



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2012-2013

(Reference: [Appropriation Bill 2012-2013 and Appropriation \(Office of the Legislative Assembly\) Bill 2012-2013](#))

Members:

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

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

FRIDAY, 15 JUNE 2012

Secretary to the committee:
Ms S Salvaneschi (Ph 620 50136)

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.

APPEARANCES

ALTAMORE, MR ROBERT, OAM, CM , Executive Officer, People with Disabilities ACT Inc.	1
BARRY, MS ERIN , Policy and Development Officer, Youth Coalition of the ACT.....	19
COLLINS, MS DIANE , Deputy Chair, ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body	45
FOWLIE, MS CARRIE , Executive Officer, Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drug Association ACT.....	63
HOLMESBY, MR DAVID , Executive Committee Member, Association of Independent Schools of the ACT	53
KING, MR WAYNE , Chairman, Chisholm Community Park Committee	71
KITCHIN, MS JENNY , President, ACT Council of Social Service Inc	28
KORPINEN, MS KIKI , Deputy Director, ACT Council of Social Service Inc.....	28
LINKE, MR MICHAEL , Chief Executive Officer, RSPCA ACT	37
LITTLE, MR RODNEY (ROD) , Chairperson, ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body	45
MORISON, MR RUSS , President, South East Tuggeranong Residents Association.....	71
ROBERTSON, MS EMMA , Director, Youth Coalition of the ACT	19
SEYMOUR, MS ANGELA , Office Manager, ACT Shelter	9
TSOULIAS, MR NICK , Media and Public Officer, South East Tuggeranong Residents Association	71
WATSON, MS LEIGH , Executive Officer, ACT Shelter.....	9
WRIGLEY, MR ANDREW , Executive Director, Association of Independent Schools of the ACT.....	53

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Amended 9 August 2011

The committee met at 9.02 am.

ALTAMORE, MR ROBERT, OAM, CM, Executive Officer, People with Disabilities ACT Inc.

THE CHAIR: Welcome to this estimates inquiry into the budget for 2012-13. Just so you know, these proceedings are being broadcast. You are aware of that? And just to make sure, someone has made you familiar with the privilege statement? That has been made familiar to you?

Mr Altamore: I have been provided with a copy.

THE CHAIR: Fantastic. I understand you have got a statement you wanted to have read. And I understand you need someone to read that for you. Because the committee secretary has not got a microphone, I will read that statement out for Mr Altamore, if everyone is okay with that. As I should have said, you are representing People with Disabilities ACT. The statement reads:

PWDACT is a systemic advocacy organisation which is operated by people with disabilities for people with disabilities to represent their views and interests. PWDACT works for improved access to information and community activities and to inform the community about disability issues. Our commitment is to improve access to all amenities and to all forms of information activities in the ACT community. We seek to do this by bringing the lived experience of disability to the consideration of policies for the provision of services and facilities for people with disabilities. PWDACT also works to inform the community about disability issues.

Lack of growth funds for disability services.

PWDACT is very concerned that the 2012-2013 budget contains no growth funds for disability services. These are the services provided through Disability ACT. We note that other sectors, including the health sector and the mental health sector, have received growth funding, but not the disability sector. The lack of any growth funds for disability services is concerning because most stakeholders in the sector, including service providers, policy makers and regulators and people with disabilities themselves, are aware through their personal experience that the demands for disability services are increasing. This increase is apparent through the simple factor of the annual ageing of the ACT population. If there is increased demand for disability services and no growth funds, the consequence can only be that current levels of unmet demand will increase, quality of service will fall and more people with disabilities will not get the support they need. While the ACT government lies back and waits for the commonwealth to fix everything for it, through the NDIS, people with disabilities lie in their homes unable to access services, get an education or job or enjoy a social life. A service which is particularly vital and which has received no growth funds is community transport. Just yesterday a provider of community transport told me that they had had to even further restrict the transport they could offer because one of their vehicles was off the road for a week for repairs and they could not access a replacement vehicle. Also just yesterday it was confirmed through the COAG report on the commonwealth-state disability agreement that one in three people with disabilities are not getting the support

and services they need.

Insufficient provision in new spending.

We note that the budget papers and government announcements refer to \$155 million of new spending. However, in the budget papers we can only find \$12.6 million of new spending on disability. \$7.7 million is on education. This means that the new government spending on disability programs is less than one-thirteenth, or 7.75 per cent, of the total of new government spending. ABS figures indicate that up to 18 per cent of the population of the ACT has some form of significant disability. An example where people with disabilities have been forgotten is in new spending on corrections. While there is cultural awareness training for Corrections ACT staff, there is no disability awareness training for these staff.

No provision for transition to national disability insurance scheme.

The budget contains no funding for initiatives to help people with disabilities transition to the NDIS. We submit that at this time the ACT government should be assisting people with disabilities to transition to the scheme by funding programs to train and equip them with the skills they need to choose their services and supports and manage their funds. These skills are essential for people with disabilities to benefit from the NDIS in the manner contemplated by the Productivity Commission report. It is not good enough for the ACT to rely on the commonwealth to fund this training. Nor is it good enough to ask that the commonwealth or the ACT to be one of the first roll-out sites for the NDIS. The commonwealth has and always will maintain that the implementation of the NDIS is a joint undertaking between the commonwealth and state and territory governments. Other states, in particular, New South Wales, Victoria and WA, are way ahead of the ACT in programs to give people with disabilities the skills they need when the NDIS becomes a reality. The ACT should fund training programs which give people with disabilities NDIS skills, in particular with respect to exercise of choice, management of supports, human rights and self-advocacy.

Advocacy funding.

The ACT is one of only two Australian jurisdictions which does not fund individual advocacy for people with disabilities. The ACT funds systemic advocacy, but this funding is both limited and inadequate. The inadequate funding for systemic advocacy means that PWDACT cannot respond to many of the requests for input and feedback which we receive from ACT government agencies and the community. Further, where we can respond, we are not able to respond with the timeliness and thoroughness we would wish to bring to our work. In particular, in many instances we are not able to consult fully with our individual and organisational members. The consequence is that the ACT does not get the benefit of the lived experience of disability in the development of policies for people with disabilities, and the delivery of their services and supports. Thus ACT policies and service delivery arrangements are not as good as they should be and lag behind standards in other states and territories. PWDACT believes that the ACT should have at least two more full-time policy officers located in disability, consumer and advocacy organisations to ensure that policy and service delivery in the ACT is shaped by the lived experience of people with disabilities. We also believe that ACT government agencies should engage and pay people with disabilities to ensure that their services and policies

are shaped by the lived experience of disability.

In relation to individual advocacy, PWDACT does not provide this service but is aware of the lack of funding for this service and the consequences of the unmet need for individual advocacy because of our close collaboration with these organisations. We ask committee members to contact the two organisations in the ACT which provide individual advocacy, namely, Advocacy for Inclusion and ADACAS, so that they have a personal understanding of the need for more funding for individual advocacy.

Conclusion.

PWDACT ask that the estimates committee in its report draws the Assembly's attention to the lack of growth funds for vital disability services, the absence of funds to enable people with disabilities to transition to the NDIS and the lack of funding for individual and systemic advocacy for people with disabilities. PWDACT also calls on the committee and the Assembly to take such action as they can to remedy these funding inequities in the 2012-2013 budget.

Are you happy to go to questions or is there anything you wanted to add to that?

Mr Altamore: I would like to add a few very quick things.

THE CHAIR: Sure.

Mr Altamore: First of all, I would like to thank the Assembly for allowing PWDACT to present and apologise on behalf of my president, Terry Millar, for her inability to be here with us today. Also, there are two things I would like to clarify. Firstly, in our concluding comments, where we ask the Assembly to report on the inadequacies in funding for disability services, I did not ask that the Assembly increase the funding, and I am not sure that is even within the power of this committee. But obviously, if it is within the power of the committee, I would hope that some of that remedial action which would flow from this committee's considerations of the matter and support would be to provide for funding for these areas where I have said there are funding shortfalls.

The other thing is that, at the end of my remarks, I would like to take two or three minutes of your time to raise a personal matter regarding access to the budget papers.

THE CHAIR: Certainly. Did you want to raise that now or after we have asked some further questions.

MR HARGREAVES: Now is a good time.

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Altamore: Okay, then, I will raise it now. As you know, I am a blind person. This year I tried to access the budget papers online, and I found that they were in PDF formats which were inaccessible to people like me who use screen readers. This has happened over several years. I emailed the webmaster at Treasury on the day of the budget with this concern and emailed the webmaster two days ago. I have had no response. As this is a matter which has gone on for several years, I am hoping that it

can be remedied. The committee might raise it with the Treasury officers when they hear from them later. Each year we come across this inaccessibility of the budget papers, and it really hinders the ability of someone like me to help you, to help Assembly members, when we are presenting.

MR COE: That is actually an issue which the whole of the ACT government experiences at the moment. It is called optimal character recognition, OCR, and pretty much none of our scanners in the Assembly nor all the FOI documents which are published actually have that recognition. So I think it is a very valid point that it is not just useful for people who use screen readers but also people who want to search PDF documents.

THE CHAIR: There is a recommendation there.

MR HARGREAVES: You might find that the problem, of course, is that unless it is rectified, you will not be able to read it. So you will have to trust us that it is there.

THE CHAIR: I might, if I can, go to a question.

Mr Altamore: I am happy to take questions now.

THE CHAIR: Excellent. I will go to the first one. You mentioned in your opening statement the NDIS, which is good. You have got in there a couple of things about the sorts of activities and programs that are needed to help people make that transition. I just want to ask: do you have any idea, from the interactions you have, how many people in the ACT would need to have that assistance and training to make those decisions for themselves?

Mr Altamore: I cannot give you numbers, I am sorry. But what I do know is that if the NDIS operates as it is said it operates and the funding goes to the person and the person needs to make choices about services and manage those services, then to do so effectively they would need the skills. So I would suggest that for each person who gets the individualised funding, there should be a training component.

THE CHAIR: That is, as you said, something that probably could be worked out by looking at the number of people on the packages?

Mr Altamore: It is more than the number of people on packages, because the NDIS will not just apply to current package recipients. It will apply to a lot of people who currently receive services under block funding arrangements.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Hargreaves.

MR HARGREAVES: Robert, I want to explore with you a little more your views on the growth funding, or lack of it. I think we have had this conversation for a number of years. I am going to suggest to you that we need to have the conversation until some justice is actually delivered on this.

Do you agree with the view that disability services, like health services, are in fact human services and that the actual physical services received by many people with

disabilities are in fact sourced from the health services programs anyway? The most salient point is that when you have a disability, the probability is that it is for life. You do not get cured; you get a little bit better. That means there is an ever-increasing number of people accessing those services, and if we do not have growth funding built in then the people receiving services now will receive proportionally less as the population in the disability sector grows. Am I right there?

Mr Altamore: You are right in the fact that the demand for disability services will increase over time and that if we do not have growth funding, as you said, people will not get the services. The matter I would like to clarify is that we need to be very careful that we do not create a divide between health and disability services whereby people fall through the cracks. Whatever the government does in its funding of services, it must provide a seamless service system.

MR HARGREAVES: How do you feel about the notion that there are certain disability services and health services that could be grouped together for the purposes of funding and that attract growth funding in the same sort of fashion?

Mr Altamore: It would depend on how it was done. There are some fundamental differences between disability and health services. For example, health services are episodic. Some disability services are episodic but a lot of disability services are ongoing. So there are different management issues for service managers.

MR HARGREAVES: My last question on this for the moment is that I notice that the health services get growth funding of around the nine per cent mark, depending on what year we are talking about. Is that a reasonable figure to apply to disability services or do you have another number or an idea in your mind about that?

Mr Altamore: I do not think I have a specific number. Nine per cent would be good, as it is nine per cent more than we have at the moment. While health did get nine per cent, and the government and the Assembly have promoted the growth in health funding as a key aspect of this budget, mental health, which is disability related, has only received \$1 million of growth funding, which I think is less than nine per cent.

MR HARGREAVES: It is, and that is something that the chair is a bit worried about.

Mr Altamore: I understand you are hearing from mental health people later in these hearings.

THE CHAIR: Robert, I need to flag with you, so that you are aware of it, that the media have just come in.

Mr Altamore: Thank you.

MS HUNTER: Mr Altamore, I want to go back to this question around the sort of training that is needed for people to move to this new environment with the NDIS. You have said in your submission and this morning that there needs to be some training so that people can make good choices when they are out there putting their packages together and to ensure that their needs are being met and so forth. Do you know if any of this work is happening in other states or territories? Are there similar

positions being set up or programs being set up?

Mr Altamore: As far as I am aware—I stand corrected because I am not an expert on all other states—the conversation is just beginning to be held. In New South Wales there have been consultations on individualised funding; I know that. I think there have also been some in Victoria and some in Western Australia. But we are still in the early days. But at least the other states have started down the road. The ACT is yet to start down this road.

The ACT has done some very small things for service providers and has looked at things like the disability workforce, but it has not yet engaged people with disabilities in the discussion and said to people with disabilities: “The NDIS is coming. It’s going to change the way you receive services. We want you involved and we want you to be trained and skilled so that when the NDIS comes, in whatever form it comes, you know you have a choice.” A lot of people do not even know they have choices. “You know what choices are available to you. You know your rights and you know how to advocate for yourself.”

MS HUNTER: There is a disability advisory council here in the ACT. You are not aware if they have started to have that conversation with people in the community and organisations working in the disability area?

Mr Altamore: I am not aware that the Disability Advisory Council has started this conversation. I would suggest that you check directly with the council chairperson.

MR SMYTH: You raised a number of issues about funding. If we start with the level of unmet demand, what is that level, and how much do you estimate it might increase by?

Mr Altamore: I am not good at the precise figures on unmet demand. I am better at the anecdotal evidence that points to that unmet demand. No, I cannot give you numbers. People in organisations that are better resourced than our organisation, such as ACTCOSS or NDS, might be able to give you some idea of that.

MR SMYTH: And the anecdotal—

Mr Altamore: I am sorry; I just do not have the resources within my organisation to do figure calculations.

MR SMYTH: You talked about anecdotal evidence. Is there a small amount, a medium amount, a large amount of unmet demand?

Mr Altamore: I would suggest there is a significant amount.

MR SMYTH: The funding issue is real for organisations like your own. What level of funding would you suggest is required for the individual advocacy? You make the point that the systemic advocacy is also limited and inadequate. What would be reasonable amounts for the committee to recommend that the government put in?

Mr Altamore: Because PWDACT do not provide individual advocacy, and I do not

have a brief to make specific recommendations on behalf of the organisations that do this work, I would prefer it if you would ask that question of them directly. I am not trying to avoid the question; I just think the answer would be more meaningful and more accurate if it comes from the organisations actually providing the individual advocacy.

MR SMYTH: Sure. Thank you.

MR COE: Rather than talking about this at the macro level, one area of particular interest to me is accessibility of public transport for people with disabilities—not just wheelchair accessible public transport but vision impaired accessibility. I was wondering whether you can give any commentary on the reliability of ACTION bus timetables with regard to their published accessibility and also the bus stops and how they fare in terms of meeting the needs of people that you represent.

Mr Altamore: In terms of accessibility of the timetables, the timetables themselves can be accessed if you know how to access them, and many people do not. If you can use the web, the internet and those sorts of things, they are accessible. From a vision impairment point of view, if you need help with other formats, I understand that blindness agencies can help with other formats, audio or braille, for the timetables. So, yes, they can be made accessible. What was your second question?

MR COE: In terms of the actual reliability of wheelchair accessible buses and also the quality of the actual urban infrastructure, especially the bus stops.

Mr Altamore: In terms of reliability of wheelchair accessible buses, I believe that there is not enough awareness in the community that our buses are wheelchair accessible. I would like to see ACTION do more to promote to the disability community the accessible buses, the routes they run on and when they run, so that people can be more aware and plan their travel more appropriately. That is the feedback given to me by wheelchair users.

The other thing you asked about was bus stops. We are aware that ACTION is engaged in a program to upgrade bus stops. PWDACT cooperates by inviting people to inform us so that we can tell ACTION about the bus stops that need upgrading. But this is a long, slow process.

I will mention, though—it is something that you might look at, Alistair—that the year 2012 is a key year in that the ACT, like other states and territories, needs to meet benchmarks for accessibility in terms of both the bus fleet and the bus infrastructure. We ourselves are—and I am sure each member of the Assembly is—very keen to know how ACTION is tracking in that regard.

The only other thing I want to mention on this is that we do work with ACTION through the ACTION transport advisory committee on accessible public transport, on which PWDACT is represented. There are also a number of people with disabilities on that committee with a lot of skill and background in this area.

MR COE: You can rest assured I will be following up some of those issues with ACTION later in the estimates program.

THE CHAIR: We are almost out of time. I want to ask one other question. With respect to the issue of advocacy, which we have talked about, and which you raised quite a bit in your statement, what sort of impact does it have on people? As you said, you have people coming to you asking for that advocacy and you just cannot provide them with that assistance. What sort of impact does that have on people? I think it is good to get a sense of the personal story.

Mr Altamore: That is in individual advocacy. When we get individual advocacy requests, we refer them to one of the two advocacy organisations, who generally will try their hardest to do something for the person. Where they cannot, it means that obviously the person's situation remains unremedied. It may be that they are living in unsatisfactory accommodation and that they continue to live in unsatisfactory accommodation, that they cannot get access to a day service or a respite service or that they are thrown off a service before they have completed it. Let us say that they are in rehab and they are taken off rehab before they have completed their rehab.

THE CHAIR: That sort of situation, being taken off rehab before it is completed, is that something you have heard occurs often?

Mr Altamore: Not often. I have heard of it occurring on several occasions.

THE CHAIR: There being no further questions, thank you, Mr Altamore, very much for appearing once again and for providing us with your opening statement. A copy of the transcript of the hearing will be sent to you. We will have to make sure that it is in an accessible format so that you can read it. It most certainly will be, I am informed by the committee secretary.

Mr Altamore: Samantha has been very meticulous in looking after the accessibility issues.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Samantha is sitting here, so she will have heard that. Thank you very much for appearing before the committee and for providing us, as I said, with your statement and the valuable information you have given us.

Mr Altamore: Thank you, everyone.

WATSON, MS LEIGH, Executive Officer, ACT Shelter
SEYMOUR, MS ANGELA, Office Manager, ACT Shelter

THE CHAIR: I would like to thank Ms Watson and Ms Seymour from ACT Shelter for appearing before the estimates committee inquiry into the 2012-13 budget. The proceedings are being broadcast today. I draw your attention to the privilege statement, which is on the blue card in front of you—just to make sure that you have seen that and are aware of the implications of that.

Ms Watson: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Wonderful. Before we go to questions from the committee, I would like to invite you to make an opening statement.

Ms Watson: Thank you for inviting ACT Shelter here today to provide further evidence to this inquiry. The role of ACT Shelter is to provide advocacy and advice on policy issues that impact on housing justice for people on low to moderate incomes. We feel we are well placed to provide feedback on housing and homelessness issues arising from this budget.

To start with, it is clear at the moment that the ACT is experiencing a housing crisis. The combined factors of extremely high private rental and not enough social housing mean that a very large proportion of Canberrans—around 40 per cent—are battling to pay mortgages or rent. Housing stress and even homelessness are now very real experiences for many people in our territory. There are not enough supported housing services for homeless people; 59 per cent of all people who make a new request for immediate emergency accommodation are turned away. There are not enough exits—in fact, there are almost none—from those homeless services into long-term housing. There are no plans to build additional social housing. We feel that \$5 million in the budget is just a catch-up.

Housing affordability, as one of the key points, is now a serious concern for Canberrans on low to moderate incomes. In this regard, we applaud the recent moves towards a more progressive taxation system, though we feel that the impacts on affordability will be incremental and over time, and it is to be seen what impact that will have.

While we applaud the efforts of the government over the past 10 years through a series of affordable housing action plans, we feel this has done very little to alleviate the situation. Housing is now more unaffordable than ever. We are very conscious that at this very moment the government is releasing mark III of the affordable housing action plan. We were pleased to review an early draft, but while we felt the plan had some sound recommendations, it was not a complete solution to what is now a very serious problem.

