



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, 29 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.

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Privilege statement

The Committee has authorised the recording, broadcasting and re-broadcasting of these proceedings.

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Amended 9 August 2011

The committee met at 9.04 am.

Appearances:

Burch, Ms Joy, Minister for Community Services, Minister for the Arts, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Women and Minister for Gaming and Racing

Community Services Directorate

Howson, Ms Natalie, Acting Director-General

Overton-Clarke, Ms Bronwen, Executive Director, Policy and Organisational Services

Sheehan, Ms Maureen, Deputy Director-General, Housing and Community Services

Matthews, Mr David, Senior Director, Governance, Advocacy and Community Policy, Policy and Organisational Services

Collett, Mr David, Executive Director, Housing and Community Services

Hubbard, Mr Ian, Senior Director, Finance and Budget, Policy and Organisational Services

Manikis, Mr Nic, Director, Office of Multicultural, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

Hyland, Mr Bob, Financial Controller, Housing and Community Services

Wensing, Ms Veronica, Office for Women

ACT Gambling and Racing Commission

Jones, Mr Greg, Chief Executive

Economic Development Directorate

Gilding, Ms Louise, Acting Executive Director, Ministerial, Cabinet and Policy

THE CHAIR: Welcome, Minister Burch, in your capacity, again, as Minister for Community Services this morning. Welcome to this 10th public hearing of the Select Committee on Estimates 2012-2013. The Legislative Assembly has referred to the committee for examination the expenditure proposals in the Appropriation Bill 2012-13 and the revenue estimates in the 2011-12 budget. The committee is due to report to the Assembly on 14 August 2012.

The committee has resolved that all questions on notice will be lodged with the Committee Office within three business days of receipt of the uncorrected proof transcript, with day one being the first business day after the transcript is received. Answers to questions on notice will be lodged with the Committee Office within five business days of receipt of the question, with day one being the first business day after the transcript is received. Answers to questions taken on notice will be returned five business days after the hearing at which it was taken, with day one being the first business day after the question was taken.

The proceedings today will commence with an examination of Housing ACT, output class 1, social housing services. We will then go on to consider ageing, multicultural affairs, the status of women, gaming and racing, the Office of the Legislative Assembly and, this afternoon, the Auditor-General.

I draw your attention to the privilege statement on the blue card in front of you. If you can indicate that you are all aware of the implications and the information in that. Thank you. Just so everyone is aware, the proceedings are being broadcast today. Minister, before we go to questions, would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms Burch: Thank you, Ms Bresnan. I also thank you for the opportunity to answer questions on the Appropriation Bill. Before I start, I would just like to thank the executive and the staff of the Community Services Directorate and Housing for the work that they did over the 12 months.

Turning first to Housing, the ACT was the first jurisdiction to complete its commitments under the nation building and jobs plan—a significant achievement where we delivered 421 social housing properties, which was over 100 more than our initial target. In the past 12 months we have continued to construct more public housing. As at 31 May Housing ACT had a portfolio of 11,848 properties and it is projected to be 11,862 by the financial year's end. This is up from 11,805 from 30 June last year.

As well as building new homes, we are improving existing homes. In 2007-08 the government committed \$20 million over 10 years for energy efficiency measures in public housing, and in 2011-12 we provided an additional \$8 million over four years, while this year there is an extra \$2 million. So far improvements have been undertaken to 4,400 properties. We have also completed key reforms to youth homelessness, with the new services commencing last autumn. The key focus here is to reintegrate young people with their families and to encourage them to continue with employment, training and education.

In addition to improving and increasing our housing stock, the government has delivered new and improved community facilities across Canberra. \$9 million was allocated in the 2011-12 budget to upgrade and provide an additional 173 places to childcare facilities. These improvements have responded to community demand for childcare places. Work on the Flynn early childhood education centre has been completed, while work on stage 2 and the refurbishment of the remainder of the building are well advanced.

Turning to community policy development in the area of ageing, last September Canberra hosted Australia's first older persons assembly. This brought together 70 older people to discuss issues and advise the government on priorities for seniors which will guide the government's action plan for positive ageing over the next three years.

No area demonstrates the directorate's work with the community better than the Office of Multicultural Affairs which, over the 2011-12 financial year, supported over 250 organisations. A major achievement was last November's multicultural jobs roundtable. This highlighted barriers to workforce participation, including lack of both English language skills and a drivers licence. Projects have been implemented to address these barriers.

I cannot overlook the Multicultural Festival, which drew a record crowd of more than

260,000 people, with its mixture of dancing, singing, food and fun. The ACT government continues to demonstrate its support to the community sector and build the capacity for vulnerable members of our community. The government makes a significant investment of around \$130 million per annum in supporting the fundamental work provided by our community partners.

The ACT women's plan 2010-15 articulates the government's commitment to improving outcomes for women and girls across economic, social and environmental areas. The plan provides a reporting framework for undertaking actions which would lead to enhanced data on women and girls.

The women's microcredit program provides women on low incomes with access to interest free loans of up to \$3,000. The program is administered through the Lighthouse Business Innovation Centre, which provides women with access to mentoring, training and networking opportunities. As at May this year 31 loans have been approved since the program commenced. Through the brilliant idea program, local female entrepreneurs have developed innovative business ideas in areas such as allied health, cleaning, cosmetics, education, training, food, recreation, professional services, waste management, fashion, accessories, wearable arts, and arts and cultural products.

The 2004 social compact that articulates the relationship between the ACT government and the community sector has been refreshed, in consultation with our community partners. It is on our website but I am quite happy to table a copy of the new compact now.

There are a couple of other things before we go to questions. There is a correction in relation to a comment made yesterday on the blueprint and its circulation. We have sought clarity on that. It has not gone to formal circulation yet. The draft will be provided to the advisory group and the task force.

Before we go to questions, I reference a media release yesterday by Mrs Dunne. I quote:

The Public Advocate found Joy Burch's Department broke the very laws it administers by allowing unapproved organisations to care for children at risk in our community.

I ask Mrs Dunne to withdraw or to apologise for those hurtful and, indeed, what have now been found to be incorrect statements.

MR SMYTH: Which bit is incorrect? Twenty-four breaches of the law.

Ms Burch: No. Advice has clarified that there were no breaches of the law, Mr Smyth.

THE CHAIR: Minister, this is probably not the appropriate place to be reading that out or to be asking questions about this at this stage. You have read that out nonetheless.

Before we go to questions, let me say this. I should have stated it at the beginning, and

I do apologise. We have got Housing scheduled from 9 till 11. We will probably break for morning tea at 10.45; then we can go to ageing, multicultural and women, scheduled from 11 to 12.

I will go to my first question on Housing. I have a question about the Spotless contract. There were some announcements made, I think a month or so ago, in terms of the contract and people employed—people with disability and in other circumstances who are going to be employed under that contract with Housing. I am just wondering if we could get a bit more information about what are some of the guarantees that are going to be put into the contract with Spotless to make sure that they are giving the required number of hours to people who should be employed under that. Can we just get some more information about how that is going to be put into practice?

Ms Burch: The contract is very clear in its targets, but David Collett can go to detail in the maintenance contracts.

Mr Collett: Thank you for the question. Of course, you are correct: moving from the aspirational targets of the previous contract, we have made it a contract requirement in the new contract that a range of cohorts of people who might otherwise experience difficulty in finding employment are given opportunities under the contract. We are focusing on young people, people with disabilities, public housing tenants and people with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background. There are clear requirements for each of those cohorts in the contract. The first method of control is that this is not an aspiration or a reward for effort basis; this is a contractual requirement, and they will be in default of the contract if they do not comply.

THE CHAIR: What will the actual targets be? Will they be number of hours of work provided? What will the actual target be?

Mr Collett: They are expressed in the contract as full-time employment—a number for each of those cohorts. If Spotless were to come to us with a proposal that showed that there were advantages to the people involved in having part-time employment for any number of those people, we would look at that carefully, but were that to be the case, it would be a variation to the contract. Our requirement is that they are full-time equivalents. If we were to vary that, that would require our agreement.

THE CHAIR: Will that be shown through the number? It is full-time equivalent, but will they be showing that they are actually providing the hours of employment for these people? How are we actually keeping track that this work is being—

Ms Howson: How will they be reporting to us? Is that your question?

THE CHAIR: Obviously I know they will be reporting, but how will it actually be reported? Will they say, “These are the number of people employed; these are the number of hours that they have been given work”? How will it actually be tracked?

Mr Collett: Yes. We will require an acquittal against each of the cohorts that we have specified in the contract. We will require the names of the people that are involved, the hours that they have worked, the training that they have been given and the sorts of activities that they are engaged in.

THE CHAIR: So they will need to provide a record of the hours of work that people are given?

Mr Collett: Yes.

Ms Sheehan: In addition to that, we will report in the annual report, as we have in previous annual reports, on employment of people under the contract. And also Spotless will be required to report to us at the joint consultative committee, which is the major governance arrangement under the contract; Spotless meets with us quarterly and has to report there on all of its key performance indicators.

THE CHAIR: I know that in New South Wales Spotless have the contract and Fair Repairs work with Spotless in New South Wales. Will there be a role for a group like Fair Repairs to do work here in the ACT? I know a bit about them. They are a group that work with people with a disability and mental illness. That is what they do and that is what they provide. Would there be a role for them to provide that sort of service here in the ACT?

Mr Collett: That has not been ruled out. A number of the tenderers came forward with a proposal to directly engage with Fair Repairs. Spotless did not.

THE CHAIR: Sorry; can you just repeat what you just said then. They did not?

Mr Collett: A number of tenderers, other than Spotless, in their tender proposals, put forward a proposition to work with Fair Repairs, so we are aware of those through—

THE CHAIR: And Spotless did not?

Mr Collett: Spotless did not. Spotless came to us with a proposal that they be permitted to do some direct employment, that they provide some of the services under the contract on a direct delivery basis. That would allow them to employ people directly, and it would allow them to offer apprenticeships or training directly rather than through their subcontractors.

One of the reasons why we were attracted to this was that we would like to expand the employment of those cohorts throughout the Spotless organisation. The maintenance contract requires a significant level of licensed employees in the form of electricians, plumbers, carpenters and others. Whilst we would like to achieve targets in that respect, we are aware that, for some of the people in the target cohorts, employment at an entry level, if I could use that expression, would be more suitable.

The other activities that Spotless are engaged in—their catering and cleaning services, for instance—would provide us with even more opportunities for employment. We have already spoken to Spotless, and we will continue to speak to them through the contract, about expanding that employment so that it is not only the mandatory requirements under the contract but the potential to provide employment opportunities in the rest of the Spotless business.

THE CHAIR: I know that Fair Repairs work with Spotless in New South Wales. Was

there any reason why they would not be working with them here? I think it has worked fairly well in New South Wales, from my understanding.

Mr Collett: It was not included in the Spotless tender. The tender evaluation required us to evaluate the documentation that was put before us. I do not know the reason why Spotless did not offer that to us. But it has not been ruled out, and we will talk to Spotless about the possibility of using Fair Repairs.

THE CHAIR: Have you had any discussions with Fair Repairs?

Mr Collett: From memory, they were represented in the presentations that were made by one of the tenderers.

THE CHAIR: So you have not had any individual discussions with them?

Mr Collett: We have not had any direct consultation with them.

Ms Sheehan: Not in the negotiation on this contract. We did have contact with them last year in consideration of whether they might be involved in tendering for some of the subcontracting work for Spotless. But can I emphasise the point that Mr Collett has made: the proposal for Spotless to directly employ over 100 people across all of the cohorts is, in our view, a superior proposition because it enables Spotless to control the number of people and deliver on the number of people rather than having to work through another organisation. And in addition, it provides an opportunity for apprenticeships and other forms of training, because it is a larger organisation and that would be an onerous requirement on a small arrangement. And it enables the potential for employment across the whole of the Spotless organisation.

It is really evidence of the government using its buying power of \$40 million a year in repairs, maintenance and upgrades to really drive some meaningful employment, including education and training and apprenticeships. It is a really strong proposition.

THE CHAIR: There was not any thought, though, given that someone like Fair Repairs—that is actually what they do; they provide employment for people in vulnerable circumstances. If that was going to be a specific requirement of the contract, there was not any thought to having someone like Fair Repairs, who have a track record in doing that, providing that part of the contract?

Mr Collett: We were not unhappy with Spotless's proposal. They are experienced in employing people with disabilities and people with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background. There is no reason for us to single out Fair Repairs. There are a number of different employers that provide employment opportunities for people with disabilities across the spectrum, not only including the maintenance of public housing facilities but across a wide range.

THE CHAIR: I only ask that because I know that Fair Repairs were contracted as part of the subcontract in New South Wales to do that in New South Wales.

Ms Howson: I would just re-emphasise that Fair Repairs have not been ruled out. It would be, I think, logical for us, in the context of our ongoing discussions with

Spotless around the performance on this key performance indicator, to open up a conversation with them about their engagement with Fair Repairs, if that was appropriate.

The point is that we have got a very strong proposition from Spotless. We are not ruling out any employment support provider. Our focus will be on achieving this KPI and delivering meaningful employment outcomes for the target groups. We will work with Spotless to do that. I think anything is on the table in this regard.

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Collett: We would like to see the employment of people from those cohorts brought within the mainstream of employment practice. If there is an identified need for a group like Fair Repairs, we could go through a process. There are, as I say, a number of other providers of employment support for people suffering or experiencing barriers to employment. But we think there is a lot more to be gained by mainstreaming the employment of those people. We do not want to see them as being something separate, something that requires—

THE CHAIR: I guess, to be fair, Fair Repairs provide mainstream employment. They do not set them aside and go, “You’re different.” I only ask because they provided that in New South Wales in connection with Spotless, and my understanding was that it was working well so I was trying to get a sense of why it had not been pursued here.

Ms Howson: I cannot imagine that Spotless would not leverage that relationship if it was going to support the achievement of the KPI.

MR HARGREAVES: I have to go, Madam Chair, so I would like to hand over to Ms Hunter. Ms Porter will be joining you for the stimulation this committee can give her.

MS HUNTER: I want to ask how First Point is going. First of all, I want to know if there have been any concerns about the fact that the service is not provided 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Has that been an issue that has been raised at all?

Ms Sheehan: Thank you, Ms Hunter, for that question. With respect to the 24-hour service, there are a range of services across the ACT which support people in crisis which do span 24 hours. In determining what hours we would have to operate First Point, we did take into consideration what other 24-hour supports there are. I could just quickly say what those are.

The first one is, obviously, the police if it is with respect to safety and criminal activity. With respect to domestic violence, the Domestic Violence Crisis Service has a 24-hour line and workers go out with the police to situations of domestic violence. In addition to that, domestic violence has an MOU with all of the homelessness services so that they are able to place women and children at risk overnight into homelessness services through the on-call arrangement. That is a very important 24-hour support for people experiencing domestic violence. There is Lifeline with respect to counselling. And then, of course, there is the CAT team if it is with respect to a mental health crisis.

So there are a number of 24-hour services. First Point is not one of them. It is also the case that we have to look at the ability to safely place a person in crisis into an accommodation service overnight. With respect to domestic violence, obviously we do have the health and safety of people at risk. Arrangements are made so that people can be placed safely into a service. We were quite comfortable overall that there was considerable coverage across the 24 hours so that First Point could quite effectively operate from within the hours that it does operate.

MS HUNTER: What if it is somebody where it is not a domestic violence situation, not a mental health situation and not a criminal situation but a person who has just found themselves homeless and needing shelter overnight? Lifeline will provide some counselling, but it is not going to be shelter. What happens to the person who is not in those other categories?

Ms Sheehan: First Point does operate until 9 o'clock at night. Obviously there might be some catastrophic event where someone finds themselves without shelter. I would have to say that in our experience, including the experience of homelessness services, First Point and the Domestic Violence Crisis Service, it is not the norm or it is not usually the case that someone only finds themselves in that situation after 9 o'clock at night.

Yes, there will be some crisis situations where First Point cannot be contacted. If a person does find themselves in a crisis situation after 9 o'clock, they need to contact the other services that we have just talked about. Most particularly, if it is a health crisis or if it is a mental health crisis, they need to contact the CAT team or present to the emergency department at the Canberra Hospital. If it is domestic violence, they need to ring the Domestic Violence Crisis Service. And so on.

MS HUNTER: And what happens over the weekend? There would be many people who could probably cope with an overnight—

Ms Sheehan: Sure. First Point does operate through Saturday and to Saturday afternoon, and it is the same situation over the weekend.

THE CHAIR: So there have not been any instances that you have heard of where people have had to look for housing—as Ms Hunter said, not the domestic violence situation, not a mental health situation, but where someone just finds themselves without a home? You have not had any of those instances brought to you where people have not been able to call First Point because it was not available? No organisations have brought complaints to you?

Ms Sheehan: I think it would be fair to say that if we think about the nature of homelessness and crises that might occur there will undoubtedly be some instances on a weekend where someone finds themselves in crisis. When we set up First Point as a central intake service for homelessness services, both the accommodation and the support services, we did not suddenly change our model so that we were able to house anyone at any time 24 hours a day. We have a very well-structured and well-funded homelessness system and we are very proud of the amount of accommodation and support that we are able to provide.

I wish I could say that any person in crisis at any time on any day of the year at any hour could receive an accommodation response, but of course everyone knows that that is not possible. Regrettably, we do have homeless people. But the point is to improve our services all the time and to address the underlying causes of homelessness so that we can reduce the number of people that do find themselves in crisis over time.

MS HUNTER: Does First Point have a shopfront where people can go in—

Ms Sheehan: Yes, it does, and I am very proud to say that shopfront is the central access point, which is located at Nature Conservation House. It is a national first where we have the location of First Point as the central intake service for homelessness services, the housing gateway services, which is the entry portal for Housing.

We have co-located with us the sustaining tenancies program, which supports public housing tenants and private sector tenants to sustain their tenancies, and we do operate as a service system there. So it is not just that we are co-located and people have to navigate their way through different parts of the building; if you come through that front door, you will only have to tell your story once and you will get a coordinated service.

Sorry, a note has just been passed to me. I did say that First Point was open until 9 pm. In fact it is open until 7 pm.

MS HUNTER: Okay. Is there going to be some evaluation of how that is working with the telephone communication end?

Ms Sheehan: Yes, there is.

MS HUNTER: Sometimes when people have to get out of situations they may not have phones or access to phones. I had to find a public phone in the city the other day. They take a little bit of looking for these days, and at 50c a pop not everyone is necessarily going to be able to do that. So what evaluation are you doing on whether there has been a bit of an issue about access with the telephone stuff?

Ms Sheehan: The Australian Catholic University is doing the evaluation of First Point. When I say “doing the evaluation”, everyone is delighted that we have got a central intake service, so they are not evaluating whether we should have a central intake service; importantly, they are looking at the sorts of things that you are talking about. Does that model operate effectively? Are the outreach and accommodation services working together? Are the groups of people that we are providing services to well serviced by that model? Are there some things that we had not previously identified that might be issues for certain groups in that model? Certainly there is reliance on telephones.

Of course there is drop-in, as we just talked about, but reliance on the telephone is one of the things that will be looked at. And does that method of communication better suit young people or women? Those are the sorts of things. We are very confident of

the involvement of the Australian Catholic University. It has been involved in the evaluation of quite a number of different services, including services which are aimed at supporting women and children right across the community services sector. So it is very experienced at doing this sort of thing.

MS HUNTER: And do you keep an eye, or is data collected, on how timely a response is to a person ringing who may be in a crisis situation and homeless? I guess in some cases, particularly with young people, it takes a bit longer, so the response can take some days to get back and there are some issues there about timeliness. That can be about availability of beds—I understand that—but I am just wondering whether you collect that and just monitor the response times.

Ms Sheehan: The first thing that I would need to know in order to take this on notice is: do we keep a record of how long someone has to wait on the telephone for the call to be answered, or do you mean how long—

MS HUNTER: No, how long until they actually get a response, which would be a bed or a service of some kind.

Ms Sheehan: Thank you for that clarification. We certainly do keep information about how long to come back on the issue of the final service. We also keep records on the type of service that is given. For example, if someone rings, saying that they need an accommodation place, it might not be that an accommodation place can be provided but another service will be provided. So our First Point keeps a record of the type of request and the service that was provided. Where there was no service provided, regular contact is made with the person requesting the service to find out how they are going and then what other services can be provided.

I am happy to look into any delays, particularly if there are individual cases that we could be advised about outside of this venue. We would be very happy to look into that.

MS HUNTER: Is that data available about timeliness of response?

Ms Sheehan: The short answer is yes and the longer answer is that First Point is now contributing to the specialist homelessness information platform, which is the new national information system and client management system, which has been rolled out across Australia. Because there are so few central intake services for homelessness services, it has taken us a while to get First Point on to that system, but all of their data has been entered into that system now, with the assistance of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and Infoxchange, which is providing the service nationally. Each service provides their data to the AIHW on a monthly basis, and then—

MS HUNTER: This is to take over from the old SAP data?

Ms Sheehan: It is to take over from that old system. So it is a monthly report to the AIHW. The AIHW has reported back to governments nationally that it is taking around three months to get complete data entered and then they are planning to release a report to states and territories and ministers on a quarterly basis, and then of

course there will be an annual report. So it is a very new system, but we will get almost real-time data on the demand for services and the provision of services.

MS HUNTER: And when will that be available?

Ms Sheehan: The report will be released publicly within the next couple of months and it will come to officials and to ministers within the next month or so.

THE CHAIR: How is First Point going in terms of working with the other sectors, like the youth sector and mental health, because there are housing options in all different sectors? So how is that relationship going?

Ms Sheehan: First Point have—I am going to use the term “memorandum of understanding”; that might not be the terminology that they use—memoranda and agreements with many different services and they make themselves aware of services right across the system, so all of the homelessness services are mandated in their contracts to use First Point as their intake and referral system.

Services in other service systems are not mandated to give their resources to First Point, to be allocated from First Point, but First Point is aware of them. So, for example, if it was the case that someone rang First Point because they needed an accommodation place but First Point were very concerned about their mental health, then First Point would be able to provide a referral or a direct entry into an accommodation service or, say, a non-mental health service, but they would then, because they know about the mental health services, be able to make contact with other services to make sure that the person concerned was receiving the appropriate suite of services.

So in a worst-case scenario First Point cannot directly allocate a bed in a psychiatric inpatient unit, but they can certainly make contact with the CAT team and make sure, if they are very concerned about someone who rings, that they are directed towards the right services.

MR SMYTH: In budget paper 4 on page 382, indicator g, the average cost per dwelling of public housing, the target for the year was \$9,954, and it has come in at \$11,401. The explanation at note 4 across on page 383 says:

... as a result of higher property costs, including repairs and maintenance, rates and body corporate fees, higher consultancy costs associated with the major redevelopment projects currently underway, employee costs and depreciation and amortisation.

They would have all been known at the time. Why weren't they factored in then? They are just standard costs.

Mr Collett: They are costs, and we generally forecast them quite accurately. There were some other factors, though. We saw significant increases in water and sewerage rates and charges. We also saw the final flow-on of the work that the minister referred to in her opening remarks around the stimulus package that was funded by the commonwealth government.

As you may have heard in previous presentations, a significant portion of the stimulus funding moneys was applied to community facilities land that was provided at no cost by the ACT government and was developed as housing for older people in order to permit them to downsize from existing public housing properties.

When we went to return those existing public housing properties to stock, we found that many of the tenants had not requested maintenance work for a long time and some of the wet areas and kitchens needed to be completely upgraded before the properties could be re-let. You might say that we should have anticipated that. We did not anticipate the scale of it.

