try and attract native wildlife, native birds, back

into that Tuggeranong area—

THE CHAIR: And also to clean that water and filter it before it goes into the lake.

Mr Johnston: and also to clean it before it goes into Lake Tuggeranong. Whenever we have an enormous storm in Tuggeranong, the lake there becomes a garbage dump. On the air pollution in Tuggeranong, we are participating in a workshop, which is being run on 19 March with ACT environment, where we will be raising those issues. Also, a number of residents have come to council to express concerns over the prospective development of a data centre, which will be fired by gas, down at Hume. They are concerned about the air pollution that that will generate in Tuggeranong, on top of the problems we already have.

THE CHAIR: There being no further questions from the committee, thank you very much, Mr Johnston, for appearing today. A transcript of the evidence will be sent to you. If there are any corrections, please get in contact with our secretary.

Mr Johnston: Thank you.

Short adjournment.

CARTER, MS CATHERINE, Executive Director, Property Council of Australia
WHEELER, MR CHRIS, ACT Division Treasurer, Property Council of Australia

THE CHAIR: Welcome to this public hearing of the Select Committee on Estimates. Thank you, Mr Wheeler and Ms Carter, for appearing today and representing the Property Council. We have set aside approximately 30 minutes for today's hearing. Could you please both confirm that you have read and understood the privileges statement?

Ms Carter: Yes, I have.

Mr Wheeler: Yes, I have, thank you.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to start with a short opening statement?

Ms Carter: Thank you. I will make some opening remarks, just some general observations about the budget, and then Chris Wheeler may wish to follow up with some of the detail on some of the issues.

Very broadly, the Property Council views the ACT budget as a modest budget. There were no particular spectacular surprises, no very strong negatives in it for the property sector, but equally no very particular, strong initiatives.

From the Property Council's point of view, we were pleased that there were no new property taxes announced but we were disappointed to see that the tax take from property in Canberra remains at 52 per cent. More than half of ACT taxation revenue comes from the property sector, that is, both commercial and residential property, including people's homes. The thing that is disappointing about that is that we cannot see any movement by government towards broadening the territory's tax base. We contend that that remains unsustainable into the long term.

The territory continues to face the prospect of large increases in taxes and charges into the future, plus substantial resources being diverted from community services to overcome the debt burden that we are increasingly faced with. And that is very concerning to us.

One thing that should be noted about property taxes generally, though—and it does get lost in a bit of the commentary—is that in recent years the government linked increases in taxes to wage price index rather than CPI. So many of the taxes we are concerned with have gone up by an additional six per cent this year, which is well beyond inflation, and again it is hard for both the commercial property sector and residential property owners to bear.

Stamp duties deserve some attention as well. ACT Treasury consistently underestimates and underforecasts the amount of revenue they are going to achieve from stamp duty, quite dramatically in some instances. And I will ask Chris in a short time to follow up with some of the detail on that. Why does that matter? In our opinion, it matters enormously. If the Treasury does not have a good handle on the sort of revenue that it is receiving, it is not informed and cannot make decisions relating to other expenditure by government.

The change of use charge, of course, is a matter of concern to the Property Council and there has been a lot of media comment around that. There are two pleasing things. The government has extended the consultation period on that and they have vacated the 1 July date for the introduction of that legislation. We do not have a date as yet for introduction but it is our belief, based on discussions with government, that there will be serious and a good further period of consultation on that. If it were introduced in its current form, it would have very negative and adverse consequences on the territory's economy. But we will cross that bridge when we come to it. As I say, Chris may be able to speak further to that.

The other point that is of relevance and interest to the property sector is infrastructure and land supply. We welcome very strongly the release of the government's indicative land release program, over the next year particularly. The numbers look right to us. The government has made good efforts in terms of greenfields residential opportunities in particular to address affordable housing problems in the territory.

But we note that the government remains unable to deliver on its capital works program. In the last financial year, the underspend was in the order of \$153 million, and that gives us very little confidence that they will be able to catch up on the spend to date or that they will be able to deliver on infrastructure that has been promised in the next financial year. It is also our belief that we do not attract the sort of federal infrastructure investment that we should do because of the territory's inability to deliver its own capital works program. We believe that there should be greater private sector involvement in delivery of capital works and we are, in fact, yet to see a private sector project with government that was promised in the last financial year, a demonstration project to see and test whether the private sector could better deliver some capital works programs.

There is still no long-term infrastructure plan for Canberra. We regard that as a problem. I note that one of the previous witnesses was talking about roads and transport problems and we see that as directly attributable to not having a long-term, at least a 20-year, infrastructure plan.

Ditto sustainable transport. There was funding identified and some good initiatives towards the sustainable transport idea. But there is still no genuinely integrated sustainable transport plan. The Property Council is supportive of more realistic car parking pricing. We think that is a good initiative by government but we continue to be frustrated, as does the government, that the feds do not come to the party and they still make no decisions about parking in the parliamentary zone. Until they do that, it is very difficult for the territory government to deal with the problems we have here.

Likewise and more broadly on sustainability initiatives, there is really not much in this budget. In the last budget there was a modest amount, which was welcome, for the tune-up Canberra program. The government is just starting to roll that out now. We are disappointed that funds were not identified for this forthcoming financial year. There were a lot of opportunities there but not much in the budget, as I say.

That goes generally to a broader comment. The government has many good ideas on infrastructure, land supply, sustainability and a master plan for Civic but there is no

money to realise that vision. These things are very important and you get a lot of discussion about it when these ideas are released and then they seem to die away. As I say, there is no money to realise the vision and there are no projects we can identify in this current budget to fulfil any of these promises—an infrastructure plan, a sustainable transport plan, something to be done for Civic.

So all in all, it is a modest budget. There was nothing in it from the property sector which was really bad but we have not realised much of the vision yet and that is concerning. Do you want to comment further?

THE CHAIR: Would you like to make a statement or should we go to some questions?

Mr Wheeler: I am happy to make a statement. I am the Treasurer of the ACT Division of the Property Council. I am also convener of the economic development committee. Elaborating on some of the comments that Catherine made, I have to confess that I am a bit of a statement paper 3 junkie. That is where the realities are, in that paper in the budget. So we always flip straight to that in lock-up time.

But to emphasise the comments that Catherine was making about stamp duty, it is interesting comparing last year's forecast on stamp duty revenue for conveyancing with this year's. Last year, the forecast for stamp duty was \$207 million in a GFC climate. The actual reality, what was collected, was \$266 million. That is an underestimate of 29 per cent, again in a GFC climate. The actual take for this year will be \$266 million. The estimate for this year is \$249 million. That is actually six per cent below what we are collecting this year.

You have got to say to yourself, "Last year was in a GFC climate. This is not in a GFC climate." We are talking potentially two per cent GDP growth for this next coming year. We have a desire to roll out 17,000 new residential sites in the next four years, with 5,000 next year alone, and yet we are still forecasting a reduction in the revenue take that we took for stamp duty in a GFC climate last year. You have got to ask yourself, "Does that make sense?" We think that there are some serious underestimates in that revenue line. All we have got to do is look to last year.

Catherine has also already mentioned the in-built increase in property-based taxes in the territory. The forecast for general rates is an increase of five per cent. For land tax, it is 10 per cent. The fire levy is six per cent and the Civic levy is 11 per cent. They are the sorts of silent creepers that are embedded in every year. It is a nice little earner if you are a treasurer from any party, but you have got to remind yourself that it is there; and so you then have to remind yourself what you are doing with it.

So there are our concerns on the revenue line. On the spend line, the infrastructure scenario is actually quite telling. There is a nice little graph on page 125 of paper 3 which shows you what our actual spend has been in the last six years. It is trending in the right direction. They are nice little numbers but we cannot break the barrier of \$300 million in our spending. But our forecast for the next four years is almost twice that, certainly in the next two years and then around \$550 million in the third. We are just not going to make it. Really, we are talking about infrastructure in the city, delivery of basic needs, which are—

MR HARGREAVES: But is that not the hospital bits, though? Is that not the big \$700 million bill for the hospital system?

Mr Wheeler: There is an element of Health in that, correct.

MR HARGREAVES: Because that would almost be the same amount as the rest of the capital works program put together, would it not?

Mr Wheeler: And that is rolling out as well. But again, there is our history in delivery on time. The car park, for instance, at Canberra Hospital has not been delivered yet, as an example, the worthy thing that it is. Catherine is just pointing out that the reason why it is decreasing is that there is a realisation in government, and fair enough too, that they do not have the capacity to deliver in the future year; so on an honesty perspective, it was not worth forecasting additional growth in the outyears, because we just cannot handle it.

But where we pay for that is in real, hard dollar delivery. Our federal friends, the Prime Minister and Wayne Swan, announced in Tuesday's budget a further infrastructure fund. Our share of that, if you like, from the ACT's perspective, should be a reasonable portion of that money to deliver much-needed infrastructure such as the Majura Parkway. That is the classic example.

We cannot attract the money from our federal friends because they do not have the confidence that we can deliver. And that is a problem. So we need to have some policies and, as Catherine suggested, there is no more private involvement. There needs to be some active policy development on that front.

Ms Carter: If I could comment on that, it has been put out there that industry does not have the capacity to deliver on infrastructure projects. That is not the experience or the view of the Property Council. We have many managing consultants, civil contractors, professionals and so on who will draw in resources from other state offices or in fact overseas if the work is there. What people always want is timeliness and certainty. We have a number of large companies in the ACT—GHD is an example—that have offices in every state in Australia. There has been a downturn in some of the other capitals and people would come here if there was some idea about the timing and staging of the works.

So we want to refute that idea that seems to percolate around that there is not industry capacity to deliver. There is industry capacity to deliver. And it should be remembered that only two, three years ago we came off the biggest property boom in Canberra's history, where fully 25 per cent of the commercial office market was added into the market in the last two, three, four years. So I think that is an important point that needs to be borne in mind. Industry is very keen to get on and deliver capital works, if it comes out, and they can be involved.

THE CHAIR: You have picked up on the need for an infrastructure plan, that sort of vision of where we are going in the next 5, 10, 15, 20 years. We do have a spike. You have pointed out this table on page 125, a very big infrastructure spend in 2010-11. Do you see some value in having a smoother rollout of that rather than these peaks?

You have just made the comment, Ms Carter, that there is the capacity within the ACT, but I am wondering whether it is a good thing to have a massive spike and drop-off. Maybe the reality is that it is going to be rolled over and it will be a lower amount delivered over a longer time.

Mr Wheeler: If I can answer that, I think the reason why it appears as a spike is that it is a catch-up of all the unspent from the previous years. While there may have been a desire to have a more even delivery aspect it is—

THE CHAIR: It is because of the previous rollovers.

Mr Wheeler: It is just a catch-up. So you have got to ask, “Do you have confidence this is going to be delivered?” Sadly, no. Worthy money as it is, we do not have the capacity, it seems, in a managerial sense to deliver on those meritorious things.

THE CHAIR: So it would be desirable, as you said, to have a plan that has more realistic milestones that are put into that plan?

Ms Carter: Yes.

THE CHAIR: I want to go back to that plan a bit. There have been some ideas put about. One of them is around this idea of an infrastructure commissioner. When the Property Council has talked about its vision and its plan, what sort of model would it like to see in this area?

Ms Carter: One of the things that we do talk about is that it must be a minimum of 20 years looking forward. It takes it out of the election cycle and it also puts into the mix all of the other things that we all talk about in Canberra: population targets, where people are going to move to, what community facilities need to be around that, where the roads are needed—all of these kinds of things. These are not short-term decisions.

The Property Council, in the broad, has no difficulty with the concept of an infrastructure commissioner. There are some details around that that we would need to take a closer look at. Our only concern would be that we do not necessarily need to have yet another government agency. It could be that something like that could be placed in the Department of Land and Property Services. But the plan is the thing, and there ought to be a methodology underlying what the infrastructure plan would have in it, based on triple-bottom-line considerations.

In fact, a model that was developed by the Property Council and put to Infrastructure Australia has largely been taken up by Infrastructure Australia. We would like to see something similar roll out here. We know the government would like to do this. They talk repeatedly about it, but it is like a lot of these things. It is about sustainable transport planning; it is about a civic master plan. We need to cut through the talk and realise the vision. We are very keen to assist with that process. We would like to do it. It needs to be done.

Mr Wheeler: Again, to answer that very good question, if there is a proposal that actually puts the focus on the planning of infrastructure and its delivery—not just talking about it but actually have we delivered and where are we up to, on a year-on-

year basis—then the idea is a good one. We are not wedded to a particular model, but if a model does have the ability to show it as being forethought into a long-term strategy and an accountability into how it is delivered, so that we do not just have a budget line every year that keeps getting rolled and rolled and rolled on—that does not achieve anything—and we actually have some sort of an accountability of people involved as to why we have not and what are you doing to fix it—if there is a model that achieves that, we will be all for it.

Ms Carter: And it would be more than just lines on the map, if you like. It would also look at things such as infrastructure funding. The government more recently has been more open to debt funding, and that is something that we support. I think you said that yourself in your own budget speech, that infrastructure is often things that are used by generations to come, so they ought to bear the cost of that as well. That is fair and that is equitable. We have welcomed that from government. But we would like more rigour around it. We would like it as part of a longer term plan, and we would like it to be measurable and accountable.

MR SESELJA: Getting back to the change of use charge and the consultation process that is going along codification, what is your understanding? You have mentioned that it has been put back in terms of the time frame. What is your understanding, though, on what is in the budget, which is not about codification but is more about revenue as a result of site-by-site analysis? What has the government told you about that, given that you are going through a consultation process on codification?

Mr Wheeler: I guess there are two worlds we have got at the moment. One is a continuation, if you like, of the current system and a commitment by government to ensure that that is carried out and enforced. And then there is the ongoing policy development as to what will be the new codified system. The government, to be fair to it, has actually heard the arguments put forward and it has taken a step back to give the industry a bit more time. People were panicking at the 1 July rollout. Government heard that and is working with us and other groups about perfecting that model. We want to make sure, though, that the underlying assumptions about revenue and flow-on are realistic—and an alignment of policy.

There is a lot of mystique about the change of use charge. It is a complex area. It is a tool. It is a tool that can be a very harsh revenue tool, but it affects delivery of a lot of things. It is a demonstration of how a revenue line can actually affect, very strongly, the delivery of other policies such as sustainability, energy efficiency, infrastructure investment and densification of parts of the city—town centres and transport nodes. If we do not harness this tax correctly, it will be totally counter to achieving those other aims. I think all the parties have got similar endeavours in that respect.

The continuation of the current system—the budget line for this current year was \$5 million, and that is the projection that we are going to achieve in the change of use charge. The government is anticipating that next year we will have a \$14.2 million position on the change of use charge, which is a 185 per cent increase on where we are today. The assumption behind that is that they will simply enforce the rules more tightly on the residential sector; the commercial sector already has dealt with these rules. The residential sector is the sector that delivers housing affordability and densification in the inner parts of the city. If it is not done sympathetically, it will

have the reverse effect of not delivering on those other valuable policies. The industry is watching, and it will be watching very carefully as to how that is done.

THE CHAIR: Would it be fair to say that it is a balance between looking at the issues you have raised around the need for densification and so forth and also—is there a view that the current system probably should be changed or increased? That is the idea, isn't it? It has been a standard, I understand—a standard amount that has been paid—and there is an agreement that maybe there is some room to move in that area.

Mr Wheeler: Absolutely.

THE CHAIR: So there is a balance there?

Mr Wheeler: Industry is not opposed. Across all the relevant issues, it is not opposed to a codified system at all. The question is getting the right codified system. The discussions that have been had with the consultant to the government have become very fruitful. We are optimistic people. We are optimistic that there will be a satisfactory outcome. Sure, the current system has not been used properly and not used consistently. But there are two parties to the current system. There is the government and the Australian Valuation Office and there is the proponent and its team of consultants. It takes two to tango.

MR SMYTH: Just on the change of use charge, are you aware of the nature of the legal advice the government has that allows it to reassess the application of the existing law? Change of use has been around since about 1971. My understanding is that most times when people challenge it, if they take the AVO or the government to court, they win. Are you concerned at the nature of the legal advice that the government has got in this dramatic change?

Mr Wheeler: No. Speaking as a lawyer—advice can change from one lawyer to the next. I do not think we are necessarily concerned about that. The justification from the government was publically that “we as a government are advised that we are not enforcing the law, so therefore now we are going to have to enforce the law properly”. The reality is that, when there are disputes, in most cases, any significant change of use charge is just disputed. It is just as a matter of fact. But when you get down to brass tacks, by far and away the majority of those cases are settled by agreement. That is a negotiation, in one sense, apart from what the legal position is. Am I getting a just return? Is it worth while? I think there is a little bit of rhetoric about that.

MR SMYTH: The government say they are being forced because it is the law and they have to apply the law, but in the budget papers there is a waiver of the change of use charge for the redevelopment of former petrol station sites. Of course, if the government wants densification, particularly around the town centres, they could waive the change of use charge as a tool for aiding that. Is it contradictory for the government to have a policy position of densification in appropriate areas and yet at the same time apply the change of use charge in this way?

Mr Wheeler: Again, it comes back to my initial comment about consistency of policy. We have an inclination in the city for a silo development within various departments about developing their own policy and looking at their own world. In one sense, it is

very human. But we have not yet achieved a holistic approach to making sure that those silos are working in unison in the same way. We are only a small jurisdiction. How hard can it be?

MR SMYTH: The last question then would be this. We asked the Treasurer a number of questions last week. In the answer to one of them, she said:

... I would refer Mr Seselja to the schedule of tables which indicate it, so it is very clear from that that it would be a significant increase on what is currently being paid now under codification, and we expect it to be in that order under a site-by-site valuation process.

Are you concerned that the government is taking the tax now anyway and that codification may add to a further tax burden?

Ms Carter: If the model went ahead as proposed, yes. But I think this is why the consultation period is being extended and we are having ongoing discussions with government. As proposed, yes, it would dramatically increase the tax revenue. But it returns to the fundamental issue for us, which is that, in our opinion, if it was to come in in the format that has been proposed, there would be—

Mr Wheeler: There would be no tax revenue.

Ms Carter: There would be no tax revenue. That is one of the issues. There would be no infill development; there would be no multi-unit development in inner city or town centre locations. From what we can see, this is contrary to just about every other important government policy that they have.

Going back to some earlier comments about a sustainable transport plan and very little in the budget for sustainability initiatives, it is difficult for us to see how, based on any of this, we are going to be carbon neutral by 2060. There is no doubt that government would reap good prices from greenfields releases, and perhaps in financial terms they may not notice for two or three years. But in a couple of years they would look around and see that there had been no redevelopment. Civic, particularly, would be languishing still. That would cause government to revisit it.