This current housing crisis requires a groundswell, a whole-of-government approach and one that comes with a very serious financial commitment, not just tick-tacking around the edges.

We know that government funds are not unlimited, but every dollar that is spent in

housing for the people of our community will be recouped in productivity gains. It is now a fact that a happy, securely housed person is more likely to be able to make a positive contribution to the community and the economy. In the long run it saves the government money.

We would also particularly like to point out that we have concerns around public housing targets as outlined in the budget. I will just talk about a few figures. The ACT government failed to meet its 2011-12 target for managed public housing properties. Instead of the 12,050, the outcome was 11,862. We believe that this shortfall was due to a combination of construction delays and transfers of properties to community housing organisations. However, we are a little unclear on that, so we feel there should be more transparency in that latter process.

In the transferring of properties, we would like to know how many were transferred and, of these, how many were let at 75 per cent of market rent as opposed to the 25 per cent of income, as is the case for public housing. The target for 2013-14 is 11,941—I am now quoting figures from the budget papers—which is a decrease on the unmet demand of 2011-12. From our reading of this, it would seem that to get to the 2013-14 target previously stated, the government would need to acquire 79 properties between now and then, which is certainly not achievable with \$5 million.

The lack of adequate social housing, combined with the housing affordability crisis, is only going to impact adversely on the number of homeless people living in the territory.

Those three key issues were certainly uppermost in our mind, and they were certainly issues from the budget.

In summary, our three main concerns are inadequate provision of the expansion of social housing, homelessness support only receiving minimal new funding, and no significant allocations for improving housing affordability.

Moving on to the second part of our budget submission, we made a request for additional funding to undertake quality policy research on all these areas. Given the housing crisis that the territory is currently experiencing, we feel that rejection of our submission was short-sighted, especially given Shelter's 25-year history of working closely and productively with government on these issues. That is also not forgetting the weight that the ACT government receives from our input into our national body, National Shelter, impacting on the NAHA.

That is the conclusion of my opening statement.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Watson. I will just go to the first question. Obviously you have raised the issue of social housing and public housing as being vital. From what you said, what is the sort of level of investment that is needed to make sure that we are not just maintaining but actually increasing the number of properties available to people?

Ms Watson: Obviously I do not have any dollar figures in mind.

THE CHAIR: No, I appreciate that.

Ms Watson: But it would certainly need to be significant. There are 1,800 people—just rounded figures—on the waiting list at the moment. So there would be a significant investment required to—

THE CHAIR: In terms of the stories you hear and the input you are providing, obviously you hear from the organisations that are assisting people in various situations, whether they are in crisis or they just need to find stable accommodation. What impact does it have when you do not have that adequate supply—the flow-on effects that this has for crisis accommodation in all sorts of areas?

Ms Watson: I will just answer one part. Angela, who has been with the organisation longer than me, probably has more anecdotal information on that. One of the new things that is happening—we are getting this fed back to us constantly, and I am sure that you know this—is that the support services are seeing a new group of people: the working poor, basically; people who have never approached a charity or a welfare organisation. We are talking about people with jobs; they might be in retail, childcare or some trades jobs. That is of real concern. Angela, do you want to add anything?

Ms Seymour: I think the extra support that has been put in for people that have been homeless and now have been housed has certainly been helpful in stabilising some of those tendencies, but the problem is that the overall percentage has not increased. As a result, there are still people that are not assisted that do the rounds of crisis accommodation—who are literally homeless, couch surfing. This does not help them get jobs and bring themselves up into being a productive member of society.

THE CHAIR: Absolutely. One last question. You have said that stable housing is important for all those other areas of life. Do you think that—because the funding has gone down, and with public housing, particularly, we have seen people in really desperate circumstances going in—other people who need that sort of housing are missing out as well?

Ms Watson: Totally. You are right; housing has now become welfare housing rather than social housing. The history of public housing in Canberra is that it was built to house the workers who came here, the public servants. As you say, now there are even people who are on Centrelink payments who cannot get access to it anyway. But you are right: there are people whose situations may just be—a classic example is marriage break-ups. It may not even involve domestic violence, so their lives could be pretty stable. But there are single women who may be, say, working as a childcare worker—and I know people in this situation—who now need to turn around and find accommodation. Even to rent—we all know that \$400 is a minimum. If you are only receiving \$700 or \$800 a week, that is totally unaffordable.

THE CHAIR: Just one final question. We have been hearing anecdotally that a lot of older women are finding themselves in the situation where they may be in public housing now, too, because of other circumstances—they have not got the super, all those sorts of issues. Are you hearing those stories?

Ms Watson: We have both been hearing it. In fact, I attended a national conference

yesterday where that was flagged—that older women will be the real danger group in the near future. There are women who are, say, 50 and above who missed out on the super. Again, they may be married or may not have been married, but they have left the home with not many assets. For them to turn around and be able to afford to purchase is just out of their—

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. Mr Hargreaves.

MR HARGREAVES: Thanks very much for that. Thanks for coming along. It is good to see you. I just have got one. I recall that in the summit that we had in 2005 one of the issues that came out of the discussion with the sector was the need for that single waiting list. At the time, we really did not have an accurate handle on what the demand was, so we could not actually project forward to work out what the need was as opposed to the demand. We know what the demand was; it was just people asking for it. But what we could not get a handle on was the need—how many of those really needed it and how many were just asking for it. Has that introduction of that single waiting list made a difference to your knowledge of exactly what the situation is out there, or is it just a convenient administrative tool? How does it strike you?

Ms Watson: I guess I cannot comment because I do not have that history. But I would be very surprised if all those people on the waiting list do not have a very critical need—as well as people who are not on the waiting list. Angela, do you want to say something?

Ms Seymour: Yes. I think there always was a single waiting list, but what has happened is that the people that were applying direct to community housing providers are now going through that channel as well. The thing is that we do not know how many of those people would have only just gone through the community housing waiting list. What percentage of that increase is that due to or is it just that people are not applying anymore? That is the problem. And what has been clarified with having that single waiting list—the priority lists are now much clearer than they were, which is a good thing.

MR HARGREAVES: One of the areas that I particularly wanted to focus on—and I am grateful for that, because that has cleared it up a bit for me—is this. I can recall the difficulty in getting a handle on how many people, particularly women, were in crisis in the accommodation sense. People would knock on the doors of three or four different crisis accommodation providers, to be knocked back because they just did not have enough rooms. Of course, if we counted each one of those it inflated the numbers, so it gave us an inflated idea of how many people were there but it also did not give us an accurate idea of how many women were in real crisis and how many other services we needed to bring to bear on top of just the accommodation one. Has that improved over time?

Ms Watson: Are you talking about the crisis waiting list rather than the social housing waiting list?

MR HARGREAVES: It is actually a bit of both. It is part of a continuum of social housing provision; it is at the sharp end of that provision continuum.

Ms Watson: Do you want to answer that question?

Ms Seymour: I think what it has assisted is the people themselves. What you are talking about now is having the one-stop shop type model. You have got the first point where now people just apply to one place as opposed to a lot of different places. But even when they did apply to different places, the counting methodology was not necessarily such that they were counted twice. If a crisis accommodation service had that phone call and did not take them, they would not have been counted in that data that was released by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. So I am not sure that it is the same thing.

THE CHAIR: Ms Hunter.

MS HUNTER: In your comments this morning, you do speak around affordable action plan III, which is being launched today. I am not sure if you caught Minister Barr's interview this morning. From what I did get around to hearing, there is a focus on private rental, as you have said. And it appears to also be around increasing supply through a conversation around maybe extending, increasing, that percentage of affordable housing being within, say, englobo developments. I heard a 60 per cent figure discussed this morning. The view is that it is about supply, and that more supply out there will put downward pressure on rents. Have you had an opportunity to hear that, and do you have any thoughts? I know it is very early—it only happened an hour or so ago—but do you have any thoughts on that?

Ms Watson: Yes. We really do applaud the plan. We think there are some great strategies in it. The thing is that a lot of them are incentives for developers and landlords, but there is no guarantee that they will be passed down to the tenants in terms of the private rental developments. Also, we hear this talk, again, about relieving that downward pressure, but we would really like to see evidence on that. I know there are economic models and assumptions made, but at the end of the day those programs have been happening for 10 years and they have not done anything. So how do we know that doing more of the same is going to have that effect? The CHC model is a similar sort of model; you put more affordable housing out there. We would also like to explain, which I am sure you know, that “affordable” means just a little bit less expensive.

MS HUNTER: The 75, 78, or whatever it is, per cent of market rent.

Ms Watson: It is 74.9.

MS HUNTER: Thanks.

Ms Watson: So that is our feeling. We feel it is good; it is better than doing nothing. But is it really going to reach the bottom two quintiles of the market?

MS HUNTER: In fact, that is what public housing is supposed to be about. You have identified that we have moved to a welfare housing system. We did it more than a decade ago.

Ms Watson: Yes.

MS HUNTER: So that has cut out quite a few people who we thought would go into that affordable bit. But of course many of them cannot afford the affordable part of this continuum.

Ms Watson: Exactly.

MS HUNTER: There is a bit of despair. Have we actually moved anywhere in providing the amount of public housing we need, the amount of social housing we need and the amount of crisis accommodation we need? We still seem to be where we were 15 years ago.

Ms Watson: I was not around 15 years ago, but my feeling is it is probably worse.

Ms Seymour: Yes. It is more targeted, as I said before. We have now got more supports for people that have been actually homeless, but the people on that top of the second lowest quintile are now missing out. So you have sort of shifted the problem. Eventually, they go along the housing stress continuum and become homeless. So that part of the continuum has not really solved anything. And, as Leigh said, the issue is that we have not seen any evidence that the previous action plans—I was on the first action plan in 2002—

Ms Watson: Yes, 10 years ago.

Ms Seymour: In 2002. And we have still got unaffordable housing in the ACT. The modelling that has been done for housing action plan III—I have not looked at it in detail, but I think Leigh has—does not actually show whether it has given much assistance. I think the only solution is, as our submission has said, to put a whole lot more money into providing really affordable housing.

MS HUNTER: Would you say that that would be through the public housing system?

Ms Watson: That is certainly one way—public and community housing.

MS HUNTER: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Let us start on the role of community housing. How important are groups like community housing groups to actually help those who cannot afford to get their own home or to rent?

Ms Watson: Yes, that is a good question. Again, the conference I attended yesterday was actually on community housing. There were national providers there with very innovative models, and I was very impressed. Canberra is a very small player with community housing. Again, I am not sure of the history or why that is. We hear that there are moves to move more into that area. I think there have been some developments over the last year, but I feel it is a bit of a fudgy area between affordable and community housing. Again, I am new to the sector and sometimes new eyes can look at things objectively. But I think there should be very clear

demarcations between what is affordable housing and community housing.

Community housing really just should be a little step up from public housing, but it seems to have moved a little bit into the affordable continuum, in my mind. So I feel that there is great scope, but I am not sure what is being done or what the government's thinking is on that, to be frank.

MR SMYTH: In your submission on page 3 you talk about there being some indication that the initiatives intended to increase home ownership for those on low to moderate incomes are actually being utilised by people on high incomes. What evidence have you got to support that?

Ms Watson: Yes, obviously, we talk to our stakeholders and members in confidence; so I cannot divulge names. In particular, I can say with all surety that the land rent scheme is being utilised by financially savvy people who know how, legally, to use the system. I believe it is not capped. There is no top income.

My background is communications. So I find it quite interesting that when I was in the market myself until recently looking for a house, I had never heard of the land rent scheme. So if I have not heard of it, how are people who are a bit further down the economic spectrum going to know about it? In fact, none of my friends had even heard about it as well. So there is the double thing: it is not being promoted to the people who should be using it, whereas the savvy people are able to access that information.

MR SMYTH: So if we go back to community housing, you said you thought they should be in the space perhaps slightly above public housing, but they are obviously filling a void. I mean, you sort of move where the pressure of the market takes you.

Ms Watson: Yes.

MR SMYTH: How do we get CHC back out to where you think they should be but then how do we solve the problem—

Ms Watson: Sorry, I was not saying that. I feel that CHC should be there.

MR SMYTH: Okay.

Ms Watson: So I feel there is definitely a market—there is definitely a need for the affordable housing market. But I feel there is also a need for a community housing sector. Does that answer your question?

MR SMYTH: Yes, but CHC is the community market, but they are working in the affordable space. How do we fill the void that their movement would create?

Ms Watson: By looking at innovative models for community housing providers to develop with support, including financial support, from the government—not totally from the government. We understand that the government does not have unlimited money; but, certainly, some support to kick the sector off.

MR COE: I have a question about community housing providers and the consolidation which seems to be happening across the country, but especially here in the ACT. It seems that there are perhaps one or two players that are getting much larger, perhaps at the expense of some of the other community housing providers. What do you see as the future of community housing in the ACT? Is the direction that we are seemingly going down actually going to meet the need that community housing providers are currently filling?

Ms Watson: I understand your question. As I said, I am not sure what the government's feelings are on that. So I do not know that we are actually going down a path. I believe that the first step would be to look at what can be provided. So we should put the discussion on the table and open it up. It could be that some smaller—I mean, it should be a diversity of options. So it could be that it includes some bigger players but also we should not forget the smaller players and they are probably the ones that need the extra support in order to grow. So basically looking at it holistically and just putting it out there and revisiting it.

MR COE: Yes. It seems to me that one of the benefits of community housing providers, as opposed to public housing, is that, hopefully, they can be more robust and they can meet certain niche requirements that will exist in the community. However, if you go down the track whereby you have mass consolidation and you only have one or two community housing providers, do you run the risk of actually just having another bureaucracy?

Ms Watson: Yes, that is a good point.

MR COE: Thus not actually meeting the demands that the original providers were designed to meet?

Ms Watson: Yes.

MR COE: Is that a view that is actually articulated in the community?

Ms Watson: Yes, at the conference I attended yesterday that was certainly the message I came away with. I guess the key word is “diversity”.

MR COE: Yes.

Ms Watson: Certainly not just replicating a model; you are right. That would just be another—

MR COE: Yes, sure.

THE CHAIR: Just on that, having been at the conference, is it also about having organisations that have a local understanding of an area as well? Is that seen as something which is important?

Ms Watson: Yes, that is also a good question. That point was actually made, because there were some very clever, innovative models. One, for example, was from Melbourne. People were madly writing notes and thinking, “Wow!” But that provider

himself stressed that it really was about everybody thinking creatively themselves, being innovative and looking at what works. He said, “Look, this works in Melbourne, but it may not work in Canberra.” There is a trend, too, where people get excited about American and English models. He just said, “Don’t forget about it, but look inside yourself.” So that is a really good point.

THE CHAIR: Just on that, obviously we have got community housing and public housing. Is it important to have that mix, Sometimes, perhaps some of the tenancy arrangements that might come under community housing might have an impact on certain people who might have, I guess, less stable circumstances. Is it important in your view that you actually have that mix, that you have got the public housing but you also have other models for people?

Ms Watson: Totally, and it is just like private housing. There is such a diversity. We are all different. We all want different things from our housing. So it is the same thing with having public and community housing. It just provides a range of options. I think the other advantage too with community housing is that it can sometimes be provided at lower cost as well.

THE CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

MR SMYTH: Just to close, you said in your opening statement that housing is now more unaffordable than ever. You said in your commentary when answering questions that you thought housing affordability was now worse than it was 15 years ago. I see that in the last paragraph of your submission you talk about the tax reform. You state, “However, these tax reforms, like the budget generally, do little to respond to the lack of affordability in private rental, which is where housing stress is the most acute in the ACT.” How do we address that quickly in the short term? What is the solution that fixes that problem? What should the committee recommend to the government in their report?

Ms Watson: That is a good question.

Ms Seymour: I think that if you have got measures that have been introduced—just on the affordable plan—you have got to have caps. You have got to have sanctions on those sort of plans. Unfortunately, some things work and some things do not. Rent control never worked, but some sort of limit or sanction that actually prevents or, rather, ensures that those rents are reduced as a result of the actions—for example, the reduction in stamp duty.

From what I understand, for instance, the stamp duty concessions are only available if you purchase new dwellings. A lot of the cheaper properties are not new dwellings. So there is going to be no advantage in that. As Leigh mentioned, with land rent it is publicity, making sure that people that will benefit from that do get told about those sorts of schemes and that more rigour is put on checking that the people that apply for these schemes are not being clever with the regulations.

MR SMYTH: My last question would be this: you have raised doubt about the effectiveness of phase 1 and phase II of the housing affordability action plans. Is it possible to actually determine how effective they are? Have other people looked at

their plans and worked out whether they are working or not? Is it time for an independent review of stages I and II before we move to stage III?

Ms Watson: I think that is a good suggestion, actually. That would be one of our criticisms—that it is not clear what recommendations were successful in the first two plans. Even in the third plan, our understanding is that there are no in-built mechanisms for review of that, either. So that is good.

Ms Seymour: And on that, I know there were progress reports. I remember Minister Hargreaves doing a progress report on that. But I think they have fallen off the agenda. I have not been on the policy side for two or three years, but I have not been aware that there have been progress reports on the previous plans.

MR SMYTH: I am talking about somebody independent coming in and actually assessing. It is nice to do the glossies, have the launches and do progress reports, but, unless you are actually delivering something, you are wasting your time.

Ms Watson: Yes, that is a good idea.

Ms Seymour: As long as it is not really expensive—employing a really expensive consultant to—

Ms Watson: Or you could fund a very clever not-for-profit organisation to do it.

MR HARGREAVES: One that has clearly no conflict of interest.

Ms Watson: Clearly.

THE CHAIR: Excellent. We are out of time. Thank you once again, Ms Watson and Ms Seymour, for appearing before the committee. A transcript of the hearing will be sent to you to check. Thank you once again.

ROBERTSON, MS EMMA, Director, Youth Coalition of the ACT

BARRY, MS ERIN, Policy and Development Officer, Youth Coalition of the ACT

THE CHAIR: I would like to welcome Ms Robertson and Ms Barry from the Youth Coalition to the hearing of the estimates committee for 2012-13. Just so you are aware, the proceedings are being broadcast. I also draw your attention to the privilege statement on the card in front of you, which I am sure you are both very familiar with. Before we go to questions, I invite you to make an opening statement if you wish.

Ms Barry: As you would be aware, the Youth Coalition is the peak body for youth affairs and for young people aged 12 to 25 in the ACT. We represent and advocate on behalf of young people but we also work quite closely with a range of services that support young people in the ACT.

I would like to kick off by talking about the things that we welcomed in the budget, in particular the investment of \$5.5 million for initiatives in the youth justice sector, particularly to progress the actions to be identified in the blueprint for youth justice, the continued funding for the Street Law outreach legal service for people experiencing homelessness, \$3.2 million over four years for the CIT year 12 program and disability support area, \$150,000 over three years for services provided by A Gender Agenda—that is something we are particularly pleased with; it is a service that we work quite closely with and a few years ago held a function with here at the Legislative Assembly—funding for the Heart Foundation’s active living program, funding for the annual Nightrider service and \$1.1 million over two years to extend the AMC through-care model.

As you might be aware, our main concerns with the budget are particularly focused around a lack of investment in early intervention and prevention for vulnerable children and young people and their families at a systemic level, funding for the child, youth and family services program—which I will refer to as the CYFSP—and the need for strategic investment to address workforce capacity, recruitment and retention across community service delivery, including the broader youth and family sector workforce.

The budget included a significant investment in tertiary services for vulnerable children and young people and particularly, as you would be aware, in care and protection services. This included professional development and practice improvement for the care and protection workforce. While we support the investment in the care and protection workforce and we understand the difficult and very complex work that care and protection does, we note that in previous budgets there has often been a significant investment in the care and protection workforce without a significant investment in early intervention and prevention services.

You will see that in our budget response we have titled it “caught in cycles of crisis”. In doing so, we are seeking to make the point that if we continue to channel funding towards these tertiary and statutory services, we will have to continue to do this, as we will not be adequately investing in measures that seek to support vulnerable children, young people and families before they become involved in the statutory system. In our submission to the budget back in February we called upon the ACT government to resource the development of an early intervention and prevention framework that

encompasses a whole-of-government approach to strategies and funding and engages the broader community, including the child, youth and family support sector, but also other sectors, such as health and education.