MR SMYTH: So how many properties were returned and how many properties needed the upgrades to the wet areas?

Mr Collett: If I could speak off the top of my head, approximately 300 properties were involved in the downsizing exercise and 50 per cent of those would have required significantly more maintenance than would normally have been allocated to properties being returned to stock.

MR SMYTH: All right. Is it possible to get a breakdown of the additional costs by class, category? You have said rates. How come rates were such an unexpected extra cost?

Mr Collett: The increase was higher than expected. But we can give you a breakdown against those categories.

MR SMYTH: So the increase the government applied was higher than expected? The increases are in the budget.

Ms Howson: I think it would be fair to say that we use a formulaic approach generally when we are forecasting, and we make our best estimates on the information that is available at the time.

MR SMYTH: But you are part of the government. Didn't the government tell you that the rates were going up? Are you not part of the government?

Mr Collett: We are part of the government.

Ms Howson: We are.

MR SMYTH: Are you part of the budget process?

Mr Collett: We are part of the budget process.

MR SMYTH: And then of course we are now one government. Are we one government or not?

Mr Collett: I will be delighted to provide the breakdown—

Ms Howson: We made the best estimates on the information that was available to us at the time, Mr Smyth.

Ms Burch: And we have already said that we will give you some details.

MR COE: Does that formulaic approach include the data provided by Treasury about the rates for the coming financial year?

Ms Burch: It includes a range of information, Mr Coe. But we have already advised that we will give you the breakdown on that.

THE CHAIR: So that is taken on notice to provide that breakdown.

Ms Burch: Yes, unless Mr Hubbard has got the answer.

MR SMYTH: I am happy to hear Mr Hubbard's version of the story.

Mr Hubbard: I think David's version of the story is pretty accurate. The rates proportion of the increase is relatively minor to the whole lot. If you look at the operating statement, you will see the movement in the budget process from \$142 million to \$164 million. Quite a big chunk of that is made up of some pretty big movements in property transfers. While there has been a significant increase in property costs generally, which has been experienced, I think, by everyone in the market, probably the more significant movement is to do with the transfer of properties to the community sector, which is actually about \$6 million of the \$7 million in the grants and purchased services. The property cost increase is probably around \$5 million to \$6 million, which is shown up in the supplies and services. It is less than 30 per cent of the total impact of the cost increases. The actual mathematics around that is simply the number of properties divided into that total ordinary expenses line.

MR SMYTH: It is out by, what, about \$14 million?

Mr Hubbard: Yes, and if you take the combination of the transfer of properties to the community, which is about \$6 million, and then also some transfer of properties into CSD, which is about another \$6 million, that is about \$12 million of that total cost of transfers.

MR SMYTH: So we will get a reconciliation as far as we can break it down?

Mr Hubbard: Yes, you can see where the majority of the increase is.

MR SMYTH: I notice you are saying now that you expect that cost to go back down to \$10,900 in the coming year, so you are hoping to save about \$500 per dwelling per year. What is the impact of the carbon tax?

Mr Hubbard: We have had some discussion around the impact of the carbon tax. As you would appreciate, there is a lot of estimating and modelling around the carbon tax impact. That comes through mainly in additional energy costs, of course, which is usually not a cost to the agency. It also comes through in the building materials and

specifically in construction costs generally. I think those numbers are pretty well estimated by various commonwealth agencies. We are using some of those estimates going forward in our costings.

MR SMYTH: One of the other reasons given for this blow-out in the current year is major developments. What major redevelopments are currently underway?

Mr Hubbard: This is specifically in relation to the consultancy costs associated with those major developments. I think, David, you have got a pretty good handle on where the funding is going.

Mr Collett: The three major developments that we are proceeding to work through with the planning process are the Bega, Allawah and Currarong flats, the Northbourne apartments immediately to the north of Haig Park and the Northbourne housing precinct around the visitor information centre on both sides of Northbourne Avenue.

MR SMYTH: In what way have the consultancy costs blown out?

Mr Hubbard: They have not blown out; they have been in addition. Because of the desire to get a good feel as to what the likely design requirements et cetera are around those, we have brought them forward to be in the current year rather than in future years. They were costs we were going to experience at some stage, but I think the focus on, I think, Northbourne, Allawah and the ABC is whether—

Ms Burch: The ABC were in the final stages of a draft variation, I think.

Mr Collett: To give you some specific advice about the increase in the consultancy costs, in the case of the Bega, Allawah and Currarong apartments, when we went to public notification about the territory plan change there was significant comment about the height of the units and some of the transport access and parking implications. As a result of that, and in response to requests from the Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate, we did more work with our consultants to address those concerns and made modifications to the plans to reduce the impact of the height of the buildings on the adjoining developments.

MR SMYTH: So have we reduced the size?

Mr Collett: I am sorry?

MR SMYTH: Are you saying you have reduced the size, the height?

Mr Collett: Of some of the units, yes. We have reconfigured the development. There was not a significant change in the number of units that were produced, but there was a reconfiguration over the site. We moved some of the units from the taller elements to the lower elements.

MR SMYTH: So you just smoothed it out?

Mr Collett: Smoothed it out.

MR SMYTH: There was talk of, what, 15 storeys?

Mr Collett: Yes, and there are still some 15-storey elements in them, but we have reconfigured a number of the other 15-storey elements to relocate some of those units on other portions of the site, which was consistent with the comments that have been brought forward by the community and which were discussed and supported by the planning authority. So that was part of the work.

MR SMYTH: On the ABC, just before you move off it, what is happening with Xavier House and St Mary's? Is that still part of the total redevelopment?

Mr Collett: The master plan covers that part of the site. That was a request of the planning authority. After discussions with the Catholic Church, we included that portion of the land in the master plan that we have developed. The planners obviously want to have a coordinated program rather than a piecemeal program. They wanted to see what that edge of Cooyong Street would look like. They wanted to see how it would relate to the city and, in particular, the additional works that are anticipated from QIC in the remainder of their development. They wanted an integrated planning approach, which makes good sense. The Catholic Church were enthusiastic to be part of it, so on that basis we included that land.

Of course, the provisions of the master plan for that area do not override any heritage listing or conservation management plan that might be put in place, required and/or approved by the heritage unit. Our plans do not force an outcome; they also do not force the Catholic Church to transfer the land to us, although it is on the public record that we have been having negotiations with the church about the possibility of acquiring their site.

The Heritage Council have made a series of errors in the listing of the church on the site, and it is a matter of public record that it has been listed three times. We are currently waiting for what we hope will be the final listing to flow through. The church has made it clear that it will appeal against the listing if it is finalised in the form that it was previously anticipated by the Heritage Council. But that is for the future. Nothing in the master plan precludes an appropriate outcome from that process.

MR SMYTH: Thank you. You have taken on notice that we will get the breakdown. When you do that breakdown can we have what the estimated was for this year and what the outcome was?

Mr Collett: I anticipated that that was what you would require. We will provide the original, the difference and an explanation about the difference broken down by those categories.

MR SMYTH: Thank you.

MR COE: I would refer you to chapter 16, volume 2 of the report on government services 2012, the ROGS report. In that report it gives a number of different indicators regarding social housing. One of them is the average turnaround time for vacant stock. The ACT is about 25 per cent, or nearly 30 per cent, over the average in terms of the turnaround. If you look at that—the ACT being 38 days and the Australian national

average being 30 days—and consider that is eight days per tenancy, that is a number of years of lost accommodation because we are above average. Why is it that we are so far above average?

Ms Burch: Before I go to either Ms Sheehan or Mr Collett, our vacancy rate, I think, sits at 99 per cent, so we have a high occupancy rate. As to the detail about what goes into the ins and outs of the days, we will go to—

MR COE: The occupancy is different to the vacancy, though, in how long it takes to turn over a property.

Mr Collett: The minister has answered your question as to the utilisation of the stock, Mr Coe, and the suggestion that we were inefficient in terms of the utilisation of the stock.

MR COE: Yes. Actually, most of the states are.

Ms Burch: We are above the national average on—

MR COE: I simply point to the average turnaround times for vacant stock. For the ACT it is 38.2 and the national average is 30. Why is it that we are so far above the average?

Mr Collett: The accounting for turnaround times in the review of government services is based on their own individual definitions around turnaround. They are not the same as we have historically used for our turnaround times. They would include in those figures what we would class as hard to let properties, so properties where we have a significant number of refusals from offers of tenancies. They would also include stock that was held for redevelopment. They would include stock that was subject to significant rebuilding either as part of an upgrading program or a development program—for instance, dual occupancy developments around an unoccupied dwelling or completely rebuilding a house that has been fire damaged.

Whilst we would exclude those from our turnaround times, because we want to focus on our business-as-usual result—because that forms the majority of our properties returned to stock—the ROGS report includes all of those in that figure. As to our own figure for what we call routine maintenance, return to stock, our target is 28 days and our target for completing those is 85 per cent. I think we are a little bit off that target, but that is what we are trying to achieve in terms of the routine returns of property to stock.

MS PORTER: The figure in the ROGS report actually gives quite a skewed picture; it is not an accurate picture of what is happening on the ground?

Mr Collett: It includes things over which we do not have the same level of control and which do not comprise the same volume of properties returned to stock as our routine vacancies.

MR COE: It is interesting because in other tables in this report where there are significant issues such as that there is usually a footnote which says, “This is why the

ACT—or whatever the jurisdiction is—has blown out.” Why is there no footnote which points to that issue?

Ms Burch: Without having the ROGS reports in front of us, you will often find that there is a general comment around the definition being inconsistent.

MR COE: Every single one says that, yet it is still the Productivity Commission, it is still publishing and it is still putting its name and reputation to it.

Ms Burch: Yes, but we are just explaining to you some of the anomalies in our data. The other stats you will find in ROGS are that we have got the highest portion of new allocations within three months to those in greatest need, at 96.7 per cent, which is well above the national average. Mr Coe, you can also find some stats that show the wonderful work that Housing does, even through the ROGS data.

MR COE: Okay. Let us continue down the stats line and go to the proportion of overcrowded houses as of 30 June. Why is it that we have got 7.2, whereas the national average is 4.3? You have got nearly double the national average of overcrowded houses.

Mr Collett: One of the significant differences between the public housing stock in the ACT and that of the other jurisdictions is that we do not have remote and rural properties. There will be a significant proportion, depending upon which jurisdiction you are looking at, of properties in country towns where the demand is lower. The stock will generally be allocated to anyone who wants that stock who falls within the eligibility criteria for Housing New South Wales, for instance. Therefore, those houses will tend to be less occupied. It is consistent with the comment that the minister made about our targeting of people in highest and greatest need that we do not have that level of under-utilisation of our stock that characterises some of the other jurisdictions.

MR COE: That should also provide some very good economies of scale, should it not, in terms of delivering services and in maintenance? Yet if you actually look at the expenditure figures, again the ACT is right up there. Should we not have some incredible economies of scale here in the ACT given every single property is within roughly half an hour’s drive of the head office?

Ms Burch: We have also got some of the oldest property in stock. We have got the highest percentage of stock and we have got some of the oldest property in stock. I refer you to another stat in ROGS, Mr Coe: Housing ACT provides the highest level of rebate to its tenants, an average of \$240 per week, compared to \$138 nationally. Again, Mr Coe, there are good stories in the ROGS data which you are failing to find as well.

MR SMYTH: Just as you are failing to answer his question.

Mr Collett: The question of the costs of maintenance is only partly a question of economies of scale. The other significant issue is the cost of providing the services and the standard to which those services are applied. I will just make the point that reducing the spend on maintenance does not lead to the long-term preservation of the

value of the stock. If we had a commercial portfolio we would be required to make a maintenance spend on the basis of the value of the stock. Given the history of housing, that is not the way we develop it, but it is hard to sustain an argument that by not carrying out maintenance or by underspending on maintenance we are benefiting the public housing portfolio in the longer term.

MR COE: It is interesting that the minister should be spruiking the occupancy rate when we are actually below the national average there as well.

Ms Burch: At 99 per cent?

MR COE: If you go by the public housing occupancy rates as of 30 June, 97.9 and 98 are in the table there. When you have got issues with the ROGS data, either in comparisons or otherwise, do you contact the Productivity Commission and say, “We’d like to discuss how we can make sure our data is more consistent with the other states”?

Ms Sheehan: The compilation of the ROGS data is a process that takes place over the course of a year. Every jurisdiction is represented on the subcommittees, which are chaired by the Productivity Commission, for the compilation of the data, and throughout the course of the year issues that particular jurisdictions are concerned about—we have covered some of the issues that we believe are anomalous for the ACT today—are discussed at the subcommittee. As the data comes through close to the end of the year—the ROGS data is published in January—we look at the draft data and we have the opportunity to provide comments and then sometimes we are successful in having footnotes included.

As I think you can see, it is quite an iterative process, and that includes that when we do make comments on the final data sometimes we are successful in having comments inserted; sometimes we are not. But there is the opportunity for people to raise the issues, and we do raise the issues, and we will continue to do that. So the ACT’s input across all of those committees that sit under the Productivity Commission is coordinated by Chief Minister’s and cabinet department, and a very good job they do too. So, Mr Coe, we do have those opportunities and we do take them.

MR COE: Thank you.

MS PORTER: I have a supplementary on that homelessness one first: what changes have been made to youth homelessness, minister?

Ms Burch: There have been some changes to youth homelessness and they came into effect in March-April of this year. There has been some change. There have been some new providers and new arrangements brought in under that system. I might ask Ms Sheehan to talk some more on that.

Ms Sheehan: Thank you, minister. Thank you for the question, Ms Porter. We are very proud of the changes that have been made to the youth homelessness services, most particularly because they came as the result of a research paper which was looking at best practice models of provision of services for youth homelessness and what are the major causes of youth homelessness. Previously, youth homelessness

services were almost exclusively geared to the crisis end of young people who had already become homeless and people in the youth homelessness accommodations. They were almost exclusively youth accommodation services and almost all of the young people in those services had been homeless for some period of time and were circulating through the youth homelessness system.

What our research showed us, perhaps not surprisingly, is that the greatest cause of homelessness for young people was the breakdown of families, and that included where there was family violence and there might have been violence against the young person themselves. As a result of that finding and looking at what are the points in time where young people are at risk of becoming homeless and then they have their first period of homelessness, we were able to then look at what the research was showing across youth services generally.

We worked closely with our colleagues in the Office of Children, Youth and Family Support, looking at the service design that they were doing for young people. Then we were able to work with our colleagues in the youth homelessness services to design a new framework for new youth homelessness services which was aimed at looking at what are those major causes around family breakdown, what are the points of intervention where we can do something to address youth homelessness and then to try and focus more of our resources down at that—I am going to say the softer end but really the preventative end.

So in the new service design of course we have accommodation services, because unfortunately there will always be a need for crisis accommodation. But the really large reform in the system design is to put resources at the early intervention end. For example, one service is now run by the conflict resolution service, which aims to reunite young people with their families where it is safe to do so. So if you think about that scenario where the young person is having a fair bit of conflict with their family, one way that can go is that the young person ends up in crisis in a homelessness service, but the other way it can go is that you have a conflict resolution service and mediation so that the family can be reunified. We have those types of services which aim at reunification.

We also have services where sometimes it might be appropriate that the young person does not live with their family anymore but it does not mean that they have to become homeless. So we have developed a suite of services which are based on the idea of what we call the friendly landlord. That involves youth providers. In some instances they will be renting properties from the private rental market and supporting a number of young people to live together in shared accommodation through private rental, and that is quite appropriate, because many young people in the community are doing that. Sometimes the service will be head leasing properties from ACT Housing, and again the services will be supporting group share and supported accommodation for young people.

So you can see we have got that continuum from trying to reunify young people with their families where it is safe to do so, supporting young people to have other accommodation rather than falling into youth homelessness—a range of those sorts of options—and then of course in the crisis situation we do have that crisis accommodation.

The other really important reform that we have made there is that we are moving away from, as we have done elsewhere in the homelessness system, a very old-fashioned model, which is the refuge. The problem with the refuge is that it is a built form that does not really support people being able to address the issues that caused their homelessness. It is a built form that really, I am going to say, supports distress and drama. If you can imagine six very distressed young people in crisis—or in some instances it is nine and 10 people—living on top of each other in a refuge, it is hardly a calming environment.

What we have been able to do is to construct clusters of properties. The clusters will have 24-hour supervision by the providers, which is a consortium of Canberra Youth Refuge and the Salvation Army, and that is a built form much more conducive to a normalisation environment. Committee members will be aware that we have been very successful at doing that more generally in the homelessness system and that that improved built form has been highly beneficial to people who we are trying to move out of crisis.

MS PORTER: Thank you.

Ms Burch: I just want to add, if I can, Ms Porter, some additional information to that. Ms Sheehan made mention of one of the non-accommodation services. There are four non-accommodation services. One is the Housing Support Service, and that is operated by Catholic Care, and I think you were talking about the Family Tree House, which is a conflict resolution service. There is a youth identified accommodation and support service operated through Barnardo's, and a take hold program, which is a mentoring life skills service operated by the Ted Noffs Foundation—so a good mix of accommodation and non-accommodation support services.

MS HUNTER: My supplementary was: how are we going with setting up the clusters out there, the dwellings? We are supposed to have—is it four clusters of three houses?

Ms Sheehan: Thanks for that question. Those houses are being specially constructed and we have the first cluster established in Belconnen. There has been a slight delay in one of the southern clusters. Anglicare, who are providing the refuge style accommodation, at the moment have been really great and will continue on providing that until we can finish construction of that southern cluster.

MS HUNTER: And when will that be done?

Ms Sheehan: By the end of this calendar year. Anglicare were providing the refuge style accommodation through to July and they are happy to continue on those additional places until we can bring the new cluster on line.

Ms Burch: The Belconnen cluster is operational from 1 April, as I understand.

Ms Sheehan: Yes.

MS HUNTER: It was more about the number of clusters, because there are not just two clusters, are there?

Ms Sheehan: There are four clusters, two north and two south.

MS HUNTER: So what has happened to the other two? We have got Belconnen up and operating; the southern cluster will not be done until the end of the year. When do you expect the other two to be done?

Ms Sheehan: The Chisholm and Duffy clusters will be operational by September and the Ainslie cluster by the end of the year.

Ms Burch: And the accommodation services to the young parents place, which is operated by St Vincent de Paul, is being provided with a full complement of properties and they are operational.

MS HUNTER: And are you still working through the risk assessment process? We have got clusters of houses now, so there are some issues around duty of care and supervision and safety of workers. Are you working through that and working with the agencies and with young people about how that can be best approached?

Ms Sheehan: Yes, we are. We have quite an extensive risk management framework for the establishment of the new services. I am happy to tell the committee about the way in which we have managed that risk. The first thing was—

MS HUNTER: Are we able to get a copy of the risk management plan for the committee?

Ms Sheehan: With the agreement of the minister, we are happy to provide—

Ms Burch: But I think it is worth talking through as well.

MS HUNTER: I have had a briefing on it, so I have got some idea but not the detail. It would be good if the committee could get the risk assessment.

THE CHAIR: And just in the interests of time—

MS PORTER: I would be interested to know. I am not—

THE CHAIR: Probably in the interests of time, as we have only about half an hour left, it is probably—

MS PORTER: I have got a substantive question, obviously, so if it could be very brief, I would appreciate it.

MRS DUNNE: I have got some questions as well, Madam Chair, so I do not know whether—

THE CHAIR: If we could just be provided with a copy, in terms of time that would probably be more useful. Is that able to be provided?

Ms Burch: We will take some advice about the state of the document and I am quite

happy to offer some briefings to individual members.

THE CHAIR: Okay.

MS PORTER: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Has that been taken on notice or has it not been taken on notice?

Ms Burch: I will have to have a look and take some advice. We will forward what we can. But we certainly encourage a briefing on it as well.

THE CHAIR: Okay.

Ms Burch: Just so people are really understanding, risk management, as Ms Hunter has said, is around organisational risk and young people as well.

THE CHAIR: And I think, as Ms Hunter said, she has had a briefing on that. So if any further information can be provided to the committee—

MS HUNTER: The risk management plan would be good.

MS PORTER: As someone who was involved in setting up a youth refuge many, many years ago, I can really appreciate what you have been discussing with us this morning, Ms Sheehan. It is very important.

At the other end of the scale, my substantive question was about what is mentioned on page 384 of budget paper 4 in relation to the money that has been announced to improve safety and security of older public housing tenants in the ACT. Can you talk us through that, please? What additional security measures will be included and implemented?

Ms Burch: This is to support older tenants in our stock around a level of additional security. We are looking at a very targeted—I think it is the lower levels, the lower floors of flats, so to speak; more concentrated living. Mr Collett can provide more information.

Mr Collett: I referred previously to the work that we had done through the stimulus package in developing housing targeted at older people who were underoccupying public housing. As part of working through the designs for those and working with the tenants who were moving into those properties, it became clear to us that there were a number of security concerns that older people had that were not shared in the community and that they were particularly sensitive. Some of the changes to the design of buildings were exacerbating those concerns rather than assisting them.

One of the obvious examples of that is where we have sliding doors providing the main ventilation or access to the outside from the living spaces. They are not provided with security screens. They are provided with flyscreens but not security screens. So we were able to work through a number of those issues—door and window locks, secure screens, observation—

MS PORTER: Excuse me just one moment, Mr Collett. Chair, could I ask that the other members lower their voices? I am having trouble hearing Mr Collett.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, could you—

Mr Collett: Sorry, Ms Porter, I will try to project more.

MS PORTER: No, it is just that you do have a soft voice and they also have loud voices. The combination was not improving the situation.

MR SMYTH: We were hardly loud, Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: You were in my ear, thank you.

THE CHAIR: Can we just have the question, please?

Mr Collett: So what this budget allocation gives us is the ability to go back to existing properties and address some of those concerns. They will be done on the basis of individual properties. We will run a couple of pilots this year through our maintenance program, try and get a good sense of what is the most cost effective way of spending that money. But it will be largely through improved physical security of the ground floor units and single houses, as the minister suggested. We might do some external lighting where that is appropriate and some garden maintenance to remove furtive spaces around the buildings.

MS PORTER: With regard to the security doors, the screen doors you were talking about, these are easily opened, are they? I am just thinking of fire risk and things like that.

Mr Collett: Yes.

MS PORTER: There is that combination of being able to be securely locked in but how do you get out if there is a fire? That is not creating another problem?

Mr Collett: No, they will comply with the BCA, which is quite clear in terms of egress from fire.

MS PORTER: That is really good news, thank you.

MRS DUNNE: I have a question about maintenance. It is a particular constituent issue that has arisen in the last couple of days. I have not yet had a chance to write to the minister about it. I have a constituent who has had a leaking water pipe in their kitchen since December last year. It was finally assessed in April this year as needing urgent and major work, which would also result in a kitchen upgrade. My constituent has been effectively without kitchen facilities for most of this year. She is a high needs patient with a range of health issues and has asked for a transfer. How is it that a piece of maintenance that includes a burst water pipe in a kitchen could go unaddressed since December last year?

Mr Collett: Clearly, without the details of the case—I am not suggesting that we talk

about the details of this case in this meeting—

MRS DUNNE: No.

Mr Collett: But without the details of the case, I cannot possibly answer the question. I can check what has happened and provide you with any useful information. If the information can be provided through the minister, I am happy to address that concern. I would say that that is completely outside our acceptable standard and that across the board that does not happen.

Having said that, there are literally thousands and thousands of work orders that are undertaken by hundreds of different contractors across the maintenance portfolio every year. I am not making excuses, but it would be unrealistic to suggest that mistakes are not made, that there are not delays, that things do not get lost as part of the process.