So as things stand, the proposals that have been put by ACT Treasury are not positive from many perspectives that we can see, but, to be very fair to government, they have been very open about having further consultation. They do realise that this is a very, very technical issue. There are very few people with expertise in this area. Industry has it, and we are continuing discussions.

MR SMYTH: The final questions we asked were about what analysis the government had done and the impact the change of use charge increases would have on first homebuyers, older Canberrans downsizing and indeed the rental market. The government said they had done none of that analysis or that the analysis was being worked on. There is, of course, a case that says that the further you go out and the more infrastructure you have to build the more expensive the city becomes to operate. If the change of use charge does, as you have just said, force a decline in infill and more greenfield sites, how does that affect the long-term viability of the city?

Ms Carter: In relation to the question about housing affordability, I think it is just speculative to say that it would reduce housing affordability. It certainly would mean that it was less possible for first homebuyers to acquire property, whether a unit or what have you, in inner city locations. But the government has a strong forward land release program, with many thousands of residential blocks to be released. The government has a very successful program at the moment, OwnPlace, which I had the opportunity to visit in recent weeks out at Bonner and so on. There is high-quality stock at a good price—under \$300,000. So that is all happening.

But the broader question really is about what sort of city we want in the future. The Treasury did not consider the other issues around the change of use charge. It was not part of the consultant's brief. The consultant was not asked to look at the range of issues we are talking about today, such as the flow-on impact to other property taxes, stamp duties and so on. The consultant was not asked to consider issues such as sites, land release and infill. One of the things the Property Council has asked of Treasury is that the scope of the brief that the consultant was given be broadened to take into account these other factors.

Mr Wheeler: Just to add to that, there is an inherent conflict in the way in which the government assesses this. I can understand the position. On the one hand they are relying on revenue from land very heavily, and the easiest way to do that is simply to release more land on the fringes. We are having a whole new satellite city, Molonglo, being developed. It is very easy to have policies just to promote that—that is purely the revenue raising side of the equation—but at the same time there is a strong development community and industry which employ a lot people and which are basically the main tool for achieving densification and greater sustainability within the confines of the city. We cannot afford the infrastructure. I do not know how the government justifies, on a carbon neutrality basis, how we just keep growing. We as a city just cannot afford that, and that is related to population. So there are all those sorts of other policy conflicts that do not sit well with just leverage or a decision being made purely on revenue alone. It is an inherent conflict that I think the government is conscious of, but it is such a temptation to give into it.

THE CHAIR: I want to go back to one of the things you said in your opening statement, which was around 52 per cent of the tax revenue coming from the property sector in one form or another and the need to broaden the tax base. Have you developed any ideas at the council about what could be put forward? What else could make up any gap if there were to be a drop in that income?

Mr Wheeler: I think we have recently ruled out a super profits tax for mining.

Ms Carter: Just to restate the point and why it has been possible for the ACT government to reap these kinds of revenues from the property sector, there have been a couple of unique factors. As I said earlier, we have had the largest property and construction boom in Canberra's history. That was almost entirely driven by commonwealth government expansion. Our office market is over two million square metres, the third largest in the country.

When we added 25 per cent of the office market to that, it was very significant. There

has been a lot of work in Canberra as a result of that. We are heading into a downturn because there simply is not that kind of demand from the commonwealth. Inevitably, in terms of the commercial property sector, there will be some contraction. It just goes to the underlying principle. It is not a sound thing for government to rely so heavily on one sector of the economy—more than 50 per cent in this case—for revenue, especially, looking forward, when we have come off the back of a property boom and are not likely to see something like that for many years to come. We saw in the federal budget when it was handed down that they are establishing or relocating a number of commonwealth agencies and functions to other capital cities. This is very unfortunate from our point of view.

In terms of how do we address the over-reliance on property tax, the simple, easy way to describe it is to broaden the tax base. The hard question is how. One of the things that could be done is to have a proper and comprehensive review of some of the taxes we have and how they could be more broadly and equitably applied. We talk about this every year, but the fire and emergency services levy is a perfect case in point. It is currently only levied on property, yet the recipients of fire and emergency services are motor vehicle owners and a whole range of others in the community that ought to bear that cost.

There are modest things that the ACT government can do that we support, such as realising more equitable car parking prices. Again, this is borne by the community and it adds to things such as sustainable transport policies. This is slightly beyond the Property Council's remit, but we have one of the most successful universities in the country, if not the world. In fact, the ANU was rated recently by the *Times* education supplement as the 16th top university of the world.

Mr Wheeler: The Harvard of the south, I think it has been called.

THE CHAIR: Yes, I believe it has been called the Harvard of the south.

Ms Carter: We should be leveraging from that. The commonwealth government has just provided in the federal budget a very large injection of funds into the ANU to build on more research capacity. There are opportunities there for the ACT government to work with the federal government and the ANU to encourage and support more clean and green industries.

There are barriers to doing that. One of them, unfortunately enough, is housing affordability. There have been examples in past years where IT consultancy firms, major international ones, have wanted to set up schools at the ANU but have been unable to because there has not been sufficient accommodation for people to relocate to Canberra.

In fact, it would be useful—and I am sure the government cares about this—to have some sort of public forum and discussion about the things that we can do as a community to broaden our tax base and to encourage some of those industries. I suspect the Canberra Business Council, which has more IT sorts of firms, would have better ideas on that as well. From our point of view, let us scrutinise the taxes that are applied, see how they can be applied more efficiently and more cleverly, broaden them out and make them fairer. If we have the right economy, if it is a good place to

invest and if we do not have prohibitive taxes that are higher than across the border, people will invest here.

When you look at some of our larger members, the Stocklands, the GPTs, the Mirvac, they do not think about Canberra in the way that they do. They think about their property asset portfolio and where they are going to invest. If you make it hard, it will not be here; it will be in Perth or Adelaide or somewhere else. They just look at their bottom line. I think it would be timely to review some of the more onerous, punitive and unfairly applied taxes, such as the fire and emergency services levy. We do not need to do this by reinventing the wheel. The New South Wales public accounts committee spent 12 months looking at precisely that tax and came up with a better model than we did. We should learn from their lessons.

Mr Wheeler: It is a timely question to ask. One of the justifications, I guess, for the ACT not exploring the question further was the fact that the Henry review was being undertaken. We know what the Henry review now says. In fact, we know what the federal government's response, notably, is on that. There were 123 recommendations and three have been taken up.

There is a broad landscape that is being provided that can be leveraged off from the ACT's perspective. Devising the best tax model and the best revenue model is the function, sadly, of our federal system where various legal powers rest in some states and the commonwealth, and not as a whole, and that creates problems. But the government can be creative in the way in which it seeks to choose to enforce its revenue. But relying on one source alone is inherently risky; it has to be.

MR SMYTH: With regard to tax, your recommendation 10 talks about bracket creep, particularly in terms of stamp duty and land tax, and you suggest an annual review. Are the thresholds still way too low?

Mr Wheeler: We still have the highest stamp duty ultimate rate in the country, as I keep getting reminded by clients. They say, "What's the stamp duty?" I say, "6.75 per cent" and they go, "What? It's even more here." So it does register. The government takes the cream off that. It is convenient for any government of any colour to take that, but to be fair and equitable you would think you should give some of that back.

Ms Carter: We did some analysis on this and I think it is helpful to put it in context. There are some tax design principles that governments ought to always take into account—and I do not need to give anyone a lesson—efficiency, equity, simplicity, stability and transparency. They are the tests. Taxes that are levied in the ACT are very far from those principles. The worst offenders, from our point of view, are stamp duty on property transactions, stamp duty on insurances, the fire and emergency services levy that I have spoken to, and the change of use charge which we have dealt with as well.

To put some numbers around it—this was from analysis done by KPMG Econtech—over the five years to 2009-10 the ACT's total revenue increased by an average of 6.6 per cent per year, but tax revenue from stamp duty on property transfers blew out by an average of 17.3 per cent per year. That is absolutely massive. We are the worst offenders in the country. Institutional investors and others—capital is mobile—look at

that. Conveyances increased 2½ times faster than the overall government revenue. Over the same five years that I am talking about, the average annual increase in all property taxes was 13.3 per cent, or twice the growth in total government revenue. So it is getting much, much worse.

THE CHAIR: I guess that goes back to my question. We do not have mining in the ACT. We do not have those sorts of industries. What we have is land and transactions around property.

Ms Carter: We gouge it and land is finite.

THE CHAIR: So we are limited in all of that. I guess that was where I was thinking about the Property Council. Ms Carter, you mentioned the ANU—that we should be leveraging off the research and development that is coming out of those institutions and looking at building new industry within the ACT as well. I understand that is what you were saying.

Ms Carter: Yes.

Mr Wheeler: I guess the perspective there—and we have made this point before, privately and publicly, to government—is that there are two ways of getting revenue. One is to increase the level of taxes you have and the other is to stimulate activity, because it is activity that creates more revenue, more value, more payroll tax and so forth. One is a positive and one is a negative.

The negative is very easy to implement because it is just a line on the page. The stimulus is a little bit harder, but it is more long term and more sustainable. We have the leverage to be able to do that, but we do not seem to have clicked it yet. To be fair, the question you have asked of us is a very good question, but you should not be asking that of us. You should be asking it of someone else.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MR SMYTH: That document that you were quoting from—can you supply the committee with that if it is a public document?

Ms Carter: I will be able to. This is just a draft. I will be able to provide that analysis to the committee, yes.

MR SMYTH: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Are there any other questions? Mr Hargreaves?

MR HARGREAVES: No, I have been entertained quite sufficiently, thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for appearing before the estimates committee today. There will be a transcript sent out. If you have any corrections please get back to the secretary.

Meeting adjourned from 12.35 to 2.03 pm.

LINKE, MR MICHAEL, Chief Executive Officer, RSPCA

THE CHAIR: Welcome to this public hearing of the Select Committee on Estimates. Thank you to Mr Linke, who is representing the RSPCA today, for agreeing to meet with us. We have set aside approximately 30 minutes. Could you first confirm for the record that you understand the implications of the privilege statement?

Mr Linke: Yes, I have read it and I do understand it.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Would you like to start by making a brief opening statement?

Mr Linke: Thank you. I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to present some information about RSPCA, give you a brief rundown of our role in the community and look at some of the highlights and some of the pressure points that we face over the next couple of years.

Just to give you a little bit of history, in the last five years we have had an overall increase in demand for our services of about 20 per cent, which is continuing to stretch both our operational resources and the site that we are currently on—a site that we have been on since 1955. Those increases have come in a couple of different areas. We have had a sustained increase of about 15 per cent in the last five years of companion animals. As Canberra has grown, so has the need for companion animal care. Cats, dogs, ferrets, rabbits, guinea pigs, rats and mice are the main species that we look after there.

In terms of our wild animal management, we are the only licensed carer in the ACT that can look after wild animals. We have had a 27 per cent increase in the number of animals coming into care over the last five years, with no additional increase in the capacity to cater and care for those animals, other than a few ramshackle sheds and aviaries that we have put in.

In terms of our funding base, our need for funding and our operational expenditure have more than doubled in the last five years, and we have enjoyed some increased funding from the government. Our funding has increased from about \$200,000 a year to a peak last year of \$780,000, which included a \$100,000 emergency payment as a result of the global financial crisis.

We submitted a budget proposal to the ACT government seeking similar funding this year. We have been advised that our core funding will not increase but there will be other avenues to add additional funding to try and match that level of \$780,000 in the 2009-10 financial year. So we are hoping that that funding is matched in the coming year.

With respect to some of the successes that we have had, we are the only RSPCA in Australia that has a euthanasia rate under 10 per cent for dogs, which is a fantastic success. A number of the programs that we have introduced have been adopted in other shelters. I have, in fact, recently been appointed as a mentor to RSPCA Tasmania to assist them to develop some of the programs that we have developed here in Canberra with a view to improving their homing rate for dogs and cats.

We enjoy the lowest euthanasia rate for cats in the country, running at about 30 to 35 per cent, when most other shelters are euthanasing 50 to 60 per cent, and in some cases 70 per cent, of cats. We introduced the find a friend program, which is a program that has now gone nationally across RSPCA and is now implemented in 40 shelters across the country, which is one of the reasons we have such success with our homing rate.

With respect to our key areas and areas of concern in the coming years, obviously there is the site where we are currently located. I had the privilege of having about 97 semitrailers drive past my office about two weeks ago, which was quite fun. As you know, they are obviously developing that area and it is going to put pressure on our facility and something needs to be considered. So that is one of the main things that we have identified in our strategic forward planning.

Large volumes of animals coming through backyard breeding is an increasing concern for us, and an ongoing concern. We have had a number of high-profile cases in Queensland and New South Wales to do with puppy farms and we do have evidence that there are puppy farms operating outside Canberra that are sending their animals in to pet shops here in Canberra, which is a concern to us.

The issue of mental health, domestic violence, low income earners and socially disadvantaged people is also a concern. Sixty-five per cent of the community own pets and it is reasonable to assume that 65 per cent of people suffering from mental illness and 65 per cent of domestic violence victims will also own pets, and we need to put in place strategies to manage those people and their pets.

Two other areas of concern for us are food labelling—we are looking at some improvements and some initiatives to improve labelling of food so that people are aware of where their food comes from—and, of course, the ongoing battery hen debate. I would like to thank John Hargreaves for championing our fireworks cause over the last number of years. We were successful in having that passed through parliament. I would like to acknowledge and thank him for that today.

MR HARGREAVES: Thanks, Michael.

Mr Linke: That is all I have to say as an opening address.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Linke. I wanted to pick up on the increase in demand. You said there was not going to be an increase in the amount of money that you got from the ACT government but that there were additional funding options that might be available to you. One of my questions is: what are those funding options? If it is around grants and so forth that you need to put in for, doesn't that add a level of uncertainty and doesn't that make it a little bit of an ad hoc approach to properly funding the organisation?

Mr Linke: It does indeed. I would prefer to have core funding and have some certainty around the funding. It allows me then to put in place a strategic plan for our staff and gives my staff certainty. If we are relying on grants such as environment grants or grants through an infrastructure scheme here in Canberra—ACT Health

promotion grants and those types of grants which we have successfully won in the past—some years you win them and some years you do not. So if you win a grant for \$20,000 one year and then do not win it the next year, you need to find alternative funding or you need to stop that service that you are providing. My personal belief is that core funding should be set. It should be set at a commensurate level that we need to do the work that we need to do, based on current numbers, rather than chasing and applying for government-based grants.

We also apply for private grants through private trusts and foundations. Again, that can add some uncertainty because often, once a trust or a foundation funds you, it will then look to fund other organisations in future years. So you are not always going to win that \$50,000 grant. You might win it once; you might win it three or four years later. It does make it difficult. My preference would be to have certainty and core funding available to us.

MR SMYTH: On that issue, what is the shortfall?

MR HARGREAVES: Madam Chair, can I add a question on that, please?

THE CHAIR: Yes, certainly, Mr Hargreaves, and then we will go back to Mr Smyth.

MR HARGREAVES: Michael, I notice that—and Brendan would know because we have both had responsibility for it—Domestic Animal Services is predominantly about dogs. It has other animals that it looks after but it is predominantly about dogs, whereas the RSPCA has the whole gamut of domestic and wildlife welfare at its core. Do you think the government should now be looking at an overarching funding model to look after total animal welfare, where there is a partnership between government-provided services like Domestic Animal Services, kangaroo welfare and the RSPCA, and it is totally funded from a partnership perspective?

Mr Linke: I am not opposed to that. I think it is a great idea. I think it could set a unique model in Australia. You are correct in saying that DAS—Domestic Animal Services—look after dogs. Their current facility only caters for dogs. So when they have a puppy surrendered, a kitten, a cat, it comes across to us. Models in other states and pounds send those animals across and there is a funded contract. There is a contract with the local RSPCA to manage those animals. There is nothing like that in Canberra. There is core funding and a flat figure, I suppose, that we are given each year to cater for those animals.

If we developed a model and a facility where RSPCA managed the Animal Welfare Act and the Domestic Animals Act was managed by the government but the actual day-to-day care of those animals fell to RSPCA and it was appropriately funded, I think we would have a better model overall. So I would not be opposed to it at all.

MR HARGREAVES: In fact, you would probably support it, wouldn't you?

Mr Linke: I would support it, yes.

MR SMYTH: What is the projected shortfall this year?

Mr Linke: If we do not receive similar funding to the \$786,000 that we received last year, by whatever figure that falls short, that will be our shortfall. So if we only receive the core funding of \$400,000, we will have a \$386,000 shortfall in the current financial year. We have budgeted on that money. I have looked at all the core programs that we are running. We can raise the \$2.7 million figure needed to deliver all those core programs; the additional \$700,000 allows us to deliver 100 per cent of the programs that we need to deliver. So the \$400,000 is locked in under a contract. We will receive \$220,000, including GST, of that in July and we will receive an additional \$220,000 in January. It is the other \$380,000 that we have been advised should be coming, but we have had no concrete advice, no letter, no official confirmation, that that has been budgeted and will be allocated to us, other than some verbal advice.

MS BRESNAN: You mentioned in your opening statement relocating the facility. In discussions with government, including the budget discussions, because it will have an impact on that for you, has there been any mention of the relocation issue and how that would actually be funded, if that were to happen?

Mr Linke: There has been lots of talk of relocation. I think I opened discussions with the government four years ago on relocating our site. There have been two feasibility studies or two costing studies of building alternative sites and we are doing a third one now. I received a letter recently from Territory and Municipal Services asking RSPCA to do a needs assessment of what our needs are into the future and we are currently preparing a response to that. So, yes, there has been lots of discussion.

RSPCA has been very clear that we do not have the capital reserves to fund such a facility. We are talking about \$10 million to \$30 million in terms of a facility. Especially if you combine what Mr Hargreaves said with a government-run pound facility there as well, you are looking in the high \$20 million price bracket to deliver a facility of that nature. We have \$1 million in the bank, so we do not have the resources. It needs to be funded from somewhere.

Discussions with government have suggested that at some point in a budget in the very near future funding of a capital nature may be allocated. Again, we do not have anything concrete on that and we are currently sitting in our site. I have cut back all capital expenditure on our site, in the view that we will move, and hoping to save money and not spend it on non-urgent repairs or development of our current site. We are only putting in what we need to cater for the increase in demand. We put a new shed in, as an example, last week—a \$3,000 shed—to manage the increased demand in kittens. But I am not putting down bricks and mortar because one day we will have to move.