An example of what we are talking about when we talk about early intervention and prevention is the work being progressed by the Education and Training Directorate around a youth commitment which seeks to support young people who are vulnerable and potentially disengaging from education, but also young people who are less vulnerable, before it reaches a point of disengagement from education. It is a key early intervention and prevention measure and we note that there was no funding allocated in the budget to support this. I guess our key message in relation to this is that until we prioritise funding support for children, young people and families prior to statutory involvement, we will continue to see continuing pressure on consecutive budgets to allocate funding towards crisis responses.

This leads me to funding for the CYFSP. You will all be aware that the Youth Coalition and Families ACT, which is the peak body for the family support sector, sent an open letter to cabinet in May 2012, seeking further funding of \$1.3 million to be allocated to the CYFSP in this budget. The CYFSP funds a range of community-based services to support vulnerable children, young people and their families, with relationships, housing, financial support, parenting, education and employment, but also to prevent them from becoming involved in statutory services such as care and protection and youth justice. In a way, the CYFSP operates as an early intervention program to prevent these vulnerable people from having to become involved in statutory services.

The funding of \$1.3 million that we sought in the letter was to replace the money that was taken out of front-line and face-to-face service delivery in the merger of the youth services program and the family support program in developing the CYFSP and was put towards essential intake services and network coordination. In our letter we advocated for additional funding of \$1.3 million to be allocated to the CYFSP in recognition of the shortfall that we are now experiencing in service delivery in the CYFSP. An example of that, as you would be aware, is that the CYFSP has a focus on assertive outreach. The Youth Coalition advocates that there needs to be a balance of service delivery, including assertive outreach but also anchored delivery, and that this is not being achieved in the CYFSP, particularly through the reduction in and sometimes closure of youth drop-in services that we have seen.

Further to this, the funding that is currently allocated in the CYFSP towards youth engagement does not adequately support the development and implementation of effective models of outreach to engage vulnerable young people in the ACT. We were disappointed that this additional funding of \$1.3 million was not allocated in the budget, particularly as it comprises only around 20 per cent of what was allocated towards care and protection.

In relation to workforce development, we acknowledge, again, the ACT government's commitment to funding the outcomes of the equal remuneration case, including the commitment to provide \$27 million towards funding its implementation. While we understand that this is to occur over eight years, it appears that only \$4.5 million has been allocated over four years in the ACT budget, so we seek some clarification there.

As we have discussed, we support the investment in the care and protection workforce towards professional development and practice improvement. However, we are disappointed that funding was not allocated to address workforce capacity, recruitment and retention in the broader youth and family support sector workforce. Is there anything you want to add?

Ms Robertson: No, I think that covers it.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. My first question goes to what you have raised about the outreach services, the youth engagement and the drop-in centres. Can you talk about the impact that the closures or the reduction in the centres is having on young people? What are your concerns with regard to this outreach?

Ms Robertson: At the moment it is very hard to get some empirical evidence about what is happening, but certainly anecdotally one of our concerns is that there now is not a place that young people can go to immediately and seek support. They can still get in contact with the community services, but the pathways have changed quite significantly. Many of the services have reported that, even in the wind-down or scaling back of their drop-in hours, the numbers are down because word is kind of out to young people that youth centres are closing, so they are not seeing that as an option.

We are also hearing reports that major shopping centres are employing more security personnel, and that is in response to their perception that more young people are hanging around in the shopping centres. Again, I think that is one of the challenges in having the right balance and mix of services. While we support the investment in models of outreach and the notion of taking services to young people where they are at, we also need to recognise that those vulnerable young people are experiencing social isolation and exclusion. That often means that where they are at is a series of places they are being moved on from. It is very difficult, then, to provide services if we are not able to support them to have space and place and being linked into changing, I guess, that transient nature of where they are hanging out and existing.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Hargreaves.

MR HARGREAVES: Erin was pretty comprehensive, and fast.

THE CHAIR: She was. Ms Hunter.

MS HUNTER: Thanks, chair. I wanted to ask about this early intervention focus. You are saying there is a lack of focus on early intervention, prevention and so forth. It is my understanding that the reform and the amalgamation of the old family support program and the youth support program into the CYFSP was really about making it an extension of the juvenile justice and care and protection systems. It was going to be targeting those who are in risk, not those who are necessarily at risk. Therefore, that means that the eye has been taken off early intervention; it is not about early intervention prevention as it used to be. Is that your understanding of the system?

Ms Robertson: That is correct. We would argue that early intervention covers early in the life of the child or young person but also early in the life of the problem. I think

that it is working to support families who might be at risk, or the situation might be that a notification has been made but not substantiated. There may be some indicators that things are starting to become a struggle. Having services that go in and work with that family so that they do not have to wait until there is a substantiated notification to get service or support is an early intervention response.

I guess the reason we put in our budget submission that we want a whole-of-government coordinated approach is that our observation would be that across a range of funding programs that government supports there are elements or components of early intervention. It is certainly well evidenced that early intervention and preventative work is the direction we need to go in. It is like every funding program has a little bit attached. We really see the potential that if there is a coordinated whole-of-government approach we could actually pool those resources in a different way.

We know that young people disengaging from school, for example, puts them at high risk of experiencing homelessness. It also puts them at higher risk of experiencing contact with the juvenile justice system. If you were to intervene early to prevent people from being in detention or needing housing support, it might be at that school end. We are talking about the same groups of families and young people experiencing that range of high support needs further down the track. I think that is one of the arguments around not just having a little bit of early intervention in a homelessness response and a little bit in a youth justice response and a little bit in a health response, but a much more coordinated, strategic and well-resourced strategy.

MS HUNTER: You also talk about the workforce issues. On the one hand, you are acknowledging that it is good that government has come on board to fund wage increases and so forth, but, if you go back to this sector, there has been huge upheaval and changes, particularly over the last 12 months. From my understanding, we have lost a huge number of really experienced youth workers who have had enough or, for a range of reasons, have said: “I’m moving on. I’m going to go and get a job somewhere else.” What has that meant for our workforce out there?

Ms Robertson: It is certainly challenging for the workforce at the moment. We are trying to implement a range of changes to quite sophisticated models. This program in CYFSP is now clearly articulating the target group as the most vulnerable people in our community. It is complex work. The reality is that we are trying to implement new programs and doing highly complex work with a relatively inexperienced cohort of workers. They are very dedicated, enthusiastic workers and very dedicated services. The sector is absolutely committed to making this work. I do not want there to be any doubt about that.

Talking about human service delivery and working with the most vulnerable in the community, it makes sense that our investment needs to be in ensuring that the workers have the skills and capacity to be able to deliver there. I think we have well moved away from the idea that any intervention is a good intervention. It actually needs to be a skilled and useful intervention. We run the risk, if we do not have that workforce capacity, of doing more damage than good, I suppose. I acknowledge that a percentage of the children, youth and family support program has been held back for workforce development. That is two per cent of the entire program. While we really welcome that, again we are taking the bucket of money in that program and stretching

it further and further.

MS HUNTER: What does that mean in dollar terms?

Ms Robertson: I think it is about \$180,000 a year.

MS HUNTER: So that is another program that is basically being withdrawn—

Ms Robertson: Yes. We would argue that that is a good investment to make. I think there is a really nice piece of work happening with government and the sector around being quite strategic about how we invest that. But it is not a huge amount of money. Again, we are increasingly seeing that in working with highly vulnerable people we need multi-disciplinary teams. Again, we look across government and see that across the community sector there are very different levels of investment in the workforce. We welcome the initiatives around funding the mental health workforce and the alcohol, tobacco and other drug workforce. I guess what we are looking for, again, is that whole-of-government strategic approach to it and ensuring that if we are having multi-disciplinary teams work with highly vulnerable people there is a level of equity around the skill, experience and resource of those teams.

MS HUNTER: Are you saying that you welcome investment in that work but you question whether it should have come out of an already stretched bucket; it should have been on top of that? Is that what you are saying?

Ms Robertson: In terms of CYFSP, we absolutely welcome it and it had to come from somewhere. Is it enough? Given the significant challenges of rolling out a bunch of new services, the reality in CYFSP is that with the merger we have seen a reduction in the number of face-to-face workers there are supporting children and young people and their families. That has been because that investment has been directed into coordination services. Again, we would say those coordination services are valuable and need to be there, but that is why we put the case that if you are going to change a service system like that for a relatively small investment you actually need to put a little bit more money into the program.

THE CHAIR: Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: On page 7 of your ACT budget “Caught in cycles of crisis” document, in the analysis, you say:

Until we prioritise funding support for families prior to statutory involvement, we will see continuing pressure on consecutive budgets to allocate money to crisis responses.

How much of your heading “Caught in the cycle of crisis” is hyperbole, or how real is that for people out there? How big is this problem?

Ms Robertson: We recently undertook consultation with young people as part of the work we are doing with the ACT government to develop the blueprint for youth justice in the ACT. I think one of the really disturbing things for me—again, we talk about it quite a lot—was to hear from young people directly that they were well aware

that they needed to be in a state of absolute crisis when basically everything had gone wrong before they would get the support that they needed. When the people who need support services know that they need everything to go wrong before someone will help them turn that around it is quite frightening.

MR SMYTH: And that is just a lack of resources?

Ms Robertson: Yes.

MR SMYTH: We have a problem that stretches from starting to crisis and we simply crisis manage because that is all we can do within the resources that we have got?

Ms Robertson: Absolutely.

MR SMYTH: What sort of financial response would be appropriate to move away from the crisis model to early intervention? Is it just the \$1.3 million that you have asked for, for the CYFSP, or is more required?

Ms Robertson: I do think that is a “how long is a piece of string” question, and it would not be solved across the life of one budget. Again, I think we have been quite specific around the \$1.3 million, and that was partly because we are not trying to be greedy here; we are trying to be real. Governments do need to balance priorities and there is a limit to the bucket.

In terms of the answer as to how much is needed to move away, there needs to be quite a lot of thinking done around that. We have seen in the areas of justice, in both adult justice and juvenile justice, people talking more and more about justice reinvestment models. In a sense, that is the kind of thing we are talking about. Let us stop putting all of our money into the crisis response and look at putting it into what would essentially, I guess, turn off the tap.

That is a challenging and brave thing for any government to do, because obviously there is some really immediate need there, and that has to be balanced with what we can afford. I think that the challenging and brave thing for any government to do is to face the fact that for a period of time we will be investing more, because we do need to have some crisis response capacity, while we are trying to get the early intervention and prevention working. Again the evidence is growing that if we do that down the track, we can start to then pedal back on the investment in crisis response.

MR SMYTH: Shelter made the comment that housing is now more unaffordable than ever. Clearly housing has an impact, particularly for young people. They thought that housing affordability was worse than it was 15 years ago. Is the situation that your clients find themselves in getting better or is it deteriorating?

Ms Robertson: For young people—and we have been talking about this for quite a long time—housing affordability is getting worse and worse. Young people in particular are even more challenged by the fact that they are earning less in wages. For some years now we have certainly been raising the issue that housing affordability is no longer just an issue for the most vulnerable in our community; we are talking about waged young people, young apprentices and young people who are studying,

who are also really feeling the challenge around being able to afford to live in the ACT.

MR SMYTH: Not just focusing on housing affordability and accommodation but on all of the issues facing the people you represent, are things getting better or are we truly moving into a cycle of crises?

Ms Robertson: In terms of living affordability, things are not getting better for young people. Any raises that we see in income support certainly do not match the increase in costs of living.

MS HUNTER: So this is with commonwealth benefits?

Ms Robertson: Yes.

MR COE: About a month ago during Youth Week there was a forum at the Catholic University which you presented at. One of the startling statistics was the proportion of people who have experience with juvenile detention who then go on to mainstream or adult detention later on. How much of that is seemingly just an inevitability and how much is because there is not the transition support after a juvenile detention experience?

Ms Robertson: That is a fantastic question, and I could not give you an empirical answer—50 per cent or not.

MR COE: Sure.

Ms Robertson: Again I think it is well evidenced that we have stretched services and that we do not do as well as we could in terms of the transitional support. Again coming back to the need for early intervention, that is the case in the justice system—that young people who have experience of juvenile justice will end up in the adult system. That is quite common. It is the same in homelessness. Chronically homeless adults often had their first experience of homelessness while they were under the age of 18. When you look at the expectation for young people who have had significant care and protection involvement, in both those systems of justice and homelessness, the numbers are too high. If we are going to intervene, we definitely need to be doing better.

I do think that more and more the evidence is supporting what the sector has been saying for years, which is that we really need to resource those transitions and supports. In the past we have often talked about those intensive transitional services as being incredibly costly. Face to face, they probably are, if we are talking about a dedicated worker for that person, and being able to just work with that one person for a time. My challenge to government would be to think about more than just what we are spending today. If the result is that that person does not then end up needing to have accommodation support or be in detention further down the track, is it an expensive program or is it actually a relatively cheap investment in that it makes the difference?

MR COE: By the time you factor in all the support costs later in life, the legal costs,

the detention costs, it is huge.

Ms Robertson: And lack of economic participation, as those people are not paying tax while they are in detention, either. It is quite a big picture.

MR COE: A lot of people point to the Scottish example. Are there other examples that we should look to in order to get ideas or advice on who is targeting these people more effectively than we are?

Ms Robertson: I think that we know the evidence. The evidence is there. I think that, in government, in community, we have been working together. We look at models of what has been tried in Victoria, in other jurisdictions in Australia. We look at what is being trialled in the UK. It is very interesting what is happening there in terms of youth drop-in services. As a sector we have evolved and we very much look to the evidence of what is happening in other jurisdictions. I think that more than ever before we actually have ideas and know what works. It is about being able to actually have the resources to be able to implement it.

Rather than taking a scattergun approach, in that we know that this particular model of one service is having a good impact in Scotland, so we will just bring it in in isolation here in Canberra, again, we need to be much more strategic about it and recognise that one bandaid service is not going to solve this problem for us. It may have some good outcomes for some individuals in that period of time, but this is actually about a much more strategic and systemic approach.

I do think that in some ways that was some of the intent of what has certainly been talked about in this attempt to merge the youth and family support program in terms of being more strategic. Again I think we are trying to do that by stretching the dollar further and further. So I am not convinced at this point that we can hit the mark by doing that.

MS HUNTER: Are you aware of whether there has been an evaluation framework set up for the CYFSP? This is a brave new world. We have a new scheme in place. Have they set up an evaluation framework?

Ms Robertson: The Youth Coalition and Families ACT have been advocating very strongly around an evaluation framework. I am really pleased to say that one is being developed. That is being developed with government and community in partnership, with assistance from the Institute of Child Protection Studies. So that is excellent. We would be concerned that that is being developed and the program is already up and running. But in the environment we are working in, as I said, there is incredible commitment and dedication from the agencies and workers involved. This is really about us trying to make it work and do the best in the circumstances. Ideally, we would have liked to have had an evaluation framework in place and have done that thinking afterwards. The fact that we are getting one and working towards one is a good thing.

MS HUNTER: Have all contracts been signed? Are all services up and running under the new program?

Ms Robertson: I cannot definitively say today whether all contracts have been signed. Certainly a couple of weeks ago I was aware that some contracts were still in negotiation.

MS HUNTER: And this was for a 1 March 2012 start date?

Ms Robertson: Yes.

THE CHAIR: We are out of time. Thank you, Ms Robertson and Ms Barry, for appearing before the committee. As usual, a copy of the transcript will be sent to you so that you can check it for accuracy. We will now take a break.

Meeting adjourned from 10.30 to 10.48 am.

KITCHIN, MS JENNY, President, ACT Council of Social Service Inc

KORPINEN, MS KIKI, Deputy Director, ACT Council of Social Service Inc

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Korpinen and Ms Kitchin, for appearing on behalf of ACTCOSS before the estimates committee into the budget for 2012-13. The proceedings are being broadcast today and I draw your attention to the privilege statement, which is on the blue card in front of you. Could you indicate that you are aware of the implications of that?

Ms Korpinen: Yes.

Ms Kitchin: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Excellent. Before we go to questions from the committee, I would like to invite you to make an opening statement.

Ms Korpinen: Firstly, thank you for the opportunity to participate in these hearings today. As the peak representative body for not-for-profit community organisations and vulnerable Canberrans, there are a few key issues we would like to put forward through today's proceedings. These include, as per our survey submission, community sector viability, housing and homelessness, and early intervention services, including justice reinvestment, transport and services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

I would like to also note that, given that the major focus of this budget is taxation reform, ACTCOSS welcomes discussion on revenue policy, particularly where the taxation base can be changed to improve equity, remove social distortions, improve administrative efficiency and provide for future growth. We see these reforms as welcome and necessary and we look forward to working with the government on ensuring taxes are well targeted and that appropriate concessions are in place. However, the need for reform in service delivery remains, shifting from increasing acute services to supporting early intervention.

In relation to housing and homelessness, we would like to note that we welcome the allocation of funds for the expansion of social housing, to construct additional dwellings to address social housing. However, the lack of overall funding for housing affordability is disappointing. The land tax reforms may result in cheaper rental, but only if landlords choose to reduce their rates of rent. We hope the affordable housing action plan phase 3 will be able to target the small funding allocated for its implementation—\$600,000 over the next two years—to ensure a real increase in rental affordability.

However, housing affordability is not about the cost of the dwelling alone; liveability and transport are also significant cost contributors. The increasing cost of public transport and utilities needs to be met with accessible and balanced concessions or we will see more families in housing stress, increased social isolation and preventable health problems. Assumptions have been made around the continuation of commonwealth funding for social housing and homelessness, which is due to be renegotiated in 2013. However, we remain concerned about the potential impact and the future of homelessness services in the ACT.

Ms Kitchin: We also wanted to talk about early intervention services, particularly in relation to young people and children. While we were happy to see money going towards some of the most needy children in our community through the out-of-home care allocation, we were very concerned that very little, if any, money went towards early intervention services for children and young people. There is no doubt that the more you can put in at the front end for children and families at risk the fewer children are going to go into out-of-home care and into the youth justice system.

That links to our request to have the children, youth and family support service program expanded somewhat in terms of funding. At the moment that program in its new form is operating with the same amount of funds that it has for many years. That is certainly a concern for us.

Ms Korpinen: With early intervention we would also like to note our disappointment in relation to there not being any health funding allocated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services, especially given the government's commitment to closing the gap in areas including health care.

Additionally, we have concerns about the implementation of programs with one-off funding for a 12-month period. Good practice supports consultation and relationship building for programs to be successful, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and that needs to be respected. We continue to recommend the ACT government engage in comprehensive consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in order to ascertain that programs such as the ones named in the 2012-13 budget are what the community desires and provide also opportunities to learn how these programs can best be implemented.

Following on around our concerns for areas such as transport, with the increase in public transport fees, the 2.5 per cent for students and the 2.6 per cent for adults, this increase may place a significant burden on low income citizens who are reliant on public transport as their only means of travel and are most affected by increased changes to transport fares. While transport services have associated costs, the desire to encourage more Canberrans to use public transport will be met if prices remain affordable and services are accessible.

We welcome the announcement of funding to support transport initiatives for people with disabilities, including the school transport. However, we are concerned with the lack of mention of community transport at any point in the 2012-13 budget. This is despite the fact that the ACT has individuals who cannot access public transport, for a variety of reasons, has an increasing population in satellite suburbs and that current service providers of community transport are at capacity. It is particularly disappointing given the growing body of evidence linking the availability of accessible transport to the social determinants of health and the understanding of the negative impacts transport disadvantage can have on an individual.

Ms Kitchin: The last area we want to talk about is community sector viability. While we appreciate that our request for a 15 per cent increase of funding to the community sector was probably fairly ambitious, it does reflect the costings and the analysis that we have done, what the demand on services is currently and what people need in

organisations to actually meet that demand.

We understand that the 0.34 per cent that has been asked for in relation to indexation costs from organisations is necessary to do some of the reforms that are wanted to be put in place for the community sector. We would have preferred that money to have come from government. However, I think the sector is now supportive of the sorts of reforms, and certainly the joint government-community group that is working to try and reduce red tape and increase some of the sector viability is welcome.