We have a performance management contract with Spotless. We have a process of abatements under the new contracts, penalties under the old contracts. We have got the capacity to look at what the systemic causes of these problems are and to issue notices to remedy and to take those notices to remedy and judge whether they are accurate or not.

Also, the sorts of complaints that you have highlighted here would form the basis of our QA team doing audits either of all plumbing jobs, of all jobs that were done by the contractor who was responsible for that job if, in fact, the job was attended to. If it is a question of the job not being logged by the call centre, we would go back and examine the transcripts or the recordings of the call centre call that took the job and whether the job had a works order.

There is a comprehensive process for addressing these concerns, not just in terms of getting an outcome for what sounds like an unfortunate tenant in this case, but also to look at the systemic issues that have led to this problem in order to improve the maintenance contract. So without details I cannot respond.

MRS DUNNE: My constituent says that she has been in contact with the maintenance section on a regular basis since 17 April, when she was told that this needed urgent and major work and that she has a considerable problem with damp in the house because she has got a leaking pipe and mould in the house, which is exacerbating her respiratory conditions. How is it that these things could go on so long?

Mr Collett: Without the details—

Ms Howson: That particular incident sounds very concerning but, as Mr Collett said, until we have the specific details we cannot address it. We would certainly respond very quickly to that concern.

MRS DUNNE: I will forward this to the minister's office but I would also like on notice an answer to the issues about how this went unaddressed over this very long period of time.

THE CHAIR: That is taken on notice?

Ms Burch: What we can do—please, send it through. But as Mr Collett has said, there are a range of processes that we have in place around logging and quality control. This appears to have not been responded to in an appropriate time. We have clear hours for response—in four hours, 12 hours, X number of working days—on a number of jobs. We can look into it and we can certainly provide information about if there have been flaws, failings or whatever it is that has led to this. We are quite happy to do that. The sooner you get it through to me, Mrs Dunne, the better.

MRS DUNNE: The other question, Madam Chair, is this: is this a one-off unfortunate case or is it a symptom of something else? How long does it take? How often do your audits show up cases that go unaddressed for long periods of time?

Ms Burch: Mrs Dunne, I am sure David Collett can make a response as well, but we are the largest landlord in town with close on 12,000 properties. This is not ideal, but we have a very complex maintenance program. It is very rigorous and robust in our work orders, how we take them, how we log them, how we respond to them, how we go through some quality assurance to make sure that the work is done to standard.

As David has indicated, with the many, many thousands and thousands of jobs that go through, I do not know of any maintenance contractor, landlord or anyone that would say that there would not be problems occasionally. Is that acceptable? We try to eradicate any delay that would cause a tenant that level of distress. Did you want to talk around anything else in addition to what you have said before?

Mr Collett: Other than to say that the answer to that question is, no, this is not typical. I would be quite confident in saying it is not typical. We have a number of systems—our complaints handling unit, the tracking of job orders, the QA audits, both by the contractor and by ourselves. They are all designed to produce a system that produces consistently good results in terms of turnaround times, quality of work done and presentations.

The fact is that I need more information. I need to know whether there was a works order that was issued originally, whether a tradesman attended but could not fix the problem, whether they said that they could fix the problem but the problem recurred. So without that level of detail, either from your constituent or from our records, I really cannot add much more to the answer that I have given.

MRS DUNNE: Great, thanks.

THE CHAIR: I have a question in relation to debt waiver and repayment. There was a recommendation from the targeted assistance panel that the ACT government use debt waiver and partial debt waiver as a form of assisting people who had little or no capacity to pay and also where debt would prolong or compound financial hardship. I understand that applications for waiver of Housing ACT debt is directed first to Housing ACT and then to Treasury. I understand that is how the process works and that there have been some instances that I have been told about where sometimes it can take years for a decision to be made or that it just does not progress out of Housing.

There was a submission made, I think, on this particular point by one of the housing organisations. I am wondering whether Housing ACT are going to implement the recommendations of the targeted assistance panel. Are there set time frames for matters to be addressed?

Ms Burch: The short answer is that the targeted assistance recommendations will be implemented through Housing but Ms Sheehan can get—

THE CHAIR: So the debt waiver and repayment will be?

Ms Burch: That is my understanding.

Ms Sheehan: Thank you, minister. Ms Bresnan, when the government announced a range of reforms to the provision of housing assistance back in 2003 around domestic violence, at that time the government recognised that very often domestic violence can result in debt around housing—

THE CHAIR: I think there is debt in other situations too. I know there was the 2005 subcommittee.

Ms Sheehan: Yes, and that was what I was about to go to.

THE CHAIR: But that does not exist now.

Ms Sheehan: No. Arising from that, a committee was established, the debt review committee, and the debt review committee looked at all cases that were brought forward, mostly brought forward by Housing ACT, where we suspected that the debt related to domestic violence. That really was the main focus, and that is still a focus that we have. We looked at debt related to domestic violence, and if the committee could establish, through Housing ACT records and through any other information that the tenant or applicant or another supporting agency could bring, that it was related to domestic violence, we then made a recommendation to the Under Treasurer that the debt be waived. And that was a very good process.

THE CHAIR: But that does not exist now.

Ms Sheehan: That committee does not exist anymore, because we essentially dealt with that level of debt at the time. We have, internally with the director-general, been having discussions around whether it might be time to do that again, particularly with respect to domestic violence debt. It comes at a good time in terms of the recommendations of that committee. Since we had been able to successfully do it before, we are quite confident that we have the processes and the records available, and the support of external agencies, to assist people to bring these sorts of cases forward.

THE CHAIR: Domestic violence is a good example but so too are debt waiver and repayment across the board when it comes to Housing ACT. I know there was a submission made that there have been some instances where it just does not progress out of Housing ACT applications. Are there any instances that you are aware of where

it is taking a number of years? That is what has been brought to me.

Ms Sheehan: I am not aware of it taking a number of years. I am certainly aware, from the time of the debt review committee, that there were occasions where it took months, not because things were stuck but because, when it comes to waiving a debt, the Under Treasurer has a responsibility to ensure that all of the evidence is present. The debt review committee was confident to send the information on.

THE CHAIR: But we do not have the debt review committee now. So what is happening now?

Ms Sheehan: Outside the debt review committee, there are very few instances where Housing ACT goes to the Under Treasurer to request the waiver of debt. So I would need to look at any specific instances that you are referring to.

THE CHAIR: I think there was a submission made by welfare rights regarding the targeted assistance panel. They actually raised these issues in that submission.

Ms Sheehan: It has not been raised specifically with Housing ACT.

THE CHAIR: Even though it was in their submission?

Ms Sheehan: Yes.

Ms Howson: I think the more general point, though, is that with the government's response to the recommendations around the targeted assistance package, Ms Sheehan and I are looking again at the debt management process for Housing ACT.

THE CHAIR: Another thing that I have seen is the policy around people having to repay a minimum of \$30 per fortnight regardless of whether they can afford it or not. Is that still the policy?

Ms Sheehan: It has never been the policy. The policy is that we will never require a tenant to pay overall—and this includes their rent and any repayment of debt—above 30 per cent of their income. And the reason for that is that the generally accepted definition in Australia of an affordable rent or affordable payment is no more than 30 per cent of income. So it has never been Housing policy to require a \$30 repayment. It is that we would never require a tenant to go above 30 per cent of their income.

THE CHAIR: That is the issue, then. What if they actually cannot afford to pay that amount back, that 30 per cent, every fortnight?

Ms Sheehan: The issue is that they would talk to us about what they can afford to repay.

Ms Howson: We are always open to negotiate repayment schedules that take that into account.

Ms Sheehan: We are, absolutely.

THE CHAIR: I am seeking clarification as well with regard to charging statute barred debt. I understand that Housing ACT agreed to review this policy but that statute barred debt is actually still being charged.

Ms Sheehan: Statute barred debt should not be charged, and in my—

THE CHAIR: So it is not being charged to people?

Ms Sheehan: It should not be charged, and there have been many discussions inside Housing ACT, including discussions of the executive, where it has been made absolutely clear that Housing ACT will not be pursuing statute barred debt.

THE CHAIR: Are there any instances where it is being charged?

Ms Sheehan: I am not aware of them, but I am certainly prepared to go back and examine that because, if it is being charged, it needs to stop.

THE CHAIR: If you could take that on notice.

MR SMYTH: I have a supplementary on the debt. Indicator k on page 383 of budget paper 4 refers to the percentage of tenant accounts greater than \$500 and four or more weeks in arrears. Again the numbers presented there are exactly the same as last year. The target has not been reached again. Last year the note talked about focusing on debt. I note that note 6 on page 383 this year, however, adds the following line:

However, the results for the measure are below target for the year due to the ongoing cost of living pressures and difficult economic environment facing low income and vulnerable families.

What are the cost of living pressures that are affecting ACT Housing tenants and how is the government working to ameliorate them?

Ms Sheehan: There are some very obvious pressures that are facing people in the community, and the increasing rise in utility costs is one of those. The government and agencies have a number of measures in place to try to assist people there. For example, the former essential services review committee, which has become part of ACAT, is a mechanism which quite successfully aims to ensure that where people have debts related to essential services, their essential services are maintained while they continue to address the debt related there. That is one very obvious one, and I think probably most people sitting in the committee today, in the room, will have experienced the shock of opening their electricity bill or their gas bill and finding that it has increased in price.

Ms Burch: Noting, though, that the ACT has still got the lowest energy cost.

Ms Sheehan: And that there are concessions provided by government.

MR SMYTH: Yes, but we have got the highest variation in climate per city as well.

Ms Sheehan: There is an increase in the cost of food. There is an increase in the cost of clothing. And the thing for people on very low incomes is that they have the lowest amount of discretionary income. So almost all of their income will go on things that are absolutely essential. That is a cost of living pressure that public housing tenants on statutory incomes do have.

Ms Burch: But can I say—

MS HUNTER: How many tenants are made aware of the energy concessions that are available?

Ms Burch: I was about to, if I can, go to what we are doing with our stock now. We are building five and six-plus star properties.

MS HUNTER: We have got the energy efficiency program, but this is about concessions.

Ms Burch: Yes.

MS HUNTER: The concession scheme.

Ms Burch: If you are looking at supporting people with energy costs, you have to look at the use and how you reduce their use and make the built form more efficient with regard to energy concessions. Budget paper 3, starting at page 59, has a range of comments about cost of living. I know the targeted assistance strategy goes to significant improvements. We have continued to increase our concession.

Last budget there was a significant concession increase. In this budget you will see another concession, which is to support those with multiple sclerosis and, I believe, Parkinson's disease with heating and cooling costs. There are the major tax reforms and the reduction of insurance costs. Mr Smyth, I thought you were wanting to see reform in the tax arena. That is what we delivered, and you have done nothing but be disappointed with it.

MR SMYTH: No. Sorry, at the end of four years, you have still got \$360 million collected by four taxes that you abolished. Back to the debt, though—

Ms Burch: You are trying to bring one in that you pulled out, the last bit of business—

MR SMYTH: What have you done—

MR COE: What proportion of public housing tenants have insurance?

THE CHAIR: Can we let Mr Smyth ask his question.

MR SMYTH: The minister will not know that. She does not know much at all.

THE CHAIR: Ask the question.

MR SMYTH: Back to the debt, what research have you done into the cause of the debt and is there any research or data that indicates what the greatest pressure is? That will obviously lead to what the answers or the solutions are. What research has been done?

Ms Sheehan: We have not engaged a researcher to do research, but the research that we do as providers of a service is that we discuss with tenants the fact that they are in debt, we talk to them about what is the cause of the debt, and our tenants do talk to us about that. So they talk about things that are going on in their life. It might be—again, people here will be familiar with this—when it is back to school time, there will be a pressure on families to fit out their children to go back to school. When it is Christmas time, there is tremendous peer pressure from children and from other families to buy their children expensive presents. At other times of the year when it comes to winter, we have talked a bit about some pressures that people might have there and other things that we have done to try to alleviate some of those pressures.

The other thing is that we look at what is happening in society generally. Most recently there have been reports about the level of credit card debt for people in Australia generally. Public housing tenants are members of the community, like everyone else. We can see many indicators of economic pressure on people and, as I said, 91 per cent of public housing tenants are on a statutory benefit, which means that they have little if no discretionary income. Their income is going on staples, and that does put pressure on them.

MS PORTER: The money that has come from the federal government as far as the school expenses are concerned, the lump sum, would have assisted many of these families? They would be in that category that would receive that money?

Ms Burch: Absolutely.

Ms Howson: And they will also be receiving household assistance from the federal government.

Ms Burch: David Matthews may be able to talk a bit more about that.

MR SMYTH: Just going back to the question, I appreciate that tenants speak to management officers, and we have anecdotal evidence in that way, but has there been an attempt to actually collate how widespread those problems are and the degree of each of the various causes that you mentioned to officers so that we get a fuller picture of what the debt is and how it occurs? ACT circumstances are different. I appreciate all the national studies and surveys, but we are slightly—

Ms Howson: Mr Smyth, I would only say that, as Ms Sheehan has already indicated, we have been really focusing on this issue. Clearly, if we are going to be more effective in our strategies in responding to debt, we will have to do a more thorough analysis of the causes.

MR SMYTH: That is what I wanted; thank you.

MS HUNTER: I want to go back to the accountability indicators on page 382.

Minister, you put out some numbers in your opening statement, and I am sorry if I missed those, but I just want to go through the numbers here. If we go to indicator b, it talks about the numbers of properties. We had a target of 12,050. The estimated outcome is 11,862. We might start there. The note to explain that is around some of those properties being moved to other places. As I understand it from what Mr Collett said before, \$6 million worth of property went to community housing providers and \$6 million was transferred to CSD. I just want to get an understanding. First of all, how many properties are we talking about when we are talking \$6 million? I know they will be different types of properties.

Ms Burch: Before we do that, in my opening statement I said that, as of 31 May, our portfolio stock was 11,848 and there was a projection to come to 30 June, which is now. In a short time we will be able to confirm where we are end of year.

MS HUNTER: So maybe below the 11,862 that has been estimated if you are only at 11,848?

Ms Burch: In May we were at 848, but we can give you a final number. Mr Collett, do you want to talk about that?

MS HUNTER: Approximately or do you know how many properties?

Mr Collett: The numbers of properties I will take on notice, but they were transfers of properties to the community housing sector and other programs.

THE CHAIR: So that is taken on notice.

Mr Collett: Yes.

MS HUNTER: With the \$6 million worth of stock that was transferred to CSD, what do you mean by “transferred to CSD”? I am a bit confused about that.

Mr Collett: As part of the development of the larger sites, we have trialled a process of establishing a social mix on those developments, and a mix of tenancies, by providing a small percentage of affordable rentals to allow people an exit pathway out of public housing. In order to allow those tenants to access commonwealth rental assistance, we have been able to do that at arm’s length from the operations of public housing, so that has been transferred to the office of affordable rental. The properties are still—

MS HUNTER: Within CSD, so that then they can be eligible for rent assistance. Okay; I get that. Again, it is \$6 million worth. How many properties are in this 74.9 per cent?

Ms Burch: Of the affordable rental?

Mr Collett: We are building up to our target of about 30. We are just over 20 at the moment; I think it is 22. We are signing people up on a regular basis against that.

MS HUNTER: With the transfers, whether they were to CHC or whether they were

to CSD, were they all empty properties or with tenants?

Mr Collett: Sorry, I missed that.

MS HUNTER: With the transfers, whether to CHC or CSD, were they all empty properties or were there tenants in some of those properties—or was there a mixture?

Mr Collett: They were tenanted as part of that process.

Ms Sheehan: If I can add something there, Ms Hunter, they were nation building properties. As you will recall, the commonwealth government had some very firm targets where they want partnerships between the public housing authorities and community organisations. We formed partnerships with the Salvation Army, St Margaret's Uniting Church in Hackett and CHC Affordable Housing. As a result of that, when the properties were constructed—if we constructed them, they had to be transferred. That is where those transfers occurred.

MS HUNTER: As I said, we had a target of 12,050. We may reach 11,862 or we may be under. And then next year's target is 11,941. Why is that? Why are we not meeting the 12,050? It seems to indicate to me that we are not even going to meet that 12,050 within the next financial year.

Mr Collett: That is based on our current construction program, so we retain that target of 12,050. We will look for opportunities to reach that target. It will depend upon the rate and the return that we receive from the development of some of our larger properties and the timing of that. We are still approaching that 12,050. On the basis of works that are already commenced, we are not expecting to reach that target entirely by the end of next financial year. The bulk of these are reasonably large projects. They will take 12 months, in most cases, to complete, where they are multi-unit properties. Those will already be under construction.

MS HUNTER: We have the government putting in \$5 million over three years to increase housing stock. That is ongoing on some of these major projects you are talking about?

Mr Collett: No.

MS HUNTER: No? Separate?

Ms Burch: We spoke about this earlier with disability as well.

MS HUNTER: We did, yes.

Ms Burch: We are looking at increasing general good access properties that could be applied for supportive accommodation. But also I have an interest, as mentioned earlier in the week, in looking at some alternative models of accommodation that support people with a disability, recognising their eligibility as social housing tenants as well.

MS HUNTER: I recall that at the time we were discussing this, because of the

working through the models and so forth, you had not come to a number of dwellings.

Ms Burch: Not a final one; that is right.

MS HUNTER: I want to go to page 384. If we go down to the bottom there with the 2012-13 technical adjustments in the budget, we have “Commonwealth grant—nation building and jobs plan—social housing NP”. We seem to be losing \$1.8 million. Why is that?

Mr Collett: My understanding is that that is not continuing, but questions of technical adjustments around finances are the purview of Mr Hubbard, and I note him coming to the table.

Mr Hubbard: As it is a technical adjustment, that indicates that the nation building and jobs plan social housing national partnership needs to be renegotiated. So it is coming to a renegotiation, and we are uncertain at this time what that negotiation will produce. I presume it will produce something, but at the moment we do not know—

MS HUNTER: So can you explain? We signed up to a national partnership and there was funding that was attached to that. How have we lost \$1.8 million of that?

Mr Hubbard: I can get the exact detail, but I think it is in the scheduling of the payments.

MR SMYTH: Mr Matthews, don’t go. You have not said anything.

Ms Burch: You shut him down. He was going to talk about concessions, and you guys shut him down.

MR SMYTH: I think you shut him down, minister. You butted in and spoke over everybody, quite rudely.

Ms Burch: Never as rude as you, Mr Smyth.

THE CHAIR: In the interests of time, do we have an answer?

Mr Hyland: Do you want me to quickly answer it?

Mr Collett: Yes.

Mr Hyland: The amount of \$1.804 million is the technical adjustment removing the nation building funding from next year’s budget. It is built into the current new budget. When you go to the next year’s budget and you lose the funding, it just comes out and shows that loss of funding.

MS HUNTER: I understand that. Why is it coming out?

Mr Hyland: Because it is the end of the nation building money. It is the end of that program.

MS HUNTER: Does that mean that we did not receive \$1.8 million from the commonwealth?

Mr Hyland: No; we received it. We received it, and we received it this year.

MS HUNTER: Yes.

Mr Hyland: Next year there is no more funding under nation building. We spent it.

MS HUNTER: Okay.

Mr Hyland: Next year, there is no funding on it, so you remove it from the budget to show the budget going forward on the same basis.

MS HUNTER: Thank you. That is the clarification I needed.

MR SMYTH: It is a bit of a Wayne Swan: you have it for next year, but you spent it this year. Mr Collett, you are coming to the Tuggeranong Community Council on Tuesday night to talk about the development at Chisholm. What is happening with that development?

Mr Collett: I am looking forward to it.

Ms Burch: Behind Chisholm shops?

MR SMYTH: Yes.

Ms Burch: Where we are looking to put older persons units in? We went out to the community with a draft plan. The community came back to us and, as you know, Mr Smyth, because I think you were there on the corner at that meeting, as you were in other meetings, they are supportive of having older persons units there. There are some issues around traffic and access, but I think traffic and access with Aldi going up was probably going to be more of a concern than older persons units. We are going back, as I have said, to everybody I have spoken to. We will go back and say, "Given that you're supportive of older persons accommodation, what are your views on what the built form will end up looking like?" That is what Tuesday's meeting will be about.

MR SMYTH: So the DA is on hold until further consultation?

Ms Burch: That is right. I am very keen to listen to the community and make sure that we get a form that is going to work and be valued by the local community.

MR SMYTH: On a different issue, Billabong—

Ms Burch: I thought you were going to talk about the other Chisholm block. It is just around the corner from—

MR SMYTH: Are you willing to listen to the community on the other Chisholm block?

Ms Burch: I have been listening to the community, Mr Smyth, and I know—

MR SMYTH: I understand that you are anxious to table their petition. But we will move to the closure of Billabong—

Ms Burch: So are you. I believe that you have been talking regularly with Mr King, and I know you have an interest because I think you live four houses away from that development.

MR SMYTH: I do.

THE CHAIR: Members! Can we get to the question, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: I have told many people that. It is the level of snarliness that is creeping into your voice, here, minister.

THE CHAIR: We are running out of time.

MR SMYTH: I have a different question on the closure of Billabong Indigenous housing program. Billabong has been forced to write to all its tenants, and I quote from the letter:

This closure has come about because of changes to the way community housing is required to operate and in particular the lack of resources and commitment by the Government to have a strong Indigenous Housing provider.

We heard the ridiculous notion the other day from Minister Bourke that Billabong is not a registered Indigenous corporation. Minister, why have you not provided the resources and commitment to provide a strong Indigenous housing provider?

Ms Burch: First, the premise of your question is absolute nonsense. We have been working very closely with Billabong—

MR SMYTH: I am quoting here from Billabong.

Ms Burch: I am just telling you, Mr Smyth, that we have worked very closely with Billabong. I think Maureen Sheehan was—

MR SMYTH: So Billabong, in their letter, are wrong?

Ms Burch: Mr Smyth, do you want an answer or do you just want to keep on badgering?

MR SMYTH: I actually do want an answer. I do not want waffle.

THE CHAIR: Members, can we have one person at a time.

Ms Burch: We are giving you one, Mr Smyth. Maureen Sheehan was in front of the committee recently. She spoke quite extensively of the work, the register. Housing

ACT and Canberra Community Housing have all been supportive. I have met with Billabong. We have done, I believe, all we can. If that board now chooses not to participate as a member of the register, which is needed to be part of the social housing and community housing program here in Canberra, that is a decision for their board to make. But make no mistake: we have worked very closely and carefully with Billabong Aboriginal organisation.

MR SMYTH: I will relay that to Billabong. I will be interested to find out what their view is.

THE CHAIR: One very final, quick question.

MR COE: Firstly, earlier I asked about the turnaround times for properties with the ROGS data. The ROGS report says that hard to let properties were included. It also says that data for this indicator are comparable and complete. It might be worth bearing that in mind when looking at that data next time.

Ms Burch: Yes, and I can also talk, if I may, on some ROGS data where—

MR COE: I was adding that information because the information provided earlier was wrong.

Ms Burch: Well—

THE CHAIR: Just a quick question, please, Mr Coe.

MR COE: With regard to—

Ms Burch: Well—

Ms Sheehan: I do not think so.

Ms Burch: I am not quite sure. I think your statement saying it is wrong is not quite—we will have a look at that one as well, Mr Coe.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Coe, a final question.

MR COE: With regard to the policy for people to downsize from an old family home to somewhere smaller—if they no longer qualify for public housing, if they are a new applicant, are they able to downsize?

Ms Sheehan: Mr Coe, the answer is that in the public rental housing assistance program, if you apply for a transfer, the program says that you are only eligible for a transfer if you would be eligible to be freshly allocated public housing. That means that you cannot have income or assets above that for an applicant—

MR COE: Sure, so—

Ms Sheehan: But let me go on.