MS BRESNAN: With that feasibility study, there has been no time line given by government about when—

Mr Linke: No.

MS BRESNAN: you expect that to happen so that you can do that sort of planning? There has been none of that?

Mr Linke: No. My understanding is that a site will be selected by Christmas this year. Beyond that, how that is funded, how a site is then established and a facility built on that site, I have no understanding of what the time line is for that. I do know that it takes about 18 months to build an animal shelter.

THE CHAIR: You just mentioned that you have been in discussions about location for the last four years, I think you said, and in that time there have been two feasibility or costing studies and now you are on to your third. Why? Were they different sites that were being costed or is this because your needs were changing? I am just wondering why we have had three in four years.

Mr Linke: The site changed. The first site was Narrabundah Lane. I think that site is still under consideration. It is a site next door to Therapeutic Goods. There was an initial design concept put together to give the government some understanding of how much it would cost. Then the Quamby facility was considered in tandem with the mental health facility that has finally ended up or will end up there. That was the second feasibility looked at. The third one is the current site where Domestic Animal Services is located and that is the current site that is being looked at.

I suspect it is a combination of both as to which site is more suitable. As time progresses, there is the matter of having some more understanding of where the government wants the facility and, as Mr Hargreaves said about the co-joined facility, that has only entered discussions in the last six to 12 months. It was not originally considered three or four years ago. It was just a matter of asking: what is RSPCA going to do? It was when the original announcements about the Molonglo development arose that somebody said: "RSPCA is there. We need to start having some thinking about where that site will end up."

MR HARGREAVES: With respect to the Narrabundah Lane option, is that the same site that the proposed prison was to go on, which would be between TGA and Callum Brae, as I understand that lot to be?

Mr Linke: Is that the old pony club?

MR HARGREAVES: I do not know if there are ponies on it, but I am aware that there are endangered grasses and endangered wildlife species like the earless dragon, I think, on that site. Do you know whether that may be the reason why that was rejected?

Mr Linke: I do not know why it was and I do not know whether it has been rejected but I would happily have it rejected if there were endangered species on it.

MR HARGREAVES: That may be a conversation for another time, perhaps.

Mr Linke: It might be.

MR COE: On the broader issue of Domestic Animal Services and the RSPCA and the relationship between the two, why is the government in this space at all, in providing the pound? Why isn't the RSPCA doing everything?

Mr Linke: About 150 or 160 years ago, you used to have dog catchers, and dog catchers were always engaged by the government, because we had lots of stray dogs. I think it is a historic hangover that we still have pounds because that is where the space was. The government used to engage a dog catcher, he would drive around in his truck and pick up dogs and you would need somewhere to keep them. Historically, they used to put them in big vats of water and just drown them, whereas now they have pounds and they have quality care in most cases. So I think there is a historical reason why we still have pounds and then why we have RSPCA.

RSPCA came along and said: “Hang on, we want to help these animals. We want to do something to stop cruelty.” So RSPCAs grew up, pounds grew up and now, in 2010, we are looking at each other and thinking, “Why are we running two facilities?” Should the government just say: “Here’s the money. You guys look after animals. You guys do a good job, tap into the sponsorship, tap into the charity market, tap into those type of opportunities available and you guys manage it”?

I would much prefer that model. We need to move away from history and say that the dog catcher as a concept is no more. We do not have thousands of roaming dogs like we used to have. There are still a few but we are better equipped and better able, I suppose, to do that now than government. Government still needs to take responsibility for recalcitrant dogs, dogs that bite people, dogs that attack people and families that do not manage aggressive dogs appropriately. I think the government has a role to play there and I think it should continue to have a role to play. But there is no reason that RSPCA cannot play a role in the day-to-day care of those animals. The government can manage the people side of it and put some rules and guidelines in place to manage an aggressive dog, but if that has been seized, we will look after it for a period of time.

MR COE: Has the government been receptive to that idea?

Mr Linke: At this stage, yes. I have had very positive conversations on that. We have been able to break it down quite clearly about where the roles are, where the delineation is and what role the RSPCA would play. My concern is that we need to make sure the community is aware that if RSPCA is co-joined or co-located with a government-run pound, the community actually see it as an RSPCA facility and they continue to donate, they continue to come in and buy food and continue to support us. If there is a perception that it is a government facility, community support will drop off. So I think branding, marketing and awareness in the community are paramount to make sure it is successful.

MR COE: Why would it necessarily have to be a co-located facility? Why does the government even run a pound in the first place?

Mr Linke: It does not need to be co-located. It could just be RSPCA, and every time the government seizes an aggressive dog, it brings it in to us and there is a fee for service to deliver that. The government manages the people, so the community does not see the pound. What a wonderful society we would be if we were the only territory or state in Australia that did not have a pound. It would be absolutely magnificent. If we did not have a pound, it would just remove the stigma of what is attached to current government-run pounds, and it would be a fantastic step forward

for us.

MR COE: I imagine it would be cheaper as well.

Mr Linke: Yes.

MR COE: Considerably, I would imagine.

Mr Linke: Considerably.

MR HARGREAVES: Can I flick to a slightly different subject. The thing that you and I have spoken about, Michael, over the recent past has been the protection of wild birds. This is related to the budget, because I do not see anything in it. Maybe this is something that this estimates committee could consider recommending, or not, as is its wont. We see, over at Grevillea Park and places like that, a regular collecting place for people with bags of bread, feeding the swans and feeding the ducks. From our conversations, your information to me is that that is probably the most dangerous thing you can do to a duck or a swan. Is it time, in fact, that we started having education programs saying to people in Canberra, “Do not do this, please, because you’re going to kill these animals”? If that program of education does not work, should we legislate to stop it? Could you give me the association’s view on that, please?

Mr Linke: Yes and yes. Quite simply, feeding water birds and native birds bread is totally alien. It is like humans eating half a dozen hamburgers for dinner every night.

MR HARGREAVES: And the problem with that is?

Mr Linke: The problem is death, ultimately. The bread swells up in their throats, they suffocate, birds get a condition called bumble foot because they are not used to being out of the water. They then come out of the water searching for the bread, the biscuits and the things that we feed them, so they get a condition called bumble foot, which affects their feet. They get cuts and bruises on their feet, they are susceptible to disease and, ultimately, death. So all avenues for a bird being fed bread ultimately lead to death.

MR HARGREAVES: And the crop, of course—the fact that the bread swells.

Mr Linke: Exactly. It swells in the neck and stops them being able to breathe—so in the crop, in their neck. I have seen birds that have had to have their necks cut open to release it and to see the volume. Sometimes it is two to three times the normal volume width or circumference of the neck of a swan. It is quite damaging to the animal. Perhaps we can market and promote a community education awareness campaign, or perhaps we can legislate. Perhaps we can spend \$5,000 and put some signs around our lakes.

At the same time, we might want to say, “Hey, don’t go shooting them either.” We have had some shooting instances recently. People should not be using our waterways and our lakes as areas to shoot native animals. It is just ridiculous. It would be great to see some funding in the budget to do some of these little things. There are the macro

things we can do in society—building pounds, phasing out battery hens and things like that—but there are some real micro level things that we can do where we can get some quick wins, where we can tick off half a dozen and see dramatic improvements to animal welfare.

It cost me nine months of care for the swan that was shot, costing thousands and thousands of dollars. If we have more information about fishermen who fish on the lake not leaving twine and if we have more information about people not feeding animals, those animals will not come in for care and then we are going to save money. You spend a little bit of money on preventing that type of activity and your budget reduces in terms of your overall spend. This is something we talk about all the time at the shelter. If we can stop these animals coming into care, it will save a fortune.

Why should somebody suffering from mental illness have to surrender an animal because they are going into a mental health facility for a week? There should be a capacity in our shelter to care for their animal whilst they are receiving their mental health support so they can come out with the knowledge that they are going to get their animal back.

THE CHAIR: I wanted to move on to that point because you raised it in your community survey. It is around additional funding for mental health, domestic violence, youth at risk, violent youth and so forth. I was assuming that that was the case. It is about those who may have to be hospitalised and domestic violence where mum and kids have to flee. They have the pet with them but they cannot take the pet into whatever emergency accommodation they are staying in. Is that the sort of thing that you are talking about?

Mr Linke: Exactly. Those cases were brought up with the Treasurer recently—women’s refuges. The mental health facility that is going to be built, we understand, is a forensic mental health facility, so it is for the worst offenders. We are talking to staff at the Alexander Maconochie Centre about prisoners having access to animals. People in domestic violence situations and people who suffer mental health all need to go somewhere else. As I said at the outset, six to seven out of 10 of them have an animal. So when they go somewhere else, what happens to the animal? Invariably, the unsophisticated answer is to send it to the RSPCA—they will look after it. But it becomes an additional cost. We have to find another family for that animal. It may be in care for 20 days. If it is in care for 20 days, it has cost us the cost of the animal already. So we are losing money.

Perhaps we can come up with a strategy that says, “Whilst you’re receiving your mental health support, whilst you’ve fled the domestic violence situation and you’re looking for new supported accommodation, there’s a guarantee that your animal will be cared for and that when you finally solve those problems in your life your animal will be returned to you.” I think we will have quicker turnaround times in a lot of these places as well. People will recover more quickly from mental health episodes and they may require less overall treatment. Then you have got other savings in your budget. You start to see health savings across the budget. Again, it requires a little bit of investment up front. Why do women’s refuges in Canberra not have the capacity for cats and dogs to be housed in them? We have a government policy which says that in ACT housing you can take your cats and dogs, but those refuges do not have any

capacity.

THE CHAIR: That is why I am interested in that one. A project looked at that very issue under the homelessness strategy. I must follow up on that to see where it has got to. It is a real situation that is faced every day by families fleeing domestic violence.

Mr Linke: Exactly. We can support that. We can then support the animals in care in those houses. We can make sure there is appropriate food and we can make sure that any vaccinations and wormings are up to date. But they are not in our facility taking up the space of other animals that are stray or need to be surrendered for other reasons. We can work with both sets of animals in two facilities. It makes real common sense to us to get into that space and support those people. Again, it needs to be funded. There is no funding directly for animals as a result of the budget announcements where all the additional spending was going to be into mental health and domestic violence.

MS BRESNAN: So you would see it being like a separate facility or a separate type of program? Is that how it would work?

Mr Linke: It would work where the facilities are. If you have a women's refuge, you put a dog kennel and a couple of cat cages there. I mentioned the Alexander Maconochie Centre. We are working with their pre-release program. We will be building a bird aviary for pre-release prisoners to provide care for native birds to rehabilitate and assist us with native bird rehabilitation because our current facility does not have the space. We can offer the pre-release prisoners an opportunity to develop some core skills, some volunteering skills, some training skills, so that their employment opportunities are enhanced when they leave the prison system altogether. So not only are we helping animals; we are helping people now. There is too much common sense around sometimes.

MR SMYTH: I refer to your table 6 on page 10. You have factored in a four per cent growth in the projected total of incoming animals each year for the next couple of years. That is above the growth of population. Why is it growing at that rate?

Mr Linke: There are a couple of reasons. A lot of animals are coming into Canberra from outside areas. If you look at Canberra's population growth, we have a lot of people going out to Cooma pound, Goulburn pound and a lot of areas in Queanbeyan. We are supporting Queanbeyan pound. They are bringing animals to us because our programs are proving to be so successful. We are seeing some additional pressure. People are ringing us up saying, "I don't want to take it here because it'll get put down. I'll take it to you guys." I factored some of that growth based on our population growth, plus the additional growth that we are seeing as a result of the successful programs. That is based on our historical growth. As I said at the outset, 20 per cent over five years is about four per cent growth per year. So we are just sitting with that. That is a reason.

MR SMYTH: Referring to table 2 on page 7, the number of wildlife animals that are brought to you has grown significantly—1,700, 2,500, 3,400, 3,700, 4,000. What is driving that growth?

Mr Linke: I think it is awareness. Five years ago we were a fairly tight organisation. We only had one staff member looking after wildlife, so we had no real capacity to manage wildlife. In the five years that I have been at RSPCA, we now have four staff during quiet times and seven staff at peak times. So we have a sevenfold human resource available to care for some of those native animals. We have adjusted our program so that it is not hospice care. It used to be hospice care. An animal would come in and, as we could not really help it, it was put to sleep. We are now providing a lot of rehabilitative care, which is allowing us to release those animals.

Coupled with the RSPCA television program that enjoys 1.5 to two million viewers per week when it is on TV and the high profile that we have here in Canberra, the community has the confidence to say, “Well, if I do find an injured animal, I will take it to RSPCA because the outcome is going to be positive.” I think, historically, people did not do that. We still get some people saying, “I don’t want to bring an animal to RSPCA. It might get put down.” But we are seeing that less and less. I think it is a combination of increased population, increased urbanisation and what we call “people recreating”. When people are out and about and see animals, they are more inclined to bring them to us rather than leave them. That is why I think that growth is there.

THE CHAIR: Mr Hargreaves, a final question?

MR HARGREAVES: Thank you very much. Michael, a kangaroo management plan has just been released. I have two questions. One is a yes or no answer and the other one is an open question. Was the society involved in the compilation of the plan, and does the society have a view on it?

Mr Linke: We provided a submission on the plan. Historically, we have been involved in the development of plans. At some past committees, and the kangaroo management committees that we sat on, we provided evidence and information at that time. To answer your second question—yes, we are very happy with it. It is probably the number one kangaroo management plan in the country. It is a standout plan, over and above the states and territories outside this area, and we are very pleased with it. It is a great outcome. I think the way the government has managed the very difficult question of kangaroo management in the last three years after we got beyond Belconnen has been very good.

MR HARGREAVES: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr Linke, for appearing today. The transcript of the hearing will be provided to you. If you have any corrections, could you please send them back through the secretary?

Mr Linke: Thanks for the opportunity.

SINGER, MS ELIZABETH, President, ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations

BAGWORTH, MS MEGAN, Policy Officer, ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Singer and Ms Bagworth, for attending today and representing the P&C association. We have approximately 30 minutes for discussion. Could you first please confirm that you have read and understood the implications of the privileges statement?

Ms Singer: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Before we start asking our questions, did you want to begin with a brief statement?

Ms Singer: No, I think we are just happy to take questions.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for filling out the community groups survey for the committee. I note that you identified four particular areas of concern that you had with regard to the 2010-11 budget. The first one was around your concern that the ACT government will not be able to deliver on its key strategic priority of enhancing the literacy and numeracy performance of all students based on the budget and the money it has put in there. Could you just give us a little bit more information around that?

Ms Singer: Our concern came from the NAPLAN estimates that are included in the budget documents. There are two years of NAPLAN estimates and there is no growth factor; there is no improvement factor. The numbers are the same. The indication that I have from parents is that they believe their schools are being encouraged to teach the students to improve literacy and numeracy in a way that is going to improve the NAPLAN—

THE CHAIR: So teaching to the test?

Ms Singer: Not so much teaching, no—they are improving how they are teaching in literacy and numeracy, and you will see that result in the NAPLAN testing. So we were surprised when we saw in the budget papers that the figures are the same.

Ms Bagworth: In having the strategic priority of increasing the numeracy and literacy skills of students we are given this data that is saying how students are performing in schools. In order to act on that strategic priority, the government should be using this data to then decide where it is going to be directing its funds. When student cohorts have improved and the target for 2010 is actually less than they achieved this year—and then there are also cases where, particularly in writing, Indigenous students have not performed to the 2009-10 targets—you are left with the question: how are they going to be able to achieve next year's targets when, even with the increase in funds directed towards literacy and numeracy, they still failed to achieve those targets? How is the government then going to act on its strategic priority to achieve those targets?

MR HARGREAVES: Madam Chair, can I ask a question about that? You mentioned that there are a couple of schools that are already achieving above the targets. In your

view, is what we are seeing a benchmark, if you like, for the lowest common denominator? We should be celebrating those schools that are above that lowest common denominator and trying to expose those schools which are doing it as role models for those people, but we still need to recognise that there needs to be a benchmark which is achievable for those ones that are not.

Ms Bagworth: I think there are only four of them which achieve above the target. These are averages across schools. You cannot really pinpoint schools and say, “That’s because of a program that’s run at that school or they’ve got good teachers there.”

MR HARGREAVES: Is it P&C’s view that the highest performing schools are those four, which I think we should celebrate, but that perhaps should be the lowest benchmark? Is that what we are hearing is coming?

Ms Singer: If I could just correct you. The numbers that we have are the scores across the whole of the ACT, not scores of the four schools. We are talking about four different areas of the tests, so the tests are run—

MR HARGREAVES: I understand that.

Ms Singer: There are multiple papers. The test within itself has not got a benchmark. It actually has a performance band which they consider to be a minimum standard. That is not written against as a number. I could not find the number of students with minimum standards in the budget papers. That just could be my bad reading. That is a federally reported indicator—the percentage of students we get above that minimum band. The minimum band—

MR HARGREAVES: So you are saying those four schools are above that minimum band. Is that what you are saying?

Ms Singer: No. The budget papers separate them into the literacy and numeracy sections and then by year and by Indigenous group. So the ACT score for all year 3 students in reading is 427, as reported. The target is 417. When we look at the target then for 2010-11, the target is still 417. It has not been adjusted with an improvement measure that I would expect to see if—

THE CHAIR: With this focus on literacy and numeracy programs—in this case, literacy programs across schools—you would expect that those targets would be improving.

Ms Singer: Yes.

MR HARGREAVES: Does the council have a view on how far that improvement should be? Like you said, you do not see an improvement in the target, if you like—I will use my words for a second—and you would have hoped to have seen something developed to give us a better target or a better benchmark. Does the council have a view on how far up that should be?

Ms Singer: No. We are still trying to relate the numbers here backwards through the

statistical process to the 40 questions that each student answers on the paper. We do not—

MR HARGREAVES: It is not a trick question, by the way; I just wanted to know.

Ms Singer: It would be really nice, as a parent, to say, “There are 40 questions on the exam paper and the student got, say, 21 right.” We hope that in year 3 next year the average in the class got 22 questions out of 40 right. It would be nice to have that. The accountability measures use the statistical numbers that go through from the exam. It has been explained to me. It is like a black psychometrics statistical black box of computations that occur and then they come out with this much larger number in the end.

MR HARGREAVES: Am I the only person in the whole world that does not understand it? Does everybody out there in the community understand how that three dimensional matrix thing that you are talking about actually works? They are talking about a black box and they really do not know what they are going to measure there.

THE CHAIR: Complicated, yes.

MR HARGREAVES: Am I right?