That is probably all that we would like to say as our opening statement; we are open to any questions.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. First off I will go to one of the issues you have raised in your budget submission, calling for an increase in funding over the longer term to address the shortfalls that will occur through commonwealth funding for homelessness in the ACT. Could you outline a bit more for the committee what the loss of the COAG national partnership money will mean to the ACT and what will be the impacts on the ground that will be felt?

Ms Kitchin: At this stage, certainly from where I sit, I do not have a lot of clear information from government about what it actually is going to mean, so I am not able to answer that question. I do not have a figure and I do not have a sense of which programs will continue, which will not and how the negotiation of funding will happen between the commonwealth and the territory.

THE CHAIR: Is that information coming from the ACT or commonwealth government, or both?

Ms Kitchin: ACT government.

THE CHAIR: In relation to what you have raised in your submission as an issue, could you outline to the committee the concerns that relate to the possible withdrawal of funding—

Ms Kitchin: Certainly when I think of, say, the youth homelessness area there are a lot of new, exciting and viable youth housing programs that we would not want to see threatened in any way with the change and negotiations around that partnership. Is there anything else you want to say, Kiki?

Ms Korpinen: The anticipation of what the potential reduction in funding across the board will look like, how that is actually going to impact on services on the ground, given that services are already reporting, and have continued to report over a number of years, that they are at capacity, and also given that in this budget there was no growth funding that we could see for community service providers, including housing and homelessness providers, is a significant concern for the sector. We look forward to hearing about how that might be managed and also to engaging, if appropriate, in that process.

THE CHAIR: So there has been no engagement as yet with the sector about what will be the potential impacts on the ground for the services?

Ms Korpinen: Not at this point in time.

THE CHAIR: Okay. And you made the point about the on-flow with crisis services—blockage is not the right word, but we know that there are issues there—

Ms Korpinen: Yes.

THE CHAIR: I appreciate you said you are not sure yet what the impact will be but, given your concern about those issues already happening, are you concerned about what impact any further withdrawal of funding will have on those services?

Ms Korpinen: Yes.

Ms Kitchin: Huge concerns, yes. Certainly the withdrawal of any existing ones would be very worrying.

MS HUNTER: I want to ask a few questions and get a little bit more of a sense around the early intervention sort of investment that needs to be going on. You did mention in your opening remarks about children and young people that there has been a clear move away from early intervention and that the CYFSP needs more funding because the same amount of money has pretty much been going into that program for a decade or more.

Anglicare, Ms Kitchin, which is the organisation you work for, was running a drop-in service at the youth centre in Civic. Have you got any sense of what the impact has been on young people of not having a clear access point to the service system?

Ms Kitchin: I think that has been a real issue for a number of young people. We run a youth centre, as other services do, and there has been some real concern, particularly about young people who have drifted away from those youth centres. I think what we are all trying to do in our youth engagement programs that are part of the new model is to find ways of attracting those young people back to those centres with some kind of structured and unstructured programs.

The department has been responsive to the fact that that may not have been the best way to go, and both Families ACT and the Youth Coalition are now looking at gathering some data on where young people are going now in relation to that. We are certainly looking at how we can use that space for those young people in a slightly different way so that we do not actually lose them.

MS HUNTER: I would also like to go to the issue of sector viability. What are the top threats? Is the top threat funding? Lack of growth funds I am assuming is one. But what are the threats, if you had to give the top threats?

Ms Kitchin: From my perspective, skill base of the workforce, attracting staff and keeping staff. In all our services at the moment we are having difficulty recruiting qualified and skilled staff. That would be one of the threats. What would some of the others be?

Ms Korpinen: Also we see the potential of the reforms, both commonwealth and ACT reforms, and the additional resources it takes to comply with those reforms as a threat. Organisations are reporting currently that they are working at capacity; with a bunch of reforms coming into play in this financial year potentially as well, there is concern about the capacity to continue to deliver services while working through reforms.

MR SMYTH: I note in your submission that you say that the CYFSP is already at capacity. We have heard this morning that another \$1.3 million was recommended by another community group. Do you have a figure on how much it should be increased by?

Ms Kitchin: The community agencies involved in the program supported that, with a letter from the Youth Coalition and Families ACT, yes.

MR SMYTH: So \$1.3 million is adequate or \$1.3 million is a start?

Ms Kitchin: It would be a good start.

MR SMYTH: The 15 per cent increase request: how realistic is that, or what numbers have you got to back that request for 15 per cent? Is it an ambit claim, or do you have costings that lead you to that number?

Ms Kitchin: There are costings. The Productivity Commission report certainly did a lot of that work which we based our research on. We also looked at what happened in Western Australia with the gap in government funding to community organisations, what was required and what the government then came forward and delivered. It was a whole range of things around training, around infrastructure and certainly around meeting greater demand, skill base, qualifications and attracting more staff, so it was a whole package that was costed on that.

MR SMYTH: If, magically, the 15 per cent was suddenly available, how quickly could you implement it, though? You could not do it overnight. What would be a reasonable time period to ramp it up to that level?

Ms Korpinen: It is difficult to put a time frame on it. We would definitely want to consult with the sector around what would be a realistic time frame. Off the top of my head, I would be thinking that we could look at a period of 12 months to work out how that might be implemented and then start perhaps a transition process of implementing that on the ground.

MR SMYTH: But it would take time to get the staff up to speed and get the organisations to be able to deliver?

Ms Korpinen: Yes.

Ms Kitchin: And I guess it would be how government chooses to do that—whether it involved procurement of new services or whether it was just boosting up existing services, and how they would divide up the money. My guess is there would be some complexities around some of that. The key issue for the organisations would be

getting more staff on the ground. But if we were able to have additional resources to fund and to attract and recruit, that would greatly help.

MR SMYTH: You mentioned in your speech and also in your submission that you have concerns about what appears to be one-off money, where it is just funded for the one year. The one that springs to mind is the \$2 million for disability funding in non-government schools. What are your concerns about that in particular? The concern I have is that clearly if you are going to recruit people for a year, they have got no certainty. That makes it more difficult. You are just starting to get the impact of the funding and the funding might stop.

Ms Korpinen: Yes.

MR SMYTH: What are your concerns and should one-off funding in the areas that you have an interest in be extended into the outyears?

Ms Kitchin: For me there is no question about that. Not only is there an issue about staff; more importantly, there is an issue about the client group that you are working with, that you have set up a program and expectations. Usually, my experience is that a year is just when it has got off the ground and it is kicking off. The federal government does this regularly, and we experience enormous difficulties around then being asked to keep sustaining it through our own means or through philanthropic means. But I think sometimes it is more dishonourable to families and clients to actually set something up and then take it away.

Ms Korpinen: If I could add to that, we were also looking at the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific initiatives in the budget—for example, the \$100,000, one-off funding for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders support and capacity building program in relation to the childcare certificates. We were looking at what sort of consultations have happened with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to reach that outcome. How will programs over one year be able to actually provide what they are asking to be delivered?

MR SMYTH: So where we have got one year's funding for a project—I assume the government will say it is just a pilot, it is a starter or it is a trial, but is one year enough in those circumstances?

Ms Kitchin: No.

MR SMYTH: Shelter mentioned that housing was more unaffordable than ever. You have said similar in your opening remarks. One of the comments made by Shelter was that they were not sure that parts I and II of the affordable housing program had actually achieved anything. I suggested that perhaps it was time to do an independent review. You are the third group this morning to talk about the impact of housing. Is it worth an independent review of parts I and II and, indeed, part III of the housing strategy to see whether it has actually delivered anything?

Ms Kitchin: It certainly would not hurt to do something in that direction, yes.

MR SMYTH: Do you believe parts I and II have delivered? Do you have evidence

that it has or evidence to the contrary?

Ms Kitchin: I certainly think there are aspects of it that have worked. The release of community housing and the number of community housing properties that have emerged or been given over the last few years have certainly filled a gap. I think what we are seeing now is a problem of the 75 per cent market rent rate becoming unaffordable in Canberra to low income earners. We have now got a problem that a number of people are actually missing out in that community housing formula. Looking at that I think is really critical in the next stage.

Ms Korpinen: Another interesting report to look at is the targeted assistance strategy, which outlines a number of those issues.

MR COE: I have a question about the government's proposed taxation reform. With any sort of whole scale or wholesale reform, there are potentially quite a few unintended consequences. I was wondering what your assessment of the impact will be on the increase in rates, especially for people renting. Do you think that we will see an increase in rental prices and will that increase be above the percentage of rates?

Ms Korpinen: It will certainly be interesting to see what unintended consequences these reforms will have. We have already heard, I think, as the budget was being announced landlords that were going to be putting their rents up. One of them quite openly spoke on the radio: "Yes, this is a good thing. It will not be something that will filter down to people who are renting homes." Of course, we have concern that that will continue across the board.

Ms Kitchin: I guess that throws up the need to look at what incentives we can give—the government can give—through the reform package to landlords to pass on any savings to tenants, that critical group that we are worried about, low income earners trying to access the rental market.

Ms Korpinen: That is a real concern, given that there is such a bottleneck already with public housing, the rents being the way they are in the ACT and affordability being perhaps at its all-time low. What we are seeing through also the targeted assistance strategy and the working group that looked at that issue, and becoming more and more concerned about, is that people who have traditionally been able to maintain their own properties, who have been able to live in rental properties as well, are coming forward now and actually saying, "We cannot afford to pay our mortgages anymore," or "We cannot afford to pay our rents anymore," and looking for emergency relief. If this group of people continue to infiltrate the crisis end of the system, it is going to have a big impact on community services agencies.

THE CHAIR: In relation to that, obviously you have mentioned that bottleneck that is occurring in public housing as well and then the sort of flow-on impacts that has. You mentioned community housing. But is that need to maintain investment in public housing also a key area that needs to occur so we have got that full spectrum of provision?

Ms Kitchin: Yes. While you have got a waiting list of 2,000 people on the public housing waiting list, yes, it is attention to both ends.

THE CHAIR: I asked Shelter about this this morning. You mentioned that 75 per cent, or 74.9 per cent, that that is becoming unaffordable for people and those people that can fall between that gap of public housing and community housing. I think we have seen public housing become almost like welfare housing. If we maintain that investment, we can actually provide housing to people who fall between that gap. We should actually be providing public housing for those people as well.

Ms Kitchin: It is whether you keep a public housing model for that group or whether you have got another—whether the community housing model can drop its market rental rate of rent lower and remain financially viable so that you can actually keep that group—whether it be 55, whether it be 60 or whether it be 65—coming through.

THE CHAIR: Yes, that is great. What I probably should have said is: can public housing also be, like you said, not separating the group but actually broadening probably what originally public housing—what it was actually originally for? Should we need to take a bit more of that approach now to public housing and how we view it? Does that make sense?

Ms Korpinen: Potentially, yes. I think I hear what you are saying.

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Korpinen: Given the mix of need and the complexity of need, I think it is wise to have a range of options and a range of models to suit a range people on a range of incomes—things like the common ground model for which there was some money in the budget to work towards that. Once again, that is not going to be the be-all and end-all, but it will be another option. I think that as long as we are able to continue to think proactively about what it is that is needed in the ACT prior to us being in a crisis, which is sort of where we are finding ourselves a little bit today, it is really important to have community and government engagement and really work in partnership to try and alleviate some of the stresses that are impacting on households.

Ms Kitchin: I would really strengthen what Kiki said about the common ground model. It is a very exciting and very successful model in other states, bringing together low income earners and homeless people. I have recently visited the Sydney development and it is a very impressive and supportive environment. It moves a number of homeless people into private rental. It is an excellent model for the ACT. So we were very pleased the government looked at some further funding of that model.

THE CHAIR: So you think it would be a model that would work here in the ACT?

Ms Kitchin: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Good. Ms Hunter's question will be the last one, because we are out of time.

MS HUNTER: You also call for a detailed consultation with the community sector regarding ongoing growth in demand for community services. What sorts of

mechanisms are you talking about? What are you talking about with this consultation? We seem to have a lot of different community-government groups, whether they are advisory groups or joint community-government reference groups. We have got subcommittees going on here, there and everywhere. We have got directors' groups. What is wrong with the current mechanisms that are not working that we need to then set in place something new?

Ms Kitchin: I am not sure if you are suggesting there that the establishment of new cross-government and community groups would actually necessarily meet the demand issue, because that is not the problem. There are a vast number of groups across community and government that work together. It is more about getting the right data from the organisations, many of which collect that anyway, and what we actually do with it and how government responds to it. I am not quite sure if I have answered your question there and whether that is what you were asking.

MS HUNTER: Yes, it is about whether we already have the different groups and mechanisms in place. I understand the data collection issue. I agree with you. The data has been collected for years and years. It just is not necessarily considered. So it was more around whether you were suggesting a new group of some sort or whether you are saying, "No, we need to do the consultation to collect the data." But then there are mechanisms to take that up through government.

Ms Korpinen: I think that the existing mechanisms or avenues for consultation that we currently have are sufficient. I think that if we are able to really robustly use those mechanisms and perhaps ensure that we have got adequate diversity as part of those groups and—

MR SMYTH: But if I hear Jenny correctly, she is saying we have got the data. Let us bring it together from the groups that have the data and then get the government to respond appropriately.

Ms Kitchin: Yes. I think we have got the groups, both community and government and both across government and community groups.

THE CHAIR: We are out of time. Thank you, Ms Korpinen and Ms Kitchin, for appearing today before the committee. As usual, a copy of the transcript of the hearing will be sent to you to check for accuracy. Thank you for appearing.

Ms Korpinen: Thank you.

LINKE, MR MICHAEL, Chief Executive Officer, RSPCA ACT

THE CHAIR: Thank you for appearing before the estimates committee on the 2012-13 budget today. The proceedings are being broadcast today. I draw your attention to the privilege statement, which is on the blue card in front of you. Can you just indicate that you are aware of the implications of that so that we can get that on the record.

Mr Linke: I am aware of the implications of the privilege statement.

THE CHAIR: Fantastic. Before we go to questions, would you like to make an opening statement for the committee?

Mr Linke: Thank you. I will just make a short opening statement about our application for funding and the relationship with government over the last 12 months. We felt we had a difficult relationship at times with the government. There was a fairly protracted negotiation process that went into this financial year over and above the sort of end of financial year negotiations that we had. It took quite a bit of time to detail the funding agreement for RSPCA—a funding agreement that we still believe is well below the level of funding that is required to allow us to continue to meet the demands of companion animals, wild animals and inspectorate services here in Canberra.

As a result of those negotiations, as I said, there are still significant underpayments or under-value in terms of the funds offered to RSPCA. We did receive the CPI increases as part of the budget process, but our submission was not funded at all.

We focused this year on a specific submission looking at cat control and cat management here in Canberra, an area of responsibility for RSPCA. I suppose we are the only ones that take responsibility for the management of stray cats here in Canberra. It is something that has never been acknowledged in our funding agreement from the government—or never recognised by the government. It was a large topic of discussion for a number of months throughout the negotiation processes.

We decided to put a direct application in for funding for cat control here in Canberra—of about \$186,000 for the control of cats. No funding was forthcoming, so again there is an expectation that RSPCA will continue to manage the stray cat population here in Canberra. As more and more suburbs are opened in Canberra, and each and every one of them is declared cat containment, there is an expectation that there will be increased demands on RSPCA having to house and look after stray cats from those areas but no commensurate funding to meet those demands. That is where we are at, and I suppose that is why we are here today.

Looking back at our organisation over the last 12 months, we had some significant successes around cats—or, more, kittens. Really, hats off to our team, who essentially eradicated cat and kitten disease in our shelter. We had a very difficult two years, with significant cat and kitten disease during that time. Our hardworking team really got on top of disease issues in the cattery and allowed us to improve our homing rate. We are probably in the top two per cent of homing rates of shelters in the world, not only here in Australia but internationally, in terms of the number of kittens that we are homing

and the fewest number of kittens euthanased on record, which is something that we are very proud of. There are some really good successes.

Other successes include being invited to speak at international conferences on some of the work that we have been doing here in Canberra; we are very pleased with that. A number of staff have been invited to conferences nationally to talk about some of the programs that we have delivered in the last 12 months. So that has been fairly successful. And we have had a number of wins, not only locally but nationally, in terms of animal welfare. I think animal welfare in the last 12 months has been a topic of discussion on a number of levels, all the way up to the live export trade, to pigs, to battery hen farming, to companion animals and puppy factories. Those are the key four or five issues that we have been dealing with.

Looking forward to the emerging issues that we are facing, it was interesting listening to ACTCOSS talking about some of the same issues that RSPCA is facing, with people on the fringe of society, people who find it difficult with housing, low socioeconomically placed people, people suffering from mental health and the homeless. These people own animals. They have pets; they love their pets. Historically they have been expected to surrender those animals if their living circumstances change. But there has been a definitive movement, I suppose, in the last five to 10 years, with these people saying: “No, we don’t want to surrender our animals. We want to come up with a solution.” RSPCA has been looked to to provide support to those people, often at significant expense, if you consider mental health cases where some people receive healthcare services for six, 12 or 18 months. Their animals are often at the shelter for that period of time, and there is no commensurate funding from any source to assist, to defray the costs of that care.

One win this year was recognition by Minister Burch under the health and ageing portfolio, where RSPCA was offered some funding to assist the elderly with pet care. If any elderly people required pet care at RSPCA, we received a small grant to support some of that work. So there is a bit of a movement within government that there are non-traditional services that RSPCA is offering—and offering more and more—and that there is a significant cost. We are hoping that, over time, governments and budget processes see that and provide additional funding. And also we are hoping that they recognise the demand that cats are placing on our services, give some recognition to and some support for RSPCA and provide further funding for the stray cat issue here in Canberra, which is a significant issue. Of all the animal species that we are seeing, adult cats are the one group that is continuing to trend upwards. The others are either plateauing or trending downwards. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Linke. You mentioned that you put in a budget submission particularly around the issue with stray cats. As you said, there did not seem to be that recognition there. As you said, you are the only organisation that is performing this role. What was the feedback you got from government about that? Was there any recognition of that?

Mr Linke: No. No feedback at all from government regarding that submission. There was no “this is an interesting submission; come and chat to us about it”. It was sent in in the normal course of business to the minister and there was no additional funding. It did not make it at any stage. I am not aware of how far it made it through those

stages, but we received no feedback on that submission.

THE CHAIR: You said that your normal contract negotiations were fairly protracted as well. Was there any discussion about these other issues in that process?

Mr Linke: Cats formed a significant part of that. From the conversation I had with a couple of the bureaucrats at the time, it was generally suggested: “Cats are another issue, Michael. Let’s move those to one side. Let’s talk about the core funding issues.” And we focused on core funding.

The government made a number of non-financial concessions to RSPCA as part of that negotiation process. They offered us access to the Domestic Animal Services pound for long-term dogs and said that some of the government staff could do some cruelty inspections for us. But that does not help us fund the services that we are delivering or the fact that we are already at capacity and that inspectors are very busy already.

With those types of support mechanisms that the government put in place, we have not tapped into them in 12 months. There has been no need to access those services or no willingness or desire by RSPCA to access those services. We would have rather seen that money come to us in cold, hard cash to allow us to continue to fund the services that we are delivering. I do not think it was a necessary part of the negotiation process, but that appeared to be the part that the government really focused on: they felt could save us money by offering us services and support when in essence there were no real savings at all from that.

THE CHAIR: Just to follow up on that, are there any other things we can actually do in terms of stray cats being a real issue, particularly adult cats? Are there any other things that could be done—not just in terms of financial issues but in terms of other ways we can address this particular issue and be a bit more proactive about it?

Mr Linke: There are a couple of things we could do. I had a meeting—I work with a strategy group looking at cat control in Canberra—about a number of ideas specifically in the new areas and new suburbs of development, and really making animal ownership and cat ownership an awareness issue for people as they move into houses. So if they move into a new suburb in Wright, Bonner, Forde or any one of these new suburbs that is declared cat containment, there is awareness of the owners’ responsibilities and they go in with eyes wide open about desexing, microchipping and their responsibility with regard to that cat.