MR COE: Sorry.

Ms Sheehan: Which is that also under the program, the commissioner for housing has a discretion to waive any of the requirements of the public rental housing assistance program. In that circumstance, to assist an older person to downsize, the commissioner—or the delegate, which would most likely be me or Mr Collett—would have exercised discretion to enable that transfer and that downsizing to occur.

MR COE: Thank you.

Ms Burch: Can I also make reference to ROGS data, given that you are more interested in ROGS than the budget, Mr Coe? The report shows that low income households in the ACT are less likely to be in rental stress than those in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and WA. The report also highlights the success of our homelessness sector in achieving a reduction in rough sleepers, with just 0.7 per cent of clients living rough after homelessness service support compared to 1.9 per cent nationwide.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister. We are going to break now.

MR COE: One hundred and fifty indicators and you name three.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, members. We will break now.

Ms Burch: I look forward to your flyer, Mr Coe.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, members.

MR COE: I look forward to you handing out Labor Party brochures at Campbell high school.

THE CHAIR: Members, can we please stop. We are breaking now until five past 11. We will come back to multicultural, ageing and women.

Meeting adjourned from 10.49 to 11.08 am.

THE CHAIR: We have got very limited time. We will move to examination of the proposals in revenue estimates for community services output class 3, community development and policy—3.1, community services; and 3.2, community affairs—looking at ageing, multicultural affairs and the Office for Women. We will go to ageing first. Ms Overton-Clarke, you are probably very familiar with the privilege statement but I would just make you aware of that.

Ms Overton-Clarke: Yes.

Ms Burch: Before we start, chair, for the record, I ask David Collett to make a statement of clarification, please.

THE CHAIR: Sure.

Mr Collett: There was a bit of cross-conversation towards the end of the previous session.

THE CHAIR: There was.

Mr Collett: It may have been a bit confusing. In my earlier comments I said in response to the question about the ROGS data on vacant turnaround times that the ROGS data included hard-to-lets and complex reconstructions. The point was that we exclude those from our routine hard-to-lets, and we think that our exclusion is a more accurate measure. But the point was that I acknowledged the fact that the ROGS data includes hard-to-lets. So that advice was not incorrect; it was consistent with what Mr Coe read out.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Collett. We will go to ageing first, as I said, then we will move on to multicultural affairs. I want to ask about the accountability indicators for this area. They are on page 352, budget paper 4. With regard to ageing, I want to get an idea of—

Ms Burch: Comes to all of us, Ms Bresnan.

THE CHAIR: I know, but I am just looking at the accountability indicators.

MR HARGREAVES: The growing up is optional, minister.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, members. There is nothing specifically there around the ageing area. There are a couple of things there about the councils and about the secretariat support that is provided, but there is nothing really looking at it specifically. I recognise that this is something that is across different areas. It comes into Health and it comes into Housing, but it comes into Health in particular. I know the government has talked about the age-friendly city and making us an age-friendly city. I am just wondering why we do not have things like that that should give us a true picture of what we are doing to address ageing policy in the ACT.

Ms Burch: Bronwen Overton-Clarke can talk to it, but there is our strategic plan for positive ageing and how we report on that within our annual reports, how other government directorates reply to that and how we mark what we are doing towards an age-friendly city. We do measure our activity and improvements, but we articulate them in the annual reports more than here.

THE CHAIR: Yes, and I recognise that. That is with a number of areas. But there has been a quite a bit of discussion across the two weeks about accountability indicators in a whole lot of areas. Obviously, I recognise that it happens in the annual report area, but when we look at the budget it is very hard to see what we are doing. You mentioned the age-friendly city strategic plan, but there is nothing there to say what we are doing in the budget for that.

Ms Overton-Clarke: As you are aware, Ms Bresnan, there are a number of whole-of-government policy and coordination areas within CSD, and the Office for Ageing is one of those. In terms of actual delivery of programs, it is not an area where we are specifically responsible for any particular delivery activities. That is why MACA, the

Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing, is one of the indicators. It is an indicator there. As the minister said—

THE CHAIR: Sorry to interrupt, but I guess all it says is that we provide secretariat support. That is the indicator.

Ms Overton-Clarke: Providing secretariat support is an indication of the broader role of the policy advice that goes to the minister to influence the strategic direction. As the minister and you mentioned, last year was the older persons assembly. We have a new MACA which is developing the strategic plan. The sorts of policy advice that will come out of that to look at the driving of where those actions are best derived will go into the new strategic plan. So you are right. We could equally have the development of the strategic plan in here, but I suppose the secretariat function is actually just an indication of a physical activity that we do.

THE CHAIR: And I recognise—

Ms Burch: Sorry, if I can, I think what we are quite happy to do is have a look at positive ageing and what we do with MACA. Now we have signed up as the age-friendly city we will have a look at those existing documents and see what we can pull out of that in the annual reports and make some relevant indicators in here as well. We have not done it traditionally, but there is nothing to say that within the framework that we operate in we cannot bring something in.

THE CHAIR: Yes, and I recognise, as you said, that there is the annual report and you have got the strategic plan. But this is the budget. The Office for Ageing does policy for it. So it would be good to see some recognition of that.

Ms Overton-Clarke: Yes, that is fine.

THE CHAIR: Mr Hargreaves?

MR HARGREAVES: No, I will wait.

THE CHAIR: Mr Smyth?

MR SMYTH: How do plans for Woden 9 impact on the Woden Seniors centre, and have they been consulted over the proposed development?

Ms Burch: The LDA development down at Woden?

MR SMYTH: Yes, Woden 9.

Ms Burch: Woden Seniors has not raised a concern with me. Have they raised it with you?

Ms Overton-Clarke: No.

Ms Burch: I am heading down to Woden Seniors in the not-too-distant future. I will make sure I have a conversation—

MR SMYTH: The government has not consulted with them over Woden 9?

Ms Burch: The LDA—I do not have carriage of that development, Mr Smyth, so—

MR SMYTH: But surely—

Ms Burch: Given that they do have a very rigorous community consultation process in the main and certainly it was out for public comment, I would have very strong confidence that they have been spoken to about it.

MR SMYTH: But you do not know?

Ms Sheehan: Thank you, Mr Smyth. Over the years I, Ms Overton-Clarke and David Collett have had many discussions with that seniors group about their facility and their needs for change. As the committee would be aware, there is a feasibility study in the budget which will look at the redevelopment of the Woden community services area as a hub for community facilities.

So in general, there has been a great deal of discussion and consultation with community groups about the need for different space. We will certainly take the issue that you have raised on notice and ensure that the seniors group have been consulted by the Land Development Agency. They certainly will be involved in the more general consultations about the creation of a hub in Woden.

MR SMYTH: Is the government still in negotiations with Woden Seniors about a new facility for their site?

Ms Sheehan: What I said was that over the last few years we have certainly been in discussion with them about their site and their needs. With respect to the more general need for space in Woden, the government has announced the feasibility study. That will be looking at the general needs of the community and with a view to the creation of a hub.

MR SMYTH: Yes, but specifically for Woden Seniors, how much financial support has been provided to Woden Seniors for their planning and for the provision of a new facility on their site?

Ms Sheehan: I would need to, with the minister's agreement—

Ms Burch: Yes.

Ms Sheehan: come back to you on whether any money has been provided to the seniors, but as—

Ms Burch: It has been certainly part of a long ongoing conversation. Certainly, they would form part of the feasibility work should they have an interest. At the end of the day, they have to, one, show an interest, which—in many ways they are in two minds about relocating. They quite like their site. They like the security of having their own site there. But they have also expressed the fact that they want to be able to expand as

well. It is not as if we are not having those conversations, Mr Smyth. But at the end of the day, it is a decision for them.

Ms Overton-Clarke: And for us, as Ms Sheehan said, it is also part of a bigger picture of how community facilities in that area, and particularly Woden Community Services and Woden Seniors, interact and what the government will be actually able to do for all the tenants in that area, recognising that Woden, of course, own their own site at the moment.

MR SMYTH: In regard to the Canberra Seniors centre, I refer you to page 189, budget paper 3, \$650,000 for the replacement of the current centre. What prospective sites have been identified and what feedback or input will the club have to the site selection and design?

Ms Burch: Bronwen Overton-Clarke, again, has been in ongoing discussions with Canberra Seniors for some time. Again, they have expressed some constraints around the existing site through to access and parking—just the built form there. But, again, with particular blocks, I know that there have been earlier proposals that seemed to—was it in Dickson?

Ms Overton-Clarke: Yes.

Ms Burch: They have not eventuated. So we need, as part of this investment, to work through that to make sure that a block of land is found that is suitable for them, then how does that built form comes through and whether there are other services or agencies attached to it as well.

MR SMYTH: Has the government reimbursed the club for the \$8,000 user requirement brief that they produced for the government? If not, why not?

Ms Overton-Clarke: We worked closely with them and came to a mutual agreement. In the end, we paid for half of the study.

MR SMYTH: So you have given them \$4,000?

Ms Overton-Clarke: Yes.

MR SMYTH: In regard to the Araluen retirement village, we have been told that community organisations cannot take on volunteers who are 80 years or older as they cannot be insured.

Ms Burch: Araluen?

MR SMYTH: Araluen retirement village.

Ms Burch: I do not have any responsibility for Araluen retirement village to my knowledge. It is commonwealth—is it a question around that—

MR SMYTH: No, it is a question about volunteers—

Ms Burch: or is it a question about volunteers? It could be their own internal policy that they are applying, Mr Smyth, which has got nothing to do with this directorate.

MR SMYTH: Are you aware of it or do you have any knowledge of people over the age of 80 being excluded from volunteering?

Ms Burch: It has not come to our attention before.

MR SMYTH: All right; just asking.

Ms Burch: Yes.

MR SMYTH: In regard to Ms Porter's retirement villages bill, has the Office for Ageing been consulted on both of the bills? If yes, what advice was provided?

Ms Overton-Clarke: Yes, we have been consulted and we are in support of the current government position.

MR SMYTH: Sorry?

Ms Overton-Clarke: We were consulted on both the bills and we are in support of the current position.

MR SMYTH: What advice was provided on the first bill?

Ms Overton-Clarke: I will need to take that on notice, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: All right.

THE CHAIR: That is taken on notice.

MR SMYTH: Could we have a copy of that advice? That is fine. Has the Office for Ageing had any complaints—

Ms Burch: Just going back, we will bring back what we can on that, because there was certainly some broad community conversations, as we know. Ms Porter has been working through this retirement village legislation for some time. There are very enthusiastic resident groups and there are very enthusiastic provider groups. We will bring back what we can to the committee, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Right. In the last 12 months, has the office received any complaints relating to residents at retirement villages? If so, how many and what issues did they canvass?

Ms Overton-Clarke: We do not take complaints from retirement villages.

MR SMYTH: Who would take those complaints if someone has a complaint?

Ms Overton-Clarke: That is the commonwealth government, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: So nobody has contacted the Office for Ageing in the ACT?

Ms Overton-Clarke: Not specifically about retirement villages.

MR SMYTH: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Are there any further ageing questions? We will go on to multicultural affairs. Sorry, we have a very short time.

Ms Burch: Come on, David. We will have to get you a question.

Mr Matthews: Happy to be a participant, minister.

MR SMYTH: Name the three things you regret doing in the last 12 months and how will you fix them up in the coming 12 months?

MS HUNTER: Mine was actually in regard to the line item about certain concessions for pensioners and seniors cardholders. Do you have any information on that, Mr Matthews?

MR HARGREAVES: The answer is that you are not eligible, Ms Hunter.

Ms Overton-Clarke: Which one specifically, Ms Hunter?

Mr Matthews: Which line item were you referring to, Ms Hunter?

MS HUNTER: Budget paper 3, page 270.

MR SMYTH: Yes or no?

MS HUNTER: It is down the bottom there under community services. There are certain concessions for pensioners and seniors card holders. It looks like it is some sort of national partnership. We did not have money this year, but we have got an estimated outcome, which is an interesting one. There was not a budget but there is an estimated outcome. Then we have it going into the outyears.

Mr Matthews: Ms Hunter, I can inform the committee that there are current negotiations taking place between the ACT government and the Australian government, along with all other states and territories, regarding a partnership agreement for concessions. We are expecting that to be finalised in the next few weeks. Effectively, all states and territories have reached in-principle agreement on that. It has just been a matter of officials finalising the wording on it. That will be delivered in accordance with the timetable outlined in the budget papers.

MR HARGREAVES: Does that cover mutual recognition between jurisdictions?

Mr Matthews: It sets out that broad context of how concessions are delivered by different levels of government, in particular around funding arrangements between governments. So there is clearly a set of mutual obligations that are agreed to, as well as some direct funding arrangements and some direct territorial effort. Concessions is

obviously an area where there are multi stakeholders, and it is very important that the different stakeholders in that process, the different levels of government, work together to make sure that concessions come together in a way that makes sense to end users.

MR HARGREAVES: That means a retired ACT politician can use their seniors card to travel in Queensland, if everything goes properly?

Mr Matthews: I am not sure whether that includes—

MR HARGREAVES: I will let you know.

Ms Overton-Clarke: You would remember that we were the first state to sign on to reciprocity.

MR HARGREAVES: I wonder who was behind that.

Ms Burch: Some fellow.

Ms Overton-Clarke: We have had a long and proud history of advocating to other jurisdictions about the need for reciprocity.

MS HUNTER: It is being signed off in the next couple of weeks. There is \$1.799 million here for 2011-12. Does that mean it will go into the next financial year, is that right, and top up that next amount?

Ms Overton-Clarke: No. It is the second agreement. It will, in reality, just continue on seamlessly. We got the first payment, an incentive payment, because we signed up to the first agreement. This is the second tranche.

Ms Burch: But we are just finalising a new agreement with COTA around seniors cards administration as well.

THE CHAIR: Mr Doszpot, we will start off with you on multicultural affairs.

MR DOSZPOT: I am sorry, Mr Matthews, I have got no multicultural question for you at this point.

Mr Matthews: I am at your disposal, though.

MR DOSZPOT: I will keep that in mind. Minister, from looking at budget paper 4, page 342, the multicultural groups that took part in the current Multicultural Festival, there has been quite a huge increase to 250. We are budgeting for 250 multicultural groups and an additional 30 community groups, making it 120 community groups. Can you explain what that increase is comprised of?

Ms Burch: I think we are building on the success of the festival earlier this year, which was really a rip-roaring success, if I can use that language. And we are planning, given that next year is our centenary celebration, to really enhance and broaden that as well. But I am sure Nic Manikis can talk around those groups and how

we do not really need to encourage them to come on. They are flocking towards us, to be part of it. It is good.

Mr Manikis: Yes, that is a reflection of what we anticipate for our centenary National Multicultural Festival, on 8, 9 and 10 February next year. All indications are that the community groups are motivated. We are getting requests in the office for participation from several groups already that have not participated in the past. Groups are starting to also become quite creative in drawing in other groups, not necessarily from their own ethnic group. So that is a really good sign. Bear in mind also that we are going to go through some community consultation forums, as we do each year, in about August-September this year, and that is to tap into the community in terms of what could be improved for next year.

At this stage I can give you an example: the African communities, together with some of the African high commissions, are very keen to showcase the African culture in a bigger way than they have in the past. What you will see at the festival next year is all the usual groups there, but with an addition of an African village. And that will involve quite a few of the African organisations here in Canberra as well. The Botswana High Commission are bringing over their national performance troupe, for example. That has been indicated by the high commissioner. We will work together with the community to see how we can showcase that in a way that assists the community members, firstly, to showcase their traditions, because that is what this is all about primarily, and, secondly, to make it as inclusive on that side but also as entertaining for the audience as possible, as part of an entertaining process but also as part of an educative process as well.

Ms Burch: And we do a satisfaction survey.

Mr Manikis: We do.

Ms Burch: And 97 per cent are satisfied or more than satisfied. And that figure or higher feels safe. I think that is one of the extraordinary things about the festival and why groups are increasingly coming. We have a quarter of a million people come through town, with no serious, reportable incidents, and people coming from 10 o'clock in the morning till way after my sleep time, feeling safe and participating in our fantastic multicultural community. It is a great success, and well done to the office.

MR DOSZPOT: It is commendable, especially if we can get the increase you are talking about. One hundred additional multicultural groups is pretty significant. Have you got 100 bookings now, or is that an approximation at this point?

Mr Manikis: This is an expectation. This is what we will be able to cater for and we are expecting—

Ms Burch: Let me say—

MR DOSZPOT: No, I am digging down a little further, Ms Burch, if you would care to hang on a sec.

Mr Manikis: We have got them trickling in. We have got groups trickling in at the moment.

MR DOSZPOT: Trickling in?

Mr Manikis: Trickling in in terms of extras that we do not normally have. There are the 30 extra community groups that you have got from this year's festival to next year's. We will be promoting the centenary festival as a great occasion for the thousands of non-government service providers in town, which make up that community group number, which come and showcase generally on a Sunday what they have to offer the community. It is a good way to connect with the multicultural community.

We are hoping to be working with the Citizens Advice Bureau yet again this year but promoting it a little more intensely to pick up those 30 extra. As far as the other ones are concerned, our centenary team has been very active around the diplomatic missions. There is a great deal of interest from the diplomatic missions in this town to contribute to our centenary. There are many that are exploring ways to do that and the festival seems to be, for them, an easy way of releasing resources from their respective cultural ministries back at home in order to support performance groups. We are saying, "The festival's a forum for you," not necessarily the only forum. They could do it during Floriade, they could do it through other activities throughout the year, but we are seeing an increase.

MR DOSZPOT: And what percentage increase has been allocated for this expected hundred-odd additional groups?

Mr Manikis: A percentage increase? In the budget, you mean?

MR DOSZPOT: Dollar increase.

Mr Manikis: Dollar increase?

Ms Burch: Last year we had an allocation for this that ran into 2012-13.

Mr Manikis: That is right. The government has made available two lots of \$100,000, one for the 2012 festival to get geared up and \$100,000 extra for next year. I might add that we are also talking to some key sponsors. We are being very active in trying to attract some more sponsorship. Once you start getting that extra sponsorship, that is the icing on the cake. You can start doing some things more creatively. As far as the increases are concerned here, we are quite confident that within the existing resources, including the \$100,000 increase, we will be able to cater for the infrastructure to support these numbers.

MR DOSZPOT: That was my next question. With the expected increase, can the people who have supported this, all the various multicultural groups, some of which may have changed, be guaranteed their normal places? They will not be shoved out because of—

Mr Manikis: As far as priorities are concerned, the festival is about the local

community groups. I cannot guarantee that they will be in the exact spot they were 10 years ago, five years ago or last year. I cannot guarantee that, because of the nature of the way we look at it.

Ms Burch: It looks likely because things change.

Mr Manikis: Yes. But I can guarantee that we will not have the whole festival become 300 stalls of commercial operators. We will not have overseas groups dominating the stages. We will not have any of that happening. My role is to ensure that the local community groups are front and centre on this activity, because it is an event that showcases our cultural diversity here in the ACT. And it is supported by those additional elements that we bring in, which go a long way to make the whole thing more attractive.

MR DOSZPOT: There is some reservation from some community groups along those lines, and I am just echoing that, but it is good to hear that it is expanding. It is good to hear that you are getting more money too, as long as you do keep in mind the original contributors, as you have just stated.

Ms Burch: They are always our priority. Multicultural affairs is a priority of the Labor government.

MR DOSZPOT: It is also a priority started by the Liberal government, if you want to get political about it.

Ms Burch: It is not a priority for the Liberal Party if you—

THE CHAIR: Thank you, members.

MR SMYTH: I have a follow-up. How many stalls were there this year?

Mr Manikis: Stalls that we put on the footprint?

MR SMYTH: Yes.

Mr Manikis: Three hundred and thirty-five.

MR SMYTH: Do you expect the extra hundred multicultural groups and the extra 30 community groups to each want a stall, or do you see their participation in other areas?

Mr Manikis: There are different ways we look at that, and we will not be able to make that decision until all the applications have come in. But some community groups share. Other community groups are happy to go on the Sunday when there is some capacity for allocating more stalls. Saturday seems to be the day for everybody. It is full on.

Ms Burch: And some community groups do not have the capacity internally to run from Friday through to late on Sunday anyway. So they may prefer a single day.

Mr Manikis: Yes.

MR SMYTH: How many stalls do you expect to set up this year?

Mr Manikis: We will probably set up the same number.

MR SMYTH: Three hundred and thirty-five?

Mr Manikis: Yes. That number there does not include the sponsors, who have a stall as well, and also the commercials. We had 31 commercial stalls come in. They are very important for our bottom line. They contribute—

MR SMYTH: But how can you expect an extra 130 groups to participate and not have any extra stalls?

Ms Burch: That is the maximum footprint over the three days. And if you were there on the Friday and Sunday, you would notice that some of the stalls are not occupied. And that is where we accommodate, where we can, those smaller groups that have a preference for one day. I regularly hear them saying, “We can’t do three days.” There are only so many volunteers within their groups. But they do want to be part of it.

Mr Manikis: A different way of looking at it is that there are 335 stalls times three. These are the slots over the Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

MR SMYTH: In the current year, the 335 times three, as you put it, so your 1,005 stalls—

Mr Manikis: Yes.

MR SMYTH: How many of those were occupied?

Mr Manikis: The majority. I have not got those figures.

MR SMYTH: Can you take that on notice?

Mr Manikis: Yes.

MR SMYTH: A day-by-day breakdown: how many stalls on the Friday, the Saturday and the Sunday.

Ms Burch: Saturday is the big day.

THE CHAIR: So that is taken on notice.

Ms Burch: And Friday is building up, because we start on the Friday night. I think this is our third year.

Mr Manikis: Third year, I think, yes.

Ms Burch: We have had Jessica Mauboy, Anthony Callea and the four wonderful

women.

MR SMYTH: So you will take that on notice.

Mr Manikis: I will take that on notice.

MR SMYTH: And we will have a breakdown of the three days. Lovely.

THE CHAIR: That is taken on notice. I have got a question in relation to the Human Rights Commission. The Human Rights Commission had a racism roundtable; I went to that and I know you did, too, minister. One of the things people were talking about was religious vilification. I appreciate that multicultural is the big thing, but the people that I sat with gave examples where they have actually experienced it here in Canberra, which I found really concerning. What sort of thing are you doing around that, working with the Human Rights Commission to address this, when we hear that there are instances of this occurring in Canberra?

Ms Burch: I also made comment that we have got a very strong multicultural strategy that we believe in many ways has superseded our racism document that I think expired in—

THE CHAIR: In terms, practically—

Ms Burch: I made the comment that if we needed to strengthen those statements and activity, we will. Mr Manikis can talk about that, but today it has come to my attention that a flyer that is being distributed appears to raise—to me, it raises—concerns about the construction of a mosque in Gungahlin. It is just so disheartening when we are sitting here talking about 90-plus per cent being satisfied with the Multicultural Festival and one in five Canberrans being born overseas. It is just not what Canberra should be when you see material like that.

THE CHAIR: My question is this. This racism roundtable was held before this came about, but there had been something distributed in Queanbeyan as well, I know.

Ms Burch: And there have been recent pamphlets. I gave Mr Manikis a pamphlet that was being distributed through the suburb of Pearce, again just in the last week—

THE CHAIR: But at this roundtable people were saying that they were experiencing it. And some of the young women, like the Multicultural Women's Advocacy Service, were experiencing it. It is really concerning to hear that happening in Canberra. I know we have got the strategy, but if we are hearing these things what do we do practically?