THE CHAIR: I think what Ms Singer is getting to is that there is some sort of formula that it goes through that we would not be able to sit through and plug through at the moment.

MR HARGREAVES: So when the kids come home and there is the result measured against the class performance, parents just have to trust them. Is that what I hear you saying?

Ms Singer: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Yes.

MR HARGREAVES: And you do not?

Ms Singer: We would like to understand a little bit more about the process.

MR HARGREAVES: Fair enough. I would not.

THE CHAIR: Ms Bresnan?

MS BRESNAN: Thank you. This is in relation to one of the issues you have raised in your surveys about disability and funding for students with a disability. I think you have noted the fact that there could be about another 30 students coming into the ACT school system in 2010 with a disability, in relation particularly to Woden school. Obviously we have got the other inquiry process happening. We do not have any details yet about how that additional funding—I think it is about 1.6—for disability education is going to be distributed. I was just wondering if you have any views on that, given the points you have raised from your survey, and if there have been any

discussions with you by the government about this.

Ms Singer: The discussions so far have been around do we or do we not extend Woden to do year 11 and year 12. Woden has definitely been extended to cater for year 11 and year 12.

THE CHAIR: I met with a couple of parents yesterday who confirmed that it has been extended, yes, but not for students with mild intellectual disability, who I think will still be going off to, say, a college setting. That is my understanding.

MR HARGREAVES: Where will they go? Down to Deakin?

THE CHAIR: College.

MR HARGREAVES: College where? Is there a particular one?

THE CHAIR: A local college that may have—

MR HARGREAVES: Stirling? Canberra college up the road?

THE CHAIR: a learning support centre in their college.

Ms Singer: Our concern came from the fact that, for new schools or schools that are having years extended, there is a new school operating cost in the budget which allows for teachers to be allocated to the site early to work on curriculum or modifying the curriculum. The schools listed in the budget papers are Harrison, Tuggeranong and Gungahlin. Woden school should be given the same privilege, the same benefit, because they have the same need of having one or two teachers working offline just on developing and modifying curriculum for the students that will be there for their new year 11 studies at the beginning of 2011. The fact that it was not put in—that there is an additional amount of money for students with a disability for 2010-11, but within the new school operating costs it is not mentioned there—makes us think that its new school operating costs are going to come out of the student with a disability one. Maybe it should come out of the other bucket.

MS BRESNAN: So you are saying that it should be coming out of that general education budget?

Ms Singer: New school—

MS BRESNAN: Yes. So there has not been an indication to you from that new money that has been allocated in the budget—if that is going to be used for the Woden school?

Ms Singer: No.

MS BRESNAN: There has been no discussion about that? So it is, I guess, unclear whether funding is coming from there and when that will happen.

MR DOSZPOT: Madam Chair, can I ask a supplementary on that?

THE CHAIR: Yes, Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: Ms Singer, I note your comments about the Woden school and the year 11 and 12 extension. I am personally quite concerned about schools like Black Mountain school, years 13 and 14—in other words, where students with a disability have been allowed to stay on beyond the normal school leaving age of 18 and are allowed to stay until 20. That is being reversed and parents are now being told that students will not be allowed to stay on beyond 18 years of age. Does council have a view on that?

Ms Singer: We are waiting on further information to see how they are planning to provide for those students when they are 19 or 20.

MR DOSZPOT: After-school options?

Ms Singer: Yes.

MR DOSZPOT: I have got parents who have come to me in a different capacity, in a lay capacity, that have already had to make plans not to send their kids there. There are no after-school options that are being offered. I am wondering whether the council was consulted before this decision was taken. Are you aware of anyone being consulted on this?

Ms Singer: Council has not been consulted, no.

MR DOSZPOT: Are you aware of any other consultation that may have happened on this?

Ms Singer: Not that I know of, no.

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mr Hargreaves?

MR HARGREAVES: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Elizabeth, earlier we heard from Terry Williams, from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, that that body had some concerns about education provision to marginalised Indigenous kids. Does the council have a view on the efficacy of those provisions within our current system?

Ms Singer: There has been a recent change within, say, the last 12 months as to how the ACT department of education has provided for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. They had some programs that used to group the students together, but most of those programs, to my knowledge, have finished now and they have been put in smaller groupings in their local schools. With their local Indigenous communities and their cluster networks of schools, the schools have been developing agreements, contracts or statements about how the relationship is to work to improve the education and participation rates of Indigenous students. It is a very different model that we have just moved into. It is probably a bit early to say whether it is

going to work.

THE CHAIR: Could I just pick up on that. With the model that you are talking about, what school level was that engaging?

Ms Singer: It is cluster models. For example—

THE CHAIR: Yes, but was it secondary schools or—

Ms Singer: And primary schools sitting within—and college if that is appropriate within their cluster.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MR HARGREAVES: I was just curious to know whether or not there is any Indigenous or Torres Strait Islander representation on the board of the P&C council. Is there a specific place, for example? I do not know the constitution of the council.

Ms Singer: We do not have a specific place. We do have delegates from different backgrounds. At the moment, I would say yes, we do have a delegate from that sort of background. Our delegates come—

MR HARGREAVES: Is that more luck than judgement, though?

Ms Singer: That is how it works, yes.

MR HARGREAVES: It happened at Erindale college when I was on it. That is how it worked—luck and judgement and all that stuff. Would the council consider, given the marginalised opportunities for Indigenous kids and that we have an over-representation of these kids at Bimberi and places like that, that every now and again perhaps the focus on using education as a tool for social development for young Indigenous kids needs a little bit more limelight? Would the council consider having a specific position for an Indigenous person—maybe talk to the Indigenous elected body about that?

Ms Singer: The council is reviewing its constitution this year; how it forms its executive will be one of those things, yes.

THE CHAIR: I want to go back to the issue that you had raised in your survey and in your submission around students with a disability. I take Ms Bresnan's point that there is an inquiry underway. One of the issues raised by a couple of parents of students with a disability was their disappointment that the individual learning plans did not seem to be followed through properly and measured from year to year. They also spoke about it in terms of NAPLAN. There was obviously a heavy focus on testing children right throughout their schooling, so you could be checking every two years to see progress and so forth. But this same option was not available to students with, say, an intellectual disability. They understood that the test that was given, the mainstream test, may not be appropriate, but their feeling was "Why are our kids not being valued in the same way by having some sort of tests developed that would aim to see improvement and be able to measure where there was improvement?" Have you

got a view as to whether there should be extra disability funding in this sort of area, to be able to measure whether we are actually doing the right thing by our children with disability?

Ms Singer: It is really important for the parents of any student to be able to see a measure of their improvement. NAPLAN has provided a very good one for parents. Before that, we had an exam called ACTAP. “Students with a disability” covers such a diverse range, particularly with students with an intellectual disability, that you could not use a NAPLAN-based exam. But each teacher, as part of their ILP and their assessment, should be designing whatever the appropriate assessment measure is and be able to report back to the parent at the end of the year, the end of the ILP period, on how much of a change there is for their student in those particular areas—in literacy, numeracy, life skills and those sorts of things. For a lot of our parents at the moment, because the ILP process and the reporting are not working well in a lot of our schools, they are not getting that. They really feel that the system is missing out. I am hoping that there will be something from the review that might improve that.

THE CHAIR: Improve that and change it. Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: Ms Singer, in your submission you mention that the council argues that the education sector has made a significant contribution to savings—that savings from school closures and amalgamations have saved the ACT government \$34 million. You also state that council is concerned that ACT government schools are currently operating in a restricted fiscal environment. What is council’s opinion of the effect or the benefits of the school closures?

MR HARGREAVES: That is a trick question.

Ms Singer: I am thinking.

MR DOSZPOT: It is not a trick question.

MR HARGREAVES: It is going to be a trick answer.

Ms Singer: A lot of our schools started closing a few years ago. Most families have settled into a new educational environment. There is definitely still stress in local communities at the community level. But it has not produced what I thought we would see in schools, which is parents not having to have their students share textbooks or the move by some government schools this year to have school uniforms, which has seen school principals bartering for percentages from sales with the local store manager who is going to sell their uniform tops to get extra funding back in the school.

While there probably were savings made with closing schools, and it has meant that some schools have been able to be larger and therefore offer broader curriculums which have helped some of our students, there has been some disruption. But we are still at the point with our schools where we have a class getting a textbook one term and another class getting the textbook the next term—and this class does not have it in some of our schools. It is a representation of how tight the funding is and how hard our principals and their school business managers are having to work to provide those

resources for our students which we consider minimum.

MR DOSZPOT: I have a supplementary to that. Based on those comments, how does council feel about the dichotomy where you have got Flynn school, which could not be re-opened for \$2 million, yet the government is spending \$4 million on basically after-school care or school care?

THE CHAIR: Childcare?

MR DOSZPOT: Childcare.

MR HARGREAVES: They are different subjects.

Ms Singer: Yes. I am not really aware of the Flynn after-school childcare.

MR SESELJA: Could I get your comments, Ms Singer? You talked in your submission about the tough fiscal environment and concerns about the amount of money for education. In the coming years in the budget, it is identified, you would be aware, that the Department of Education and Training has to find some pretty significant savings—\$4 million in 2011-12, \$6 million in 2012-13 and over \$8 million for the following year. What are your thoughts on those savings? What does council believe the impact of that might be and how does it think the government might be able to manage it to ensure that school communities are not affected?

Ms Singer: Our conversations so far with the people at the Department of Education and Training have led us to believe that most of those savings are going to be made not at the basic school level but within the support services provided by head office. Most of our schools would say that the support services provided by head office are vital. Our parents are often aware that there are almost waiting lists to get people out in terms of providing support for students that might need additional behaviour management assessment so that they can get back on an appropriate learning plan. There is appropriate curriculum support provided from within the department. One of the things about the 2006 budget was that there was quite a restructure and a reduction in the number of positions within the department of education at that time to further look at those savings. That is where we are going to find that—it is going to put more of a burden on your classroom teacher and your school principal, because they will not have that support.

MR SMYTH: On page 3 of your submission—

THE CHAIR: Last question, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Certainly. It says that council would like to see funding for further development programs to engage and encourage parents to assist and participate. I notice that on your summary sheet you said, “Not done.” What is the effect of not doing that?

Ms Singer: Where we are not engaging parents in our school education, research has shown that it leads to lower outcomes for students. They are less engaged in their class activities; they are less engaged in extension activities; they are more likely to

not finish school or stay in full-time education to year 12. Parents provide vital support and encouragement for their child the whole way through, so it is important that we have that.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for attending this afternoon. A copy of the transcript will be sent out; if you have any corrections, please send them through to the secretary.

ROBERTSON, MS EMMA, Director, Youth Coalition of the ACT
SZUKALSKA, MS KAROLINA, Policy and Development Officer, Youth Coalition of the ACT

THE CHAIR: I welcome Ms Emma Robertson and Ms Karolina Szukalska from the Youth Coalition of the ACT to this public hearing of the Select Committee on Estimates. First of all, could I confirm for the record that you understand the implications of the privilege card? There is a copy there for you.

Ms Robertson: Certainly. Yes, I do, thank you.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to start by making a short opening statement?

Ms Robertson: I would like to start by saying thank you very much for allowing us the time to appear before the committee today. We are always pleased to come and let you guys know what we think about the budget.

Overall, we are really happy and really welcome some of the initiatives that were announced in the budget this year. In particular, we are pleased to see a small amount of recurrent funding finally come through for multicultural youth services. That is an issue that we raised last year and that has been an ongoing issue. We are also pleased to see further investment in both Bimberi and out-of-home care services, although we do have some concerns there which I will raise later. We are very pleased to see further investment in supporting carers—investment in young people with disabilities and providing them with support. There is the Youth Law Centre, the investment in supporting young people at risk of or experiencing domestic violence in the family, and further investment in education. We really recognise that, at a time when we expected that there was potentially not much scope for new initiatives, we have seen quite a few things for young people. I want to acknowledge the government for that.

However, overall our concern is that many of those initiatives are great one-off things, but we are really looking to see some direction. In particular, with regard to young people, there is a young people's plan that was released in December 2009. We were really looking to see that plan backed up with resources to implement the good aims of the young people's plan.

THE CHAIR: I did notice your public statements to the effect that you were surprised about that. I want to move on to the issue of community sector viability, that ongoing issue. I want to get your view on whether you saw that the government did have a commitment to working with the community sector around building sustainability and industrial relations capacity. We know that there has been a project out there to have a look at these issues. From the Youth Coalition's point of view, is that starting to deliver or is it still very uncertain?

Ms Robertson: I think some of it is still uncertain. I am sure that everybody is aware that there is a pay parity case happening at the federal level. I think that potentially is something that will dramatically change community sector viability and be a big issue for government to look at in the future, although I acknowledge that the Treasurer, Katy Gallagher, did refer to that in her post-budget address to the community sector.

I guess, from our point of view, the initiative that was announced in this budget in relation to the community sector related to the working with vulnerable people checking system. We were certainly concerned. We were involved in a submission to that system and were certainly one of the agencies that called for it to be a three-year check rather than a five-year check. I understand that changed what government had put aside in terms of funding for it but we certainly are concerned that there is now an additional cost in having those checks done, which will affect services. In the bigger picture, I think in terms of sector viability, I recognise that there have not been significant cuts but that the community sector has faced an increase in demand, and we have not seen that increase in demand being matched in terms of an increase in resources.

We certainly have been talking with all levels of government about workforce development, and I think that is a significant challenge for both government and the community sector as we move forward—how we actually plan long term to support and deliver a workforce that is going to, in particular, be able to provide the right supports and services for the most vulnerable people in the community, which is whom our sector is working with.

THE CHAIR: On the working with children check, currently you have a bit of a police check done on employees starting. I think the cost of that is something like \$75, if I recall. What is the proposed cost of the working with children check?

Ms Robertson: I think it is about the same. Yes, it is still about \$75. I guess our concern with the system in the first place is to make sure that it meets the needs of services so that they do not feel the need to have to do both in order to meet their own policies and procedures, because then it will be an additional cost.

THE CHAIR: I certainly understand. One of the things you mentioned in your opening statement was out-of-home care and increased funding to out-of-home care, and you listed several improvements. You have obviously been building on the work from CREATE, particularly around transitioning out of care and the issues there. We also heard from the kinship and grandparent group this morning their view that there is a lack of support for those carers. I just wondered whether you could list what you see as the top three priorities for the spending of that out-of-home care money.

Ms Robertson: We always talk about people exiting care. Certainly, I acknowledge that there have been increased costs for people in out-of-home care but we are still greatly concerned about what happens to those people who have grown up in care and the supports that are provided upon their leaving care. We call upon the government to really reiterate the commitment that there are no exits to homelessness from care. That includes exits into homelessness services, which is an exit to homelessness.

In terms of the priorities for the spending, our budget submission called for government to look at the issues facing the sector around supporting 12 to 14-year-olds. There was certainly some work done in partnership with government and community last year looking at options. So I guess the question for us is whether or not any of that money is looking to address that issue.

THE CHAIR: Was this because of the change with the youth refuges not taking in or providing a shelter for that age group, which previously they had more or less been pushed into because there was nowhere else for them to go?

Ms Robertson: Certainly the position for the homelessness services is that they support people from 16 and, in exceptional circumstances, 15-year-olds. But what we are seeing is that the message from generalist youth services is that, increasingly, 12 to 14-year-olds are presenting to services seeking support around accommodation. Certainly part of, I guess, the conversation that government and the sector have been having is about who is responsible for those young people and what are the options to provide support.

THE CHAIR: It was identified that it was the care and protection system. What has been happening there?

Ms Robertson: I think the conversation has identified that the care and protection system is one area but that, in some circumstances, it is not seen as desirable that those young people end up with full orders in the care and protection system and that we need to have a flexible service system that can actually intervene and provide support to people without taking it to a further step.

MR SESELJA: What are the options, then, for children in that situation, like a 12 or a 13-year-old for whom it is not appropriate to be under care and protection orders but they have got nowhere really to live? What kind of support can be offered and how are they supported so that they can function?

Ms Robertson: There are very few options. In terms of accommodation, the best option is for services to push for them to be taken on as a care and protection client, because then there are resources attached. If that step is not taken, they are certainly not eligible to go into the youth refuge system.

MR SESELJA: Why is that not taken? What are the reasons why, for a 12 or a 13-year-old, we would not have orders for care and protection

Ms Robertson: Sometimes they are assessed as not needing orders. I do acknowledge that DHCS has certainly committed to us that they will be looking at a further focus on 12 to 18-year-olds within the system this year. So we are very much looking forward to perhaps a shift in focus and priority for those young people.

MR SESELJA: More broadly on the issue of youth homelessness, are you able to share with us some of the trends? There have been recent reports about some of the strains on homeless shelters. We know that is nothing new. I visited Oasis recently and was speaking to them. They have been turning people away for a long time and have very limited resources, I think like most in the sector. What are the trends that you are seeing in terms of the demand for youth homelessness services?

Ms Robertson: Would you like to speak to that?

Ms Szukalska: There certainly has been always a higher demand than there is access to supported accommodation for young people within refuge systems. In terms of

trends, it is getting younger and younger that people are trying to access the services. And there are concerns around that for a number of reasons, apart from funding restrictions. A lot of services feel that it is inappropriate to house, say, a 12 or 13-year-old with 18-year-olds or 17-year-olds or, in some cases, 21-year-olds in refuges because of the influences that they may be exposed to, which means that they need to have different staff or more staff and there is no capacity for that to occur either. So that is one of the key things that are happening around the age for young people trying to access refuges.

MR SESELJA: What about at the numbers level? Are we seeing more demand for homeless services for young people in Canberra or in the region?

Ms Szukalska: Certainly through other networks, it has come to light that there is an increase in the number of young people presenting at other services that have no options for housing. In terms of refuges, refuges are pretty much at capacity most of the time and are struggling to actually accept new referrals or accept young people coming in that are knocking on their doors.

Ms Robertson: Certainly anecdotally, services reported to us last year that they were seeing an increase in numbers of young people presenting who were sleeping rough. We acknowledge that a service has started up, the street to home program. I guess we are really keen to see what kind of data they might come up with in terms of young people and actually trying to capture the numbers, because obviously it is a very hard area to collect data in. But anecdotally, services have reported to us that they have seen an increase.

THE CHAIR: Have they continued to fund the couch surfing project?

Ms Robertson: To my knowledge, yes.

MS BRESNAN: My question is in relation to Bimberi and funding that is provided there. You have already highlighted the importance of having the through care and after care and how important that is to keep young people from becoming homeless and all those other issues. I am wondering whether you could perhaps outline and highlight some of those intervention programs which you see as being key to addressing those issues.