In term of urban cats and town cats, I think that is the biggest problem in the ACT. RSPCA statistics and private research statistics continue to show that the owned cat population and the responsible owners—generally their cats are desexed, the cats are microchipped and there are not a lot of problems. One of the fundamental problems is that a lot of people allow their cat to have a litter first, because they want children, family or friends to experience the miracle of birth. And then the cat is desexed. The RSPCA did some research on that. Some 191,000 cats formed part of our national research over 12 months. We found that in about 60 to 70 per cent of cases, cats that were desexed had already had a litter of kittens.

One of our laws in Canberra that is very good is forcing desexing of cats at 12 weeks of age. That will stop that first litter, because cats can start reproducing at five months of age, at 20 weeks. We have brought that number in, but again it is not policed; it is not managed. Cats sold through the *Canberra Times*, through the internet or through pet shops are often sold undesexed. They will have that first litter of kittens, and that first litter comes into RSPCA. Are there non-financial things you can do? Yes, there are. You can enforce desexing at point of sale of cats. I think that is a proposal that you guys put up. I think that is a very important thing to do—and more awareness in the community of cats and the early age at which they can breed to stop that number coming in.

We are starting to see an increase in adult cats. Is there more awareness that we can do when you get a new kitten—adopting a cat for a lifetime rather than two or three years while it is a kitten and then having the family go: “Well, it’s lost its cuteness. It’s time to move it off to the shelter. Let’s get another kitten”? What things can we do there? We are going to do some research on that in the next 12 months to see what the source of these cats is when people surrender 18-month-old or two-year-old cats to RSPCA. Where is the original source? Where do they source those from? Again, microchip traceability can assist us to find out the source of these animals, because we can go back and see each point when the microchip was changed and when it was registered. So another piece of legislation or enforcement we could do is about microchip chaseability. That will assist in managing and understanding the population and how that population of cats is moving.

And then we need to come up with some solutions for town cats and urban cats. Simply trapping them and euthanasing them is not a solution in the long term, because more cats will move in. You need to look at vasectomies of kings, of males, in those areas, and returning some of those males once they are vasectomised so that they continue to mate with the females but they are not reproducing and they continue to maintain and monitor their territory. Are there pockets in Canberra where we know significant cat populations exist? And can we do some trials? Again, small amounts of money—\$5,000, \$10,000, \$15,000 contributions—can assist in monitoring little populations of cats to see if we can have an impact.

MS HUNTER: Mr Linke, I note from the survey that you returned, and your submission, that the issue about your accommodation has still not been resolved. We were talking about this last year and probably the year before.

Mr Linke: The year before.

MS HUNTER: We talked about it at length. At that point there appeared to be a resolution in sight. That is obviously no longer the case. Could you give us a bit of an update on what the discussions have been, and has this fallen off the agenda completely?

Mr Linke: It has not fallen off the agenda completely. We have had four or five discussions with government in the last 12 months about our site. The most recent discussion was about three weeks ago. We had a meeting with senior bureaucrats within the TAMS Directorate, and we discussed a number of things. We did not have full access to the information. There was some commercial-in-confidence information

which was not shared with us, which suggests to me that there is a proposal before Economic Development or before cabinet around a building for RSPCA.

We have heard dates and suggestions of dates two years hence where we may be moving into a new facility. Still we have not seen plans, we have not seen detailed costing. But I think there is a commitment and a willingness from staff definitely at the directorate that they want to see progress, and we have had meetings and we have had discussions around a number of those items, but it still is a very slow moving ship. We have not seen any speedy movement.

I did not note anything specifically in the budget regarding capital works, but there is a large, multi-million dollar figure in unspecified capital works in the budget. Whether the creation of a new animal shelter in Canberra is part of that, I am none the wiser at this point in time. But we have had a number of discussions, and it is still on the agenda, but it is not moving at the rate at which one could expect.

MS HUNTER: Have you been able to put forward what your needs in accommodation are? Site selection is the other issue. Have you had any discussion around a new site?

Mr Linke: No, there has been a site that has been identified for two or three years. The government is happy with it and the RSPCA is happy with it. It is in Symonston. We have no problems with the site. We have put forward our needs in terms of capacity. And one of the things we have said about the capacity is: this is a shelter that we should look to for the next 25, 30, 45, 50 years in Canberra, and we should understand it and be able to build something in the nation's capital that is a long-term legacy to animal welfare and animal care and a showpiece to the rest of the world.

We have got such good homing rates, such good people already working for us and such a good attitude to compassion towards animals that if we had a matching facility, combined with some of the government-run impounding facilities and enforcement facilities that the government does in terms of animal management, we could have a really sensible, positive model. But it is going to take a significant, large, million-dollar amount that the government needs to get serious about and invest in.

So I am hoping that the additional meetings that we have had in recent times are an indication that that is moving forward and there is a commitment from government. I also know that we are in an election year and at some point, unless decisions are made, the government will go into caretaker mode and there will be a period that it will be on the backburner again or sitting in a holding pattern for a period. We are hoping that some movement is made fairly soon.

THE CHAIR: Mr Coe.

MR COE: I will go to a point that I raise each year, the role of Domestic Animal Services and the RSPCA. I look at your 2010-11 annual report. It has got a page of fast facts and it centres on dogs—8,300 animals in total care, 2,800 cats et cetera. And then in this year's budget, there is an estimated outcome of 1,400 dogs processed by Domestic Animal Services. Given that you are already doing far more than the 1,400 animals that DAS are looking after, would it be relatively easy for you to incorporate

the services of DAS in the RSPCA?

Mr Linke: That is something that we have said we can do, with appropriate funding of course. But if and when a new facility is built, if that is the mood of government, then it is our mood, I think, to create a single facility which would then free up the DAS staff to do enforcement duties, to look after nuisance dogs, to look after dog attacks in Canberra, to go to the various off-lead walking parks in Canberra and do spot checks on people. Are their dogs registered? Are they desexed? They could do that type of management stuff, rather than cleaning and feeding animals in a shelter environment. That is our skill. That is our expertise. Allow us to do that and allow government to do the enforcement.

In terms of the day-to-day workload, it is an easy model to create and it is an easy inclusion into our day-to-day business that we do already. And 1,400 dogs on top of the 1,700, 1,800 dogs that we already look after, it is just more kennels. I hope that when the government build the new facility, they are cognisant of the volume of animals. Those 3,500 dogs a year are going to need a significant facility. DAS have got 55 kennels. We have got 52 kennels. So you are looking at a facility with 100 dog kennels, with a city that is growing. Do you build 120 kennels in a new facility to cater for what is going to happen in 10 years time?

I think we could easily incorporate that workload into the RSPCA model. We could do it more efficiently and cheaper than government could. We could then free up government resources to do the work that they are engaged to do in terms of enforcement, to have better management of dogs across the territory.

MR COE: In the discussions that you have had with the government with regard to the designs for the new facility, is DAS going to be co-located with the RSPCA in terms of having separate DAS kennels or is the government of the same view that you just articulated?

Mr Linke: They are looking at a combined facility. RSPCA would have responsibility for 100 per cent of the kennels. There would not be dedicated DAS kennels. There would be times that a DAS officer would bring an animal in. Maybe it is a dog that has attacked somebody and they would indicate to RSPCA staff that this is a seized dog on grounds of attacking or it is a dangerous dog, and that would need to be isolated in a specific kennel away from public view.

We would allocate kennels based on the design and the setup. That is how we would do it. That is how we do it now. It is how DAS does it now. So it would not be a function of changing how we do things. It would just be how you use the facility. And they would then indicate to us, after appropriate investigation, the dog goes back to the owner or the dog is to be euthanased because it has been declared dangerous or there are other conditions placed on that dog. We would take direction from government in regard to the management of that specific animal.

But I do not see a facility where you come in and there is a sign that says DAS and a sign that says RSPCA. I see a facility—and I think government agrees with me on this—that the sign says RSPCA, and the public come in and are serviced by RSPCA staff.

MR COE: Again the 2010-11 annual report shows considerable revenue from non-government sources. In fact the vast majority of money comes from external sources, external to government, that is. With the financial times, do you expect to receive less money through the clinic, less money through sales, through appeals and the like?

Mr Linke: We are seeing a slow decline in retail sales. I think some of the luxury items that people buy in terms of new beds and collars and leads for their dogs and cats, people are starting not to buy those and often people are starting to use home-made cat and dog toys, toilet rolls and tissue boxes, rather than buying \$20 and \$30 cat toys. So we are seeing a dip-off in that income.

We are seeing strong revenues through our vet clinic, and we are just going through a process now of looking at our vet clinic and how we can expand that service, because we have noted that at commercial vet clinics across Canberra the prices are starting to creep up. And listening to what ACTCOSS said before I started, there is a significant sector of the community that is starting to struggle financially. So we are pitching our vet clinic at the sort of middle-range people to try to assist this group of people in the mid-range of our society with veterinary services. So I am hoping we can do that with a bit of remodelling of our vet clinic.

Again the difficulty is: how long are we going to be there? Do we want to spend \$50,000 knocking down walls and putting in surgery rooms and consult rooms? Probably not. We might move. But then how long do I wait until we make a decision? It is quite a difficult business model that we are operating under, because we do not know where we are going to be in two years time. I have got opportunities where I can generate revenues in businesses that I can see that the RSPCA can expand into, but my current facility will not allow me to do that in a nice way. So it is difficult.

The third component there was donations. Mums and dad donors, family donors, are fairly strong here in Canberra. I think we have got a very strong public service support, people on good income. Interest rates have dropped again recently. So there might be a bit of loosening of the belts there. What we have seen a significant decline in is corporate fundraising. I do not think the corporate sector is as generous as it was five years ago. There has been a significant contraction of major donations from Westpac, Commonwealth Motors, places like that, large businesses here in Canberra who have contracted and reduced the level of support, not only to RSPCA but to a number of charities. So we have had to make that up through mums and dads.

MR COE: Are people delaying their visits to the vet? If they are in tough financial times, are you finding that people, instead of taking their animal every year, are pushing it out to 14 months or 15 months or whatever?

Mr Linke: In some cases. We are seeing some cases where it has been a progression of a condition and people are then surrendering the animal because it has become so bad, so badly matted, or its ears are so badly infected, that the animal then turns up in our drop-off kennels overnight. There is a significant veterinary bill associated with that, but there is no owner to charge. But some people are leaving it.

I suppose that is where we are between the devil and the deep blue sea, in that if our

inspectors see a case and say to the person, “You need to seek veterinary treatment for this animal or we are going to look at pressing some charges,” and then the person does not seek medical treatment or they come to RSPCA because it is the only place they can afford and we cannot deliver that treatment, it makes it difficult for our prosecuting staff to then mount a successful prosecution, because they have tried to seek veterinary treatment but it is outside their means and they cannot actually afford it. So it is a difficult, double-edged sword in terms of people delaying services and then looking at the cruelty aspect.

That is, I suppose, why we are trying to pitch our clinic at that sort of mid to low range, to give people those basic services, vaccinations, wormings, groomings, dental work, ear work, that type of stuff. We are not looking at getting into surgery cases. We are not looking at getting into hospitalised cases. It is that day-to-day animal welfare issue that we are seeing starting to slide and we are offering prices that people can afford, which will generate some revenue for us over time.

MR COE: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: One final question, Mr Hargreaves.

MR HARGREAVES: Sorry, I am late. I was just launching a conference down the hallway. I have got a cracker of a question for you.

Mr Linke: Hopefully I have got a cracker of an answer for you.

MR HARGREAVES: You will have, mate. How many stray dogs, injured dogs, were received by your facility over the June long weekend compared with other years?

Mr Linke: About two, I think. It was two or three. One was severely injured, and it went to DAS and is coming back to our shelter today. I think there were one or two others. Compared to other years, where it was upwards of 100, 150 animals, it is just fantastic. We closed on Monday, which was good. It gave everybody a break, which we have not done in prior years. So it was good. Great job, thank you.

MR HARGREAVES: Thank you. That is what I wanted to hear.

THE CHAIR: Are there any further questions? We have got a couple of minutes left. No. Thank you very much, Mr Linke, once again, for appearing before the committee. A copy of the transcript of the hearing will be sent to you, so that you can check it for accuracy.

Mr Linke: Thanks very much.

LITTLE, MR RODNEY (ROD), Chairperson, ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body

COLLINS, MS DIANE, Deputy Chair, ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Little, chair, and Ms Collins, deputy chair, of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body for appearing before the estimates committee into the 2012-13 budget. The proceedings are being broadcast. I draw your attention to the privilege statement which is on the blue card in front of you. Can you both indicate that you are aware of the implications of that?

Mr Little: Yes.

Ms Collins: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Before we go to questions from the committee, I would like to invite you to make an opening statement.

Mr Little: Thank you. First of all, we represent the elected body in our views, which we extract from the community. We get the community's views, in accordance with our functions under the legislation. So we have come today to share some of those views and some of our reflections on the processes that we have in place, how we can hope to improve on those things and, particularly looking at the budget, our concerns and how we would like to improve those.

THE CHAIR: I will go to the first question. One of the issues you have raised is about the justice agreement. Could you provide us with some information on what specific resources have been allocated for the implementation of the justice agreement, what resources you think are needed and what evaluation and review are built into the agreement?

Mr Little: The agreement is due for a report card next month, I believe, by the government in consultation with the elected body. We have established a number of priorities and actions deriving from that agreement. In the four years of the life of the elected body, it has been disappointing that it has been a struggle to get information that reflects achievements towards those actions and priorities. So since the inception of the agreement, we are not confident that there has been investment at each budget time to reflect actions against those priorities within the justice agreement.

One of the things on which we have constantly been in negotiation with the ACT government is enhancing the New South Wales and ACT legal services. We have constantly spoken with the Attorney-General and the federal government about investing more into that, so that we can achieve better outcomes, particularly for our young people and for people in the justice institution and the justice system. That is just one example.

The other important one is that in the justice agreement there are many agencies that have particular responsibilities. As you know, we go through our estimates-style process each year. There is an undertaking to do certain things and report back to the elected body, and the elected body develops its priorities from that process. We use

the justice agreement as our guide for measuring achievements. Each year we say: “We haven’t achieved these things. We’re not getting the reports.” The achievements are not, in our view, reflected in the annual reports presented by the agencies. So we would like to see more of that happening.

Education is one of those where we have managed to get some more collaboration and engagement. But only this week we have seen a report in the *Canberra Times* about accessing Koori preschools and things like that. We have raised, and the community have raised with us, that there is a lack of employment in the workforce for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within those services, and also with respect to families taking their children to those services. We have a number of Koori preschools here, so we are hoping that we can enhance that. Certainly the community are saying, “We want our kids to participate in this process.”

The other is around health. Health is one of those areas where the budget does not reflect on the surface the contributions to closing the gap on health or education. You basically have to drill down into the budget to see any reflection. Again the connection with the justice agreement and the responsibilities of organisations or the department and the service providers within the justice agreement is not reflecting achievements or satisfactory progress, in our view. We think that it needs to be clearer, and we want to be able to measure any closing of the gaps.

We managed to get some progress and a relationship developed with education. We have an Indigenous education consultative body in the ACT. As I understand it, education receives some funds from the commonwealth to provide support for that group. That group, according to our sources and our feedback from the community, is not effective; it is not having any influence on changes within the educational area. So we want to try to increase that as well.

In our estimates-style process, we use the justice agreement to guide us to ask those questions, to look for the reflections in the annual reports of departments. We use the overcoming disadvantage report to see if there is any impact. We also use the Indigenous expenditure report to see how much money is being spent in Indigenous affairs and then try to measure the impact or seek evidence of the impact on what the departments and service providers are doing.

We cannot really see that. We understand that we have a fairly small jurisdiction, and we expect that we should not have this level of disadvantage in this jurisdiction. We feel that quite often we are not being consulted or we are not participating in the process and in the development of programs and advice. We expect that in accordance with our functions under the legislation. We feel that in some of the budget items that came up for this year, that process has not been satisfactory. We have not participated in that process satisfactorily enough.

THE CHAIR: With the engagement, is that across the board in terms of government? You mentioned that with education you had some relatively good engagement. Are there some departments that are engaging with you and consulting you whereas others are not, or does it tend to be an across-the-board thing?

Mr Little: Some have and some have not. We went through a process of developing a

set of protocols so that we can share information across directorates and also with the elected body. But we still find that at the departmental level and also at the political level, there is not a sharing of information. If things are happening, a fundamental question, which we feel is quite simple, is: are the elected body aware of what is happening? Do they have this information?

This elected body was established under a tripartite agreement between all parties, and we feel that it is a great opportunity for this jurisdiction to make a massive improvement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in the ACT. It should not be too hard, but we still find we have lots of disadvantage.

Those disadvantages include the incarceration rates and educational achievements. We have promoted the fact that for a long time in the ACT, where we have world-standard education institutions and systems, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids still are struggling to meet the benchmark. That is unacceptable, if we promote a standard.

MR HARGREAVES: I remember when I was a minister, when the body first kicked off, I had quite a number of meetings with members of the body in areas relating to the portfolios I held at the time. Have those meetings continued? What sort of access have you got, as the body, to ministers, and is it adequate?

Ms Collins: In terms of the directorate that you were looking after?

MR HARGREAVES: No, across the board.

Ms Collins: Generally interest is growing and directorates are wanting to engage, but when you look at the budget and the initiatives that have been put up, clearly you can see that there are gaps where they are not. Others are not engaging as well as they could be. It is difficult to make people see that there is good sense in using the elected body and the skills and expertise that we have within the body, and also the connection to community, around how programs, services and initiatives can be made more appropriate to how we are seeing that fit in terms of what the community is telling us. It is growing. We are a new body, so you have to establish yourselves. I think we have done that very well, and in the second term it has been even more so. We have made a lot of inroads in terms of working with directorates, but there still is a long way to go in resourcing the elected body appropriately as well as working with areas within directorates to be more effective.

MR HARGREAVES: Are you able to get access to the ministers' staff in addition to the directorates?

Mr Little: As we did in the past, we have met annually with the corporates, the ministers, the government. We set up an annual meeting with the Chief Minister. We are yet to have that. We have met with you guys on a number of occasions now, and we have established a quarterly meeting with the minister for Indigenous affairs. We have a meeting on Monday with Minister Bourke. But in terms of the other ministers, we really have not. We worked extremely hard to establish the relationship in the first term, and that is coming to fruition now. I have met a few times with Jeremy Hanson and we are now starting to see the fruits of that effort in the first term. But now we are

starting to feel under a bit of pressure in not being able to respond to community needs.

We saw a little reflection of that very first effort in our voter turnout, which was a little bit down for this election. We were concerned about that, so we made it a priority to engage more with the community. We have done the hard work at the front end, and we have still got to sustain that. But the pressure is in responding to the needs of the community and getting to meet people like yourselves and raise these sorts of things. The role and the position of the members are very thin ones and remuneration is probably one of those things. Di works full time and everybody else works. So it is a difficult job.

I think politicians are starting to recognise it, and we want to see more of that, because I think that is the gem in the model for the jurisdiction—to be able to hold up the flag and say, “This is how we do it in the ACT, to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage.” There is a lesson to be learned right across the country, I believe.

MS HUNTER: I want to talk about resourcing for the elected body. What sort of secretariat resources do you have currently?

Mr Little: We are informed that we have the support of five people in there, but often, as I said, we find it difficult to get support for us to be able to do our job. Because it is mixed in with multicultural affairs, we cannot get the dedicated support, for whatever reason—other pressing priorities; we do not really know. But we feel that it is not satisfactory to enable us to be more effective.

Each year in the last four years we have tabled our concerns about a full-time or a part-time chair. We have not seen any fruits of that or even any real negotiations about it. We think that is going to be one way that we can actually respond to the community’s needs—get out there, meet with community, meet with organisations, and also have the capacity to meet with the directors-general and ministers, on occasions when we need to meet with them, in all portfolios. We divide ourselves up into several portfolios to try to match up with the cabinet, so that we can have those conversations. But we find that our support is not compatible with the work that we can do. We could do better if we had the dedicated resources.

Previously the Chief Minister had the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander portfolio. That has changed now. We have a separate minister. We have felt that bit of a change. That minister has several other portfolios which are important. But we feel that we can achieve more from building the relationship and so on. But we understand the timing that we are in at the moment.