Mr Manikis: What are we doing about it? Firstly, I need to say that the Office of Multicultural Affairs and the Human Rights Commission conducted a race roundtable back in 2011.

THE CHAIR: Yes, I know.

Mr Manikis: And we had another one this year.

THE CHAIR: This was a follow-up, yes; and I went along to that.

Mr Manikis: But in between we also funded an anti-Semitism report. We funded that after we were approached by the local Jewish community representatives. That was presented at the race roundtable. We are very keen to learn about the extent of this issue in our community.

The minister is right when she talks about 97 per cent being satisfied or very satisfied about a multicultural-type event where everybody virtually turns out. But, as you know, you are going to have that element that sometimes we just cannot influence. What we will be doing, though, is trying to influence them. One of the things that we are very keen to do is work with our Muslim Advisory Council and the Human Rights Commission to come up with an action plan following those race roundtable discussions. We are also exploring an antiracism strategy update for 2008 into next year.

MR HARGREAVES: I would like to talk about this mosque episode in Gungahlin.

Ms Burch: Yes.

MR HARGREAVES: I have just had a look at the RiotACT comments. Whilst I do not take a lot of notice of them normally, I notice that there is a pervading sense of horror through the comments on it. One person—

Ms Burch: And rightly so.

MR HARGREAVES: And one person labelling the Concerned Citizens of Canberra, or CCC, the Ku Klux Klan. Whilst I cannot expect you to agree with that politically, or in fact on behalf of the parliament, do you acknowledge that that is encouraging—that that sentiment of rejecting KKK ideology is out there and appears to be alive and well?

Ms Burch: As I read through this, it makes the comment that it would be doubtful if this group would be a good neighbour to the Gungahlin community. That is not a sentiment of an inclusive community. The Muslim community is a very strong part, and a very recognised and respected part, of our community. Certainly their aspirations about having a mosque in Gungahlin have a long history. They tried to have a mosque in Nicholls. There were a number of concerns. I know Alistair Coe was very concerned about the traffic impact, and that put an end to a mosque in Nicholls. In many ways—to you, and going back to Ms Bresnan about what we do around sentiments such as these—this is where all parties stand together and say we support the Muslim community and we support the construction of a mosque in Gungahlin. It is behoven on us all to here and now make that comment of support for the Muslim community to establish a mosque in Gungahlin.

MR HARGREAVES: I recall that in 2005, as a sort of postscript to the Cronulla riots, there was some anti-Muslim sentiment running around the eastern seaboard. I also recall the ACT government, and I think it had cross-party support, saying: “It will not happen in this territory. If people want to do this, they can do it somewhere else. They

will not do it here.” Do you reiterate the government’s stand on that, Ms Burch?

Ms Burch: Absolutely. It is my view that this community is an open and welcoming community. People have the right to have their heritage and their faiths upheld, and have the right to articulate their faith in a way that they choose. This does not go to that welcoming community. I find it very disappointing that we have a community in Gungahlin that has yet again been ostracised and not allowed to get on with what they do.

We have an ACT ministerial Muslim Advisory Council that I talk with regularly about matters that affect them. Sadly, that group is continuing to be in existence, unfortunately because of things such as this. If my memory serves me right—I went out to celebrate the claiming of the block, so to speak, at Gungahlin—it is within a stone’s throw of a church. I do not recall—

MR HARGREAVES: Two hundred metres.

Ms Burch: Two hundred metres. I do not recall the same sentiment around traffic, social impact, traffic noise, public interest, bulk, scale and height, which seemed to be the concerns applied to that. I am happy to put my support behind this community and their right to build their mosque, and I would ask Labor, the Greens and the Liberals here to articulate their support.

MR HARGREAVES: Before they get an opportunity to do that, antiracial vilification and incitement—

Ms Burch: Is absolutely unacceptable.

MR HARGREAVES: are illegal under the Discrimination Act and under the Human Rights Act. Are you concerned that having private, closed-door meetings with only people who have registered could be an opportunity for people to try to avoid prosecution under those pieces of legislation?

Ms Burch: I am not quite sure if the intent is to avoid prosecution, but it is not a hallmark of an open and honest conversation and an open concern.

MR HARGREAVES: Would you agree with the comment that having private, closed-door meetings where only people who are registered can go along to talk—you yourself described it as doubtful that they would be a good neighbour to the Gungahlin community—is a coward’s way out and should be condemned by the entire community in Canberra as a KKK attack on the Muslim community?

Ms Burch: I would stop short of a KKK attack. I understand your personal interest in that, Mr Hargreaves, and your long association with the Muslim community. But to have a location and time for this to be only provided to those who register is not the way that Canberra operates. I am more than happy to refer this to the HRC for investigation.

MR HARGREAVES: I wonder whether, if the police registered to go along with the Concerned Citizens of Canberra and went along in plain clothes, they would be

welcomed in that closed-door meeting.

Ms Burch: Mr Hargreaves, I do not know, but I wonder if you wanted to register and go along and express your concerns.

MR HARGREAVES: The person in charge of KKK-CCC ought to check every single registration, because I might just do that.

THE CHAIR: Okay.

Ms Burch: I would be interested in the committee's comments about our support.

THE CHAIR: As you know, minister, I was at the ground breaking, as you said, as well. It is quite obvious that it is something the Greens have supported. I think we have been on the record for many years on that.

Ms Burch: And Mr Doszpot?

MR DOSZPOT: We are here to ask you questions, minister.

Ms Burch: So you are not supporting the Gungahlin mosque?

THE CHAIR: Ms Burch—

MR SMYTH: No; this is entirely inappropriate.

MR DOSZPOT: Where are your political brochures?

THE CHAIR: Members!

MR DOSZPOT: That is about all that is missing from you today.

THE CHAIR: Members, please! Minister, please!

Ms Burch: Mrs Dunne and Mr Coe are good at flyers.

THE CHAIR: Minister! Ms Burch!

MR DOSZPOT: You are good at providing flyers to schools, minister.

THE CHAIR: Members! Please stop. As I said, if we can conduct ourselves civilly, it would be good. Thank you.

MR DOSZPOT: The minister started it; I am just responding.

THE CHAIR: Mr Doszpot, please.

Ms Burch: It was just an honest—

THE CHAIR: Ms Burch! No.

Ms Burch: Ms Bresnan, it was an honest question in response to this matter that has been raised today.

THE CHAIR: I am not going down this line. Thank you. Ms Burch; I heard that. Thank you. We have to move to the Office for Women. Mr Doszpot, do you have any final questions to ask multicultural?

MR DOSZPOT: Yes, I do.

THE CHAIR: Just a quick question, please. This squabbling has taken up quite a bit of time, so if we can have a quick question. Then we will go to the Office for Women.

MR DOSZPOT: The work experience and support program for migrants, budget paper 4, page 352, output 3.2, community affairs—the percentage of participants that successfully completed the work experience and support program for migrants is static at 85 per cent. Is there an opportunity to make that a bit higher?

Mr Manikis: There are only 20 people in each program. The numbers versus the percentages are interlinked, so when you get one person or two people dropping off for personal reasons, it makes the percentage look the way it does. If you get one or two people dropping out, you cannot—

Ms Burch: Last year we ran a particular WES program for our Sudanese community. As I understand it, that was very successful. I had the pleasure of having one of those participants in my office for a few weeks.

MR DOSZPOT: What is the cost of the program?

Mr Manikis: The cost is \$40,000 per program for putting 20 people through Australian workplace training for a month, followed by a couple of months of voluntary placement across the ACT public service. It is not a job brokerage program; it assists people that are predominantly long-term unemployed to get networks up, to get a bit of experience and also to get an appreciation of what is expected in an Australian workplace.

MR DOSZPOT: The quantity of 20 people, is that a capped number?

Mr Manikis: It is two programs of 20. We appropriated an additional amount of money in the last budget to put an extra one on. We have got \$80,000 for two programs. That is 40 people. It is capped in the sense that the dollars are there.

MR DOSZPOT: What I am trying to find out is: is there a need for more or is that roughly the number that is there?

Mr Manikis: We get 140 people applying, but there are other ways. We try to assist people that do not make it on the program through referrals to the Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services, the Multicultural Youth Services—

Ms Burch: Groups such as TEMPlar.

Mr Manikis: Yes. We have got a stable of recruitment companies where we try to get the pathways going into full-time employment. We work in partnership. The rest of them we try to help in that way.

MR DOSZPOT: You started mentioning a few agencies. How many agencies are involved in total with this?

Ms Burch: Where they do placements?

MR DOSZPOT: How many agencies participate in working with you?

Mr Manikis: On a day-to-day basis there would be five or six in the migrant space.

Ms Burch: In addition to WESP, one of the items that came out of the employment roundtable that we convened in the latter part of last year—again, with a particular focus on the Sudanese community as well—was employment opportunities. We put in train the trainer for drivers because learning to drive in Australian conditions is really important. It is also about a skill-up within their community.

I had the pleasure at Refugee Week to meet three of the successful applicants that got through. They got their certificate to be driving instructors. They were thrilled to bits and they are going through that. White Nile are another social enterprise, with Sudanese refugee women, who are operating out of the Notaras centre. They catered for that refugee breakfast. I notice they were catering for the citizenship ceremonies as well.

THE CHAIR: They did a number of events.

Ms Burch: That is fantastic.

MR DOSZPOT: We have quite a few other questions, but we will put them on notice.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Doszpot. We will move on to the Office for Women.

MS HUNTER: I wanted to start with the funding for the YWCA respect, communicate, choose program. I understand you have provided funding for them to run programs in four ACT schools. Which schools will be taking part in the program and how long will the program run for?

Ms Burch: This is part of our approach with our violence against women strategy. I am absolutely sure that the Office for Women can provide you with some detail on that.

Ms Wensing: On a point of clarification, Ms Hunter, the funding for the YWCA from the ACT Office for Women is for a pilot program. It is actually to develop the program itself. It has been further funded by the commonwealth, the Australian government, to roll out to four primary schools. It is being done in partnership with the South Australian YWCA. I would have to take on notice exactly which schools they are.

THE CHAIR: So that has been taken on notice.

MS HUNTER: Can we move to the national plan to reduce violence against women and children that the office has had a lot to do with? The ACT has signed up to the plan and will have access to the research being undertaken by the national centre for excellence. I understand we are still waiting for some states to sign up to the plan; is that the case?

Ms Wensing: That is the case. Tasmania has signed up as well. Other states are still in the process of signing up.

MS HUNTER: What is the time line?

Ms Burch: It is disappointing, I have to say, Ms Hunter. I think the ACT was the first state to sign up. Similar to not accepting any nonsense around anti-racism, we will not accept anything but good policy support for women and girls. It is disappointing about the other states. Unfortunately, I do not know if we can determine when they will sign up.

Ms Wensing: I think at this stage we cannot. All I can advise is that there is a select council on women's issues meeting coming up on 18 July. This item will be on the agenda.

MS HUNTER: What was the ACT government's financial commitment to this plan, minister?

Ms Burch: There are a number of things. We have got the family violence policy and we have got the anti-violence against women's policy. We do that through a number of activities. About six months ago we were at ANU where they did their respected anti-violence—I am sorry; I should not try and catch up with my emails on my phone at the same time. I might refer to Maureen Sheehan.

Ms Sheehan: Thank you. The ACT government provides \$1.3 million a year funding to the Domestic Violence Crisis Service. In addition to that, through the national affordable housing agreement there would be approximately \$5 million a year in supported accommodation and assistance provided to women and children escaping domestic violence.

In addition, under the national partnership on homelessness, \$100,000 was provided to the Domestic Violence Crisis Service to do a joint program with Housing ACT which was developing policies and procedures for, in cases of final domestic violence orders, removing the name of a perpetrator of violence from the lease in public housing. All of those activities and actions really form the basis of the ACT's financial commitment to the themes and the strategies in the plan.

Ms Overton-Clarke: Can I also add to that the funding of \$400,000 to Canberra Men's Centre over 3½ years to run working with the man, which was established in February this year.

Ms Burch: There is a rolling program of women's safety audits. I am actually walking a safety audit in a week or so myself.

Ms Howson: A number of the women's grants were also directed towards that focus this year.

MS HUNTER: We have some of the very worthy and vital ongoing programs such as DVCS, which, as you know, has been here for 20 or 25 years or more.

Ms Burch: Denise is retiring at the end of the year.

MS HUNTER: Indeed. What else are we going to be putting in specifically? Are there any other specific funds or discussions about funding for this plan?

Ms Howson: The plan is supported by a governance group and working committee. They will be looking at annual action plans. They are in the process of developing that at the moment. That annual action plan will inform future decisions around our funding commitments in this area.

Mr Matthews: If I can further add to that, Ms Hunter, in addition to the things that have already been mentioned there have been a number of other actions that have come from the initial stages, including family violence awareness training for CSD respect, equity and diversity contact officers. That is recognising that family violence can indeed be an issue for public sector employees as well people more generally in the community.

We are working towards a partners in prevention function in November this year. We will get a range of industry figures together, people spanning government and the community sector, to identify collective ways that we can all work towards preventing violence in the ACT community. These are the sorts of initiatives that go to that end of prevention as well as supporting people that are currently experiencing violence.

The minister has mentioned the safety audit program. We will be continuing to look at things like legislative reforms that might be required and specific activities in areas like tertiary campuses where there is a specific education need for supporting young people around family violence and related issues.

MS HUNTER: So what would that look like?

Mr Matthews: I think we need to work together with the relevant student associations and the people that are operating within those campuses. It is about particular prevention resources that target education and people's awareness of the issues. I guess within the purview of a lot of this work it is about making sure that people have got the tools to have conversations in their peer groups and in their relationships so that they can be dealt with and people can access support where those issues emerge.

Ms Burch: Just on the safety audits, the student associations are quite interested in this, for obvious reasons. We have had communications through the University of Canberra. They have accepted and have agreed to work through an audit. Whether they will do it independently using the tools that we can provide them or whether they

seek support from the Office for Women is a bit unclear yet. But I think it is a good move.

MS HUNTER: By “safety audit”, you mean public space safety audits, whether lighting needs to be put in, lines of sight—that sort of thing?

Mr Matthews: It can also be about a particular event, for example. I guess public safety is a broad, ongoing issue, but if there is a particular event where safety might be an issue. It is quite a flexible toolkit, the safety audit process. It can look at service delivery more generally as well. It is a framework in which safety issues can be considered. People can work through a process with a range of women from a variety of different backgrounds or experiences or needs to identify what those safety audits might be.

MR SMYTH: What is the budget for the office of the status of women this year?

Ms Wensing: The total budget is \$1.384 million per annum. That is the combined budget of the Office for Women and the Women’s Information and Referral Centre.

MR SMYTH: So that is 2011-12 or 2012-13?

Ms Wensing: That is 2011-12.

MR SMYTH: What will it be in 2012-13?

Ms Howson: The allocations are still being worked through, Mr Smyth, in terms of next year’s budget, but there is no expectation at this point that it would be different.

MR SMYTH: We have this discussion every year. Surely the budget was put together with bids from the various offices and we know what the allocation will be.

Ms Burch: It will be consistent with this year’s allocation, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Perhaps you could take this on notice. For the four categories of ageing, women, multicultural and Aboriginal Torres and Strait Islander affairs, could we have a list of what the budgets are in 2011-12 and what they will be in the 2012-13 year?

Ms Burch: No worries.

THE CHAIR: Yes, that is taken on notice.

MR SMYTH: It is very hard to have a discussion if you do not know what the budget is doing. That is the whole point of the budget documents. They are meant to inform the discussion, and they do not. I turn to the accountability indicators on page 352, specifically to accountability indicator d: 10,000 contacts was the target for 2011-12 with the Women’s Information and Referral Centre. You had 12,000, which is great. The note says that it was due to an increase in the use of internet technology and postal services. Given that they have both been around for some time, what was the change that saw the 20 per cent increase in contacts?

Ms Wensing: We have now examined those figures, Mr Smyth, and delved down to try and understand why there was such a high number compared to the previous years. The data is kept in quite a detailed way. It does record the method in which those contacts have occurred. After drilling down and examining that data, that was the conclusion that we came to, because that was where the most significant increase in the number of contacts was.

MR SMYTH: There was nothing specifically done to direct women more to the technology or to the postal service? It is just—

Ms Wensing: There has been—

MR SMYTH: I am looking for the catalyst for the change.

Ms Wensing: There has been an initiative also funded by the Australian government, broadband for seniors. There have been two public access computers located at the Women's Information and Referral Centre where women are encouraged to come in and use those computers and they are provided with some assistance around navigating their way around the computer system. Those computers are still in place.

MR SMYTH: Okay. If I come in and use the computer, is that then seen as a contact?

Ms Wensing: Yes, it is, because it is a direct contact with the centre.

MR SMYTH: When did they come into operation?

Ms Wensing: I may have to take that on notice, but I think it was about 2009 or 2010.

MR SMYTH: If they have been there since—

THE CHAIR: That is taken on notice.

MR SMYTH: 2009-10? It still does not give the catalyst for the sudden jump. Was the service advertised better? Was the fact that they were there made known somehow?

Ms Burch: I think that we are advertising the service and just the broader use of social media. The different programs that are being delivered, I think, are reflected in this as well. I am not quite sure whether Mr Hubbard was trying to make his way to the table.

Mr Hubbard: I can just give you the breakdown—

THE CHAIR: No, you will need to come up here; sorry.

MR SMYTH: He has got some budget numbers. We will get to that in a second. If you have had this sudden increase this year, the 20 per cent increase, why would you expect it to be flat in 2012-13?

Ms Wensing: One of the other things that we have done is review the methodology

and streamline the systems for calculating and collecting the data. So based on the revised and refined systems, we estimate that the number of contacts will be 12,500.

Ms Burch: I think the other aspect—before we go to Ian Hubbard—without having the annual reports where we also report on the numbers, I think you will find consistently that we have overachieved on the 10,000. So we have just stretched ourselves a little bit more as well.

MR SMYTH: Last year's budget has it as 10,000, 10,000 and 10,000. So if you have overachieved, you are underreporting it.

Ms Burch: I was referring to the annual report, Mr Smyth.

Ms Howson: That is a target, as opposed to what actually was achieved.

MR SMYTH: But, no, your estimated outcome for 2010-11, last year, was—if you go to last year's BP4, it is 10,000, 10,000, 10,000.

Ms Howson: Yes, so we finally lifted it up.

Ms Burch: Yes. Is there anything else, Mr Hubbard?

Mr Hubbard: Yes, I can give the breakdown for total cost for 3.2, which is the Office for Ageing's \$1 million—

MR SMYTH: Sorry, what year is this for?

Mr Hubbard: Next year.

MR SMYTH: For next year.

Mr Hubbard: You were given the previous one. So for next year, we have got Office for Ageing at \$1.07 million. We have got the Office for Women, \$1.4 million. We have got the combination of MATSIA, \$3.7 million, plus we have got the office of Indigenous affairs at \$0.87 million. Then there is approximately \$0.12 million of overheads that are spread across that group.

MR SMYTH: Just for convenience, do you happen to have last year's numbers?

Mr Hubbard: Not broken up like that. You have been given the one for the Office for Women. I think we did have MATSIA earlier. I can just give you that.

MR SMYTH: Yes, could you provide that?

Mr Hubbard: The same break-up.

MR SMYTH: That would be fine. For the two years, thank you.

THE CHAIR: That is taken on notice. We are unfortunately out of time. I do apologise for going over time. I would like to thank officials from the ageing,

multicultural affairs and status of women portfolios.

Ms Burch: Can I, too, convey my thanks to the Community Services Directorate. I acknowledge yesterday's *Canberra Times*, which referred to the boundless park. Here was an initiative that has been championed by Natalie Howson with volunteer contribution from the Community Services Directorate. That gift to the community by the community in the form of the Community Services Directorate I think is outstanding. I want to convey a big personal thanks to Natalie and to her team.

THE CHAIR: Minister, thank you. We will now move on to consider the gambling and racing portfolio. I would like to welcome Mr Dawes and Mr Jones to this hearing of the estimates committee. We will be considering the expenditure proposals and revenue estimates for the gaming and racing portfolio, which includes output class 1, gambling regulation and harm minimisation, and 1.1, gambling regulation and harm minimisation.

I will go through the usual housekeeping because we have different people here now. Firstly, I draw your attention to the privilege statement, which is on the blue card in front of you. I am sure you are all very familiar with that. But can you indicate you are aware of the information and implications?

Mr Jones: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Minister, would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms Burch: In the interests of time, I will not make an opening statement, other than offering thanks and well done to the crew at the commission that have done a fantastic job over the last 12 months but also to Economic Development for the policy support attached to gaming and racing as well.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister. I will go to my first question. It is in relation to the accountability indicators on budget paper 4, page 437. Output b relates to revenue audits. Can you explain why the same number of audits—which is 12 there—are done on the casino and gambling machine operators when there are many gaming and racing operators and only one casino?

Mr Jones: These audits are revenue-based audits. Given that gaming machine licensees and the casino licensee submit monthly returns, the 12 indicates a monthly audit on their revenue returns, whereas we do one audit on the casino with their monthly return. We count all the gaming machine licensees which come in as one audit, even though there are 68 of them that come in.

THE CHAIR: And so the same with the bookmakers—you are not actually breaking down the numbers—

Mr Jones: Exactly. Correct, we treat each licensee group as one audit. Yes, we audit each one of those as part of one audit.

THE CHAIR: On the accountability indicators, it is good to see c and d are now proper indicators. I think that is something that has been raised, given that you have

been doing this work this year. What would have been the outcomes had these indicators been in the last budget, do you think?

Mr Jones: For c and d specifically?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Jones: The research projects that we do are covered under two funding sources. One is by the commission and the other is under the problem gambling assistance fund. Would you like details of our research program now?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Jones: I can give you details of those. We have completed two projects this year and we have another two which are ongoing. The first of the two projects that we have completed this year was on help-seeking behaviours amongst those with a gambling issue. That was published in October 2011. In terms of help seeking, what we were looking at specifically was those that sought help and those that did not. We found—and this is based on our prevalence study—that only 10 per cent of people that have an issue or have problem gambling symptoms seek assistance or help or external advice on dealing with their problem gambling symptoms.

Most people that report having difficulties or problems with their gambling have not accessed help and, importantly, have not self-identified as having any issues. Not self-identifying is a significant concern for us, which I will get onto in a minute. We have got some current research trying to explore why people do not self-identify as having an issue when, clearly, when the problem gambling test is done on them, they have issues with that.

What we found particularly was that the service providers that we have been dealing with and that our research spoke to have indicated that those with a problem with their gambling are more likely to seek help for other issues, the co-morbidity issues such as family relations, financial problems, drugs and alcohol. It appears that gambling or problem gambling is on the bottom of their list of issues that they are facing, which is a significant finding which we have discovered, and we do not know why. Again, we have got some research exploring why gambling is at the bottom of the list in terms of help seeking. That was one research study, which came out in October.

The other one that we did was a further exploration of the profile of problem gamblers, and this was exploring further information or further data that we got from our prevalence study published in 2009. And what we found was that the key risk factors, if you like, in terms of problem gambling are being younger, being male, basically being single, whether that is through divorce or non-marriage, and having a low level of education. So we explored that profile of problem gamblers, and that was published in October as well. So we have had two published and available. They are on our website if you need to look at the detail.

We have also got two projects which are underway at the moment, going further on those. They are exploring the non-self-identification and the beliefs and knowledge that problem gamblers have about their own gambling activity. And one of the key

issues is: if they are not identifying that they are gambling excessively or more than what is a safe level, why have they not formed that view? We do not know whether it is a naive approach or whether they have different standards.