Ms Robertson: I guess, in relation to Bimberi, we are concerned about both ends. I think the investment in the budget identifies and recognises a potential increase in the numbers of young people in Bimberi over time. We are concerned that that is not backed up with support for a diversionary framework.

MS BRESNAN: Sorry, I should have mentioned diversion as well.

Ms Robertson: I do want to acknowledge that DHCS and JACS have started some conversation around developing a diversionary framework. I really look forward to seeing the outcomes of that. But that will obviously need some investment as well. And we have certainly looked to examples of what has happened in Victoria and in Western Australia in terms of developing those frameworks.

In relation to young people exiting Bimberi and through care, we have certainly been concerned that there is still not a lot of clarity about who is doing what. Again, in exactly the same way as we talk about young people exiting care, we would hope that the government would reiterate its commitment that no young people would exit Bimberi into homelessness. I think it is very important to recognise that going to a refuge is still being homeless, that it is actually about longer term, sustainable accommodation so that young people can link in to maintaining education, vocational training. The sorts of things they might start while they are in the facility should be continued and the same levels of support should be provided in the community upon their release.

MS BRESNAN: You mentioned work on the diversionary framework. Has there been any work done on having a framework around through care and after care for Bimberi specifically so that those different groups providing services are linked in together?

Ms Robertson: I think some work was done initially and I think it is timely to revisit that. We certainly would see that it needs some further coordination and investment. I think the focus was on getting the centre open and getting the services in there settled. Now we really need to look at what is happening around people exiting, because we are certainly concerned about that

MR SMYTH: On Bimberi, I notice recommendation 28 in your submission talks about an evaluation of the human rights framework in Bimberi. Do you have concerns that it is not effective or that it is not as effective as it could be?

Ms Robertson: I guess we would be really keen within the human rights framework for an assessment to be done on what has happened to date. Bimberi has been promoted nationally as a best-practice model. And we acknowledge that there were some fantastic changes that happened from the previous facility as Bimberi opened. But that was at a policy level. What we would like to really see is an evaluation to assess that that is translated at a practice and an on-the-ground level.

MR COE: Have you got evidence to suggest otherwise?

Ms Robertson: We are certainly concerned to see that it is actually all translated properly. I think that, generally, things are tracking well but there are certainly areas that could really be improved, yes.

MR SMYTH: Such as?

Ms Robertson: I think some of the stuff about the access to programs and access to supports in Bimberi and the consistency around that really could be improved.

MR SMYTH: Is it the expectation that the \$7 million in the budget will help access to education programs?

Ms Robertson: I would hope so. I think education is the key. My understanding is that is certainly the intent

THE CHAIR: But it is more than that, is it not? It is also the other workshop spaces

and so forth that have been provided?

Ms Robertson: Yes.

MR HARGREAVES: I have a couple of questions, if I may. Thank you for coming. On page 27 of part 2 of your analysis of the budget, you say that, in relation to working with vulnerable people checks, the additional costs that have been imposed are revenue-raising measures. Are they not really cost-recovery measures, in fact, because the police, in fact, charge for the process? They do not do it for nothing. They have not done it for nothing for quite some while. So is it really a cost-recovery thing which is being passed on, rather than a revenue-raising exercise?

Ms Robertson: It may be. As I stated at the beginning, our concern is that we think the working with vulnerable people checking system would be a really fantastic and positive thing for the ACT. We would be the first jurisdiction to introduce it more broadly rather than just being a working with children and young people check.

At the end of the day, in regard to community services, as stretched as they are, I think, wherever we can look to opportunities to really support them to be best practice and develop systems and frameworks where the burden is not necessarily on the individual worker or the agencies, then we should be looking to do that. I think that was one of the things that were very attractive about the process in the original proposal. The commitment was from government to actually fund it, yes.

MR HARGREAVES: In fact, they admitted there was a bit of a red herring in there, actually. There are a couple of little ones which I think we need your feedback on. The centralised intake service is one. I have been trying to get this going for half my life, particularly as it relates to young people. Young people are by far our most vulnerable. How do you think it is going to work in relation to helping young people and preventing homelessness for young people? Is it going to really work, do you think?

Ms Robertson: Do you want to speak to that?

Ms Szukalska: Sure. I can make a few comments. In regard to the centralised intake service, it would be great for young people to have one spot they can call and be able to have their needs met or be pointed in the right direction. Some of the concerns around that are, I suppose, around young people who may not feel comfortable contacting the central intake service or who have existing links within the community, whether it is due to past access or whether it is due to friends who are in current refuges or other supported accommodation, and just around, I suppose, some of their past issues, perhaps with the system. There may not be that level of confidence within—

MR HARGREAVES: Or the opposite, quite a degree of opposition to it?

Ms Szukalska: Absolutely. I think also one of the other things to consider is how it is going to practically work in terms of having that shift and getting organisations on board to be participating in that and then getting the word out to young people, through appropriate means, and having them be able to access it easily and freely.

MR HARGREAVES: It would be easier, would it not, for some of the youth networks to pick up the phone and dial one number? As I understand it, a lot of the youth networks are spending half a night on the phone ringing this mob, this mob, this mob and this mob. If they could just put it up online and go, “Bang, there you go,” or “No,” even if it is a no, it would save an enormous amount of time, would it not?

Ms Szukalska: I think it would be of benefit to the sector. One of the things that we have called for in our submission to the road map discussion paper that DHCS put out was that we need to ensure that the people who are at the other end of the phone or the email or whatever it is actually know how to work well with young people.

I think we have seen great success in ACT Housing with youth housing managers. That has been a program that has really had a significant difference for young people in terms of accessing the right support to interact with that agency. So we would like to see that translated right through to the interface. If they do not get past the interface, they are not going to get to the youth housing managers.

THE CHAIR: I am glad you picked up on that, because I was wondering whether that was continuing to be in place and in fact, following up on Mr Hargreaves’s line of questioning, whether the youth homelessness action plan had been fully implemented.

Ms Robertson: Certainly the youth homelessness action plan has been signed off and finished. There are a number of actions out of that that do need continuation. We have certainly called for another youth homelessness action plan but have not seen that come yet. I think in an era where we are looking at piloting new models such as the foyer model—and I note that was an announcement in last year’s budget, with no money attached last year; the money is kicking in this year—we are really keen to see that be part of an overarching direction in which we are trying to head.

I think the sector and the services are certainly keen and ready to have the discussion about service delivery framework. And that is a continuum. So it is timely. And it is something that we always call for in any of the budget initiatives. We think it is really important that the government work with the community sector and the people who are accessing and using services to make sure that they are involved in the design and implementation, the actual spending of the money.

MR HARGREAVES: Can I raise that? That is a top point. There is a thing in my head about the HYP—the housing for young people program, for Hansard. It was a pilot. Now it has gone mainstream. Have you got any feedback on how it is actually working? Is it delivering what we thought it would? The pilot is over. It is in the mainstream now. Is it delivering to help kids actually transition out of care and into proper housing or what?

Ms Robertson: The youth housing managers or—

MR HARGREAVES: No, the housing young people program. It is a completely different one. It is about ensuring that children transition out of care. Quite often you will put kids into care and they have got nowhere to go. And they have to go and live somewhere. The housing young people program, as you may know, is one where we

might put 16 or 17-year-old people. They are not regarded as adults for the purposes of the law but they are quite capable of living on their own. That is what the HYP does. Is that correct?

Ms Szukalska: It is my understanding that the youth housing managers are actually under that program and it is their role to support those young people.

MR HARGREAVES: That is right.

Ms Szukalska: So that is the role they provide. It is my understanding that there has been more of a shift away—they have been quite broadly accessed because they are such a great commodity, I suppose; everybody would really like to access them and get their support—and they are moving back towards solely supporting young people through the care and protection system.

MR HARGREAVES: One last question, if I may, Madam Chair.

THE CHAIR: Yes, and I think then we want to move on to a few last questions about—

MR HARGREAVES: It is in the summary of recommendations, in fact, that the Youth Coalition has put forward—recommendation 24. If you have got it there, it says that the ACT government fulfil its target of 10 per cent public housing stock by 2012 and the capital injections into Housing ACT increase supply. I seem to have heard that somewhere before, in somebody else's policy document. Notwithstanding that, have you guys done the calculations on the fact that this is going to cost the ACT taxpayer? Where are we going to find the \$3 billion to actually deliver it?

MR SESELJA: Treasury already have, haven't they?

MR HARGREAVES: I am asking the Youth Coalition for their view on where we are going to find the \$3 billion to deliver that. Are we going to find it in the taxation base? Are we going to find it by reducing programs, or what? How are we going to do it?

Ms Robertson: I certainly cannot offer the solution to that, but I am happy to crunch the numbers and come up with some suggestions for next year, if you like.

MR HARGREAVES: Thank you very much, Emma. I look forward to it.

MR SMYTH: While we are on that same page—

THE CHAIR: Mr Smyth, then Mr Seselja wants to move on to some questions about Bimberi.

MR SMYTH: Sure. I am just moving to their recommendation 27 about funding for Gugan Gulwan. How did the programs for Indigenous youth fare in the budget?

Ms Robertson: The funding for Gugan was an issue that we certainly raised last year.

MR SMYTH: You certainly did.

Ms Robertson: My understanding is that they did not specifically get money out of this budgetary process, but in the meantime, over the course of the year, some funding has been identified to resource the Gugan schools. So we were very pleased about that.

MR SMYTH: Will that be ongoing? And is it enough?

Ms Robertson: I think so, yes. My understanding was that some temporary funding was found to resource it over the year, with a commitment for that to be to tide it over while some ongoing funding was identified. You would be aware that Gugan is one of the services, of course, that is funded more generally under the youth services program, which is currently undergoing a review as part of a streamlining of youth service program and family support program funding. That is another thing that we identified as a concern, in particular I guess because we are not seeing an increase in the resource across those programs, but in the merging of them we will be seeing the meeting of the gap in service delivery for eight to 12-year-olds that has previously existed. So those programs will now pick up that gap, but without any additional resource.

THE CHAIR: How is that process going? I have heard from some organisations that they been told that they have a three-month rollover and then things will be sorted—some have said six months—with the bottom line being that there seems to be a lot of uncertainty out there about the future amongst organisations who are operating YSP and FSP programs. It is affecting their ability to maintain staff. It is totally affecting their ability to plan into the future. From the peak's point of view, how are you seeing that situation?

Ms Robertson: I believe that most of the services will have received a letter of offer for extension this week, and that is an offer for up to a year in three-monthly instalments, with the provision that, should a new contract come in place before then, that will supersede the existing contract. So essentially they have bought themselves up to a year, with the provision that the new framework may be rolled out before then, which I think does still leave services with a lot of uncertainty. We would be greatly concerned about going into a Christmas period with uncertainty. It is a very difficult time for people to be looking for work, so we would be concerned about a 1 January start date in terms of what that would mean for workers on the ground.

More broadly, I guess that many services are experiencing now perhaps a holding pattern where they might not be recruiting to a position because they are not sure what the service is going to look like in the future. In terms of planning and trying to maintain the level of service and delivery for young people and families at the end of the day, that is getting increasingly difficult.

THE CHAIR: I cannot imagine a government department putting up with that sort of situation at all.

MR SESELJA: Getting back to Bimberi and some of the services offered at Bimberi, I think there were reports recently—and correct me if I am wrong—around access to things like cooking facilities and the classes that go with that. I would like your

thoughts on that because I have spoken to people in the sector who say that, particularly for remandees but for anyone coming through the system, probably the most valuable thing you can do for them is to teach them some basic skills like a few recipes so they can start to look after themselves, as many of these people have come from very difficult backgrounds. What are your thoughts on the impact when those kind of programs are not delivered in Bimberi?

Ms Robertson: Living skills are something we certainly talk about in a number of areas, for young people who have been in care, for young people who are experiencing homelessness and for young people who are incarcerated, so living skills are an important issue for all those groups. I would agree that one of the challenges in Bimberi is the range of time that people are there for. Obviously, if they are in remand, they might only be there for a couple of days, but it is sometimes a bit longer.

My understanding is that we are seeing an increase in people who are there on sentence, which I think means that we should also see those programs kick in very quickly. But our position is always that living skills are absolutely crucial and important. Education is also crucial and important but, if people do not have somewhere to live and cannot maintain that, they are not going to be able to maintain the education that they start in the facility. So again we would be calling for the same programs and support to be available as people leave as while they are in custody. To set some things in motion is invaluable and it is essential that those things happen.

MR SESELJA: When we have people coming through the youth justice system, it is sometimes the only opportunity, or perhaps the last opportunity before they move into adult life, to hopefully steer them away from crime and give them the kind of skills that will help them to function well in the community, isn't it?

Ms Robertson: Absolutely.

Ms Szukalska: In that context, if I may say something, I think it is really important to look at what living skills are in the ACT. If a young person is incarcerated and has that opportunity to tap into a program around living skills, they should be afforded exactly the same program outside of Bimberi so that there is that smooth transition. Currently in the ACT there is no definition of living skills. There is no tool kit or anything that actually provides that constant program so that living skills are a basic, so that they can go anywhere and get that same program and be able to continue where they left off. So, if they are there for two days and manage only to learn how to cook a meal, they can then go on to the next service and say, "I have done this part of the program; can I continue?"

THE CHAIR: That work was being done by the Youth Coalition, I know, just before I left. We were doing a research project. What happened with that?

Ms Robertson: There is a final report to that project which is sitting with DHCS, with Housing, and we have certainly had conversations with DHCS even this week about further progressing that. The recommendations that came out of that report included the stuff that Kat's just mentioned around defining living skills, but also we have seen, particularly in the youth housing and homelessness sector, a real call from the services to look at a coordinated approach so that it is not just one program developing living

skills—one agency and you do that there and then when you go to another service you do it all again—but something that can be transferable so that agencies can pool their resources but also it is articulated and set out so that we are clear about what we are trying to achieve and what skills are being passed on to the young people so they can then be assessed and also have a sense of achievement that they have learnt something in the process.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for coming along this afternoon. A copy of the transcript of the hearing will be sent to you. If you have any corrections, please get in contact with the secretary.

Ms Robertson: Thank you all very much for your time.

Meeting adjourned from to 3.34 to 3.53 pm.

DUNDAS, MS ROSLYN, Director, ACT Council of Social Service

THE CHAIR: Welcome to this public hearing of the Select Committee on Estimates. Thank you to Ms Roslyn Dundas, who is representing the ACT Council of Social Service, for agreeing to come along today. We have approximately 30 minutes set aside for our discussion. Before we begin, could you please confirm for the record that you understand the implications of the privilege statement that is in front of you?

Ms Dundas: Thank you, chair, I have read the privilege statement and I understand it.

THE CHAIR: Before we proceed to questions, would you like to start by making a brief opening statement?

Ms Dundas: Thank you very much, chair. The ACT Council of Social Service thanks you very much for this opportunity to participate in this important inquiry as we consider the 2010-11 budget.

In preparation for this budget, the ACT Council of Social Service prepared a submission as part of the government's consultation process and I have tabled some copies of that for your information. As you may recall in previous years, the ACT Council of Social Service pre-budget submission has been a lengthy and detailed document that picks up on specific issues arising for different subsectors within the broader community sector. This year, we did something different. We did a very slimmed down document in response to the Treasurer's concerns around the money available for services and her request not to receive ongoing wish lists. So we prepared a submission titled *Nothing left to give*.

The main point of this submission was that, if there are to be cuts across the ACT community, the community sector should be spared because as individuals, families and communities become more and more stretched under the strains of the global financial crisis, they turn more and more to the community sector. Demand for community sector services is increasing and the community sector itself is stretched.

That is the focus of our submission. As part of that, we acknowledge that this Assembly passed a motion quarantining front-line community sector services from cuts in the 2010-11 budget, and we are very appreciative of that. However, we remain concerned about the future. The budget papers call for further cuts through efficiencies into the future. We are concerned about how that might play out for front-line services, especially when we know that we are seeing an increase in sector demand.

The Australian Council of Social Service community sector survey shows a 12 per cent increase in demand here in the ACT. We know of some services where, if you were trying to access emergency relief—and pick up on the word “emergency” in this conversation—you have to wait 2½ days for an appointment for an assessment before you can access that particular support.

You may have heard this spiel from me a number of times. It is something that the ACT council has been talking about for a number of years, so I am going to turn to others who are also saying this. The Community Services and Health Industry Skills

Council have released their *Environmental scan 2010*. They state:

There continues to be increased demand for service provision as the social effects of the financial crisis flow through the community. This increased demand has seen a corresponding increase in the number of people employed in community services ... partly as a result of declining employment opportunities in other areas and partly as a result of concerted policy initiatives. Modelling for the next 15 years predicts continued growth in the community services and health industries ...

In community services, key issues include increasing skill profiles and redesigning jobs through sector development to reflect the increased complexity of skills required in service provision, and improving workforce conditions. The need for public funding and for industry-level coordination to meet the skills and qualifications requirements within the industry also remains an issue. Award modernisation and equal remuneration for social and community services workers may help to address workforce capacity issues in the industry.

Enterprise Care released their not-for-profit survey on Wednesday, 5 May, following the ACT budget. That survey showed that nearly 80 per cent of Australian not-for-profit organisations rate the complexity of clients they are seeing in the community sector as moderate or extreme and that they are struggling to cope with ever-changing, complex, costly, inconsistent and not fully developed systems, which is impacting on their ability to care for those who are most in need.

This is the reality of the environment facing Canberra's community sector and those who we care for—Canberra's most vulnerable. We have heard again that the budget will be in deficit for a number of years, so we repeat our call that, even in these tough economic times, it is the community sector that needs to be supported, because we are caring for those who are not able to access small business, who are not able to hop in a car and drive to the nearest hospital and continue to drive to look for a GP that is open. They are the people who are sleeping in a tent in their mother's backyard, in a story that I heard yesterday, because there is no accommodation for them. These are the people who turn to the community sector. Especially in these tough times, we need to be resourcing the community sector, as opposed to letting it continue to do more with less.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Dundas. You spoke about the ACOSS community sector survey and the sort of turnaway rates that we are seeing. This is not a new thing; this has been going on for several years. Having regard to the fact that there is no increase in funding to community organisations this year across the board, what do you see will be the impact on those vulnerable families? Will we see greater turnaway rates? What do you think will be the result?

Ms Dundas: Certainly, we welcome the fact that the government has maintained its commitment to the indexation formula, and we are expecting that funded services will receive a 3.3 per cent increase. But, as there are no significant funding increases flowing to the community sector beyond that, we anticipate that it will take longer for vulnerable individuals to access the services that they need. More and more organisations will need to make decisions about relative need in terms of the assessment of who they see. We know organisations are already struggling with this.