Resources have always been an issue for us. We are conscious of the Hawke review. We made some recommendations to the Hawke review. We have not seen anything in there that gives us confidence that we are able to have the capacity to have an influence and work in partnership with all of the stakeholders to address the disadvantage, not only in our local area but from the COAG perspective as well, because we have some responsibilities in that field. But resourcing has always been an issue for us.

MS HUNTER: Ms Bresnan touched on the lack of consultation with the body about the budget. Was there any discussion with you? I am assuming that you put in what your thoughts are, but was there discussion coming back to you from directorates to talk through their ideas about programs or issues? We see very little in the budget—very little. I am a bit concerned that we have set up an elected body that has those connections to community but you seem to be bypassed in some very important discussions and consultations.

Ms Collins: No discussion or consultation with any directorates around the budget stuff. That is a big concern for us. We have identified our priorities based on our consultations with community. If you look at those priorities and look at the initiatives that have been put up, there is—

MS HUNTER: They do not match.

Ms Collins: a lot of disparity there. So there has not been, which is a shame. It brings us to forums like these to continue highlighting those issues, because they are a real concern for us. To be an effective body and to do the job that we have taken on to do, we need to have buy-in from the directorates to meet us halfway on that stuff.

MR SMYTH: Can you just clarify—Diane is full time?

Mr Little: No.

Ms Collins: No. I work full time. I have another job, that I get paid for.

MR SMYTH: What resources do you have dedicated full time to the elected body?

Mr Little: This is the question we have asked the directorate, and we are yet to get an answer on that.

MR SMYTH: But you mentioned the number of five.

Mr Little: That is what we have been told by the directorate that looks after the secretariat. We have been told that pretty much from the beginning. I had a meeting on Tuesday with the director-general. We sent through questions from our last estimates-style hearing, as we do not know what our operational budget is and how that is allocated. If we wanted to go out and consult with people and hold community forums, they would go and arrange it. We requested an information tour to look at elderly care in another jurisdiction, to see how community-controlled care for the elderly was operating in Kempsey, I think it was. Again we had to go through a process but it was a matter of saying, “Hang on, do we have the dollars to be able to send one or two people?” We do not even know that. It was done, but we do not know what capacity we have.

The other thing in terms of resources is that we have resources to engage a consultant to support and advise or do some work, and that I can work with, when I am able to. But what is the objective of that consultant in ultimately supporting the elected body to be effective and do its job? That sort of detail is missing.

I, as the chair, do not have a job like Di does, externally. It is sort of like volunteering work. I put my hand up to do it, the same as you guys do. But I do have another role at a national level, as a director of the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, of which the elected body is a member. That keeps me very busy. I probably do not have time for a nine to five job. But I think the important point that you have raised is that the resources for the elected body to be effective are critical and we have been saying that for a long time, since we have been set up. It is time now to move to explore that and see how you can maximise the model that we have to achieve the outcomes that we desire.

Ms Collins: Having that budget would enable us as the elected body to make decisions around our consultations and negotiations. To have to go to the director of the secretariat to seek agreement to run a consultation meeting just seems a bit unnecessary. There is a bit too much red tape there. We have the mandate to do that stuff; it is in the legislation.

MS HUNTER: You have an identified budget. You put together your work plan and your role?

Ms Collins: Yes, whereas that is missing at the moment. So we struggle with that.

MR SMYTH: It sounds like there is a feeling that there is a bit of lip-service here: "We've got the body; job done, tick—"

Mr Little: Yes.

MR SMYTH: but we'll still do all the work within the directorate because we know better." How do you get past—

MR HARGREAVES: That is a bit of a stretch. I did not hear any of that—that they know better.

MR SMYTH: You do not know your allocation of staff. You do not know your budget. You cannot make decisions about how you expend any money. You have to go to the directorate all the time. So for you to be truly effective, there needs to be some greater autonomy and control and basic knowledge of what resources you have at your service?

Mr Little: I agree; knowledge and sharing of information. If there is an initiative that might be worth exploring from the directorate, as I said earlier, the first question is: "I wonder what the elected body would think of this and how can we develop this further?" That is a fundamental thing that we would expect. One of the functions of the act is to develop programs, and we do not have the capacity to do that. We have the capacity, through consultation, to get our views from the community, but the next step to develop that and to develop it into, say, a submission is difficult. When asked what budget submissions are going forward, the answer with this last budget is: "We don't know. Have we put one forward? Have I, as the chair, put one forward? Hang on, we don't have the capacity to do that." So it comes back to the resources. We can sit down and have those conversations, but we can develop the thing together with the

resources.

MR SMYTH: Is it too strong to say that lip-service is being paid to the act and to the board, or to the elected body?

Mr Little: No, I would not say that is true. I think that might be a thing of the past. But I think people are coming to terms with the fact that there is this model here. We are starting to use it and we do not know how to use it. What we are really saying is: "Here we are. Come and talk to us. Here are some processes on how things are done." That is why we have developed a set of protocols not only for the directorates but also for the community and the politicians as well.

THE CHAIR: Mr Coe.

MR COE: I want to home in on one such decision which I hope has been brought to your attention in the decision-making phase. That is the CHANCES project—community helping Aboriginal Australians to negotiate choices leading to employment and success. I note that that program has only been funded for one year. I was wondering, firstly, what consultation the government has had with you on the merits of that program and, secondly, whether you have any thoughts on whether any real progress can be made in just one year.

Mr Little: Thank you very much for that question, because that is one of the key issues that we have with what is in the budget this time. CHANCES is one of those, as you said, that have one-year funding. It was considered as a pilot, so it happened in the last budget round. It has got some funding again this year. We really would have expected an evaluation of the pilot to build on the merits of the project. The project in its initiation came as a complete surprise. We were disappointed with it, but it was there; we went along. To my great surprise, I was to chair the working group. I was totally surprised. We have maintained, through one of our members, our participation in it.

The initiative is fine, but I think we could have given it more value and credibility with the community if there had been collaboration and a partnership. What is critical now is the evaluation of the pilot project to give it some credibility to be considered for another year's funding. But let me say that annual funding is a real problem for not only those service providers but also service providers more broadly in the ACT because there is so much reporting and red tape to go through. To do a financial audit for a project for \$150,000 you have got to get some quality people in, and that costs money.

MR COE: And obviously the question is: how much work do you put into developing resources for future years and how much work do you put into procedures and that sort of thing? If it is just a one-off then you are wasting money doing that, but if you know you have got some certainty going into the future, it is worth while investing in those up-front administration issues so you can actually reap the rewards later on.

Mr Little: Yes.

Ms Collins: That is right. The impact and outcomes are very limited, because it is a

one-year program. If you are looking at sustainability, that is a real problem. There is nothing there to continue to help make a difference from one year as opposed to three or five years.

THE CHAIR: We are, unfortunately, out of time. Thank you, Ms Collins and Mr Little, for appearing. We really appreciate your coming and talking to us. A transcript of the hearing today will be sent to you to check for accuracy.

Meeting adjourned from 12.16 to 2.04 pm.

WRIGLEY, MR ANDREW, Executive Director, Association of Independent Schools of the ACT

HOLMESBY, MR DAVID, Executive Committee Member, Association of Independent Schools of the ACT

THE CHAIR: We will start. I welcome Mr Wrigley and Mr Holmesby to this hearing of the estimates committee into the budget for 2012-13. You are here representing the Association of Independent Schools of the ACT. We would like to thank you for appearing before the committee. I draw your attention to the fact that the proceedings are being broadcast today. I also draw your attention to the privilege statement, which is on the blue card in front of you, and ask you to acknowledge that you are aware of the implications and the information in there.

Mr Wrigley: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Fantastic. Before we go to questions from the committee, I would like to invite you to make an opening statement, if you wish.

Mr Wrigley: Thank you for the opportunity to address this committee in response to the ACT budget 2012-13. I am executive director of the Association of Independent Schools of the ACT, and with me is David Holmesby, executive committee member and immediate past chair of the association.

The association has as its motto “independence choice diversity” and represents 17 independent schools in Canberra. These 17 schools embody an incredibly diverse range of styles, approaches and sizes, from schools with over 1,600 students to one with 17, and include community schools, Christian schools, Anglican schools, a Steiner school, Montessori school, Islamic school, a school for disadvantaged and at-risk students and independent Catholic schools.

Each school is unique and varied in different ways and each school works in partnership with their parents to get the best educational outcomes for each student. Some schools have been in this city for over 80 years. Others are more recent. Together they educate over 13,700 students, or over 20 per cent of the student population. Since 2008 enrolment growth in the independent schools has been 11.4 per cent.

The association made a submission as part of the government’s budget consultation process. In this submission there were three main focus areas: recurrent funding, support for capital investment and support for students with a disability. The association responded to the survey of community and industry groups on the ACT budget 2012-13. In response to the question asking our views on the budget in relation to our priority areas, the association noted that “little to no attempt appears to have been made to respond to the areas of main focus as outlined in our submission”. And I would like to now expand on that.

Our budget submission requested that government implement a more realistic approach to per capita funding. While the association supports funding increases for government schools and is clear and vocal in its belief that a strong government school system is vital to the education jurisdiction, as are strong Catholic and

independent education systems, it is important to note the saving that territory taxpayers enjoy—that is, you and I enjoy—from the nearly 41 per cent of students who attend non-government schools. Figures from the Productivity Commission's 2012 report on government services indicate that ACT non-government schools receive the third lowest funding of any jurisdiction of any state or territory government.

The request from the association was for per capita funding to be progressively increased through the term of the Assembly to 25 per cent of the funding of students in government schools in continuing real dollar terms. The current level of funding is, I believe, around 17½ per cent. Apart from indexation, which I will mention later, there has been no response to this request in this budget.

The association presented a proposal to government on how this government could support capital investment in independent schools. This proposal follows a cessation of the interest subsidy scheme in 2003, meaning since then there has been no mechanism in the ACT for non-government schools to receive support for capital development. With such a large percentage of students in independent schools, strong growth and anecdotal evidence of continuing strong demand, schools need to be in a position to respond to these pressures. We are disappointed that, again, there is nothing in this budget that supports capital investment. Let me please be clear on that again: we asked for support for capital investment, not a capital handout.

Combining these two areas—the state of recurrent funding and no allocated money for capital funding—it is difficult to understand how the territory is supporting independent schools which so many parents have clearly chosen. As I pointed out just a few moments ago, increasing numbers of parents are choosing to send their children to independent schools.

This trend is also evident in parents of children with a disability. The numbers highlight the challenges which face schools. In the past five years the number of students with disabilities identified in independent schools in the ACT has grown by approximately 30 per cent and is now nearly 10 per cent of the students with a disability in the ACT.

Along with the growth in numbers, schools are finding that there has also been an increase in the complexity of students' needs, and this is presenting challenges as to how best to meet these needs, as it is in all schools. Our budget submission stated that a student's individual level of need should be the basis for which funding is provided, irrespective of what school they attend. It stated that the association would welcome the opportunity to work with whomever to find a solution in this key education area and to ensure that there is a high level of funding for students with disabilities, irrespective of which sector they are educated in.

The budget response to this was to provide a one-off funding grant which will double the available funds to support students with a disability for the coming financial year. Let us be clear: this long-awaited injection will be a welcome boost for families and schools but it does fall short of a sustained funding model for these students and in no way can be said to result in students with similar levels of need being funded to the same degree irrespective of which school they attend.

It would be remiss of me not to highlight the positives for independent schools in this budget. The cost of providing education continues to increase, and the indexation applied to recurrent funding is welcomed. At the same time, it is recognised that indexation struggles to keep pace with the rising costs of education. ABS CPI figures for March state that the second most significant price rise for this quarter was secondary education; that is, 7.7 per cent. In the ACT education is also the second largest component increase, at 5.1 per cent this quarter. The funding indexation for non-government schools in this budget is lagging well behind this.

The association applauds the increased funding for the ACT Teacher Quality Institute. The TQI is doing fantastic work for the profession in a truly collaborative and cross-sectoral way, and this funding will help carry the work forward.

Thank you again for the opportunity to address the committee. What is important in the budget process is openness and transparency and a willingness to work together. The association would appreciate any opportunity to discuss priorities. However, I do note that the last time the association appeared before this committee was when my predecessor appeared in 2008 and, disturbingly, he talked about these very same issues four years ago. We welcome questions.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. The first question I want to go to is to do with the grant for the disability needs that you mentioned. One thing that has been mentioned already this morning with other groups is that it is disappointing that it is not recurrent funding. I am wondering whether you could perhaps outline the need that there is for this funding, which you have somewhat done already in your opening statement, for independent schools and how much you believe needs to be allocated recurrently so that we are addressing these specific needs for students with a disability. I appreciate it is a difficult thing to do but in terms of what you are seeing, what do you think are the recurrent needs for that?

Mr Wrigley: Sure. You have given me carte blanche to make a request. I will say that the one-off funding boost is a doubling of the current funding, which, as I said, will be very much welcomed by the schools and the individuals. All of the students who are supported with any type of grant go through the SCAN process. There are a specified number of students who are supported, and the school is provided with funding according to the band level that they are in. I will say that the greatest amount in dollar terms that we can provide a school for a particular student at the highest band level is about \$6,600.

If you ask what would be appropriate, I note the budget papers in their estimate of dollar per student breakdown for public schools, as they term it, have primary schools, secondary schools, colleges and so forth. The last line is for students with a disability in mainstream schools, and if I read it correctly, the 2012-13 target is \$28,500. We are a long way away.

THE CHAIR: So you are saying that, comparing those two figures, that is more than what—

Mr Wrigley: I will give you an example. A school that has a student who is deaf is

funded to a particular level according to the SCAN band the student fits in. They investigated support for that student, a hearing disability expert, and were advised that such a teaching expert or assistant expert would be available possibly one day a week if they could find them. The cost of that would be \$76 per hour plus travel. When the school calculated their funding for this child, it actually worked out at \$52 per week. So there is a discrepancy.

A child with Down syndrome in, I think, year 2 or 3—early primary, anyway—is on our second highest level of the SCAN band. It is above \$6,000 and below \$6,600; I cannot be precise—\$6,300, maybe. In an assessment of that child's needs, they needed to employ a full-time teacher assistant at \$50,000. The school funds that.

Mr Holmesby: The parents fund that.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Hargreaves.

MR HARGREAVES: I want to explore the capital thing a little. I remember when the interest subsidy scheme was alive and well, if memory serves me correctly, at least 80 per cent of the funds coming out of that scheme were going to the top four private schools, which you do not represent, if I am right. I may be wrong, and I am happy for you to correct it; please do. I think it went to something like the Marist systemics, it went to the grammar schools. I think it was something like that.

When the government decided to wind the scheme down, part of the reason was that the smaller schools—independent Catholic schools, Montessoris, that sort of thing—were not actually getting access to it and it had a snowballing effect. You could not go to the bank to get the money because you did not have the wherewithal. Unless you had the bank interested, you could not get the interest rate subsidy. So it was a cause and effect thing—chicken and egg.

What I am wanting to hear from you is whether you think that the elimination of that scheme was a good idea or a bad idea—and there is carte blanche for you to have a go—but also how the assistance under the capital investments can assist the smaller schools. My understanding stems from the fact that the larger schools have assets that they can lever off to go to the banks and get the money to do their stuff. They can go and get a loan and get a new gym, get a new science lab, get a new sports field if they want, because they have actually got that asset behind them. The smaller schools do not. Do you see where I am coming from?

Mr Wrigley: Yes.

MR HARGREAVES: I am interested in what your view is on that.

Mr Wrigley: I will clarify that the schools you mentioned are members of the Association of Independent Schools.

MR HARGREAVES: Those big ones?

Mr Wrigley: Yes.

MR HARGREAVES: Good on you.

Mr Wrigley: Yes, they are. I cannot comment on the time when the ISS was discontinued. That was before my time. David can cover that. I will say that, as part of our submission, the association did provide a proposal to provide support for capital investment. This was actually developed by the association. It has the implied agreement of all member schools that they would be able to use this as the model projected and that it could be used for \$20,000 to revamp a classroom to the \$2 million to build a hall.

MR HARGREAVES: Before you go on, Mr Wrigley, for the benefit of the committee and for me too, because my memory is very hazy on the submissions that we have got, could you outline how you saw it working, whether or not it was to pick up the interest rate, whether it was an interest-free loan or what form that actually took?

Mr Wrigley: I will pass to David for that, if you do not mind.

Mr Holmesby: The suggested proposal was that we would borrow at the same rate as the government borrowed, so essentially, still with an interest rate, obviously, but at no additional cost. And the administrative cost of that would be taken out of funds. The government were interested, in our opinion, in how they should spend them. So essentially it was, if you like, the lowest possible interest rates for these institutions. Your smaller schools in your example would have the opportunity to borrow at a reasonable interest rate to allow them to improve their capital infrastructure.

MR HARGREAVES: Levering off the AAA credit rating and all the rest of it?

Mr Holmesby: Indeed. Following on from that, the government has all of the financial information on these schools. It registers these schools. It ensures that they are viable. So it has a very good in into understanding the ability of these schools to make payments back.

MR HARGREAVES: Given that it is not an unlimited bucket in respect of those sorts of things, who would decide which particular projects would actually go forward and not go forward under your model?

Mr Wrigley: There would need to be a mechanism set up for that. We did not approach how that would be set up in our proposal. That is something that should flow necessarily after such a proposal may be considered. But it was—

Mr Holmesby: Chair, there were two views floated at the time. One was—I think the government proposed this—that they would perhaps control the process. The other was that perhaps they would use the mechanism of the Block Grant Authority, which is already in existence and which already goes through these processes.

MS HUNTER: We have talked about disability funding and the chair has asked questions around how much money you think that might be and so forth. But I guess I am interested in what you would like to see in place for disability funding. Is it that you are wanting to match the same amount that is given to a child in a government

school? Is that what you are after?

Mr Wrigley: That is at its very essence what our proposal suggests—that a child with a disability should be funded on their need irrespective of where they are educated.

MS HUNTER: Has there been work done by the association around—the reality is, of course, that there are some disabilities and needs that are better catered for and addressed in one school environment, maybe because of equipment or therapeutic needs or whatever.

Mr Wrigley: Without question.

MS HUNTER: So have you had that discussion with your schools? What is the scope?

Mr Wrigley: You are absolutely right that there are needs of students with a disability that are best met in specialist school environments. Our focus in reality is based on students who are in mainstream schools and the desire of parents to have their child educated in those schools. I have an example of parents who were ex-students of a school who have three other children at the school and the youngest sibling, who is the child with a disability, they wanted to be at that school. They moved the child from a government primary school to an independent primary school and lost the support, I suppose—that funding support. The school has then made up that difference in both funding and equipment.

MS HUNTER: I refer to this \$2 million this year, which it says in the budget papers is a one-off.

Mr Wrigley: Yes.

MS HUNTER: Was there any discussion with you before the budget?

Mr Wrigley: No, that was somewhat of a surprise.

MS HUNTER: Okay, thank you.

Mr Holmesby: We had had an expectation that there would be some funding for children with disability, because of the results of the Shaddock review and the fact that in all good conscience it was obvious that something needed to be done about all of the students who had disabilities and the funding. So we did have an expectation that there may be something for it. But we did have an expectation that some of the other requests that we had made—were invited to make—would have been dealt with as well.

MR SMYTH: Does the one-off funding present difficulties in implementing it? If so, what are they?

Mr Wrigley: In its implementation, probably not. In where it leaves schools 12 months down the track, it could very well.

MR SMYTH: Yes.

Mr Wrigley: It could very well leave schools in a funding vacuum if they have implemented programs or initiated any sort of support or adjustment mechanism and then 12 months later they find they need to make up that shortfall.

MR SMYTH: Have you worked out the equivalent level of funding that a child in a government school gets? Is there a number that it would cost?

Mr Wrigley: No, I have not. I could come back to you with that.

MR SMYTH: If you could.

Mr Wrigley: Okay.

MR SMYTH: That is lovely. You said that the number of kids with a disability in the independent schools has grown 30 per cent.

Mr Wrigley: Yes.

MR SMYTH: I did not pick up a time frame.