We think one of the issues may be that there is no benchmarking. For example, if you look at alcohol, there are some guidelines about what is a safe level to drink in terms of number of drinks per day, per week or whatever. But there are none of those guidelines out there for gambling, because it is different for every person. So we think that the lack of a benchmarking standard, if you like, is one of the issues where people have difficulty working out whether their level of activity is actually problematic or not. We are exploring that with some research with high-intensity gamblers. We expect that to be published later this year, maybe October, November.

We have another study, which is ongoing, which is seeing what the level of social support is for problem gamblers. We have been focusing on getting people into counselling, but we think that there may be useful social support from families, friends, perhaps religious persons, that sort of thing.

To get back to your question in terms of outcomes, we have two research reports completed, with two underway as well. So I hope that answers it.

THE CHAIR: It does, thank you.

MR HARGREAVES: Thank you very much for reading my mind, Mr Jones. You have just answered the first two questions that I had on my list. I was interested in those programs as well. Minister and Mr Jones, the Auditor-General looked into the commission's harm minimisation policies and programs, and while the report was quite positive, it made a few recommendations for some improvements. What steps are you taking to implement those recommendations?

Ms Burch: The Auditor-General did provide a report on which the commission made comments, and there were a number of comments by the commission. As I understand it, they were supportive of the majority of those recommendations. The government is finalising its response, and once that is finalised, it will be heading down to the PAC, is my understanding, but we were very interested in the report and its recommendations—very sensible.

MR HARGREAVES: Given that we have only got two sitting weeks left in the life of this parliament and PAC will not be meeting all that frequently, given their consistency with estimates committee deliberations and the lead-up, how soon will the PAC receive that advice?

Ms Gilding: It is in the mail, I think.

MR HARGREAVES: It is in the mail?

Ms Gilding: That is the short answer to that. But certainly we are in the process of finalising that. I think it needs to be with the committee by 3 July. So we certainly will meet that time frame.

MR HARGREAVES: Ordinarily the response would be tabled in the Assembly and then shot off to the PAC?

Ms Burch: Yes.

MR HARGREAVES: Maybe Mr Smyth can help us out here. I do not know how other people get their hands on that, given the shortness of the sitting patterns. Does it need to be tabled with the Speaker on its way or just PAC or what?

MR SMYTH: The government's response?

MR HARGREAVES: So they can let it out as often as they like?

MR SMYTH: It is the government's response.

MR HARGREAVES: In which case, will you be putting that response on a website or anything like that?

Ms Burch: I am happy to, once it has gone through the appropriate procedures that it needs to do.

MR HARGREAVES: That is what I was getting at, yes.

Ms Burch: Yes, absolutely.

MR HARGREAVES: I thought that ordinarily it would go to the Assembly on its way to the PAC. I am grateful that it is not going that way, because it would be another two months before it happened. Could you take on board, without notice, to find out whether it can go out for public consumption on its way?

Ms Burch: We will make sure that we make it publicly available as quickly as we can within protocol.

MS HUNTER: I have a question around the high-bet value machines. And there were a number that were approved this year. Mr Jones, I was interested in whether there are any additional risk assessments or harm minimisation measures that are required to go with high-bet value machines, because of a higher harm that can be caused.

Mr Jones: By "high-bet value machines", presumably we are talking gaming machines and the level of the bet or whatever we can on a particular spin. Is that what you are aiming at?

MS HUNTER: That is right.

Mr Jones: In the ACT we have a maximum of a \$10 bet. So there will be nothing approved above that. We treat the applications for approval of each gaming machine according to the national standards, which we as the ACT abide by, if you like, in terms of approval. And the technical assessment of each gaming machine goes through the technical labs in New South Wales and they produce a report to us, both on its technical operation in terms of its return to player or all those things as well as

the harm minimisation requirements consistent with the national standards.

MS HUNTER: What are they?

Mr Jones: It is a document which is several hundred pages long. I can certainly provide you with a copy, if you need to. They are very technical in nature.

MS HUNTER: Is that very large document just about harm minimisation?

Mr Jones: No; it is a mixture, as I said, of the technical standards of how a machine operates, because basically a gaming machine is—

MS HUNTER: I am more focused on the harm minimisation assessments and so forth.

Mr Jones: Part of those are in the technical standards and part of those are additional requirements which we put on, and some of that is a bit of a commonsense, if you like, approach to how a machine operates and whether it is likely to be misleading to any of the players in terms of what it promises or the return to player. Things that we do not approve, for example, include some of the continual double-ups or jackpots where people could quite easily get into trouble by betting more than perhaps they would expect in, let us call it, the thrill of the moment.

MS HUNTER: Particularly when you are putting on \$10 each time.

Mr Jones: Exactly.

MS HUNTER: That is a large amount of money, really.

Mr Jones: Yes.

MS HUNTER: That can add up.

Mr Jones: Apart from those technical standards, it needs to comply with all our other legislative requirements, particularly our code of practice and things. Yes, we have a very close look at the applications for machines and the testing of those machines when they come in, and those high-bet, high-intensity machines, if you like, are certainly put under scrutiny along those lines.

MR HARGREAVES: I have got a quick update. I have got an answer to that response. Mr Smyth will be quite interested to hear this. I have just been advised by the PAC secretary that the government response will be transmitted to the PAC. Once the PAC has received it and authorised it for publication, the committee secretary puts it on the web and it is open for public consumption. So you need do nothing.

Ms Burch: Thank you for that clarification, and PAC will receive it in the mail.

MS HUNTER: I want to pick up on a question you asked at the beginning, Madam Chair, about the ANU research. This is excellent research; I am really pleased to see that it continues. With the work that comes out of that research, is that actively shared

and put out there? What do you do with the research?

Mr Jones: Yes, it certainly is. As soon as the commission has approved the research, the final report that we get, we immediately put it on our website. We advise the minister and interested directorates—for example, Community Services—if it affects them or whatever. But, yes, we certainly make it public straightaway. ANU, from an academic point of view, publish as well, and quite often give papers at various conferences and things like that based on that research. Our deed of arrangement with ANU allows them to publish those results of that research in their own right. So it gets disseminated through the academic world as well as the government and community world through us. So we are both using our networks to make that available.

MS HUNTER: Some of that research is quite cutting edge internationally. Is it being recognised, do you know?

Mr Jones: Slowly. The gambling research area is a bit slow to catch on sometimes. Our experience over the last 10 or 15 years is that it is about 10 or 15 years behind research in other areas, particularly alcohol and other co-morbidity areas. I have got a meeting at 2 o'clock today with the secretariat of Gambling Research Australia, which we are part of, in terms of the next round of prevalence studies which are coming up Australia wide in terms of trying to get some sort of standard list of at least core questions. They are particularly interested in talking to us, given the quality of our prevalence study in 2009.

So I think the recognition is slowly coming around in terms of some of this cutting-edge research. Some of the research I mentioned earlier in response to Mr Hargreaves's question really is cutting edge in Australia. And, a bit surprisingly, no-one else in Australia has been doing that. ANU, under our program, is a national, if not international, leader, as you recognise.

MS HUNTER: I am glad we have got the funding through the gambling assistance fund.

Mr Jones: Indeed.

Ms Burch: And would it be fair to say that clubs and Mission Australia would apply that research?

Mr Jones: Very much so. With our ongoing relationship and liaison with Mission Australia, we are passing on the results of this research, which, in a very practical way, will be applied by Mission Australia, particularly in terms of encouraging people to self-identify and seek help or assistance. Some of the research we are looking at at the moment—some of this will be under the gambling assistance fund—will be on how we target or promote the services such as those offered by Mission Australia. At the moment, we have been using our websites, some ads that we developed and brochures, but we are not quite sure how successful they have been.

MS HUNTER: Are the clubs and other outlets coming on board to help promote?

Mr Jones: They are. I think ClubsACT do a pretty reasonable job in terms of

engaging, using our brochures and things like that. Yes, they do have obligations under the code of practice. But their compliance on that is pretty good. So yes. Through the clubs network, through the network of gambling contact officers which is set up under the code, we are, through Mission, encouraging more frequent meetings of the gambling contact officers so that they can start exchanging information, have training additional to the minimum required under the code and things like that. That is just starting to get some momentum, which has been quite encouraging. The previous gambling contact officer meeting that we had with Mission and a few other people was really well received, and we are looking forward to having the next one, which will be in the next month or so.

MR SMYTH: On budget paper 4, page 433, the fifth dot point talks about monitoring legislative changes around the country and what effect they are likely to have on the ACT. Have there been any changes, and is there any effect on the ACT?

Mr Jones: That is a broad category which covers both racing and gaming. Particularly recently, there have been some significant changes in the wagering industry. There was, as you are probably aware, the High Court decision in New South Wales a few months ago on the race fields and the charging of product fees—whether that is on a turnover or profit basis.

We are currently seeking, through the Economic Development Directorate, some specific advice from the Government Solicitor's office on the implications of that High Court decision on the ACT legislation if we decided to move to a turnover-based model, which is what the industry wish. Clearly, with one High Court decision on a particular case, we need to be very careful on the breadth of that decision—thus the GSO advice. So we are looking at that.

If that is going to be of assistance to our industry, clearly there will be some advice to government on that—whether we go down the route of turnover rather than a profit basis. But again we need to be a bit cautious in terms of how we proceed. We do not want to be the next target of litigation in this area. That would not be a good idea. That is a particular area that we are looking at.

And the commission is constantly monitoring, particularly, the various harm minimisation strategies which are being used elsewhere. Queensland and Victoria are doing some really good work in that area. Some of it is a bit experimental, so we have got the luxury of perhaps sitting back and seeing how that goes for the next 12 months. If it works, then great; we will grab it and run with it.

MR SMYTH: When do you expect to get that legal advice and when would you expect to make any changes required?

Ms Gilding: I think Mr Jones has quite nicely articulated the situation. The advice from GSO is imminent. We then need to look at that. We have been asked by the minister, working with the commission, to look at those implications and policy issues over the next couple of months.

MR SMYTH: Sports Alive—what is the status of that issue, and are there any implications or ramifications for the ACT?

Mr Jones: Sports Alive, just for the committee's background, was a licensed sports bookmaker that was operating in the ACT, but their head office was based in Melbourne. They went into liquidation in August last year, leaving a substantial number of debts to their own creditors, including some of their directors and the parent company, as well as the betting accounts of some of their patrons.

The status of that is that in May the liquidator used its powers under the Corporations Act to hold what they call an oral examination session, which allowed them to put on the stand, under oath, the directors of Sports Alive. They also chose to put some of the directors and the CEO of Tote Tasmania on the stand. The reason they did that is that Tote Tasmania, which at that stage was a 20 per cent stakeholder in Sports Alive, had given substantial undertakings to Sports Alive and to us that they would increase their stake from 20 per cent to a 50.5 per cent controlling interest, and obviously inject further capital, further equity, into the company. In the end, that did not happen, and that was the trigger for Sports Alive going into liquidation.

There were four days of hearings. Our view was that whatever money was available in terms of the wrap-up of the company—and there is about \$800,000 still to be resolved—or a substantial portion of that, should go to the punters, the account holders, whose interests we were trying to protect, that it was allocated to those punters. We were represented at that hearing by counsel. Our counsel asked a number of questions and clarified for the record the operation of Sports Alive in terms of these segregated accounts.

The resolution of that matter is still with the Supreme Court in Victoria, where the hearing was held. We are waiting on the outcomes of that. What we are expecting to happen next is that the liquidator will be seeking formal judgement in relation to those hearings from the Supreme Court—whether the segregated accounts were properly held or properly accounted for, and therefore the money should go to the patrons rather than the general creditors, which is what the liquidator is pushing.

MR SMYTH: What is the liability to both groups?

Mr Jones: The total liability, we understand—it is difficult to get a final figure, because the information provided to us by Sports Alive has turned out to be incorrect, which is a matter of some dispute. We are relying on the liquidator's accounts or assessment with their financial report. The liquidator had difficulty because of the financial records that were made available to them at the time. We believe that the level of patron accounts could be up to \$3 million. We thought it was in the order of about \$1 million—between \$1 million and \$1.3 million. The liquidator seems to think it is closer to \$3 million—we are not in a position to come to a view as to which is the correct number, and the liquidator has got access to more information than we have, so perhaps it is the \$3 million; we are not sure—with total liabilities in the order of \$8 million to \$10 million, including all the other creditors, which really is not an issue for us.

MR SMYTH: On page 6 of your statement of intent, in the third paragraph, it finishes with a line that you will take any appropriate measures that may be needed to be taken to ensure that the integrity of the local industry is maintained. Is the integrity of the

local industry under any threat? If so, from where?

Mr Jones: Integrity could come from almost anywhere. There were issues with organisations with betting exchanges such as Betfair in terms of the ability to bet on a horse to lose as an alleged integrity threat. We and other jurisdictions have been closely monitoring that. While there have been a number of court cases and suspensions of people involved in the industry—such as jockeys, trainers or whatever being suspended, fined or whatever for betting on a horse they had some influence over to actually lose a race—there has not been any substantial increase of integrity issues as perhaps argued initially by the industry when betting exchanges came on board. So that would be one source. But I guess it is the general nature of the industry in terms of the way bookmakers operate—keeping inside information out of the betting arena and things like that. It is mostly to do with inside information being used to source some sort of bet or fixation on the races.

MR SMYTH: Finally, on page 48 in your operating statement, I see under “Taxes fees and fines” that you were to get \$56.3 million in revenue this year. You have come up with \$55.1 million, and there is a further decline next year to \$54.7 million. What is driving that decline?

Mr Jones: You are looking at—

MR SMYTH: And then what drives the bounce in the outyears where it goes up to 56, 57 and 59?

Mr Jones: Just to clarify, you are looking in the op statement, “Taxes, fees and fines”?

MR SMYTH: Yes.

Mr Jones: I think that the level of variation is relatively small given the volatilities in the industry. This is all gambling operations that are paying tax. The gradual increase in the outyears is basically our best estimate, which is CPI. There is a broad CPI growth on those. In terms of the bouncing round from the budget of 56 to estimated outcome of 55, most of that is a decrease in the public lotteries—Lotto, TattsLotto. The reason for that is when Tattersalls bought NSW Lotteries, they stopped trading in a retail network the Victorian lotteries, the TattsLotto.

You may or may not have noticed that all you can do in your shopping centre is buy a New South Wales lottery ticket now. That resulted in a drop of about \$1 million to \$1½ million dollars in terms of revenue. And whereas you would think it should have been revenue neutral, clearly there are a number of people that were buying both a New South Wales and Victorian lottery ticket, perhaps naively thinking that going into different draws would increase their chances, whereas in fact it is all in the one draw and it is all part of the same block. But so be it.

MR SMYTH: Good luck to them.

Mr Jones: Yes, indeed. Gaming machine revenue went up a little, which counteracted some of that. We are not quite sure why gaming machine revenue went up the half or

three-quarters of a million dollars that it did. Things are pretty tough out there in the industry. We would have expected maintaining at the current level, and we have gone with that expectation next year—that they will maintain roughly that level rather than continue with that slight increase. But we are only talking relatively minor percentage changes in what are fairly volatile fluctuations from month to month.

MR SMYTH: On that issue of the purpose of lotteries, there were some changes in the legislation recently that do not permit staff of a newsagency, for instance, to buy lotteries and scratchies from that outlet. Has there been any difficulty with that?

Mr Jones: That has been around for a little while. That is in the code of practice: a person who is involved with gambling cannot gamble at the venue that they work. Look, not really. It is one of those things which, both with licensed clubs and lottery outlets, we use mostly as an educational rather than a big stick approach. With a turnover of staff in both organisations, sometimes their awareness is not quite what it should be, although it is covered in the training and the responsibilities with the licensee. There is the odd occasion where someone has either bought a ticket or played gaming machines off duty at their club, but mostly it is an awareness education thing and it immediately stops. We have not had any ongoing issues with any particular outlet or club on that.

MR SMYTH: So there have been no prosecutions?

Mr Jones: No.

MR SMYTH: It does seem odd to compare the purchase of a lottery ticket with playing a poker machine. Is there any view about reviewing particularly how that affects, for instance, newsagencies and those sorts of outlets? I know a number of newsagents find it a bit odd that they cannot buy a ticket from themselves to put in an envelope and send to Mum for Mother's Day. Is there any real need to keep that restriction, given that they cannot manipulate anything inside the machine?

Mr Jones: If we are talking a lottery outlet, for example, they cannot manipulate the outcome or whatever, because they are not responsible for that. It is predetermined regardless of whatever they sell or the draw is done elsewhere if it is a Lotto block-type product. But it is also a harm minimisation product. If you are faced with a gambling product all day, for example, an instant scratchie, you could go through, if you were inclined or bored or whatever, quite a few instant scratchies and get a substantial amount of money either taken from the till or otherwise in terms of what is going on. There is, with lottery products, an instant return available. So it is more, in terms of the lotteries, a harm minimisation approach with that.

Having said that, yes, there are some substantially different risks associated with gaming machine play and lottery products, which we clearly recognise. The commission has already started a review of the code of practice and we will probably be going out for public consultation later this year. I do not know when yet. We are still doing our background research on that.

Clearly, one of the issues that we will no doubt be addressing is the issue with that, commensurate with the risk, and if it is not, then we will drop it. And if it is, because

of the potential harm minimisation, then we will probably keep it and increase our education.

MR SMYTH: There is not a great deal of evidence on abuse of scratchies and lottery-type products. The evidence is not that an enormous number of people are abusing it. I am not aware of any evidence within house that there is any abuse and that individual firms might have problems with personal security arrangements and staffing issues. If you are going to review the code of practice and look at that issue, that is fine.

Mr Jones: Yes, we will certainly look at it. It is low risk. There is no doubt about that. There is a little evidence overseas, particularly in Canada, which indicates that for some of the young people, your 16, 17-year-olds, scratchies particularly can be a bit problematic at that age and in terms of leading to other types of gambling. So there is some risk. It is not zero risk. But it is definitely lower risk on the scale. There is no doubt about that.

MR HARGREAVES: What is this Dick Smith decision all about?

Ms Burch: Dick Smith sought to come to Canberra to promote and do some giveaways. There was a decision made within the commission that did not facilitate that. Needless to say, I asked the commission to review that decision.

We have since written to Mr Smith to invite him back to Canberra to get on with his door-knocking at some ungodly hour in the morning and if you have got his peanut butter in your cupboard, you could get \$500. It was a decision, I think, made within the commission, but Greg has come back and reviewed it, as is good practice. You make decisions, but you review them. And a different decision came through.

Mr Jones: It was initially considered to be a lottery and their terms and conditions did not fit in with the consumer protection standards that we have. Dick Smith decided not to amend their terms and conditions. When I reviewed the decision, I considered it was not a lottery overall. It did not actually fit in with a lottery. It was just a giveaway decided by Mr Smith. So we refunded his application fee and said, "It is not a lottery, go for it."

MR HARGREAVES: Essentially, there was a position taken on the side of caution for the vulnerable out there and on review, it was all right?

Mr Jones: Yes.

Ms Burch: Yes.

THE CHAIR: It looks like we have come to the end of our questions. Thank you, Mr Jones. Mr Dawes, you got away without saying anything this time. Well done.

As mentioned at the commencement of the hearing today, there is a time frame of five working days for the return of answers to questions taken on notice. Obviously that is in output class 1 social housing, output 1.1 social housing services, output class 3 community development and policy, output 3.1 community services, output 3.2 community affairs and output class 1 gambling regulation harm minimisation, output

1.1 gambling regulation and harm minimisation. On behalf of the committee, thank you for appearing.

We will resume at 2.30 to consider the Office of the Legislative Assembly and the Auditor-General portfolio.

Meeting adjourned from 12.50 to 2.31 pm.

Appearances:

Rattenbury, Mr Shane, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly for the ACT

Legislative Assembly for the ACT

Duncan, Mr Tom, Clerk

Kiermaier, Mr Max, Deputy Clerk and Serjeant-at-Arms

Barrett, Ms Val, Manager, Hansard, Communications and Library

Duckworth, Mr Ian, Manager, Corporate Services

THE CHAIR: Given the time, we will start. Welcome, Mr Rattenbury and staff from the Assembly, to the resumption of the 11th public hearing of the Select Committee on Estimates 2012-2013. The Legislative Assembly has referred to the committee for examination expenditure proposals of the 2012-2013 Appropriation Bill and the revenue estimates in the 2011-2012 budget. The committee is due to report to the Assembly on 14 August 2012.

The committee has resolved that all questions on notice will be lodged with the Committee Office within three business days of receipt of the uncorrected proof transcript, with day one being the first business day after the transcript is received. Answers to questions on notice will be lodged with the Committee Office within five business days of receiving the question, with day one being the first business day after the transcript is received. Answers to questions taken on notice will be returned five business days after the hearing at which questions were taken, with day one being the first business day after the question was taken.

The proceedings this afternoon will commence with an examination of the expenditure proposals and revenue estimates of the Office of the Legislative Assembly followed by the ACT Auditor-General's Office. I am sure you are all very familiar with the housekeeping issues, but I will go through them for the record. I draw your attention, obviously, first off to the blue card privilege statement in front of you. I am sure you are all very familiar with the implications and information in it, but can you indicate that you are?

Mr Rattenbury: Yes, thank you.

THE CHAIR: Excellent. I am sure you all know that proceedings are being broadcast today. Mr Rattenbury, before we go to questions, would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr Rattenbury: No; we are happy to proceed straight to questions.

THE CHAIR: Excellent. I want to refer to the Assembly website. I note that one of the 2012-13 priorities is to develop a new website for the Assembly to enhance community access and to improve accessibility. I am wondering whether there will be a better search function—I think that is one of the things that has been brought to us—so that it is possible to search things like committee reports, transcripts, minutes of proceedings and other things, such as the notice paper and *Hansard*. What capability is that going to have?

Mr Rattenbury: Yes, on the specifics of the website, I will ask Val Barrett to come to the table. Obviously, I think the nature of web technology is such that it is time for the Assembly to update its website. We have certainly been keen to ensure that stakeholders have a good input to that redevelopment. There has been a committee comprising some staff of the Office of the Legislative Assembly. We have also had external feedback on the development of the site. On the specific question, I will ask Val Barrett to come to the table.

Ms Barrett: Yes, as Mr Speaker said, we have had an extensive stakeholder consultation in the development of the new website. We are just at the stage now of receiving—in fact, today we have received—the final version of the functional specification.

Interestingly, we did not get quite as much feedback as we would have liked. We put a survey out on the website and invited as much feedback as we could get. Generally, people complained about it perhaps being a little old fashioned and they wanted it to be updated a little bit. They thought that the content was pretty good, but searching, particularly of *Hansard*, has always been an issue. So with the redesign it is intended to be designed around finding what you need based on the parliamentary sitting calendar—what is about to happen, what is happening and what did happen.

There will be a number of ways of accessing information based on not just insider knowledge of how to get things. We are certainly a bit more comfortable that the new website will make it easier to find things than the existing one does. That has been at the forefront of our minds. We are not yet at the stage of having a technical specification and knowing exactly what the content management system or the search facility will be. But that is the important next stage—to get that technical specification right.

THE CHAIR: It will not be based on, as you said, the actual sitting date. It will be based on—there will be other capabilities to find that information?

Ms Barrett: Yes. It seems from what we have seen from the functional spec that the design is based around there being a number of ways to get to things. So it is a bit more intuitive than we have got currently.

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Barrett: From an outsider's point of view who knows that parliament is sitting, that the Assembly is sitting, they will be able to see what is coming up, then what is happening on the day and then search for things that have already happened. But there will also be the sort of content boxes where you can go straight to what you need if you know where you are going to. We have just tried to make it much more intuitive. From the front page you can quickly find whatever it is you want to see.