In some areas, you have to be so desperately in need and so unable to access any other support—some of the stories that you hear are horrifying—before you can even access the most basic support from the community sector. If you are looking for some early intervention support, if you are looking for some small assistance that might help you before things get that bad, you are unlikely to be seen, because organisations are having to see increasingly complex cases and the most vulnerable before they can support those who are requiring early intervention and are on the cusp. That is not best practice. We know that is not the best way to build social inclusion and turn the community around, but that is the reality.

MR HARGREAVES: Ros, you talk about an increase in the more desperate people, so the folk that are in real trouble are having difficulty accessing the issues because there is more of the more desperate grouping. Have you got a feeling for what size of increase that is?

Ms Dundas: I will get those statistics from the community sector survey, if I may. The community sector survey showed that 38 per cent of organisations reported that they are more tightly targeting their services than they have in the past. So that is 38 per cent of organisations who are making those triage-based decisions on the clients they see.

MR HARGREAVES: What we cannot get a handle on, though—unless you have got something there that I have not seen—is whether or not the need to be more targeted is because of a numerical increase in the number of people knocking on your door or whether it is the complexity of the cases, or perhaps both. Do we have any numbers that we can point to?

Ms Dundas: Certainly, I would believe it is a mixture of both—increasing complexity as well as sheer number. We certainly have had reports of increasing complexity in clients' needs, accessing a range of different services, whether it is a homeless service or a home and community care service or a mental health service. That is in one way impacting on organisations' ability to meet demand, but also there is an increase in the sheer number of people accessing services.

MR HARGREAVES: Is there any way we can get an idea of that increase? The feeling I am getting is that it is a significant number. The concern that you are bringing to the meeting is that it is a big number.

Ms Dundas: It is.

MR HARGREAVES: I would be interested to see what sort of a percentage increase that is.

Ms Dundas: That would require a metadata analysis that we do not have the capacity to undertake at the moment. Individual organisations do report on their increase, and we can tell you that that ranges anywhere between 10 and 40 per cent.

MR HARGREAVES: Is there any possibility, say, of picking a couple of organisations under your umbrella and asking the question of them so that we could

use it as a snapshot?

Ms Dundas: Absolutely.

MR HARGREAVES: We are going to be together—living happily together—for three or four weeks.

THE CHAIR: It may also be something you would like to ask the minister, because organisations do report six-monthly and do annual reports, if they are funded by the ACT government.

Ms Dundas: I would anticipate that you would be able to get that information quite quickly in relation to emergency relief and numbers accessing emergency relief. But in terms of accessing other services, that would require a little bit more work.

MR HARGREAVES: My concern, Madam Chair, is that I do not have absolute confidence that those numbers are informing policy decision. I would like to use this estimates committee as a vehicle to explore that. Does that make sense?

THE CHAIR: Yes, certainly. Mr Seselja?

MR SESELJA: Thank you. Ms Dundas, on page 10 of your budget submission, you talk about homelessness services and the fact that we have got a higher turnaway rate than the rest of the nation. Are you able to talk us through that? We have seen a lot of anecdotal evidence of that in recent times. I was not aware of those figures. Are you able to talk us through—even if you do not have the exact numbers—perhaps what you see as some of the reasons why? Is it simply funding? Is it the way funding is allocated? Is it the higher demand for services? What is driving those figures?

Ms Dundas: Those turnaway rates are from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, which developed what is called SAAP data. It is now called homelessness data, but at that time it was still called SAAP data. That statistic talks about the number of people who will make contact with an emergency accommodation provider and not receive at that particular contact the emergency accommodation that they are looking for. We do know that eventually those people are housed or temporarily provided with some form of assistance, but the turnaway rate is the number of times that they actually have to try and engage with a service before they can get that support.

Those figures have been quite high for a number of years. For a number of years, the reasons underpinning that have related to the lack of exit points from homelessness emergency accommodation. So not only do we have a high turnaway rate, but we also have high rates of people remaining in emergency accommodation. Emergency accommodation is meant to be for about six weeks. I think our average rate of stay is around three months. So the concern around a lack of exit points from homelessness has been one that we have been talking about for a number of years.

We know that the federal government's response to homelessness through their white paper and the ACT government's response to that federal initiative are about trying to provide more exit points from homelessness accommodation, and also to provide

what we call “housing first”, as a way to bypass emergency accommodation altogether and keep people in their homes or provide them with a property so that the care will come to them and they will remain housed for the longer term.

The rollout of that federal stimulus money to support those initiatives is still underway. As we report in our response to the ACT budget issued on Wednesday, 5 May, which you have also been provided with, as of 5 May, only three of those 20 properties have come online. So there is still work rolling out over that.

MR HARGREAVES: Is that central booking service going to give us a better handle on those numbers? If people are trying to access a number of services because they have no other choice, is their approach to those other organisations skewing the numbers a little bit and making it difficult for us to get a handle on it?

Ms Dundas: The ACT homelessness sector has for a number of years operated under a no-wrong-doors approach. So if you rock up at a homelessness service who cannot assist you, that homelessness service will assist you to try and find a homelessness service that can. So I do not think those numbers are particularly skewed by that. The centralised intake service is currently out for tender, so the model that it will look like is still up for review. But the government has responded to our concerns that it not be the only point of access. Not everybody will feel comfortable accessing that central point, because it will be co-located with Housing ACT.

MR HARGREAVES: It will give us a better handle on what is going on, I hope.

Ms Dundas: We hope that it will be able to give more technical support to the no-wrong-doors approach that is already in place.

THE CHAIR: Ms Dundas, I just have something to follow up and then we will go to Mr Smyth for a question. Mine was around the exit points and that bottleneck that happens in refuges still being an issue. That was part of the reason for the new system around prioritising those with greatest and complex needs and those who were homeless, those in refuges, straight into the public housing system. Isn't that helping with the bottleneck or is there still an issue there?

Ms Dundas: We have not seen the latest Institute of Health and Welfare data. The data they released last week did not pick up on these issues specifically. They talked more about demographic profiles. I guess it is a bit mixed. We still have a number of individuals with complex needs in emergency accommodation, but we do know that the multidisciplinary panel that is working within Housing ACT is progressing a number of cases and we are hearing positive feedback on how that is progressing.

MR SMYTH: I notice in the submission from September 2009 that pages 12, 13 and 14 looked at workforce issues and talked particularly about the decision by the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission to award pay increases of between 18 and 37 per cent. On page 63 of budget paper 3, we see the community sector funding rate, which you also mention on page 6 of your update. What is the state of play in negotiations with the government about the adequacy of the community sector funding rate increase? Have the government made any announcements on whether or not they will follow the QIRC decision?

Ms Dundas: There is currently what is called the pay equity case before Fair Work Australia. It will be a national case, and it will apply to community sector workers in the ACT. An outcome on that case is not expected until November, for commencement on 1 July 2011. We are hopeful that Fair Work Australia will support the decision already made in Queensland, recognise the value of community sector workers and decree that there should be significant pay increases for community sector workers.

The federal government and all state and territory governments have been briefed substantially on what will be the impact of this case. Minister Gallagher, at the community sector forum that we held on Wednesday, 5 May, indicated her awareness of the pay equity case. I think I should let Ms Gallagher speak about what it is that she said but she did make it clear that there was no provision for any particular increases in pay arising from the pay equity case in this budget because it is something that will need to be handled in the next budget. We recognise that the government might not want to start making announcements about how much funding it is going to pass on to the community sector when the case is still in play and has not yet been determined by Fair Work Australia.

However, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that, whilst 3.3 per cent community sector indexation is an increase on the 3.15 per cent we received last year, and whilst we still remain supportive of a model that recognises not only CPI costs but increased costs, wage-price index costs, which is the model in which CPI and wage-price index are combined to give us a 3.3 per cent figure, is detailed in budget paper 3. I can look up the page, if you like, but it is in budget paper 3.

MR SMYTH: Page 63.

Ms Dundas: Thank you, page 63. In the 2008-09 budget, this formula gave us a four per cent outcome, and that was projected into the outyears. So what we have seen across the 2009-10 budget and the 2010-11 budget is that, because of the global financial crisis and the impact that has had on CPI and wages, there has been nearly a \$700,000 saving that the government has been able to get by not passing on the projected indexation from 2008-09. This is, I believe, part of the efficiency savings that DHCS in particular has been able to find. I would say that \$175,000 per year could very much be reinvested into the community sector and would support the community sector to do quite a lot for the need that is out there.

MR SMYTH: So why not the full \$700,000?

Ms Dundas: The government are committed to a model and are passing on what the model tells them. We are saying that, because this was provisioned for in the 2008-09 budget, instead of making that small saving, it could have been passed on to the community sector, not through indexation but perhaps through some support funding and particular projects. That will go a long way in helping us to meet the growing demand.

MR HARGREAVES: Does that \$175,000 perhaps represent the saving in the year 2009-10?

Ms Dundas: It is \$700,000 across the four years. I have just divided it by four.

MR HARGREAVES: So if you brought it back, using the point you have just made, because you use a formula which is applicable at a given point in time, presumably the difference between the point in time in the 2008-09 year and the 2009-10 year, do you reckon that is where the 175 grand sits?

Ms Dundas: That is what I am trying to articulate. So when the projections were made in 2008-09, it was projected that the community sector indexation would remain at four per cent. Because it dropped back to 3.15 per cent last year, there was a saving to be made, or the government saw that there was a saving to be made. Even though we have come back up to 3.3 per cent this year, there are still savings that are being clawed back.

MR HARGREAVES: You would have squealed like blazes if you were going to go down, though, wouldn't you?

Ms Dundas: Sorry?

MR HARGREAVES: You would have squealed like blazes if it went up to four per cent in this year and then down to 3½. You would have been better off leaving it alone.

Ms Dundas: We say that, certainly, the savings that the government has found could be reinvested into the community sector.

MR SMYTH: Will you await next year with interest?

Ms Dundas: Why can't we do it this year?

MR SMYTH: Is there room therefore to have a base in the model—this number or whatever is the higher?

Ms Dundas: It is certainly something I think we need to look at. The model, we have to say, is much better than the model that was in place in the past. I guess what I am trying to say is that, whilst the government and this Assembly have made a commitment to not cut programs, and we welcome that, we find that there are still savings being clawed from the community sector, and we would prefer that that money be invested for the longer term.

MS BRESNAN: My question is in relation to your budget snapshot, and also something which has been covered in your submission, in relation to through-care and after-care services at the AMC. In the budget, there is no specific funding in relation to those specific programs. I think Simon Rosenberg called them transitional programs that are there, and then when people leave.

One of the concerns we have had raised with us is that, even though there are groups going in there and providing services, there is not that coordination there. There is not an actual plan to manage how that works. Is this a similar concern you have had expressed from your members? Should funding be going to providing that

coordination or is funding required to fund more of those types of transitional programs for the AMC?

Ms Dundas: We certainly think that there is a need to recognise the increased cost to community services in relation to the transitional care that they are delivering. If this transitional care was provided or overseen with a coordinated strategy, it would be able to operate more efficiently for the individuals who are needing to access these services. The AMC was always talked about in terms of being a human rights prison and recognising the needs of the individuals. We recognise that needs to be part of a transition process, both when they are at AMC and as they transition out of AMC and back into the community. At the moment, there have not been any real increases to a range of services which are providing support to people in AMC. We are concerned about the ongoing lack of coordination for those services.

THE CHAIR: Earlier, we heard from the Youth Coalition of the ACT. They touched on the issue of working with vulnerable people checks. What is the feedback from your organisation's point of view on the impact of those checks on organisations that are your members?

Ms Dundas: We did extensive consultations with community sector organisations as part of the working with vulnerable people check consultations that the government ran. There is strong support for a central government agency to undertake the responsibility of these checks, and there is strong support for the expansion of a police check to something more, which is what these checks are meant to be. We are quite excited by the fact that the government has committed to it being more than just a working with children check, which is what operates in other jurisdictions, but something that recognises the need to protect other vulnerable people in our community, people with disabilities and the aged.

We are concerned that what this budget has announced is different from what was originally put forward in those consultations, which was that these checks would be free for workers in the community sector. I understand that the cost for each individual working in the community sector will now be \$71 for the 2010-11 year, and I would anticipate that cost to go up in the future. We are concerned about the impact that will have on community organisations and on people looking to work in the sector.

THE CHAIR: Once it comes in, all workers will need to go through that check. That initial check is going to be quite a mean cost on many organisations.

Ms Dundas: Yes. And we are thinking especially about some of the larger organisations that provide support to people with disabilities, such as home and community care, who have a significant number of casual staff, all of whom will need to go through these checks. All of these staff have probably gone through a police check at some point but this is a more in-depth check and we recognise the value of that. But the original government commitment to keep those checks free for staff is no longer—

THE CHAIR: What has the money gone to? There have been significant amounts of money in the last budget and in this budget.

Ms Dundas: I spent budget night doing a range of calculations on the amount of money that had been spent.

THE CHAIR: Do you have an overall idea of what that money was spent on?

Ms Dundas: Certainly we understand that, as originally announced in the 2009-10 budget, the funding would be split between DHCS and Justice and Community Safety to do the policy work for the establishment of the scheme and then to support the Office of Regulatory Services to implement the scheme.

I am happy to provide you with some of the calculations that I have made to see how much money has been spent. We believe there is still some money as yet unallocated. I think that is coming through in some of the budget papers. And then this budget puts additional money on top of that for the delivery of the scheme.

We recognise that there will be a change in cost for the scheme because the government has heard our concerns that the original idea that the check be every five years would have put us out of step with legislative requirements, that those people working in the childcare industry have a check every three years. So we are glad that the government has heard that concern and will now be doing checks every three years for people working in the sector. But the fact that we now have to pay \$71 for each check every three years is a concern.

THE CHAIR: Going back to the money that has been allocated in this budget—and I will get to Mrs Dunne in a minute—you spoke about implementation. Is it clear to you what exactly that money will be spent on?

Ms Dundas: Whilst we have seen a report in response to the consultations that took place, we have not seen, I guess, any legislation or final policy document from the government about what the scheme will look like and how it will work. And we are hoping that will come soon.

MRS DUNNE: I have a somewhat different line of questioning. To the best of your knowledge, how many NGOs are working in the social services sector in the ACT?

Ms Dundas: Would you like to define social services?

MRS DUNNE: Providing services to vulnerable people?

Ms Dundas: I know it sounds like a simple question but it is not. We have around 200 organisational members who provide services but we also know that there are a range of smaller organisations who are operating, who receive either minimal funding or no funding and who are providing much-needed support to individuals that you might not think of as a headline social services or human services or community sector organisation but who, through the delivery of their services, are providing a range of early intervention supports.

MRS DUNNE: Apart from the 200-odd who are associated with ACTCOSS, do you have an idea how many other social service providers there might be?

Ms Dundas: I am specifically talking about the range of multicultural community groups, which number into the hundreds, operating in the ACT who are not all individual members of ACTCOSS but who all individually provide much-needed support to their local community. So it is a significant number.

MRS DUNNE: Do you have any sense of, say, for the larger organisations and organisations who may be affiliated with ACTCOSS, the extent to which the NGOs compete with one another and where there might be an overlap of services? When we were talking about homeless services we touched a little on the possibility that people might be signed up to one or more services.

Ms Dundas: Certainly there are a number of community-based organisations who work in partnership, who are pooling their resources to provide the best care possible to the individual who is in need. Whilst there has been past government practice that has encouraged what you call competition—and it is about competition for resources and funding from the government—we are seeing that start to turn around in some areas where organisations are working collaboratively to support an individual who might be in need.

MRS DUNNE: Can you give an example of the sorts of collaborations?

Ms Dundas: Certainly in relation to youth justice, the wrap-around service is coordinated by youth justice, which brings in any range of services that a young person might need to help them turn around, as the phrase goes. So that might be an educational service, it might be a youth social worker but it might also be support that has been provided to the family from a different organisation. It might be a homelessness organisation, it might be a mental health organisation, depending on what that particular individual might need.

MRS DUNNE: So in that case it would be a case-managed suite of services to address needs?

Ms Dundas: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: I know this was touched on on a number of occasions when the government was advocating perhaps shared corporate services, HR services. Do you see that there are potentials for efficiencies in the community sector so that you might be able to deliver more services?

Ms Dundas: I think “efficiency” is an interesting term to use when you talk about shared services. We think there is certainly potential to increase the capacity and to build up the non-money resources within organisations through shared services. Communities@Work has recently done a study on shared services that makes for interesting reading and recognises that, whilst there might be a little capacity building that comes out from shared services, it is not always cheaper. So when you talk about efficiencies, I am asking for some caution around that word because it does not always lead to more dollars freed up but it might lead to better capacity and more time.

MS BRESNAN: My question is in relation to mental health. We have had a lot of

discussion about the federal subacute beds and, as you say in your budget snapshot, it is not clear yet where those beds are going to go. I know the health minister mentioned at your budget briefing that we might consider having a step up, step down facility, which is pretty important for that early intervention type approach. Have there been any discussions, to your knowledge, with any of your members or you about the possibility of actually putting that process in practice and having some of those subacute beds as step up, step down mental health beds?

Ms Dundas: We have not heard anything since what the minister had to say at the budget forum last week. So what we are buoyed by is the fact that the ACT government has maintained its commitment to the fifty-fifty split of mental health services between community and government and a high level of engagement of dialogue between community and government services in the mental health area. Hopefully, that will lead to some of these subacute beds being used in the way that you articulate. But in terms of specific conversations, I do not think there has been anything further progressed since the budget was announced two weeks ago.

MS BRESNAN: Basically, that is all you have heard about whether or not they had actually been considered. Are you aware, under that fifty-fifty split, of some of the programs that have been funded in the community sector with mental health funding?

Ms Dundas: I cannot name any individually but I can take that on notice, if you like.

THE CHAIR: Yes, certainly. We note that that question will be taken on notice.

MR HARGREAVES: On page 9 of your budget snapshot, you talk about energy concessions and indicate quite appropriately that this resulted in a 14 per cent increase since the 2005-06 rate. You do say, though, that electricity prices have increased on average by 23 per cent. And then you are saying that while it is a step in the right direction it does not make up for the costs low income consumers need to pay. But you do not seem to have taken into account the commonwealth rebate which goes on top of that and which gets increased every six months in line with CPI. Should not those figures actually be put together so that we get an idea of the actual impost on those low income families?