Mr Wrigley: In the last—since 2008. In the last five years it has grown 30 per cent. Interestingly, students with a disability in all non-government schools have grown 32 per cent in that time and in government schools, 7.5 per cent.

MR SMYTH: Thank you. What would be the projected cost of some sort of new capital indexation system?

Mr Wrigley: I do not have any figures on that. We have not done a projection of what that cost would be until there is a structure around which that can be framed, I suppose.

MR SMYTH: But are the independent schools not building as a consequence of the removal of the scheme?

Mr Wrigley: I pass to David.

Mr Holmesby: Thanks for the question. The Block Grant Authority does give out some funds every year from the federal government. That is limited this year to \$1.8 million. So it is very small against the master plans of many of the independent schools, especially the smaller ones. The BER funding enabled a number of the schools to actually do some building. I think it is fair to say that some schools, unless they get some form of assistance in capital terms, will not be able to build and will just put that on hold until perhaps there is another BER round some time in the future. But that is unlikely. But it is—

MR COE: You can only spend the future fund once, I am afraid.

Mr Holmesby: It is a little anomalous to see the parents of children at these schools

bearing the cost of capital as well as bearing a lot of the cost of the education of these students. We as taxpayers really do not accept and acknowledge the fact that we owe a great debt to children and parents of children who are in independent and non-government schools in the ACT—to the extent of around \$200 million a year. The contribution and the heavy lifting that these parents do is significant.

MR SMYTH: And the last question: to raise the 17.5 per cent to 25 per cent, what would that be worth?

Mr Wrigley: Again, that figure I do not have with me, but I can get back to you.

MR SMYTH: Thank you.

MR HARGREAVES: But it would also be worth while, on that number, if I may, to project it over, say, a couple of years.

Mr Wrigley: Yes.

MR HARGREAVES: Could you do that for us?

Mr Wrigley: Yes.

THE CHAIR: So you will get that information back to the committee and send it through to Sam?

Mr Holmesby: If you wish, we could also give you what raising it to the average would be as well.

THE CHAIR: That would be great.

MR HARGREAVES: Any information you feel would be helpful will be very welcome.

THE CHAIR: Wonderful. I will pass to Mr Coe. Then we can have one final question from Ms Hunter.

MR COE: You mentioned the debt that taxpayers perhaps owe to families who send kids to non-government schools. Going down that line, what support at an administrative level, if any, does the directorate provide the schools in terms of any of the yearly administration, or even day-to-day administration, that would take place in a non-government school or needs to happen for a non-government school? Can you think of any support whatsoever that the directorate gives?

Mr Wrigley: The directorate has a non-government schools section, which is responsible for mainly compliance issues, I believe; so the registration of schools, ensuring the schools are performing as they need to in accordance with the act, which all independent schools do. The BSSS also administers senior secondary compliance with most of our independent schools. So the directorate does support that. We do a lot of cross-sectoral work with sections of the directorate in the areas of Australian curriculum and national partnerships, but in detail—

MR COE: In terms of actually supporting individual schools in any of their administration, there is nothing at all?

Mr Wrigley: No.

MR COE: No. I would not have thought so.

Mr Holmesby: But I might just add, how many people are in the non-government school section, do you know? There are two, are there not?

Mr Wrigley: Two, three maybe.

Mr Holmesby: Around two or three.

MR COE: You mentioned the school registration process.

Mr Wrigley: Yes.

MR COE: There are the review processes as well, I understand. Is there any streamlining of that process that you see that could be achieved?

Mr Wrigley: That I see that could be achieved? That is a fairly broad question. The registration process of independent schools is extremely rigorous, to put it gently. Schools do go through a great deal of preparation work. They do everything that is needed to be done in terms of the paperwork and the meetings that are required of the panel to approve re-registration of a school. It is, having been through it myself and then been on panels, a rigorous and demanding process for non-government schools. I would not suggest here at this committee whether that can be streamlined in any way. That would require much deeper thought than this.

MR COE: Yes. In my consultation with various principals, especially in Ginninderra, it really does consume much of the school for the months leading up to that process.

Mr Wrigley: At the time of the registration, that is the function.

MR COE: Yes.

Mr Wrigley: After education.

MR COE: And that is the point. I wonder how much of it actually does detract from the core business of the school and how much of it is absolutely vital as opposed to simply being bureaucracy.

Mr Wrigley: I would not suggest that it detracts from the core business of the school. That is why the teachers are there. But it does place an extra burden on all of the other things that the teachers, the schools, the executive of the schools and the leadership are trying to do.

Mr Holmesby: But that is not saying in any way that this is not necessary. It is

important and we do see it as important to have a registration process. Although it is a big burden—as Andrew said, it takes about four months, I think, to get ready for it and then actually do it—it does focus the schools. One would hope—I think it is the case—that there is a registration or a review process of all schools in Canberra. If they are all of the rigour of that imposed on non-government schools, then we can be satisfied that all schools in Canberra are on an equal footing in terms of their viability and in terms of their compliance.

THE CHAIR: I am sorry but we have run out of time. Thank you, once again, for appearing today before the committee. We do appreciate your coming in and giving us your time. A copy of the transcript of the hearing will be sent to you so you can check that for accuracy.

Mr Wrigley: Thank you very much for the opportunity.

Mr Holmesby: Thank you.

FOWLIE, MS CARRIE, Executive Officer, Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drug Association ACT

THE CHAIR: We are a little over time. I would like to thank Ms Fowlie for appearing today on behalf of ATODA, the Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drug Association. The proceedings are being broadcast. I draw your attention to the privilege statement, which is on the blue card in front of you. Can you just indicate that you are aware of that?

Ms Fowlie: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Excellent. Before we go to questions from the committee, I would like to invite you to make an opening statement.

Ms Fowlie: Thank you very much for your invitation today. ATODA is the peak body for the non-government and government alcohol, tobacco and other drug sector here in the ACT. Our goal is to seek to prevent and reduce harms associated with what I will call ATOD across the community here in the ACT.

I was hoping to have a bit of a discussion today in terms of the interesting place that the drug budget fits in. It is not at all a clear-cut endeavour. We very much acknowledge that drugs, as a shorthand, goes across the whole of government and a whole range in the community, when we look at police, crime prevention, schools, and health services. Drugs and alcohol cut across all of that, in terms of both practice and outcomes but also in terms of investments that we make to seek to prevent and reduce the harms. When seeking to talk about any type of drug budget, it is not a clear-cut thing. We very much acknowledge that it can be quite a complex discussion to look at how that is.

In terms of the sector that we have got here in the ACT, the Canberra community can be very proud of the sector that it has. It leads Australia in many areas, including opioid maintenance therapies, such as methadone; needle and syringe programs; drug diversion; and opiate overdose prevention and management—amongst others. We are fortunate to be in a place where we have a strong, well-skilled, highly efficient, highly effective sector, but it is also a lean sector. It has a reputation for doing the best that it can with the resources that it has got. It has a strong history of looking at how, with the resources that have been invested in it, it can identify new and innovative ways to use them better. But that means that, in some ways, it can be a little bit at risk.

This is one of the issues I wanted to flag—to make sure that we maintain and support the strong sector so that we do not find ourselves in a bit of a house of cards. This was very much brought to the attention of this sector just at the beginning of May. The sector is partially funded by the federal department of health. Some funding has been withdrawn from services, and it really put the sector into a bit of a spin and a bit of a crisis in terms of what are the most important investments and how can we keep ourselves as open.

This flags an opportunity for us to prevent future harms; to look at how we can make sure we strengthen and support the services that we have; to make sure that the Canberra community can get the support that it needs; and to make sure that the sector

is meeting the needs of the community.

We have identified within the budget, because drug money can be hidden within it, areas where there might be potential investments. We are not suggesting that there have not been any investments, although there have not been any explicit investments—just that it might require further clarification. We very much stand ready to work with the ACT government and other stakeholders to work out where those investments have been made and to talk about what investment and resourcing priorities there are.

The sector did make a submission—ATODA made a submission to the budget process—where several of those priorities were identified. They include a range of things across various types of areas, such as the alcohol ignition interlock program; tobacco management and support for vulnerable groups, including staff and detainees at the AMC; a tertiary outreach clinic on the north side of Canberra; a primary needle and syringe program on the north side of Canberra; blood-borne virus management in the Alexander Maconochie Centre; and expanding opiate maintenance therapy on the north side. As you will see, there is a bit of a trend in terms of the north side of Canberra. This sector has very much identified that there is a bit of a glut of services on the south side; we would really like to work collaboratively to make sure all Canberrans can access the drug treatment and support they need.

MR SMYTH: It is the wrong committee to tell there is a glut on the south side.

THE CHAIR: There are two north-siders here. Thank you very much, Ms Fowlie. That is a great opening statement. One of the questions relates to what you have said already. You have made the point that it is often hard to get new services funded, let alone maintain funding at its current level. What do you think are some of the reasons behind it? Do you think it is because it is an area where there often is that stigma attached to it? Or do you think it is just a matter where perhaps, as you said, because it is a sector that operates very leanly in the ACT, it is just taken as a given that that will occur? I am just wondering what you think might be some of the reasons behind why the sector faces those difficulties in terms of funding.

Ms Fowlie: In many ways the drug and alcohol area—at least the treatment and support sector part of it—is very much a linchpin related to a whole bunch of other work. If we look at prisons, mental health, care and protection or housing, we see that all those systems very much rely on a strong drug treatment sector. Often it is a quiet sector that just gets on with its business, for a lot of the reasons that you raised—because of the stigma that it is attached to it. Sometimes it is not such a glamorous place to invest, but it is an extremely important place to invest. We know that the return on investment in this sector is very good, and there is strong data to support that. I am happy to provide further information to the committee, but as an example, for needle and syringe programs, every dollar invested gives us \$4 back to the community.

THE CHAIR: It would be great if we could have that data too, please. In relation to that, you have mentioned that often the sector crosses over with other sectors. Mental health is one of them, in particular. I know that there has been an ongoing debate, but there is the integration with mental health and drugs and alcohol in terms of policy. There are a lot of people supporting that. Do you think that is a good thing? If you

cannot fund the specific drug programs in the budget, do you think there is a need for that separation or that that joint policy work is a good thing?

Ms Fowlie: I think that it is very important that the sectors work strongly together. There is lots of overlap, but at the same time there is lots of difference. A particular difference in term of drugs and alcohol is the criminality that is associated with it that does not go with mental health. That really underpins every part of it—whether or not people access treatment, the nature of the treatment, whether or not people want to work in the sector. And there are things in it to consider as they relate, say, very specifically, to crime prevention.

In the ACT drug strategy, as with the national drug strategy, we look across things across supply reduction, demand reduction and harm reduction. That is a facet that is something to be very proud of, both in Australia and the ACT, that is unique to the drug sector as opposed to, say, the mental health sector.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. Mr Hargreaves.

MR HARGREAVES: Thanks very much. Nice to see you again, Carrie.

Ms Fowlie: Yes; you too.

MR HARGREAVES: I enjoyed your company earlier today. It was good. Thanks for the lecture too, by the way.

I want to explore something that you have just mentioned and that you talked about this morning too. For the benefit of others, we are talking about the hep C issue and the needle exchange issue in the AMC. You mentioned, I think now but certainly this morning, that there is a return on investment if we do these sorts of things.

I have got a couple of questions here. I guess the background is about successful re-entry programs for people going through the corrections environment as a return on investment magnified by the level of success that you have. Firstly, do you see the needle exchange program being a corrective services issue or a health issue? Secondly, if that is not a successful program, will that put the return on investment in the corrective systems at risk?

Ms Fowlie: Our view is that prisoner health is public health; it is not one area's particular problem or responsibility, but is everyone's problem and responsibility. So the health of our prisoners is very much the health of our brothers, our sisters, our mothers, our neighbours. And the work we do to support people to be healthy and well in the community needs to be equivalent in the AMC.

The investments that we have seen in NSPs have been one of the greatest public health stories in Australia, and something that, as a community, we can be incredibly proud of. There is a story that Dr Alex Wodak tells. He compares New South Wales and New York, because they have a comparable population. The needle and syringe programs are implemented in New South Wales, but not in New York. Often, when we talk about prisoner health, there are different views in the community about whether people care about prisoners' health or not, but the great part of this story is

that it actually goes on to the children—in this case, the children of injecting drug users. [What they found was that in New York there were 17,000 children who had acquired HIV/AIDS that could be tracked to injecting drug use, whereas in New South Wales they found 45.](#)

That really highlights the impact that the community can feel in terms of some of the benefits of that. I am happy to send that to you. It is from a needle and syringe program, a review of the evidence that was funded by the Department of Health and Ageing.

THE CHAIR: That would be great. Thank you.

MR HARGREAVES: So I could take it, then, that you consider this to be in the harm minimisation and the health sphere?

Ms Fowlie: Yes.

MR HARGREAVES: And not in the corrections sphere?

Ms Fowlie: Yes.

MR HARGREAVES: Thanks, Carrie.

THE CHAIR: Ms Hunter.

MS HUNTER: Ms Fowlie, I would like to thank you for the survey you have sent back, because you have given us a whole lot of questions that we can go on to ask the departments that are involved. You have identified things like mental health growth funding and how much is in there for comorbidity issues. They are really good questions around trying to break down within budget allocations what is actually going to go to the alcohol, tobacco and other drugs sector and area. Thank you for that.

The other thing I wanted to touch on was the \$200,000 that will be reduced from the annual budget that comes into the alcohol, tobacco and other drugs sector in the ACT from the federal Department of Health and Ageing. Was that to a particular project, or was it across programs?

Ms Fowlie: The ACT had an allocation, and that allocation has been reduced. We are still following up in terms of some of the specific details in terms of how things have fallen, because the contracts have not yet been finalised and signed with treatment services. I would have to follow up with you in terms of providing more information. That is a guesstimate in terms of what we think the entire ACT allocation will be down by.

MS HUNTER: Which obviously is a concern?

Ms Fowlie: Yes, it is.

MS HUNTER: That there will be fewer services delivered.

Ms Fowlie: It is, yes.

MS HUNTER: Were they delivered at the hospital or were they community-based care?

Ms Fowlie: Community based. All the federal funding is through the non-government treatment grants program, so it is for non-government services.

MS HUNTER: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I think that the therapeutic community funding with Karralika has been sorted. Is that right?

Ms Fowlie: In the prison?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Fowlie: Yes, it has.

THE CHAIR: That is good. I know that was one of the programs that had been effective.

Ms Fowlie: Yes. The sector has had a tumultuous month in terms of having some of the funding disappear.

THE CHAIR: It has indeed.

Ms Fowlie: But fortunately much of it returned.

THE CHAIR: That is fine. Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: I notice in your response to the committee's questionnaire that you say that 20 per cent of the respondents at the AMC actually took up smoking while they were at the AMC. Given it is a controlled environment there, shouldn't we be using the opportunity while people are incarcerated to try and get them off smoking rather than have them take it up?

Ms Fowlie: Yes. We have been calling in our last two budget submissions for there to be a workplace tobacco management program implemented at the AMC. The smoking levels of the population of the AMC, both staff and clients, are completely unacceptable. The smoking rate we have in the community is about 11 per cent. We are winning in Australia on that, and we should be extremely proud, but the smoking rates we are seeing in the AMC community are completely unacceptable and we should have a range of strategies to support people to reduce or stop smoking.

MR SMYTH: Do we have any detail as to the number of prisoners at the AMC who have actually got themselves off drugs while they are in the AMC, or do we have a similar number as to how many have taken up drug use in the AMC?

Ms Fowlie: We approached the Health Directorate. There was an inmate health

survey done and there was a summary report that was done, and a lot of those questions such as those you have raised cannot really be answered. So we have asked for a secondary analysis to be done of the data, to produce a paper that specifically looks at drugs, as is committed to in the summary report—that there will be a series of summary reports on mental health, drug and alcohol, dental health, disability and other. I understand there is interest in that, so hopefully that report will be able to answer those questions for us.

MR SMYTH: Okay. Are smoking rates in the ACT going up or going down?

Ms Fowlie: Going down.

MR SMYTH: And alcohol abuse?

Ms Fowlie: Across Australia and the ACT the picture is looking quite good. Across alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, things are stabilising or reducing. It provides us, I guess, an opportunity to kind of step back and say: what is the evidence telling us? Where are some of the needs? Where can we catch our breath? Where are the best investments for us to make? One of the things that I really wanted to flag with you is to make sure that we invest where the need is. Often in the area of drugs and alcohol, some of the choices can be knee jerk. At ATODA we are very much committed to supporting people to make evidence-informed decisions and part of our role is to support all stakeholders in the community to do that.

MR SMYTH: Other drugs, so cannabis and harder drugs: is drug use there going up or down?

Ms Fowlie: Most drug use has been stabilising. What I can do is pass on to you the extent of harms report that is due out. There is a draft that has been commissioned by the Health Directorate. This is why I am just a bit in-between on that. I understand it is in draft and pending, and that can give you a complete summary of all the new drug trends that have come out.

MR SMYTH: All right. And hep C is on the rise or decreasing?

Ms Fowlie: Hep C rates are concerning in the ACT. We need to make sure, both in the community and in closed environments such as prisons and others, that we do what we can and that we know what works to reduce the incidence of hepatitis C. If you like, I can also forward you some specific details on that.

MR SMYTH: Good. Thank you.

MS HUNTER: Has ATODA had direct discussions with government about the proposal for a needle and syringe program in the AMC? And have you had discussions with the CPSU?

Ms Fowlie: We have had discussions with lots of stakeholders in terms of it. Needle and syringe programs are very much the core business of our sector; we do them every day all the time in a range of settings. So it is not an unfamiliar conversation for us to have. We had a session at our conference last year dedicated to it. We had a

discussion this morning—it is Drug Action Week and I would like to thank Mr Hargreaves for joining us this morning for the launch—so we talk to people all the time about it. We have not had any specific one on one meetings with the CPSU about it but we very much see this as part of a suite of programs that should be implemented in the prison environment. We need comprehensive drug treatment and support programs and this is just one of a whole suite of what we need to do.

THE CHAIR: Mr Coe.

MR COE: I have a question about the overall strategy regarding tobacco and smoking. What do you see as the next steps in terms of regulations or legislation? We have seen a lot in terms of public space, but I was wondering whether you have any views about where to next.

Ms Fowlie: Where to next is in regard to vulnerable populations. We have done incredibly well across the general population, but we are failing dismally in terms of vulnerable populations. [As an example, we have a 98 per cent smoking rate in some drug treatment services](#) and then 11 per cent in the population. That kind of disparity is unacceptable. We have had a really good run on successful public health initiatives, both legislative and other types of initiatives, but now we are challenged to look at how can we do things a little bit better, how we can target services well, and I would highlight some of the investments and work that have been done by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services here in the ACT; for example, Winnunga’s “no more boondah” program that has been around for a long time. I think there are lots of lessons in that for us as a community in terms of investing in tobacco management and support for vulnerable populations.

MR COE: So you are saying that you see it as more education as opposed to legislation?

Ms Fowlie: Yes. I think it is targeted education, treatment and support. Some of the initiatives that have happened through the PBS, putting nicotine replacement therapy on the PBS, have been very useful in terms of supporting people on lower incomes to be able to access, in this case, nicotine treatment.

MR COE: Does ATODA advocate turning public space and public places, such as city centres, into smoke-free environments?

Ms Fowlie: Our approach to it is one about tobacco management and taking people with you. This is often an area where, if we are not careful, people can stick in their corners. We just went through a big process with the drug and alcohol sector, the mental health sector and the youth sector, with nine pilot sites across the three sectors, to look at how in each of those services we could implement a workplace tobacco management policy and through that was a process where each environment could deal with the specific challenges that they have.

Sometimes the legislative angle just does not work because, say, the smoking area has to be 25 metres away and that ends up being in the middle of the road. This gave people an opportunity to participate in the process and at the end of the process we had workers doubling their quit attempts, people just taking it as a given that they did

not smoke at work anymore—a real change of culture—and also them engaging with their clients in terms of how they talk about tobacco and whether or not it is seen as acceptable and when and where. So there were some really good outcomes through that type of process work about smoke-free environments.