THE CHAIR: When do you think it will be ready to go?

Ms Barrett: Our aim is to have it ready for the new Assembly; so we are looking at a date of around about the end of October. That would be ideal, but it is a complicated process. We are very conscious that we have got to get a good website and that is the

most important thing. We would rather have a slight delay than not get what we want.

THE CHAIR: Sure.

Ms Barrett: But I am quite happy to say that we are aiming for the end of October.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Hargreaves?

MR HARGREAVES: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have a supplementary, not to be confused with the substantive questions that I wish to ask in a moment.

THE CHAIR: Sure.

MR HARGREAVES: I am aware of the great work that your education office actually does in terms of particularly the students that come through. You teach them about Hare-Clarke, the parliamentary process and all of that. Is the use of the Assembly website factored into the education program so that we teach the young people how they can continue to access what is happening in the Assembly after they leave Mr Baudinette's wonderful programs?

Ms Barrett: There is a strong emphasis in the design of the new website on the education aspect of it. I am fairly confident—David may have something to add, if he thinks I have not answered it sufficiently—that the new website will give even more emphasis to the education opportunities in the Assembly.

MR HARGREAVES: I notice that there has been an increased interest—or maybe it is just a standard one and I have not picked up the regularity—from the University of the Third Age. We get a lot of visits from the university. I am wondering whether or not we are trying to teach those older folks, who usually have a bit of a fear of technology—I for one hate Twitter; I hate it—how to access what is in the Assembly resources as well.

Ms Barrett: I think the key to that is making the website design as easy to use and as intuitive as possible so you do not have to have a really detailed technical knowledge of how to find things. I think we have got to try to achieve that by making it simple and intuitive for everybody.

MR HARGREAVES: Whilst I agree with you, it is the sort of thing that you do not know what you do not know. Would you consider folding it into some of these contact programs that the education officers Mr Skinner and Mr Baudinette actually do?

Ms Barrett: In terms of running education programs, I would have to hand that over to David. The website itself will feature prominently the education program that we do.

Mr Rattenbury: We can take that as a suggestion as well, Mr Hargreaves.

MR HARGREAVES: I would be happy with that. I know that when I leave here, I am going to be one of those people who refuses to write to the *Canberra Times*,

unlike other retired politicians. But curiosity would want me to be able to keep in contact. Knowing how to do it is something that you need to teach old folk.

Mr Rattenbury: I would actually like to see you start a Twitter account, Mr Hargreaves, because I would follow that. I think it would be very entertaining.

MR HARGREAVES: Thank you, Mr Speaker. We will see how you feel at the end of the session.

THE CHAIR: What is your substantive question?

MR HARGREAVES: I wanted to explore a couple of questions—plural—with regard to the approval of material out of the discretionary office allowance in an election year—surprising as that may be. I am aware that material in the first three years of a four-year term will have a slightly different focus or a different approach than in the last year. Given that we know the date of the election, the election campaigning usually starts on 1 January and goes forward. Having said that, Mr Speaker, how many applications for approval of materials have you received in the last six months, roughly?

Mr Rattenbury: The specifics of that I would probably have to take on notice, Mr Hargreaves.

THE CHAIR: That is taken on notice.

MR HARGREAVES: Okay.

Mr Rattenbury: Perhaps I can clarify before I take it on notice, and we can work out whether you want it or not. Firstly, of course, it is not approval. Members are free to approach the Secretariat for advice as to whether a publication meets guidelines. Members do not have to approach. So members are free to make a publication if they wish without that advice. The Secretariat does not keep records of those approaches. Some of those conversations are that a piece of material will come down and verbal advice will be given. Some members seek written advice, but often it is verbal advice. On that basis, it is actually probably impossible for us to answer your question, only because we do not have a record.

MR HARGREAVES: No, I accept that, and I am happy with that response so far, Mr Speaker. In respect of that, then, members have the members guide, which is just that—a guide. We have the Speaker's directions which also, whilst that is the title, are actually a guide on how you can conduct yourself and your expenditure within the context of the DOA. But is it fair to say that members regard this as the convention, the correct convention, on how they should apply themselves to the notion of expenditure of taxpayers' funds?

Mr Rattenbury: That is probably a fair characterisation.

MR HARGREAVES: In that case, the way it is at the moment, it would not be appropriate, would it, for you to rule on the spirit of compliance with that convention? You could actually rule, if you like, or give advice on the application of a given

activity against that convention, and it may be advice for people not to do something or to do something—yes, they can. But would you actually advise people on the spirit, whether the spirit has been respected?

Perhaps giving you an example might be a better way of doing it. For example, I would be interested to know whether you have approved the pamphlet distributed by Mr Doszpot—50,000 pamphlets to the electorate of Molonglo. I know that Mr Doszpot is in fact a member for Brindabella and has not distributed that pamphlet to the electorate of Brindabella, but he has distributed that pamphlet to the electorate of Molonglo and it is noted that he is a preselected candidate for the electorate of Molonglo and not the electorate of Brindabella.

MR COE: What is your question, John?

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Coe.

MR HARGREAVES: I am talking to the Speaker, Mr Coe. Mr Speaker, am I correct in assuming that if you approved or agreed that this pamphlet was to go ahead, you did so because you do not have the authority to actually make comment on whether somebody has respected the spirit of the convention?

Mr Rattenbury: I see where you are going now. There are a couple of things in that. The first is that I do not approve—again, it is that approval and advice thing. Most publications do not come to me. Most of them are dealt with through Corporate Services. I would have been involved in perhaps half a dozen incidents through the course of the term. They only come to me either if there is a formal complaint or if, in the advice that the Secretariat gives, a member disagrees. It might be escalated first to the Clerk and then finally to me if the dispute still continues. I actually see very few of the matters that go out until they come through my letterbox, I guess.

As to the example that you have provided around Mr Doszpot, that matter was drawn to my attention earlier this year, in February or March, by a member of the public. I looked into that matter at the time. I wrote to Mr Doszpot. I then received representation on his behalf from staff in the leader's office of the Liberal Party and we had a significant discussion. In that instance, I think that it was the material that Mr Doszpot had circulated—he provided an explanation to me as to why he thought it was valid to circulate that in the electorate of Molonglo. His argument was that, as the shadow education minister, he wanted to engage with people on the education issue in areas outside of his electorate.

I thought that there was validity in that argument and on that basis I did say to Mr Doszpot that I was satisfied with his explanation. I also indicated to him, though, that there were perception issues around the fact that it was known he was changing electorates and I felt that targeted distribution of that material would be acceptable, but if he was to start letterboxing entire suburbs or the entire electorate, that would probably move it into the zone of being election campaigning material under the guidelines. As I often do with these matters, I sought to work with members to sort these matters out.

MR HARGREAVES: I appreciate that. Am I right in assuming then that if he did not

send the pamphlets to Gungahlin, Belconnen, Tuggeranong or Woden but only the electorate in which he had been pre-selected, you felt that that was sufficiently targeted not to be a political document?

Mr Rattenbury: I did not ask Mr Doszpot specifically where he had distributed it. He said he was actually unable to tell me exactly where it had been, if I recall the conversation correctly. I also indicated some of those matters to him—that I felt if it was also being distributed in Belconnen that would alleviate the concern that had been brought to my attention.

MR HARGREAVES: In the context of the discretionary office allowance, this is where the Speaker's office does have an authority and an approval perspective. If I wanted to buy something out of my DOA and it was not on the list, I would approach your office and say, "Could I please do this, Mr Speaker?" You would then make a judgement on whether or not that was appropriate.

Mr Rattenbury: Yes, there is a discretion. There is a list of matters that are approved and there is a discretion for me to approve other matters in advance of the expenditure being undertaken.

MR HARGREAVES: It has been said by some that you have occasionally applied a certain bias. I would like to know for my own information whether or not you have approved all of the applications in the context of DOA or whether you have knocked people back. Have you knocked people back from the Labor Party and have you knocked people back from your own party, the Greens, because you thought it was outside the scope of the DOA?

Mr Rattenbury: The only example I can recall of rejecting an application for DOA expenditure was one from the Greens, one of the Greens' members who sought to have a matter funded out of DOA. That member sought that approval after the expenditure had been incurred. The item that was requested was not on the list. Because the rules are very clear that you cannot get after-the-fact approval, I had to reject that application. It was a sum of somewhere between \$1,000 and \$1,500. That member had to fund that expense out of their own pocket.

MR HARGREAVES: So let me get this straight: you have actually said to a member of your own party, "You have to pay for an amount out of your own pocket," and you have said the same thing to the Liberal Party recently, "You have to pay for something out of your own pocket," because of the way the rules sit?

MR SMYTH: Except they did not ask for approval retrospectively.

MR HARGREAVES: I am not talking to you, Mr Smyth; I am talking to the Speaker.

THE CHAIR: Members, please!

MR SMYTH: Well, you have been talking for a long time now. You have got a very circuitous route of trying to—

MR HARGREAVES: I am entitled to go down this track. Stop trying to cloud it over.

THE CHAIR: Members, thank you!

MR HARGREAVES: You are trying to cloud it over.

MR SMYTH: You are the only thing clouded this afternoon.

THE CHAIR: Members, please! Can you please direct your questions through me?

MR COE: One last hoorah, John.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Coe.

MR HARGREAVES: There is quite a good likelihood that you and I will have something in common after this election. Neither of us will be here.

THE CHAIR: Mr Hargreaves, please!

MR SMYTH: Except for you it is a certainty.

THE CHAIR: Mr Smith!

MR HARGREAVES: Except with me it is my choice.

THE CHAIR: Can we let the Speaker answer the question, please?

Mr Rattenbury: I think I have answered the question, but Mr Duckworth would just like to add some further information.

Mr Duckworth: In the context of the questions and the response the Speaker gave, it is worth clarifying that under the DOA guidelines members are encouraged, or guided, to approach the corporate office initially with any requests for new items. I receive those requests from time to time. The menu, I guess, over the years has largely become pretty solid and there are not a lot of new items. In the early days there were quite a number of requests. Through that process there have certainly been requests for approvals that I have added to the list without reference to the Speaker or the Clerk because, in my view, they quite clearly fit the guidelines.

I am also aware of instances where members have approached me with a proposal and I have said that I do not think it would meet the guidelines; I am aware of several instances where members have proposed items and I have said that I do not think it would meet the guidelines and they have been happy with that. In a situation where a member proposed that and that was not, in my view, acceptable and the member wished to have that reviewed, that is when we would escalate the process. I just felt it was worth clarifying that.

MR COE: But would the vast majority of claims not be retrospective? It is only when you are talking about a new item that it cannot be retrospective; is that correct?

Mr Duckworth: Yes, indeed. Just for clarity, if an item is on the menu, there is no

problem with a member lodging an expense claim for that item.

MR COE: After you have a receipt.

Mr Duckworth: That is right, yes. But as to a request for something that has not been previously approved, the guidelines are very clear that a member cannot incur an expense and then ask that that be included on the menu and be reimbursed. I think that was the situation the Speaker was referring to.

MS HUNTER: Budget paper 4, page 5, mentions employee expenses. My question is around what savings the Office of the Legislative Assembly made by bringing its payroll back into the Assembly from Shared Services' human resources. How did you achieve those savings, and what were those savings?

Mr Duckworth: I am very conscious that we provided a figure in a question on notice to the committee last year, so I would preface my remarks by saying that we did provide that. I figure it was around \$130,000 in bringing the finance function back. Just to clarify, I think you were referring to the payroll function. The payroll function has remained here throughout. We did go through a period where we outsourced our financial processing to Shared Services. When we decided to bring that back in-house, the savings that we felt we harvested were in the order of \$130,000.

MS HUNTER: Which is quite significant. I would also ask—and this may be for Ms Barrett, the Clerk or Mr Speaker—whether you can update us on the introduction of e-petitions. Where are we up to?

Mr Rattenbury: As it happens, we have an update. The Deputy Clerk and I attended a function at the Queensland parliament last year for the 150th anniversary of the Queensland parliament and we were given a tour and some educational information while we were there. The Queensland parliament has it and I felt that was a very attractive option for the ACT Assembly. At a similar time Ms Bresnan came across it in some of her research and she wrote to me asking for it. So we had a dual motivation to get underway with it. We have sought to do that.

The Queensland parliament has been very generous in providing us with the template, I suppose, and the material. We have had to work with InTACT to make that program fit with the ACT system. There has been some delay with that process in terms of ensuring security. Because it has a large public interface it is very important to get the security right. We had hoped to go live in just a couple of weeks. We have had an update just this morning, in fact, that there has been some delay in the testing process and we do not expect to go live until sometime in August.

It would be fair to say that I am fairly frustrated that it has taken something like 18 months now to get this underway. It has taken a bit of time to do something that is quite new in the context of InTACT's processes and systems, but I am hopeful that by about mid-August we should be live. It is, unfortunately, rather late for this Assembly, but we will have it in place and it will be there ready; people can start petitioning for the next Assembly. I guess that is the way it will turn out with the Assembly finishing up two-thirds of the way through August. It is not ideal, but it will be there for the future.

MS HUNTER: How were those discussions and negotiations with InTACT?

Mr Rattenbury: That is probably where I should defer to Max.

Mr Kiermaier: I might have to defer to my colleagues in the IT area of the Secretariat. InTACT, to their credit, have been very accommodating of us. It is quite a difficult project for them, but we are getting somewhere. It is just taking time. As the Speaker said, a number of security issues have been identified which have really slowed the process down. We are seeing light at the end of the tunnel now.

MS HUNTER: Are there not other interfaces on government websites that would be similar in security need?

Mr Kiermaier: Quite possibly. I am afraid I would have to defer to others for that sort of advice.

Ms Barrett: Perhaps I can just add a little more clarification to that. In relation to InTACT or SSICT—not in their defence but to add a bit more material to it—the program that we got from Queensland originally, the software program, had to be updated because it did not have all the features that the Legislative Assembly wanted. They had also given the same program to Tasmania, but they had had a later version. So there were some delays in our establishing that we had not quite got the right software program and that had to be updated. Also, there were a few changes that we needed to make.

We have quite extensively consulted the Chamber Support Office, because there are some differences between Queensland and this Assembly, obviously. I think it is fair to say, Max, that there have been a number of small changes in terms of badging and how the system was supposed to operate that needed to change. They have had to go back into the business requirements. InTACT, to its credit, has wanted proper business requirements from us rather than our saying, as we tried to do, “We have got this program free, please just tack it on to the ACTGOV network and make it work.”

We had to make sure that we did it properly. That has occasioned a little bit of a delay, but we are confident that at least we are not going to have a system that we have put on that does not work at all. We really do not want to introduce it and find that it does not work because there are things that we had not thought of. It has taken a while and it is a little frustrating; I think we all concede that.

MS HUNTER: Thank you. Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: If I could go back to a question that Mr Hargreaves asked, you said earlier that you had ruled on a Greens issue. Do you not have a conflict of interest there?

Mr Rattenbury: No, I do not believe I do. I was not personally involved in the matter. Of course, there has been a great history of Speakers in this parliament having to rule on members of their own party. It is the nature of the office. And I think if you talk to any of the Speakers—and I have been chatting to some Speakers today who visited us

this morning—when you walk through the door of the Speaker’s office, you have a different role and you leave your party membership at the door.

MR SMYTH: Have you ever stood aside as Speaker where there was a decision pending that you felt you had a conflict of interest on?

Mr Rattenbury: Yes, I have once that I can recall, when there was a matter of privilege raised, I think by Mrs Dunne, if I remember correctly, about Mr Sullivan, the head of Actew. I had, I think in the estimates process, been involved in raising questions to Mr Sullivan. So I thought it was appropriate to stand aside, as I had had some engagement in the matter, and defer the matter to the Deputy Speaker.

MR HARGREAVES: Quite appropriately too.

Mr Rattenbury: That is the only one I can think of. If there are others, I would be happy to discuss them by sending—

MR SMYTH: Surely if you, as you enter the Speaker’s office, put aside party politics and you do that all the time, why would you stand aside on a case like that and not in other cases?

Mr Rattenbury: Because on that matter I had come to the estimates hearing as the Greens’ spokesperson on water matters. So at that point I had created a situation where I needed to stand aside, and I felt at least it would be perceived as being inappropriate, and at a personal level of integrity I wanted to make sure there were no perception issues there.

MR SMYTH: Does that not show that there is a conflict of interest with having a Speaker who has also got a partisan role as a policy spokesperson for a political party?

Mr Rattenbury: I think this is an issue that has been discussed in estimates a number of times over the last couple of years.

MR SMYTH: It may well be discussed again.

Mr Rattenbury: It is a matter that has had some canvassing in the chamber as well. I think there are different views on this, and certainly some disagree with the approach that I have taken through this term. I have acknowledged that. I tend to acknowledge it, actually, when groups like the University of the Third Age come. They say, “Tell us about the role of the Speaker,” and I often refer to the fact that members of this Assembly disagree with the approach I have taken. It is perhaps unconventional, but we do many unconventional things in an Assembly of only 17 members.

MR COE: Mr Speaker, the Assembly has ruled, and you have determined, that the Labor-Greens agreement is a partisan document. To that end, is it appropriate that it be discussed in DOA-funded material?

Mr Rattenbury: I am just trying to recall. There are possibly two matters based on the conversation you and I and Mrs Dunne have had that I think you are referring to. One is the fact that the administration and procedure committee discussed whether the

parliamentary agreement should be placed on the Assembly's website. The proposal was made in the interests of public transparency. I recall that at the time a member of the administration and procedure committee, I think it was Mrs Dunne, said she felt it was inappropriate, and there was no ruling. If I recall correctly, Ms Bresnan, on behalf of the Greens, said that she could take it or leave it and it could go on party websites. That is one of the instances in which the matter has been discussed. There was no ruling there in the way that you have suggested.

I think the other context it has come up in is whether questions in question time have been in or out of order when questions have been raised of the ministers specifically about the political nature of the agreement. And the ruling I have made there—again, I would have to go back and check the exact words in *Hansard*—is that there is no minister who is responsible for the agreement per se. I think I have been quite clear in the chamber that any member is entitled to ask questions about the content, about the individual items contained in the agreement, but the broader political discussion about whether the agreement is going well and those sorts of things are the sorts of matters that, if I recall correctly, I have said are not in order, on the advice I have received.

MR COE: Given it is an agreement between the Australian Labor Party ACT branch and the ACT Greens, two political parties, is it appropriate that that be discussed in DOA-funded material?

Mr Rattenbury: That agreement has been referred to in DOA materials, as you are well aware and as you have made clear to me. Those documents have been taken to corporate and the view has been formed that, as a descriptive reference, it is appropriate to be able to refer to that document or that agreement in a descriptive sense, just as discussions have taken place whether the terms “ACT Labor”, “Canberra Liberals” or “the Greens” are descriptive terms that will go into publications that have been put out right through this term of the Assembly.

MR COE: Is it appropriate in DOA-funded material to talk about the ACT Labor government?

Mr Rattenbury: I think you appreciate, and I have written to you on this exact matter this morning, these things—partly you are asking me hypothetical questions and—

MR COE: It is not hypothetical. It is actually quite categorical.

Mr Rattenbury: No, you are asking me, “Is it appropriate?” It is a hypothetical because, as you well know, and as I have written to you this morning, these things need to be assessed in a context, and a term like that can have a descriptive usage or it can have other usages. That is the exact, unfortunate discussion we have had to have this week.

MR COE: Is it all right to be negative using DOA-funded publications?

Mr Rattenbury: I think that would depend on the context, and that is why the Secretariat and ultimately I as the Speaker offer the ability for members to seek advice before a matter goes out.

MR COE: Is it all right to be positive using DOA-funded material?

Mr Rattenbury: I refer you to my previous answer.

MR COE: Have all printing decisions made by your office and by your colleagues been referred to Corporate Services for advice?

Mr Rattenbury: I can only speak for my office, and it is policy in my office that all materials go to corporate in advance, because we have no desire to either push the envelope or to in fact step across the line when it comes to publications that I have funded out of my own DOA. I cannot speak for my colleagues. You would need to ask them that. It is not my remit as the Speaker to know whether my colleagues have sought that approval on all occasions, because, as I explained earlier, I actually often do not see those things; 99 per cent of them do not come to me.

MR COE: You said it is your policy. I said, “Have you sought approval for all documents printed using DOA?”

Mr Rattenbury: I believe so.

MR COE: In terms of the publications whereby you have gone in conjunction with your colleagues for both the funding and the material in some instances, what role has your office had in the approval of those pieces?

Mr Rattenbury: None, but in the sense that one of the staff members who is responsible for that project will have gone to Corporate Services, sought advice and either there have been changes made on that advice received, adjustments have been made, or there have been no concerns and, on that basis, they have been published. So they have not come to me at all in my capacity as the Speaker, because they have been dealt with through the usual channels available to all members.

MR COE: Have you complained about any publications that you have seen that have been distributed by DOA? Have you initiated any concerns?

Mr Rattenbury: No. I cannot think of any, no. All of the ones that have come to me have been raised by somebody. At my house I have got a “no junk mail sticker”. I do not seem to get many, to be honest. Either that or the Molonglo members are not being very active or not as active as you.

MR HARGREAVES: He is not in Molonglo.

Mr Rattenbury: Exactly. That is what I mean.

MR COE: And for the record, how many members from each political party come under this regime?

Mr Rattenbury: All the non-executive members.

MR COE: So you have got six—two and four?

Mr Rattenbury: Yes.

MR COE: For the five ministers, what accountability is there for expenditure that they commit to or for the printing which is physically undertaken in this building?

Mr Rattenbury: As you are aware, I do not have a lot of jurisdiction there. You would need to put those questions to the Chief Minister. There are occasions, as you are aware. You made a complaint to me last week about Mr Barr's use of his website. I have followed that one up, but I have very limited capacity in that sense. Because that one was about the Assembly's resources, I was able to write to Mr Barr. But the ministerial allowances around printing and the like, I have no involvement in whatsoever.

MR COE: So what constitutes Assembly resources then? You said the telephone does. Obviously, or that is the implication?

Mr Rattenbury: Yes.

MR COE: What else constitutes Assembly resources?

Mr Duckworth: If it helps to clarify, the Speaker sought advice on the issue that you had raised with him. It was in the context of the fact that there had been some similar concerns raised. My advice to the Speaker was that he should approach Mr Barr. Ordinarily, we do, from time to time, receive questions about the content of ministerial publications, and our approach is to simply refer those inquiries to the executive.

MR HARGREAVES: A supplementary, Mr Speaker: do any of the executives get DOA?

THE CHAIR: Just wait.

MR HARGREAVES: Just connected with that, do any of the executive get—

THE CHAIR: Just wait.

Mr Rattenbury: Mr Hargreaves, just before I come to you on that question, the other thing, of course, Mr Coe, is the executive is subject to the legislation that the Greens and the Liberal Party passed earlier this term about campaign advertising, which provides a series of constraints. Sorry, Mr Hargreaves, I just wanted to clarify that.

MR HARGREAVES: The question was whether any of the executives have access to a discretionary office allowance?

Mr Rattenbury: No, and that is a matter that has been raised extensively in our administration and procedure committee. The ministers do find themselves in an interesting position. They have clearly the resources of the department to communicate on policy matters arising for the department. They actually do not have a discretionary office allowance or any ministerial allowance for personal communication with the electorate in the same way as the non-executive members do.

And that is—

MR HARGREAVES: So they cannot actually communicate directly with a constituent in the same way as non-executives do?

Mr Rattenbury: Certainly the Assembly does not provide any resources to them on that basis, no.