Ms Dundas: What we are looking at here is specifically what the ACT government has committed to and what the ACT government is funding. And we are responding to increases in prices that are applied to all consumers in the ACT. No, I have not done those figures to bring in the federal rebate but I do not think that the ACT government can hope that the federal government will maintain that into the future.

We do need to look at the concession rates. The government has announced that it will increase concession rates by CPI into the future but we would actually like them to consider meeting it to the percentage costs of electricity and other services into the future, because we anticipate that both electricity and water will increase in cost significantly over the next few years as changes take place.

MR HARGREAVES: Yes, I understand that, and I do not disagree with you at all. But I just wonder whether or not, in looking at a qualitative approach to this issue about low income families, when we are trying to make a judgement on the impact on

low income families, we would really need to put together all of the supports that they might get in a given area. For example, we have talked about there being a 14 per cent increase. One could argue that it should be higher than that. But one could not come up with a figure unless we take into account the additional rebates folks get out of the commonwealth, which actually goes up every six months. And perhaps we should be looking at a matching sort of process so that the increases in the concession actually come together. Then we would know, would we not?

Ms Dundas: That would be a very interesting conversation to undertake with DHCS and DECCEW. It should be noted that certainly to be eligible for the energy concession you need to be a holder of a Centrelink pension concession card, healthcare card or veterans' affairs pensioner concession card. And so it does apply to a range of low income families but not those who are low income wage families.

THE CHAIR: Were there any other questions from the committee?

MRS DUNNE: Actually, on the subject that Mr Hargreaves raised about the shortfall between the rate at which the concession is raised and the rate at which electricity and other energy prices have gone up, can you categorise what sort of impact that would have on low income, especially low income wage, families who do not seem to meet all the concession requirements?

Ms Dundas: Certainly, we know that there are families who have to make significant decisions, especially coming into winter, about where their limited income will be spent—on their rent or their electricity or their food or their school excursion or new shoes or a doctor's appointment. We also hear of a range of individuals and families and pensioners in particular making decisions to turn the heating off over winter because they cannot afford it, which leads to long-term health problems which increase their impact on the healthcare system. So there are a range of impacts that these decisions do have on families.

One particular area that we hear about quite a lot is the impact of the supply charge. The supply charge is the fixed charge that you pay for having your gas or electricity connected to your house. And even those pensioners whom I have heard of who turn off their heating still have to pay that supply charge. So they can reduce their bills up to a point but then there is an ongoing supply charge that needs to be paid. I would most certainly welcome the opportunity for further conversation with the government, through DHCS in their concessions area and DECCEW through their climate change and environmental measures, about how we can work with these households, these families, these individuals, who are faced with a freezing winter because they cannot afford anything else.

MRS DUNNE: Is ACTCOSS able to quantify the number of households or individuals that we are talking about?

Ms Dundas: What we can say is that research that we undertook with NATSEM showed that there are 13 per cent of households in the ACT whom we would consider most at need. And work undertaken on the social impacts of climate change in the ACT had a slightly bigger figure than that. They found that 19 per cent of households received less than \$650 per week and they are the very low income households whom

we would anticipate would obviously be making these kinds of decisions. But there are households who will be making these kinds of decisions for a range of other reasons. A broken leg and six weeks off contract work can really make a difference to somebody who has been travelling well on the edge but six weeks out of work when they have been contracting can force them into making these decisions.

MR SMYTH: We heard this morning from Advocacy for Inclusion about the effectiveness of the wheelchair accessible taxi system and they have suggested that—

Ms Dundas: Or lack of effectiveness perhaps.

MR SMYTH: Or lack of effectiveness; the degree might be small. And the suggestion was that it become a not-for-profit organisation, that it is just salaried drivers and ideally could be located in ACTION. Does ACTCOSS have an opinion?

Ms Dundas: We undertook some research this time last year on the range of different transport options available. And that is certainly a proposal for consideration. We would really like to see greater connection between all the different transport options that are currently available. The funding for the community buses that are run by Home and Community care funding, the regional community centres, the wheelchair accessible taxis, ACTION and the private transport network actually needs to be better coordinated so that, if a wheelchair accessible taxi is not available, there are other options that can be easily considered, such as community buses. If a community bus is on another route and a wheelchair accessible taxi is available, it can possibly supplement the route that a community bus might be taking.

We certainly are then excited by the funding in this budget for, I think it was, a transport coordination unit. I cannot remember the technical term.

MR SMYTH: Transport coordination team.

Ms Dundas: Yes, a team. I certainly have a vision of what I think that team should be doing and I hope that in the development of that team they do talk to the community sector about the range of different options or lack thereof that are currently available to those people who are reliant on public transport, not those people who are looking to get onto public transport as an alternative but those people who are reliant on public transport.

MR SESELJA: Many low and middle-income earners are also reliant on their cars, particularly in the outer suburbs. What view do you have of the impact on them of increases in parking charges?

Ms Dundas: As I articulated in our budget statement, we are concerned about how this will impact especially on those people who are living in the outer suburbs because they cannot afford to live anywhere else. And because there is no regular public transport system or reliable public transport system in those particular areas, they do rely on their cars. These extra costs do impact disproportionately on them. I think there needs to be a better way that we can look at how we build up our public transport system so that everybody has the choice to use a cheaper option.

MR SESELJA: I know you have touched on it in your submission but do you believe that those options are there for people, particularly in those outer suburbs?

Ms Dundas: Not yet. Not currently.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Dundas. A copy of the transcript of today's hearing will be sent to you. If you have any corrections, please send them back through the secretary. Thank you once again for appearing this afternoon.

Ms Dundas: Thank you, chair, and I undertake to provide you with some information in relation to how much I think has been spent in relation to working with vulnerable people and how the community funding has been allocated in mental health.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Dundas.

CURSLEY, MR PETER, Director, Marketing, Casino Canberra

THE CHAIR: I welcome Mr Cursley from the Canberra Casino to this public hearing of the Select Committee on Estimates. Thank you to for agreeing to come and appear before us this afternoon. We have approximately 30 minutes for our discussion. To begin with, could you confirm that you understand the privilege implications on the privileges statement?

Mr Cursley: Yes, I do.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Before we proceed to questions from the committee, would you like to begin with a brief opening statement?

Mr Cursley: Yes, I would, thank you. As our recent response to the community group survey shows, Casino Canberra was very disappointed that our offer of \$10 million for a licence to operate 200 C-class gaming machines was, we believe, ignored. Furthermore, our estimate that 200 gaming machines would generate approximately \$3 million to \$4 million per annum in recurrent revenue through gaming tax has also been ignored. It seems that the community is the worse off, given that the 2010-11 budget details an increase in household rates and the emergency services levy that would have been negated if our offer had been accepted.

The budget consultative paper invited interested community groups and businesses, unions, individual Canberrans and other stakeholders to share their views and suggestions for future priorities and savings that the ACT government may consider in framing the 2010-11 budget. Casino Canberra submitted a 111-page document suggesting a revenue raising idea—that is, provide the casino with a licence to operate 200 gaming machines and let the ACT community benefit from the initial licence fee and the recurrent gaming tax revenue.

We were further disappointed to see that the casino's submission was not acknowledged in the budget list of submissions. We do not know if this was just an oversight or if our submission was ever considered. Our submission went on to detail how the Canberra economy would be advantaged through increased tourism expenditure; it detailed why the effect on problem gambling would be minimal; and it detailed the casino's harm minimisation strategies. The submission pointed to three government commissioned reports over the years that concluded that there would be a net incremental benefit in awarding the casino a gaming machine licence and it detailed the enormous net benefit to the ACT economy of having the casino here for the last 17 years—a net benefit estimated, in an independent report by Ernst & Young, to be up to \$369 million back in 2005 terms.

A similar submission to that that was put to the ACT budget consultation was put to the Productivity Commission inquiry into gaming in Australia. After taking on board the casino's position, the Productivity Commission concluded in their draft report:

The prohibition on the casino in Canberra from operating modern gaming machines is not warranted. Permitting the casino to operate gaming machines within the existing ACT cap, subject to the application of appropriate regulatory harm minimisation measures, is not likely to increase accessibility or increase gambling harms.

Forgetting one's position on gambling or poker machines, most reasonable people would conclude that the best place for poker machines would be in a designated gambling destination—that is, a casino. Most people find it very curious that the casino does not have gaming machines. Daily, tourists ask our security staff, “Where are your pokies?” We advise them that we do not have them. Then they do a circle of the gaming floor and disappear, presumably forever. When one looks at the net benefit that would be derived from granting a gaming machine licence to the casino, it is difficult to see any logic in the government's current position, especially given the impact of rate increases each householder in Canberra has to bear, as detailed in the 2010-11 budget.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Cursley. You mentioned in your opening statement that you had put in a submission—I assume you sent that to the Treasurer—and that that had not appeared on the list.

Mr Cursley: Yes.

THE CHAIR: So it did not appear up on the website or the list that was accessible? Where did it not appear?

Mr Cursley: It did not. In the budget list of submissions, it did not appear there. My email would suggest that it got through, but maybe it did not. But it did not appear in that list, so I do not know whether it has been taken into consideration or not. I do have copies here of the first two parts—the first 40-odd pages—that I am quite happy to table, and I sent through the Ernst & Young report, which forms part of our submission, with the submission for this estimates committee.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Have you had any discussions with the ACT gambling and racing commissioner about seeking to have licences for poker machines? Where is that up to and what has been the situation to date? Can you give us a run-down?

Mr Cursley: Yes, we have. In any reports that I have seen that have come through from the commission, they recommend that the casino should be granted a licence. And they are certainly on record in the media in support of the casino and machines.

THE CHAIR: Mr Seselja?

MR SESELJA: I might get you to outline in a little bit more detail for the committee—you have talked about the economic benefits to the territory of the casino's operations. What is the estimate on employment numbers, in particular, increasing if you were to get the access to the licences that you are seeking?

Mr Cursley: On employment in particular, we believe we will employ about 100 additional staff. That might seem quite large but, when you consider that the casino originally employed 600 staff and we now have 250, an additional 100 staff would take us up to only 350, which is well below the number of people that we used to employ.

MR SESELJA: So you would expect to see turnover across the board going up as a

result of the attraction of the poker machines being there and therefore—

Mr Cursley: Absolutely. There is no doubt that poker machine revenue will enable us to reinvest in the property, which we have not been able to do to date. In the last 20-odd years, we have had four years of profit, and they have been very, very small profits. Mainly our parent company in Austria has injected finances, basically, to keep us afloat. Poker machine revenue would enable us to develop the property to something that is world class. We are never going to be a Las Vegas casino, and we understand that, but we believe that we can be a world-class boutique casino that offers full entertainment—a full gamut of gambling entertainment, along with shows, restaurants and bars—like any other good-quality boutique casino around the world.

MR SESELJA: How much longer is the parent company going to continue to subsidise it?

Mr Cursley: That is a very, very interesting question, and I do not have the answer to that. What I do know is that they have made it very, very clear to us that we have to stand on our own two feet. We have been doing that, but at the cost of providing a good-quality product.

THE CHAIR: Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: On page 8, at paragraph 6.3, you make a comment that the lack of machines, from comments of visitors, reflects badly on the city. What is the nature of their comments?

Mr Cursley: I firstly go back to what I originally said: tourists coming in here cannot believe that a casino, a gambling venue, does not offer gaming machines. When you see that gaming machine play is the most popular form of gambling in a casino, it has to reflect poorly on the ACT that our casino cannot offer that product.

MR SMYTH: You also say on the previous page, page 7, at paragraph 4.5, that currently the CBD is not served with gaming facilities. What is the reason behind that?

Mr Cursley: We believe that, with the high growth of apartments and people moving into the city, the clubs that are here do not service the clientele that is building up in the city as well as they should be served with gaming machines, especially down the eastern side of the CBD.

THE CHAIR: Is it that there are not enough clubs or is it that the type of places that they are does not match with the clientele? I am just trying to get a handle on that.

Mr Cursley: Clubs, by their very nature, supply a service to their members. If you are not a member of a club, they can be relatively intimidating places, because clubs, by their nature, have clique groups and so forth, and people take a certain amount of ownership of their club. To that extent, the casino has a little bit more anonymity; people can go along to the casino and blend in, if you like, without having to stand out.

If you look at the casino's market, primarily we are a tourist market, but for locals we

are a special occasion market. Where they might go to their club on a weekly basis or a fortnightly basis, they will come to the casino for an anniversary or a birthday, thinking that the casino is a notch better than the club that they go to. Unfortunately, we are falling back behind the clubs in the sort of service and quality of product that we can offer.

THE CHAIR: Ms Bresnan.

MS BRESNAN: Thank you. Mr Cursley, in your opening statement you mentioned that the additional gaming machines you were hoping to have would have a minimal impact on problem gambling. I am just wondering if you can explain that a bit more—how they would have a minimal impact on problem gambling. Also, you mentioned that there is a harm minimisation strategy which is applied. Could you outline that—how you apply it currently and how it would affect the licences?

Mr Cursley: Smarter people than me at the Productivity Commission have determined that there will be very little impact by granting the casino a gaming machine licence. There is some research—which we do not own, but which I am sure, in a commercial-in-confidence forum, I could table and share with you—that would show the type of machine player and their attitudes towards gaming—a casino player as opposed to a club player. Basically, casino players come with a set amount of money to game with. When they have expended that money, they get up and leave. That is as opposed to a club, where people will expend their money and then go to the ATM and take a little bit more out—and so the process goes. That is where the harm comes in. The second part of your question was—sorry?

MS BRESNAN: Harm minimisation. You mentioned that you apply that.

Mr Cursley: Harm minimisation strategies?

MS BRESNAN: Yes.

Mr Cursley: I think the casino set the benchmark on harm minimisation strategies right from day one, with our self-exclusion program, which has now been adopted by clubs, whereby if people feel as though they are having a problem—or, indeed, if we identify that potentially they may have a problem—we can offer them a self-exclusion program whereby we exclude them from the casino for a set period of time. It might be six months, three months, 12 months or even up to forever.

The fact that Casino Canberra has a very high staff to patron level enables our trained staff to identify people that may be potentially heading down a path of harm with gaming. Our gambling contact officers can discreetly take them aside and say, “Look, is everything okay?” They can offer certain programs—Lifeline, for instance—if, indeed, they are having a problem.

We also have trained surveillance staff who are monitoring the gaming floor the whole time—24 hours a day, actually. There are a minimum of two staff in there at any time. They are looking out for a whole range of things. One of the things they are looking out for, though, is if somebody is showing signs of being overly frustrated with their losses or getting overly angry, which would indicate that they may well be

heading down the path of problem gambling.

MS BRESNAN: How are your staff trained to read that? What sort of training are they offered to do that? I am just trying to get a sense of the process of the staff. Do they identify it to one of the officers you mentioned? I am just thinking of how it is done in a sensitive way.

Mr Cursley: That is right. They do not approach the patron, but they do make their concerns known to our gambling contact officer, who is on duty whenever the casino is open. That officer will approach that problem as they see fit.

MS BRESNAN: You also mentioned why people might go to the casino to use gaming machines rather than to a club. You mentioned a sense of anonymity. I am just wondering why that would be applied to the casino—why people would be seeking that sense of anonymity.

Mr Cursley: It is mainly because the majority—that is not quite right; it is about 50 per cent, depending on the season: 45 per cent or 50 per cent—of our market is tourists, not locals, as opposed to a club where, I would say, probably 95 per cent of the market would be locals and maybe five per cent would be from interstate.

MR SMYTH: Just on the problem gambling, Lifeline is probably the premier body charged with looking after problem gambling in the ACT in terms of the delivery of services. What do they say? Is there any evidence from them that problem gamblers from the casino are on the increase or decrease—any numbers?

Mr Cursley: You only need to look at their annual report and see the number of problem gamblers that present themselves and the percentage that say that it is caused by casino gambling. Their report does not indicate whether it is Casino Canberra casino gambling or Star City or Crown, but it is a very, very low percentage of people that present themselves. I think it is about five per cent over the last five years who say they have a casino gambling problem.

MS BRESNAN: But that is people self-presenting, is it?

Mr Cursley: That is people self-presenting.

MS BRESNAN: They are self-selecting, so they are not anyone who has been referred or had a problem identified.

Mr Cursley: Sorry, I do not understand.

MS BRESNAN: A lot of people might self-refer, but a lot of people would not actually do that. We know from people who might have a gambling problem or any other sort of problem like that that they might not actually seek out that help themselves.

Mr Cursley: You are quite right; they may not. A family member may well seek out that help for them on their behalf. Or they might come to our notice, for instance, through their gambling habit, and we will approach them. In some cases, that might be

all that is required to encourage them to self-exclude themselves for a few months just to sit back and re-assess their situation.

THE CHAIR: Any more questions from the panel? Just to finish up, Mr Cursley, I am told that the Casino Canberra submission is up on the Treasury website. I am not sure if that is the list that you were referring to—whether it was the list that was up on the Treasury website, where you can actually download a copy.

Mr Cursley: The list that I was referring to is the list that was published in the budget.

THE CHAIR: Okay, and that was budget paper—

Mr Cursley: I have a copy here I can table.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr Cursley: It is appendix A, “Budget consultation (submission acknowledgement)”.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Page 281, budget paper No 3. Thank you very much, Mr Cursley. A transcript will be sent out to you. If there are any corrections, please feel free to send those through to the secretary. Thank you again for appearing this afternoon before the committee.

Mr Cursley: Thank you.

Short adjournment.

KERLIN, MR ALAN, President, Gungahlin Community Council

THE CHAIR: Welcome to this public hearing of the Select Committee on Estimates. Thank you, Mr Kerlin, for coming this afternoon and representing the Gungahlin Community Council. We have approximately 30 minutes set aside for this afternoon's discussion. Could you confirm for the record that you understand the privileges implications from the statement that is before you?

Mr Kerlin: Yes, I understand them.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Would you like to start with a brief opening statement?

Mr Kerlin: Sure, thank you. Summarising the budget, I would have to say that there are a lot of positives for Gungahlin in there, although there are also some disappointing areas, not entirely unexpected in some respects. We have had quite a focus in the last few budgets on road-building projects out our way, but, apart from fixing the mistake of Gungahlin Drive, the majority of these projects have all been about facilitating further land sales. They have not really been about servicing the needs of Gungahlin residents and, as you would be aware, most of us have to commute out for virtually everything, from swimming lessons to our jobs.