MR COE: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: You have just talked about the program which you are looking to get up and running and you mentioned vulnerable groups. Have you done any work with other groups like the Cancer Council on how to target specific groups? I know amongst single mothers there is a really high rate of smoking. So have you done any work with other groups to look at how you can jointly approach this issue?

Ms Fowlie: Yes. The ACT alcohol, tobacco and other drug strategy last year formed a tobacco working group, of which I am co-chair with the Health Directorate, and that group has very much focused on vulnerable groups. It has also been an opportunity to kind of pull together the different arms of tobacco. There are regulatory arms, there are health arms, there are different community services arms, so it is a chance to pull everyone together. Vulnerable groups are very much a priority within that, as are the achievements that have been done through the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tobacco control strategy. Those have also been very good.

THE CHAIR: And are other groups like the Cancer Council involved with that?

Ms Fowlie: Yes, as are the University of Canberra and other stakeholders like that.

THE CHAIR: Great. As there are no further questions, thank you very much, Ms Fowlie, for appearing before the committee today. We do appreciate it. And if you can send through the information you mentioned to the committee secretary that would be great.

Ms Fowlie: Yes.

THE CHAIR: A transcript of the hearing will be sent to you to check for accuracy.

Ms Fowlie: Thank you very much for the opportunity, and I just remind everyone that it is Drug Action Week and I encourage you all to get along to activities throughout the week.

THE CHAIR: We will indeed.

MORISON, MR RUSS, President, South East Tuggeranong Residents Association
KING, MR WAYNE, Chairman, Chisholm Community Park Committee
TSOULIAS, MR NICK, Media and Public Officer, South East Tuggeranong Residents Association

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Morison, Mr Tsoulias and Mr King for appearing before the estimates committee into the budget for 2012-13. You are also obviously here on behalf of the South East Tuggeranong Residents Association.

Mr Morison: Correct.

THE CHAIR: I just want to make you aware of the fact that the proceedings are being broadcast today and I draw your attention to the privilege statement which is on the blue card in front of you. All three of you are aware of that? If you can just indicate that you have been able to see that? Okay. Before we go to questions from the committee, I would like to invite one of you, if you wish, to make an opening statement.

Mr Morison: I was elected on Sunday as the chair of the South East Tuggeranong Residents Association, which involves the residents living south of Isabella Drive. If our presentation seems a little bit light on detail it is because we are here on short notice and because we have not been to a committee meeting of this nature before, but we are keen to provide you with some quality information. We do not have all the facts, even after burning the budget midnight candle a few nights ago, but we do have some issues that we would like to discuss. What I propose to do this afternoon, if I may, is to introduce Wayne, who is the chair of the Chisholm community park, and then I will talk about the specific public transport and mobile library issues.

Mr King: My major concern is the Chisholm community park, a park which is at the corner of Deamer and Heagney. The government have been fighting for the last 10 years to take that block of land off the community for different reasons. This is the third time it has come up. The community on the last two occasions said that they wanted the park to be left as a park. The government have come back again and are fighting very strongly to have the land basically split up and sold off to a developer to put 22 units on it. I have been out in the community for the last couple of weeks campaigning with signatures that we have for our petition and also for a questionnaire that we had. The questionnaire was just asking people whether they were interested in having units or whatever on the park. The community have come out together and said, "No, we just want our park to be left alone."

My major concern is the fact that the government is spending so much time and wasting so much money on coming back to the community when it is quite clear that the community is saying, "Leave our block of land alone." It is not that the community is against infill or residential development, but there are other blocks that have been tagged in Chisholm for other types of development. There are other blocks around Chisholm that have: "This site is up for development". The argument that the government keeps on coming back to us with is this: "Well, we've had a sign sitting up there for 10 years that said this has been up for development." The original sign was up there 20 years ago. It fell over and rusted away. I believe back then it was up for a corner shop and a doctors surgery.

Recently the government planted 10 mature age trees just off to the side of the block where they proposed to move the children's playground to and less than a week later they came and dug them out. Okay, they were planted there, but to turn around a week later and rip them out? I know when I spoke to the Chief Minister on Chief Minister's talkback she said, "Oh, look, they've been relocated." But I was there; I saw them being pulled out. There were a lot of trees on the ground that were dead. They were not going back in anywhere. That is my main issue.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr King.

Mr Morison: Thank you, Madam Chair. I also want to introduce Nick Tsoulas, who is our media liaison and public officer for SETRA. He will be wanting to talk in a minute as well. I want to talk about the fact that the government's policy in 2011-12 was to build some park and ride facilities, in particular in Calwell, Kippax and Molonglo. Obviously we have got a particular interest in the Calwell site. We also note the government's policy and that its key principle was to locate these park and rides on transport corridors on the way to work. Calwell is one such corridor. In excess of about 14,000 cars morning and evening use that particular corridor.

We were originally told that work was to commence at Calwell in March 2012. But the RTA told us on Sunday at our community meeting that they have not yet gone to open tender and it would depend on whether they were able to achieve value for money. The community came away feeling that it might not happen at all. We notice that last financial year \$4.2 million was allocated for park and rides. There has been a feasibility study done. The problem for us is that we cannot see a line entry. We have looked for the rollover budget, and we cannot see that either, for those particular park and rides. The community would like an assurance that these park and rides will go ahead.

As an additional point to that, the way this particular site has been chosen seems to have been a little bit short-sighted. If park and rides are tied in with public transport and mass movement of passengers to their workplaces, it is quite likely that this will grow exponentially, like the Mawson site did. In relation to that, we have also had a very quick look at a site at the junction of the two roads, Tharwa Drive and Johnston Drive. We have not pursued this yet, but we intend asking further questions about that to see whether that might be a better site. Something like 24,000 cars go through that particular intersection, and that does not include anyone coming from Cooma along the Monaro Highway. We think there is certainly a need for park and rides in Canberra, particularly in the Calwell-Chisholm area. We are keen to see that go ahead, but we do not see an assurance of it. That is the first issue. Can I go to the second one now?

MR HARGREAVES: Before you get off that one, if I may, I am just interested in that park and ride alternative proposal that you have. Whilst I do not have to deal with it, I would be interested in your views and particularly Nick's, with respect, because Nick is at the Calwell shopping centre. If you change the locality of the park and ride too far away from where the buses are going to interchange at—because, as I understand it, the idea is to make Calwell shops one of the minor interchange things—will that have a negative effect on people getting on those buses and, therefore, have

not so many people going through the shopping centre after and before work?

Mr Tsoulias: I think it is about accessibility, in fairness, and having an outcome on this park and ride for all walks of life—those with a disability and seniors. Whilst it is an option, something that would be considered a best practice model would be having a larger scale park and ride. That would be the broader dynamic to service a greater population—south Tuggeranong. Obviously the constraints of the budget would not meet that at this point in time. But if we were serious about park and ride, the budget would certainly need to be enhanced to accommodate a larger scale park and ride, as Russell suggested. I would call it the best practice option, with your security and your car battery swapping plants and stations et cetera. There is a lot of interest to get this park and ride up and running. The residents are really asking us questions on the park and ride for Calwell. Certainly, we are doing our best to work with the government and all the parties as well to try and get this up and running.

With passing trade, obviously Calwell is on the outer parts of Tuggeranong. The commercial area and retail space does not equate to Lanyon or Chisholm or Erindale or some other areas, or even Westfield Woden with 30,000 square metres and, as was only announced this week, proposed expansions. So what we have is what we already have. We are constrained and limited to what we can do at Calwell. Calwell is not about me or the residents association or the Calwell shops. It is about the residents that service this area and how they can access better services—public transport, health et cetera. We are trying to bring all these into an area which would not be a burden on running that part of Tuggeranong. We would not want to double dip on public transport, we would not want to double dip on medical centres and we would not want to double dip on pedestrian paths and getting all the infrastructure laid out.

Just to finish up on my point, a few years ago the government spent \$11 million in Lanyon on infrastructure and a lot of other amenities. We believe that the Calwell park and ride will be integral to job creation and servicing the local schools and meeting public transport demands as well.

MR HARGREAVES: The distance between the proposed alternative and the shopping centre, is that going to create a disincentive for people to use public transport around there? I remember—if I am not wrong—the plea that you made out to have the medical centre reinstated within the shopping centre, and it was, and it is great.

Mr Morison: Yes.

MR HARGREAVES: But a lot of that is dependent on a lot of people using it and being able to access the centre. Is that going to enhance the access to the centre or is it going to work to its detriment because it is so far away?

Mr Morison: I actually do not think it will impact things greatly. It is really a convenience issue. If we put a park and ride in behind the Calwell shops adjacent to the Calwell club, people are still going to get in there. They are not going to walk across to the shop. Invariably they will get in the car and drive around the corner and pull up in the existing car park in the shopping complex. It is about half a kilometre from that parking site that we have briefly mentioned to get along Johnston Drive and

back to Calwell shops. The shopping centre is the closest major shopping complex in the area, so we do not think—

MR HARGREAVES: Do you think they will get off the bus, get into their car and go to the shops?

Mr Morison: I think they are going to do that. The reason I say they are going to do that is because they are going to do it anyway, regardless of whether we put it in behind the Calwell club or we put it down the road. We are trying to make it a much more effective and much better value proposition. You have got something like 13,000 to 15,000 cars going down Tharwa Drive coming from Lanyon and a similar number of cars coming down the other one. Some would argue that you really need two park and rides—one at that apex and then you have got the additional feeder coming in from Cooma—the Cooma traffic—Royalla and so on. That seems to make a lot more sense. I have to say that we have not talked about this significantly, but in principle we think that it needs to be investigated further.

THE CHAIR: Just on that, and a lot of people use Mawson as the example, and you did as well, do you think that moving the location—and this is just to get your views on it—would have any impact on safety issues and that sort of thing in terms of being located near where there are shops and the like? Do you think that would have any impact if it was moved to another location?

Mr Tsoulias: It would have an impact, yes. Obviously a realistic model would be an introduction park and ride. I think what Russ is talking about would be a succession park and ride. I am sure this would be the best practice model.

THE CHAIR: When you said that yes, you think it would have an impact, do you think it would have an impact on improving safety or would it actually have a negative impact on safety?

Mr Tsoulias: Having it up the road? Obviously it would have a negative impact on the running of park and ride. Obviously we have all the stops at Calwell and at the group centres. What we are saying is that the park and rides should be a feeder, so if there is going to be one at Erindale it will feed into Mawson. So you would have Calwell, Erindale and Mawson with the current scale park and ride. I think what has happened at Mawson is something that is not realistically achievable. The best practice model that Russ is talking about is something that could succeed down the track. We would support a succession park and ride of that scale. As a shopping centre, we would first like to see the park and ride be developed as it is—

THE CHAIR: As is planned?

Mr Morison: Yes, as planned.

THE CHAIR: Great. Thank you.

Mr Morison: At the point where that park and ride needs to expand in the same way Mawson does, we would be looking at the potential to relocate somewhere else. If I may, I would like to now just switch, unless you have any other questions about park

and ride?

THE CHAIR: Are there any questions on that? No.

MR HARGREAVES: I was only wondering about security of cars and people.

Mr Morison: Sure.

THE CHAIR: No, keep going. Thank you, Mr Morison.

Mr Morison: The other one is about a mobile library stop in the area, in the catchment. In March 2010 I wrote to the manager of library services. At the time, I was tied up with the Theodore Neighbourhood Watch. I asked about adding additional stops for Theodore and Calwell. The answer I got was that any changes to the mobile stops would involve a detailed needs assessment across all communities in the ACT.

We have now got a situation where the land has been sold in Isabella Plains and Calwell for an aged care centre. Aged care centres are obviously going to mean a market there for the elderly people to be able to go to the library. Some of them will not have vehicle access; therefore relocating a mobile library stop to those two sites would be advantageous and would achieve a lot for those particular people.

I notice this letter does not say anything about conducting a detailed needs assessment. The question I have is: is it possible to fund a needs assessment taking into account the future growth of this particular area?

MR HARGREAVES: Are you aware of the home library service?

Mr Morison: I have heard of that, yes.

MR HARGREAVES: That is particularly for the elderly who are in their own home. We do not want them to be isolated in those homes, so they can actually talk to the library service on the telephone or online and have the books delivered and picked up again. It is one of those complimentary services: the mobile library will turn up and people can go for a limited perusal or, if they have a particular genre that they like, they can tell the library service and it will talk to the client and say: "These are the sorts of things that are available to you. Just let us know." It is free.

Mr Morison: I have heard about it. I have seen both of them operating up in Queensland and they are very effective; there is no doubt about that.

THE CHAIR: The good thing with the mobile library is that it does provide the opportunity for people to get out as well.

Mr Morison: It gets people out and if they do not have a computer they can see a selection of books.

THE CHAIR: And have a bit of social interaction.

Mr Morison: Yes, the interaction with the librarian and so on. That is the other issue

I wanted to raise.

THE CHAIR: Did you want to say anything further, Mr Tsoulias?

Mr Tsoulias: We are all new and fresh faced here, so obviously—

MR HARGREAVES: That is a bold statement. We have known each other for a long time. It is a very bold statement.

Mr Tsoulias: Yes, we go around in circles sometimes, but it is always good to see that you are open to meeting with us in other areas in the ACT and at other events, the TCC meetings. Certainly what we represent here are not necessarily our personal views but the views of the residents. We are adamant that we want to see the park and ride, and I will carry on about that. It is important that we address that and hopefully it is something that we will see achieved this year.

What I am worried about if we do not commence something is how much the costings will actually increase; will the budget require a lot more funding next year or this year if we are going to meet park and rides in the ACT? I also speak for the Kippax group centre as well, who have been meeting over the course of last year.

I know Meredith and Amanda were at Kippax last year and we met with the owners. Paul Peters from ACTION had mentioned that we could see commencement of a park and ride at Kippax by April this year. When in April we did not see a Kippax park and ride developed, alarm bells started ringing. We need a bit further clarity on it. Last year it was announced, but this year it is costing that much more.

Coffee these days has gone up, drinks have gone up, food has gone up and petrol has gone up. So is the announcement in the budget the true value of park and rides or will it need to be adjusted to factor in perhaps other costs involved in getting to the park and ride development? If we do not see it this year, how much will our park and ride be next year? What I want to know is: is that funding there to meet five park and rides or six park and rides? How many park and rides will \$4.2 million provide the ACT with? I would like to know that, please.

MR HARGREAVES: It would be a fair thing to suggest too, though, that if you did move it to a site further away from the shopping centre—the other ones are actually clustered around a major one, Mawson being the most obvious example, as the chair said—there would be a need for additional security, and lighting would need to be enhanced. Do you think it would not be too much a stretch of the imagination to think that that one may in fact be more expensive than the standard—

Mr Morison: That may cost \$5 million on its own, having it up there. But I am just talking about the current proposal, the one—

MS HUNTER: I think they are good questions, and I know the committee will be pleased to take those up with the directorates. Each park and ride, because of its own features or whatever or where it is sited, would probably have a slightly different cost, but I think that is a really good question: how many are they hoping to achieve, and which ones, and do we have a priority list? You are right about Kippax. We were

sitting there talking that through last year. I wrote off to the former Chief Minister around a particular site and was told that they were designing it and it was underway.

Mr Tsoulias: Yes.

MS HUNTER: So it is a good one to say, “Well, where is it up to?”

THE CHAIR: Mr Smyth, I know you are waiting. I did notice you looking then, so I do apologise.

MR SMYTH: Thank you. The pool site at Calwell: is the pool still likely to proceed?

Mr Tsoulias: Yes, that is likely to go ahead. Phil King is going to develop that. However, Phil King is selling off his Kingswim pools in the ACT. One of his final developments will be the Calwell Kingswim. He is going into childcare, moving away and setting up childcare. We are fortunate to have been approached by Phil, who is also looking at bringing a childcare centre to that part of Tuggeranong and, I am sure, other areas in the ACT as well.

At the moment that is not a priority because the way the land is zoned at the moment it is very difficult to get anything up other than transport. I know the master plan has been prioritised in the recent motion in the Assembly last year. I would go one step further and bring that priority level to a high priority level; if we want to achieve a childcare centre we will have to seriously consider changing some of the zones there to allow that to be developed. He is ready to build one but unfortunately there is the process involved, the statutory process and the changing of all the zonings of the area.

We are fortunate to have the aged care centre built, but building the pool where it is, with a 1991 car park, will not really help decongest the area. This is why a park and ride hopefully will alleviate the problems with the existing car park. It will move away the existing park and ride, which is full every day. That will be at a permanent location on the other side of the Calwell shops. It will also entice people to use public transport. If we do not have this in our area, people will still continue to use cars and they will still continue to bottleneck Ashley Drive at 23,000 cars a day, which Tony Gill mentioned at the TCC meeting last week. It is the busiest inner suburban road outside of Drakeford Drive. There are a lot of challenges facing that road, and I do understand the Tuggeranong Community Council is lobbying to have that road duplicated in due course.

Deane’s Transit Group have set up a new service from Cooma which uses Johnson Drive and Ashley Drive services. They are looking to also support dropping off passengers at that existing bus stop on Johnson Drive, so the park and ride will act as a multi-role park and ride, so it will be unlike many other park and rides. Hopefully it will also be servicing private operators, so that will encourage perhaps even tourist coaches to come through.

The broader visionary picture that we have is to engage with the weekend Tuggeranong Homestead markets. They do not have any parking, and we believe the park and ride, which is sitting empty on Saturdays and Sundays, could act as a parking lot for the homestead markets and the Lions, for which parking would otherwise be in

the grounds of the homestead.

THE CHAIR: Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: I have a question for Wayne: are there any results out yet from the survey of what the community wants for that block?

Mr King: We have not published anything as such, but from the surveys that I saw—I think nearly the whole lot, 100-odd surveys—one person said that they would be happy to see maybe a Chisholm-size block go on that piece of land. Everybody else has said: “Leave it. It’s a community park for our children. If you take this park away from our children, our children will have to play in the streets.” I know the government are saying that there is a little tiny patch of dirt at the back where they took the trees away. That patch of dirt is not much bigger than half this room and the community are worried that if you put swings in that area it will become a haven for drugs and alcohol misuse. That is why people walk two and three blocks from other smaller parks in the community to go to this large park, because of that problem.

One lady said, “I can’t take my child across the road to the park outside my house because there are syringes in the dirt near the swings. Yet I can walk two blocks up to Heagney and Deamer, where there’s a great big open space.” The reason that park is so good is that you have got two main roads that it is visible from, and the police drive down those roads on regular basis, and then you have got all those houses along Deamer and Heagney, plus the ones at the back that can view that.

I know that around schoolies time you will get a few kids over in the park; they will be having a couple of beers and they might make a bit of noise, but someone will flash a light on at the back door or in the house, and the kids settle down. It is funny; it is the only park I have ever seen where you will go over the next day and see that the kids have picked up all their bottles and put them in a box. I could not believe it, but that has happened on a couple of occasions. Normally you would go to a park and there would be glass smashed all over the ground, but, no, there have been boxes of beer bottles and stuff.

I am not condoning drinking, but they have got pride in this park, even the kids. The other day I was at the Chisholm shops collecting signatures and a whole group—of I will say 18 year olds; they could have been a little bit younger—said, “We want to keep this park because it is a good place for us to go; we like it.” That is what it is all about; these were young people under 20.

MR SMYTH: I saw in the *Chronicle* this week you had an observatory day there?

Mr King: We did. We set up a telescope in the park so that people could come along and have a look at the transit of Venus. The ABC got hold of it and publicised it. FM 104.7 told everybody about it. We also set up a larger telescope in the park at night because it is the closest thing we have got to being in the bush—in the middle of the suburb—without going out in the bush. I go to Mount Stromlo and my view from that park is just as good if not better than I get at Mount Stromlo. If we take that away from the community it is going to be a very, very sad loss.

THE CHAIR: As there are no further questions and we are unfortunately out of time, I thank you all very much for coming to the committee. I hope it was a not too negative experience for you, the first time appearing before a committee. A transcript of the hearing will be sent to you for you to check for accuracy. Thank you once again for appearing before the committee. We do appreciate it.

Mr Morison: Thank you.

Mr Tsoulias: Terrific. Thank you very much.

The committee adjourned at 3.30 pm.