MR HARGREAVES: Are you aware of any of the ministerial code of conduct provisions which would cover this sort of behaviour?

Mr Rattenbury: Not off the top of my head, no.

Mr Duncan: But I would point out that the members code of conduct applies to all members. And the members code of conduct does go to the issue of the use of resources for official purposes.

MR COE: However, ministers do not need to disclose the information on what resources they use in the same way as non-executive members do.

Mr Rattenbury: Correct. And I believe that is a flaw in the system. I have written to the chief ministers—certainly the previous Chief Minister—during this term. As you know, I have moved a number of transparency measures, including putting DOA on the web, travel and the like. On the occasions that we have made those changes for the Assembly, I have written to the chief ministers inviting them to make use of the system that we are putting in place if they wish to. It is my recollection that those offers have not been taken up.

Mr Duckworth: If I can just clarify, in relation to travel and members' vehicles—

Mr Rattenbury: Yes.

Mr Duckworth: I think Mr Coe is aware that there was a bit of a misunderstanding with the vehicle details, and there was a lag. But that was eventually supplied, and we do post that.

Mr Rattenbury: Thank you. Apologies for the lack of clarity there.

THE CHAIR: Is there anything further, Mr Coe?

MR COE: No, not for the moment.

MR SMYTH: I have a supplementary. We had a discussion back in the estimates for 2009-10 where, in the priorities for the Legislative Assembly secretariat, you had a line in there that read “implementing relevant aspects of the ALP/Greens Parliamentary Agreement”. We had a discussion about that. I asked you then about the suitability of something that the Assembly has never voted on, and is not a signatory to, appearing as one of the priorities of the speakership. You agreed that perhaps that was inappropriate there. I have checked all of the subsequent Legislative Assembly sections in budget paper 4, and, true to your word, you removed it. If it is

not relevant for the words “ALP/Greens Parliamentary Agreement” to be in the activities of the Legislative Assembly secretariat, how can it be relevant for it to be funded in DOA-funded publications?

Mr Rattenbury: I think the issue you raised with me in 2009-10 was that you felt it was highly inappropriate for the secretariat to make reference to it through its budgetary papers. I agreed with you on that. That is why there have been no further references. I think it is fair to say that in these documents and the annual reports, the Assembly seeks to reflect the sorts of resource pressures that are on it. I think the inclusion of that in those budget papers was an acknowledgement of the fact that it created some resource issues, because there were references to various changes to parliamentary processes, funding of committees and the like. I think that is quite different for the secretariat as opposed to individual members who wish to report on the work that they have been doing and how some of that work has come about.

MR COE: If I can have a supplementary, something further to what I said earlier, what is the role of the additional sentence which members are required to put on all publications to say that they were publicly funded?

Mr Rattenbury: That was a matter that was discussed in the administration and procedure committee. Certainly it is a practice that the commonwealth parliament has adopted. Whilst we are using slightly different words here—and I look to the experience in the UK, where issues around parliamentary allowances cast a terrible shadow over that parliament—I am keen to ensure that we have a maximum level of transparency here so that members of the public can be confident, and perhaps at least clearly understand how things have been funded, where they have come from and the like. It is the same rationale I have used to put travel reporting and DOA expenditure on the website. The less mystery exists around these things, the less likely there is to be a scandal or public concern, and that is in the interests of all members of this place and also the institution. I think that that is my role as the Speaker—to try to ensure that there are as few reports about these kinds of things in the *Canberra Times* as possible.

MR HARGREAVES: Mr Speaker, how many times has there been a publication submitted for advice and the advice been given that that material has been okay, only to find that that same material has appeared in the public arena in a different form?

Mr Rattenbury: To be honest, I would have to defer to Mr Duckworth on that one.

Mr Duckworth: Mr Hargreaves, I think the point that was made earlier in this hearing today is that I do not keep a detailed record of all the advice that my people and I give. Sometimes it is a clarification about a word or a sentence. In some instances it is a case of being given documentation, but we give advice when it is sought. In a great number of cases, that advice is accepted. In some cases that advice is either conditionally or begrudgingly accepted and sometimes it is contested. But we do not go through a process of lining up that material and reconciling it with material. Quite simply, we do not know what information is distributed in the electorate.

THE CHAIR: We are, unfortunately, out of time. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you, Mr Speaker, and officials from the Office of the Legislative

Assembly, for appearing today. Questions taken on notice for the Office of the Legislative Assembly should be lodged with the Committee Office within three business days of receipt of the uncorrected proof transcript, with day one being the first business day after the transcript is received. We will have a short adjournment before we move to the Auditor-General's Office.

Short adjournment.

Appearances:

Auditor-General's Office

Cooper, Dr Maxine, Auditor-General

Sheville, Mr Bernie, Director, Financial Audit

Stanton, Mr Brett, Acting Director, Performance Audits and Corporate Services

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Dr Cooper, for joining the committee today in your capacity as the ACT Auditor-General for this hearing of the estimates committee. I will go through a few housekeeping matters. I am sure you are very familiar with them. I draw your attention first off to the privilege statement on the blue card in front of you. Could you indicate that you are aware of the information and implications in that?

Dr Cooper: I am, thank you, Madam Chair.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Dr Cooper. So you are all aware, proceedings are being broadcast. Dr Cooper, before we do go to questions, would you like to make an opening statement at all?

Dr Cooper: Thank you very much, yes, I would. I am very pleased to present the 2012-13 budget papers for my office. We are particularly pleased to receive additional funding for our performance audits. In practical terms, the additional funding of \$250,000 per annum roughly equates to a rather large performance audit in one year or over two years, two medium and one small. So it is—

MR HARGREAVES: A big win.

Dr Cooper: It is a big win and we thank everybody for our increase. Our budget is, in rounded figures, \$6.2 million, which includes \$3.6 million for financial audits and now \$2.5 million for performance audits and corporate matters. The financial audits budget is provided from fees charged to those entities we audit. Our performance audits and other demands, including the corporate management, are covered by the \$2.5 million appropriation.

Most of this is directed towards producing the performance audits. However, I would like to bring to the committee's attention that it is also used for preparing reports for the Legislative Assembly that summarise our financial situation, our audit program, liaising with the committees, representations of which we have had about 13 this year, developing our performance audit program, preparing the annual report, handling disclosures, liaising and consulting with government agencies—for instance, in providing seminars and workshops to assist in how they respond to our needs—and also for ordinary corporate functions such as internal audits.

The increased performance audit results in an increase in appropriation funding from 38 to 41 per cent of the office's income, so we are very pleased. In terms of our financial results, the operating statement, budget paper No 4, page 26, shows that the Audit Office expects to incur a deficit of \$270,000 for the year ended 30 June 2012. This is higher than we budgeted, \$96,000. However, we do have sufficient funds to cover this deficit from previous years' savings when, for example, we were unable to

replace departing staff.

The expanded higher than budgeted deficit mainly reflects a decision by the office to engage contractors to complete the audits of financial statements for the year ended 30 June 2011 and 30 June 2012. In particular, two contractors were engaged to complete audits for the year ended 30 June 2011 because the office had been unable to replace departing staff. Three contractors were expected to be engaged to complete the audits for the year ended 30 June 2012 to provide assurance that the audit of the territory's financial statements will be completed earlier than applies in non-election years.

These higher costs were expected to be partially offset by lower than expected employee costs, as there were delays in replacing financial and performance audit staff. Apart from the recruitment of financial audit staff towards the end of 2011-12, which resulted in FTE staff numbers being increased to 39 by 30 June, attempts until recently to replace departing staff had met with limited success. So we are far more optimistic, is the message, in terms of containing that deficit.

In terms of governance arrangements, we have a strategic plan that has been revamped. That is on our website. In terms of performance audits, I am pleased to say that the Audit Office in this financial year has completed six performance audits: the management of food safety; monitoring and minimising harm caused by problem gambling; whole-of-government information, communication technology security management and services; early childhood schooling; development applications and approval system for high-density residential and commercial developments; and management of recycle estates.

I would also like to share with the committee that part of the investment of the funds we are allocated is to ensure quality. We have what we call these hot reviews undertaken so that we make sure our work is critiqued as we are doing it. We are in the process now of finalising our forward performance audit program. However, already underway are performance audits on the emergency department, ACT public service recruitment, grants for legal aid, care and protection of children and young people, targeting homelessness, and Emergency Services Agency governance and accountability. Thank you for giving me the opportunity.

THE CHAIR: Wonderful, thank you, Dr Cooper. I have a quick question first off. We have probably already got this information, but the \$250,000 in increased funding, how many increased audits will that lead to?

Dr Cooper: We generally do audits in three types of scales. You have got the small, which come for \$100,000 to \$120,000. You have got the medium at \$180,000 and you have got the larger at \$250,000. So over one year we can guarantee we could do one large additional audit. But over two years, it might mean more like two medium and a small. So we will maximise that funding and do as many audits as we possibly can without necessarily saying that this is the definitive number.

THE CHAIR: I understand. I note that when you look at your strategic plan it includes quite detailed accountability indicators against each of the Audit Office's objectives and strategies. I am wondering why—it is probably very simple—none of

these are reported in the budget papers.

Mr Sheville: Under the Financial Management Act there is no requirement for the Audit Office to report against accountability indicators.

Dr Cooper: But we do report in our annual report, as indicated in that plan, against the key ones.

THE CHAIR: Yes, I have noticed. I just thought it was something like that.

Mr Sheville: To provide some measure of public accountability, we provide in our budget submission to the PAC what our performance targets are for the year and we report against those particular targets in our annual report. We prepare a statement of performance which compares our performance against the targets that we provided to the public accounts committee earlier in the year.

THE CHAIR: Great, thank you very much. Mr Hargreaves.

MR HARGREAVES: No, I am on PAC. I have a conflict of interest because I reckon they are doing a great job and leave them to it.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Hargreaves. Ms Hunter.

MS HUNTER: I first of all want to ask about how it was going with staff recruitment, because that had been an issue. Have you got a full complement of staff at this point?

Dr Cooper: We have got as full a complement, I think, as we can possibly get, given the current market. We are particularly pleased. We have just done some major recruitment rounds and that is why we are optimistic about forward coming deficits not being so large, because we have managed to secure these staff.

Mr Sheville: We still struggle to get people in the three to five years audit experience. We have been losing some of our more experienced folk and we have been replacing those folk with staff at a more junior level. However, our most recent recruitment round, taking in, I think it was, five people in financial audit at a more junior level, stands us in good stead over the next couple of years, because they do accumulate experience pretty rapidly.

MS HUNTER: Looking at supplies and services in the papers, it talks about KPMG being contracted in May 2011 to assist the Audit Office. You did mention some of these in your remarks, I think, around outside contractors. In 2011 KPMG were contracted to assist the office with its financial audit activities. You mentioned that. The value of the contract was \$48,299. I also note that KPMG were contracted to provide internal audit services to your office. That was around about \$3,900. They were also engaged just recently to provide IT audit services. The value of that was \$78,350.

Given that a significant amount of work has been contracted to KPMG, could you advise how these arrangements do not lead to a conflict of interest with respect to the internal audit activities that they are performing for the Audit Office? So it is basic

to—how have you ensured—

Mr Sheville: Ms Hunter, are these figures from our annual report?

MS HUNTER: Yes, they are from your 2010-11 audited financial statements.

Dr Cooper: If you could go back to the page, we were—

MS HUNTER: Sorry, they are from the 2010 audited financial statements. They show that you have contracted—

Dr Cooper: Yes.

MS HUNTER: Dr Cooper did mention some of that, how you got KPMG or you got a company in to help you with some of your audit activities. I guess what I am getting at is this: how have you ensured that there is not some sort of conflict of interest when you are contracting them to do work for you and then also contracting them to do an internal audit process?

Dr Cooper: Yes, if I could just find—we will go to each contract that they have got. Brett has some knowledge on this.

MS HUNTER: Thank you.

Mr Stanton: Whenever we conduct a procurement process that is for contractors to help us with our audits or contractors to provide internal audit services to us, we seek advice from the contractors as to whether there is any conflict of interest for them in undertaking that specific piece of work. We also assure ourselves through our own discussions internally that there is no conflict of interest in them undertaking that work for us.

Mr Sheville: The amount of work involved, too, is really quite small—

MS HUNTER: It is not terribly large, yes. That was another question around the \$3,900, which did not seem to be a lot of money. What was that used for as far as internal audit activities are concerned?

Dr Cooper: Ms Hunter, I was not there at that stage, I am sorry.

Mr Stanton: I am actually a member of our audit and review committee, but as of earlier this year. I do not know the answer to that. We can take that on notice, if you like.

Dr Cooper: Yes, thank you.

THE CHAIR: It is taken on notice.

MS HUNTER: That is all.

THE CHAIR: Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Just a suggestion: on page 24 in the third dot point, you want to enhance effective relationship with ACT legislative committees. We do not actually have any ACT legislative committees. The Assembly has committees, but just the wording is a bit out there.

Dr Cooper: Thank you, sorry.

MR SMYTH: Auditor-General, I think you said you had had a number of representations from the public during the year?

Dr Cooper: Yes, we have.

MR SMYTH: How many was that?

Dr Cooper: Thirteen, from memory.

MR SMYTH: And what issues did they cover?

Dr Cooper: I will just go to that, Mr Smyth. There was an issue to do with ACTION buses. There was an issue to do with ACAT and the slow process there; CIT, inefficient teaching practices; CSD, care and protection services. As you know now, we are doing an audit that some of those issues are picked up in. Others are TAMS, awarding of waste management contracts; CSD, another care and protection one; CSD, housing; ESDD, development applications. That was resolved as part of the DA audit we have done. We have done another one on Das, another one on Das, two ongoing ones at the moment to do with supermarkets and competition policy. We have also had one on the ACTION MyWay system and we resolved that. So the two outstanding ones for us at the moment that we are still working on are both around the supermarkets and the competition policy.

MR SMYTH: Did you receive any public interest disclosures during the year?

Mr Stanton: No, not a public interest disclosure this year. There was one that remained from the prior year, which we worked through earlier this financial year.

MR SMYTH: All right. And what was the outcome there?

Mr Stanton: The agency itself undertook an investigation into that matter and resolved that issue. It provided us with advice on that.

MR SMYTH: So was the complaint upheld or found to be false?

Mr Stanton: My understanding is that the complaint itself—there were some practices that could be improved within the agency and those recommendations were made. That is how it was resolved.

MR SMYTH: So between the PIDs and general reps from the public, what application of resources was required and how much did it cost the office?

Dr Cooper: I could not give you the dollars right now, but we can possibly calculate that roughly.

Mr Stanton: I think there are about 120 hours or so, maybe about \$15,000, \$16,000.

MR SMYTH: Thank you on that. In your balance sheet on page 27, the cash flow statements on page 29 and then a note on page 31, why did the office decide to withdraw—

Dr Cooper: Excuse me; we are having hearing problems. I do not know if—

MR SMYTH: Sorry.

Dr Cooper: A bit louder.

MR SMYTH: It is budget paper 4, page 27, page 29 and page 31. There is a note on page 31 that you decided to withdraw your funds from the territory banking account and place them in the audit office operating bank account. Was that the money you spoke of earlier, required to—

Dr Cooper: That is right. That is the money from not employing staff previously. We did that for more security in the way the money was held. It was very much a business decision about security—less interest but more security.

MR SMYTH: Less interest from the TBA but more security?

Dr Cooper: More security in the way it was being held—absolutely.

MR SMYTH: So the TBA is not secure?

Mr Sheville: It is secure.

Dr Cooper: The word is “more”.

MR SMYTH: Or were you just afraid the government was going to spend it on you and take it as a saving?

Dr Cooper: No.

Mr Sheville: The funds were held in the territory banking account cash-in-hand fund, and it has some exposure to the capital movements. We preferred not to have exposure to unrealised gains or losses in an account that we are going to use to fund our operations. So we decided just to withdraw the funds and put them into our general operating account.

MR SMYTH: You may or may not be able to answer this. You have advised the public accounts committee on it, but we are not all on the public accounts committee. There was a thought that the report into the doctored figures in the emergency department would be tabled this week.

Dr Cooper: I can answer that.

MR SMYTH: Will it be tabled this week?

Dr Cooper: No, it will not be tabled—

MR SMYTH: Or will it be tabled at some later stage.

Dr Cooper: It will be tabled very soon. I will not be in the office for the next two weeks. We have finished the report. It will be going to the printers. It is a matter of printing time. We intend tabling early next week, with a target date of Tuesday.

MR SMYTH: So it is at the printers? All right. Thanks for that.

MS HUNTER: I want to follow up on a couple of the other audits you are doing—the care and protection one and targeting homelessness. What are the expected dates for completing those two?

Dr Cooper: Let me just go to the schedule on that. Care and protection—by the end of September this year. Again, bear with us because, as we do audits, sometimes we have to look into things that take a bit longer. But that is our target date. And the other one?

MS HUNTER: The homelessness one.

Dr Cooper: That is a nationally coordinated one. That is in the third quarter of 2012-13—possibly early next year.

THE CHAIR: Did you say that was a nationally coordinated one?

Dr Cooper: Yes. It is one whereby all the A-Gs are doing something in this arena at the same time. What we are trying to do is see if we can work in a harmonised way, given our different pieces of legislation, and present these at roughly the same time.

THE CHAIR: Okay; great.

MS HUNTER: Interesting. The other one you raised was that someone had contacted your office around awarding of waste contracts.

Dr Cooper: Yes.

MS HUNTER: Could you give us bit more information about that?

Dr Cooper: I am just trying to think. May I say that, given the issues that were raised, we have tried to incorporate some of that into the current waste one. Also, with that particular one, we have tried on several occasions to contact the person, and that person has not responded back to us. That person put a complaint in to the Ombudsman about us. We responded in detail, and we have still left it open for that person to come back and talk to us further. And we have not heard from them. We have made numerous attempts to communicate with the person who put that issue in,

and we feel now that we have tried everything we can. The Ombudsman has looked at us. And also we have done the current waste audit.

MS HUNTER: Okay.

THE CHAIR: I have another question around the strategic plan. Dr Cooper, in your opening statement and, I think, in response to a question Ms Hunter asked about retaining staff and some of those things around that—

Dr Cooper: Yes.

THE CHAIR: One of the things you have got in the strategic plan is to encourage and support opportunities for staff to develop skills. I am informed that in financial years there tend to be numerous changes to Australian accounting standards and auditing standards. I am just wondering how you keep staff up to date with these standards. And also do you run training internally or do you go to external bodies to do that?

Dr Cooper: I am going to let Bernie answer that, but I think, from memory, our figure on expenditure on our training is in the vicinity of \$82,000 a year—around \$80,000. We actually have a mixture of training. We use staff to train staff, we have some internal, and we go for some external. So it is variable. One of the successes recently was a three-day or four-day session we had for our financial team. I will let Bernie talk on that.

Mr Sheville: Each year each individual in our office has a learning and development plan, and we settle priorities for training with staff. The technical aspects of our work, as you would expect for an audit office, receive a lot of attention. Each year our financial and audit staff attend financial audit methodology training. Sometimes that training involves inviting people from Queensland and other audit offices to talk with our staff about methodology. The training focuses on addressing issues from our internal quality assurance reviews, and the technical changes in audit and accounting standards from previous years. It is a way of keeping our staff up to date.

There is also significant assistance given to staff in relation to those who want to complete their professional post-grad accounting qualifications with the CPA and chartered accounting. Typically, someone who is enrolled in one of those courses will receive five days annual leave plus funding for their course, successfully completing their exams as they progress through the modules.

THE CHAIR: Do you ever send staff to training run by the Australian National Audit Office and make use of their training opportunities?

Mr Sheville: No, we have not made extensive use of ANAO over time, although many of our senior officers attend ACAG working groups, where we are able to see the practices happening in other offices. In the financial audit area we have tended to obtain most of our assistance from the Queensland Audit Office, because they are running the same methodology. Our methodology was sourced from the Queensland and Victorian audit offices.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MS HUNTER: I was wondering if you have been able to fully recover financial audit costs from directorates during 2011-12.

Mr Sheville: In—

Dr Cooper: Sorry, I will just answer that. The way we actually calculate our audit fees is that we try, if you like, for the agencies involved to smooth out any major ups and downs. Because we had some staffing issues and we have gone into deficit, we made a conscious decision that we would maintain, if you like—increase their fees but not make them pay for the fees because of our staffing issues. If it had continued into the future, we certainly would have had to pass that on, but because we have had savings from the past, and we are all under budgetary constraints, we tried to even that out. We try to charge them according to the time we would put into them, not necessarily taking into account that we had to use contractors for some of it. And over the years, because every year they know we come to audit them, it balances out.

MS HUNTER: One of your accountability indicators is to try and complete performance audits within seven months. How have you gone with that?

Dr Cooper: That is a bit of a challenge, and I would ask the committee to ask me that question this time next year after I have been at the helm for a full year. The staff have been absolutely magnificent, and I must say that I could not have worked with a greater champions of getting things done. But recently I think they have accelerated the production of performance audits like not before, and we cannot sustain that level of performance. But it will be up closer to that level as an ongoing basis. We will be looking to try and achieve targets within a contained time. But we do realise that some performance audits—the national office was telling us the other day that they have one now that has been going for two years. We will try and avoid that, because the data then may not have currency in terms of timeliness.

Mr Stanton: The larger performance audits might take in the order of nine or 10 months, perhaps.

MS HUNTER: Sure.

Mr Stanton: Smaller ones will take less than that, of course.

Dr Cooper: Except that I will say that with a moderate to large one at the moment, like the one we are doing for the data at the hospitals—we have thrown a lot of resources at that. So it depends on whether you throw a lot of resources into a contained time or you balance that out. We have to balance staffing. If it involves whole-of-government issues, the audits will take an extraordinary amount of time, because we have to consult, and our philosophy is that we will consult till everybody is on the same page in terms of agreeing that what we are putting up is accurate.

MS HUNTER: Thank you.

MR COE: Do you have a view about whether departments' internal audit reports

should be published?

Dr Cooper: Mr Coe, no, I do not. I have never actually applied my mind to that. I would like to apply it and come back. I think that is a very good question. I do realise that internal audits are there for their own improvement, so I would hate them not to have rigorous audit programs that identify their highest areas of risk and vulnerability—where, because they are made public, they therefore do not look at that.

MR COE: Yes.

Dr Cooper: Ours are made public, so I think they kind of balance each other.

MR COE: Sure.

Dr Cooper: But I would like more time—

MR COE: The commonwealth are now publishing internal audit reports through FOI, whereas the other jurisdictions are not. I would just be curious to know—

Dr Cooper: I think there is a fine balance, because of the human nature that people happen to have. With your highest risks, you really want to know how to manage them. But if you have got to publish it, would there be a bit of hesitation? There would probably be pros and cons, of course.

MR COE: Yes; sure.

THE CHAIR: Any further questions? It looks as though we have come to the end of our questions. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you, Dr Cooper, Auditor-General, and the staff here.

Dr Cooper: Sorry; may we answer the question? We have got an answer.

Mr Sheville: In relation to KPMG, Mr Prentice reminded me that KPMG was engaged to do an audit of our GST and fringe benefits tax compliance. This audit was one that was done as part of a whole of government. The auditor, I understand, was selected by Treasury rather than our office. They come in and provide us with a report on our FBE and GST compliance.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. As mentioned at the commencement of the hearing today, there is a time frame of five working days for the return of answers to questions taken on notice at this hearing for the Office of the Auditor-General. They should be lodged with the committee office within three business days of receipt of the uncorrected proof transcript, with day one being the first business day after the transcript is received. Thank you very much.

The committee adjourned at 3.45 pm.