In the budget this time around, though, there was a distinct emphasis on servicing the transport needs of locals, and it was pleasing to see that that emphasis was in the direction of public transport rather than more road construction. The park-and-ride at EPIC is something that we have been campaigning for for more than three years, and it will ensure the success of the Redex buses, I believe. Not only that, it will also be good for the people of north Canberra, because with the Morisset Road, the Sandford Road extension, going through, it will give the opportunity for the EPIC park-and-ride to also intercept a lot of commuters from over the border. Instead of going through Watson, Hackett, Ainslie and Braddon, they can go to the park-and-ride and jump on a Redex. As long as the government makes it attractive for people to leave their cars there, I believe it will take a lot of heat off Northbourne Avenue, suburban rat runs and parking in the city.

It does not get into the light rail solution, which of course leaves us with the difficulty of segregating the public transport from traffic congestion. There is an emphasis on finding a solution for Northbourne Avenue, and also for Flemington Road, with regard to bus lanes. We are on the record as supporting a tidal bus lane solution for Northbourne Avenue. We believe a one-lane bus lane can fit down Northbourne Avenue, through the trees, without significant damage and without affecting what has been stated publicly by many as one of the best boulevard entrances into a city.

So we would not like to see that disturbed, but we believe that a one-lane bus lane can fit down there. Obviously, bidirectional light rail would fit down there a whole lot better, and that would be a preferable solution. I am happy to elaborate on our concerns about the lack of adoption of the PricewaterhouseCoopers cost-benefit analysis later.

Also good for the Gungahlin people from a transport perspective is to fix the bottleneck that occurs every morning at the Phillip Avenue/Majura Avenue

intersection, although I am concerned that \$1 million for a set of traffic lights running 24/7 for a problem that exists for five hours a week—a very intense five hours—is overkill. I have proposed a solution that could be trialled prior to that million dollars being put down, and I am happy to elaborate on that.

Another good thing in the budget that we have been campaigning for is to address the problems that Harrison school is having. The newest school in Canberra is already turning away students from its priority catchment area, deflecting them to Majura and to Palmerston and the like, and getting demountable buildings. In a brand-new school, it is disgraceful that a lack of demographic analysis has got us into that situation. So it is good that planning for a P to 2 school for Franklin is going to get started.

I suggest it needs a rocket under it to try to correct the overflow problems that we have got with Harrison school already.

I would also suggest that the government seriously looks at co-locating a childcare centre, not nearby but right next door. Anyone who has had kids in both school and childcare would appreciate the need to avoid double drop-offs, and also the need, where you have only got preschool provided for a couple of days a week, to be able to move between a childcare centre and a preschool that are next door to each other, not several blocks away.

We remain concerned and uncertain about what is happening with TAMS service levels, given the workshops that happened last year and all sorts of talk about what we believe are silly little things like reducing the number of times that grass in parks is mowed, toilets are washed and that sort of stuff, instead of getting serious about addressing the very issues that cause the expenditure, which may indeed require capital expenditure. That leads me to an overarching concern: that this government, in various guises, seems averse to debt, whereas in a growing population in a growing area debt is an important part of amortising capital works over a population that is not here yet, I believe, and it is used to good effect in other jurisdictions.

On a personal note, I was very pleased to see the allocation for the wetlands in the Gungahlin town centre. Back in, I think, May 2007 I was standing on top of the hill with Andrew Pearce from the Canberra off-road cycling group and we were contemplating whether it would be a good location for a dirt track for bicycles, to give some activities for our youth. Having formerly managed a major Landcare group, I looked down at the dams and things that were there and I said, “Well, Drew, you know, I used to help farmers build wetlands on their properties, and what we are looking at down there would be an absolutely magnificent wetlands park, a park unlike any other park in any town centre in Canberra. And, because of that school right opposite, Burgmann, and the college which is going to be built up the road, and the scout hall as well, you have got stewards there and the opportunity for those schools to use the park as an environmental “learnscape.” For Hansard, that is not “landscape”; it is learnscape, which is very similar to a model I have seen in Burrumbuttock called Wirraminna. Those schools then could beef up their sciences curriculum with a view, long term, to directing more of our kids towards courses that are serviced very well by our own local universities, so that those kids, instead of working every day and night to pay the rent at a uni somewhere else, can actually stay home and go to a local uni.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Kerlin. I noticed in the survey that you filled out—and you have covered a number of these issues in your opening statement—that you also spoke about hospital services and that Gungahlin Community Council’s view, if I am reading it correctly, is that the government should really be looking at building another hospital, out at Gungahlin; that there is land you have identified there and that could be sort of master planned in a way that would really meet future needs. Your view, as I read it here, is that the Calvary site is just not going to cope with the future needs, particularly with the population of 100,000 out in Gungahlin. Do you want to elaborate on that a little more?

Mr Kerlin: Sure. One of my predecessors, Ian Rucroft, accused various people in the government of what he called tiny town syndrome—not having a view towards ultimate populations, and building things for something that is going to happen in the next five years instead of the next 15 or 50 years. I believe there is a little bit of that going on with hospitals at the moment. We are going to have 40,000 or 50,000 more people in Molonglo, which will probably split demand evenly between Calvary and Garran, and we are going to have another 50,000 to 60,000 people in Gungahlin, bringing us from a current 41,000 up to about 100,000 final population at the last estimates that I saw.

With another 100,000 people coming into the central and northern sides, I cannot conceive that those two hospitals could possibly be expanded to be able to cope with that sort of population. They are already suffering considerable stresses with regard to the ad hoc planning and construction that has gone on in the past and you cannot build anything on the sites now without pulling something else down or sacrificing parking and the like.

MR COE: That is not to mention growth in Queanbeyan as well.

Mr Kerlin: Indeed. I am tempted to go into what I would do with the ACT border if I was despot for a day, but I shall not. Braidwood, certainly Bungendore and out to Yass would be on my target—the entire social, political and economic catchment in one jurisdiction would make a lot of sense, I believe, and give us the population we need without population expansion, if you get my drift.

Back to the hospital, there is the added difficulty with Calvary, apart from the vexed problem the government has in trying to purchase it, that we are continuing to pump millions upon millions of dollars of public funds into a hospital that has non-secular beliefs imposed on the services that it delivers.

I do not think I need to go into specifics but I think—and I confirmed this with our meeting last night; they were comfortable with me saying this—that public funds going into a public hospital service for the full range of types of treatments that the public may need in Calvary is not necessarily the case where the operators restrict certain services. That is getting into tricky territory with the church-state separation, I believe.

The obvious solution to us, and it was also canvassed, “thought bubbled”, by the Chief Minister in a radio interview recently, is to cut and run with Calvary and look at

a third hospital. With that in mind, we just wish to draw the government's and the Assembly's attention to the fact that, with the territory plan review in 2008, just shy of 40 hectares of land that was earmarked for townhouse expansion right up to the core of the Gungahlin town centre was actually rezoned to CZ2, to business zone, so think Brindabella Park.

We are jealously guarding that land because that is the future employment base, the thing that will help us reduce the amount of commuting out that we have to do, which in turn is good for all people in Canberra as far as reducing road construction costs and the like. But we do believe that a significant portion of that land could be earmarked for a third hospital and master planning could start straightaway. We have got \$18 million about to be spent on a community health clinic that could very well be the first stage of a third hospital. And, given that it is a greenfield site, there is nothing to pull down, there is nothing to plan around, except for surrounding neighbours.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that.

MS BRESNAN: Can I just follow up on the community health centre to get your view on this. Those sorts of centres are important in terms of trying to prevent people from going to hospital often and providing these primary healthcare services. The Health Care Consumers Association have talked about the need to have more of those. Do you think that sort of thing is better placed in the community rather than having it in a hospital setting, given that it is trying to achieve a different purpose from what a hospital would?

Mr Kerlin: I take your point. I would say instead that a hospital is better located very close to a town centre. Look at Garran: it has got all these other shops and various services and things erupting around it. Even though Phillip is just down the road, it is just that bit too far. The land we are talking about is literally one block from the town centre, so as a hospital location it would be ideal in that respect. Whether then the community health clinic, which is literally one block away from the land we are talking about, is better that one block away or as part of, say, 20 of the 40 hectares of rezoned land is not that big a deal, I guess. But I think what is a big deal is earmarking the land now. The rest of the land we would also like to get out there on the market—test the market instead of trying to second guess it—for office blocks.

From the hospital perspective, if it is earmarked now, inappropriate decisions will not be made about it that impact it. I said before about jealously guarding the land. This land can go up to eight, maybe 10, storeys high in development, yet we have got the LDA, on behalf of the government, nominating blocks right next to it for one and two-storey uses like a licensed club, a mosque and this sort of thing, which, from the mosque perspective, if they had talked with us first, there are more appropriate blocks of land. The club: we just plain do not want it. These are underutilisations of the particular blocks of land that are being proposed to be given to those uses. But not just that; they actually compromise what can go next to them, because you cannot go and put an eight-storey development next to a one-storey church.

MR COE: Do you have concern about the design of the health centre compared to the desired specs and also the actual cost of it?

Mr Kerlin: We have not seen too much in the way of design yet—pretty much just sort of blobby plans.

MR COE: I was actually at the GCC meeting where there was a presentation and I do remember that some people did express some concerns about the cost and just whether it actually would fill the needs of the community.

Mr Kerlin: I think one of the key concerns that was raised at the meeting was the fact that it was not going to be the same sort of facility that has been in the media in the last couple of days as far as the walk-in kind of thing went, but also it would not have a casualty facet to it. That is a pretty big deal for us because, again, we are down at Calvary and we are lined up for hours and hours with everyone else.

MR SESELJA: Alan, you have had a lot to say about the town centre—not just in relation to the potential for a hospital there but also, just for the development of the town centre generally, the need for government offices there. What is your feedback currently from local businesses of the town centre about, particularly, daytime trade? I note that, a little bit further away from the marketplace and the other main shops there, a couple of businesses have closed in recent times. What is the latest feedback from businesses in the area?

Mr Kerlin: It is way more than a couple; there have literally been dozens close, and some quite significant ones in prime locations—not just around the back blocks but prime locations. Fruitylicious has gone, and that was right on the main street directly opposite Coles. I am hoping that with other tenants like Eagle Boys Pizza moving into the middle of town that will sort of re-energise it a little bit. A lot of the night time trade has been dragged down towards the so-called entertainment precinct where McDonald's and KFC are, which tends to also undermine the town centre. But there have been a lot of businesses close. There is a big struggle and they desperately need a weekday, daytime trade. When the mosque is built, I think that will help on one day a week, because it will bring a lot of people into the town at a time when everything is pretty quiet, and again that is why the location of it is so critical.

We need jobs there. We were bitterly disappointed when the government allowed the LDA to put its own efficiencies before efficiencies of service to clients by not moving out to Gungahlin, particularly when there is an entire floor of empty offices upstairs in the G building that Immigration moved out of. LDA could have moved in straightaway there and, as we have said, with another 60,000 blocks still to be sold out there, that is where the lion's share of their work is going to be. But it was more important for them to be opposite ACTPLA than to be near their clients, which was quite disappointing.

There are a couple of blocks of land going on the market at the moment behind the emergency services precinct, off Gozzard Street, which is an LDA development, and I guess that is the first chance of testing the market, office block wise, but it is a little distant from the town centre so there will be a little bit of reluctance in some quarters. We are urging the government to get on with releasing some of the land right in the town centre. I have a number of people in the development trade talk to me and they say to me that they just will not put anything on the market: "We would like to look at building in Gungahlin, but we can't get land."

MR SESELJA: What is your view on the government office project that is going on? Obviously that would probably make it more difficult down the track for government offices to be located in places like Gungahlin, because there would be a centralising of many of the ACT government public servants.

Mr Kerlin: I think it is fairly understandable, in much the same way as it is understandable that a number of federal government departments in Canberra want to try to get everyone that they can in one location. We are pragmatic about that sort of thing. It is why we have targeted Defence as a prime candidate for coming out to Gungahlin and we were cock-a-hoop that there are 350 jobs going out our way with a call centre—in Mitchell, admittedly, not the town centre, but hopefully it is a foot in the door—and with so much Defence housing out there, plus the fact that Defence is far too big to ever be in one location.

That is why it is a primary target. It was also why agencies like the LDA were prime targets, because they were not agencies that necessarily had to be all rolled in, like, TAMS and parks and roads and all those sorts of things, which are understandably something that the government would want to be fairly close to.

THE CHAIR: In your opening address you talked about public transport and welcomed park-and-ride, particularly the one at EPIC. I just wanted to see council's view on how the Redex bus service has gone. It was a trial in this budget. It has been decided to fund it recurrently and to also extend it to Fyshwick. What is your feedback from the Gungahlin community about Redex?

Mr Kerlin: I had Redex on my list; I just did not look down at my list. Yes, we are very pleased to see the Redex extended. It has been very popular. I know a lot of my workmates have mentioned that they are really pleased to see how it has impacted—not just the Redex services and the availability, but also easing the pressure on the other services. So I have had a lot of personal feedback from people that has been positive about Redex.

One of the things with the bus services that we are keen to see now that the roadworks are virtually wrapped up around the airport precinct is the bus service that runs from Gungahlin out to Brindabella Park via Defence. The last service out leaves Gungahlin at seven in the morning, which is a patently absurd schedule, but at the time that we convinced ACTION to implement the new service the road congestion there made it absolutely untenable for them to try to offer a reliable service outside those early times and very late return runs.

I have written to Tom Elliott just in the last week saying that now is the time to get a more reasonable service on that run as well, particularly in the mornings, and I would hope that, given that the Majura Parkway was not funded, augmenting that service considerably would take some of the heat off the need to upgrade Horse Park Drive and Majura Road, which are both becoming congested. Horse Park Drive in particular is rapidly congested. It is very hard to get out of some of the suburbs along that road in the morning at the moment. Hopefully, some more traffic light intersections, when they go in, will put a bit of a surge and gap in that will allow people to get safer out of there.

THE CHAIR: And to incorporate a regular bus service that does not stop at 7 am

from Gungahlin across to the airport.

Mr Kerlin: Yes. Originally, we campaigned for it to just go straight down the Majura Road so it was just an express service for all the Gungahlin suburbs along Horse Park Drive basically and off to the airport. ACTION saw a need to service Russell a bit better and they went that way and that is fine. It appears to be working, although we have not seen any statistics out of ACTION as to what the patronage is like. I would not be surprised if it is not brilliant, given the hours it operates. At more reasonable hours, we would hope to see that patronage go up a lot.

MS BRESNAN: I was just wondering if you have had any feedback on the progress of the master plan for Gungahlin and if—

Mr Kerlin: The town centre planning study?

MS BRESNAN: Yes, and if people are happy, and what input you have had into the process.

Mr Kerlin: It feels like it has fallen in a bit of a hole since Jason Forest, who was the project officer, left. There are alternative staff on there now but we have not had any contact since a workshop basically that Jason ran in November. We were interested to see the \$300,000 that was allocated in this budget for a feasibility study for the town centre roads and we are assuming/hoping that that is to investigate the shared zone proposal that we have been promoting for the town centre, which is partway between a mall and an open road.

The obvious local example is Childers Street in the ANU precinct. We believe that creating a high-friction zone through the town centre during the daytime will make it pedestrian friendly and good for the businesses but still business friendly at night time when the friction is down and there is more casual surveillance.

The key thing is that we need to bounce through-traffic around the town centre. Someone in their wisdom figured they would deliver a whole bunch of traffic right into the town centre to kick-start the shopping centre, I guess, but we now have to undo the damage that has been done and get that through traffic that goes through to Amaroo, Ngunnawal and the like back out of the town centre and try to retrain everyone to go around it instead of through it, which is a whole lot harder to do than just getting the road network right in the first place. But we have to live with these mistakes.

MR COE: Sure. The Clarrie Hermes Drive extension: you have been met with a little bit of opposition by Nicholls residents in particular.

Mr Kerlin: By Nicholls residents?

MR COE: By some Nicholls residents; at this stage it is not a big groundswell. I was just wondering whether the council has a view on the road and whether it actually needs to be constructed and when it should be constructed or about the actual steps of paying for it.

Mr Kerlin: I did notice mention in your newsletter that it was deferred for a couple of years. I queried Tony Gill about that and he tells me that actually they are intending to

go to tender, I think midyear, with a view towards commencing work late in the year. I am not sure where that information came from.

MR COE: The budget tells a slightly different story, I think.

Mr Kerlin: It would be interesting to clarify it, but I only know what Tony has told us directly. I was not aware of any intention to delay that road. It is a pretty important road from a couple of perspectives, but I understand where some of the concerns are coming from and they are very similar to the concerns that were raised in Harrison for Well Station Drive. It is important because it is going to be a fully signalised intersection on the Barton Highway, which in turn will reduce a lot of rat running through Nicholls, so people in Nicholls that are concerned about the road going through probably are not the ones that live on the rat runs and are copping the traffic through those various streets at the moment.

It will take a lot of people off those rat runs and take a lot of traffic off the Curran Drive intersection. Not only will it reduce traffic coming out of Curran Drive; it will also introduce a surge and gap at the traffic lights just a little bit further to the west, which will make it a whole lot safer to get in and out of Curran Drive for the cars that do continue to use it. So from a safety perspective it is important.

It is important for the people up around further to the north that are currently getting a lot of Casey traffic that is going to continue to grow rapidly over the next few years. That traffic has a more alternative way to get out of Casey and straight onto a major arterial road, so it is key that that road gets built. What is most unfortunate is that the developers of Casey were allowed to put together a subdivision plan, which to be fair on them was essentially the indicative subdivision plan that ACTPLA developed in their own concept planning, that allowed house blocks to be developed so close up to the edge of the development, giving no room for adequate buffering of this road that was always on the plans.

The situation that we have got, where we are going to have concrete noise barriers built along a brand-new road where a brand new suburb has gone in and could easily have been shifted further away from the road, is patently absurd. I know we have had a number of ACTPLA and Roads ACT reps in meetings in recent times saying, “We’ve learnt from that mistake and we’re not going to repeat it.” But that is a line I have heard from MLAs and bureaucrats a lot over the last four years.

We had John Hargreaves stand up in one of our meetings and say, “We’ve learnt from the mistakes of Tuggeranong and we are not going to repeat them in Gungahlin” and then a year later Andrew Barr stood up in a meeting down at Weston and said, “We’ve learnt from the mistakes in Gungahlin and we are not going to repeat them in Molonglo.” We have got to start learning from the mistakes eventually, but it is most regrettable that Clarrie Hermes Drive is going to have to have noise barriers—and I sure hope that mistake is learnt from. But the road does need to go through.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Kerlin, for appearing before the estimates committee this afternoon. A transcript will be sent to you of this afternoon’s hearing. If you have any corrections, please send them back through.

Mr Kerlin: Thank you, everyone, for staying late.

The committee adjourned at 5.34 pm.