



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, COMMUNITY AND  
SOCIAL SERVICES**

(Reference: [Annual and financial reports 2010-2011](#))

**Members:**

**MR S DOSZPOT (The Chair)  
MS A BRESNAN (The Deputy Chair)  
MR J HARGREAVES**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**WEDNESDAY, 30 NOVEMBER 2011**

**Secretary to the committee:  
Ms G Concannon (Ph: 6205 0129)**

**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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*Amended 9 August 2011*

## **The committee met at 9.36 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

Hehir, Mr Martin, Director-General

Howson, Ms Natalie, Deputy Director-General

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

Gotts, Mr Robert, Director, Community Sector Project

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

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

Wensing, Ms Veronica, Manager, Office for Women

Whitten, Ms Meredith, Senior Director, Governance, Advocacy and Community Policy

**THE CHAIR:** Welcome to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Health, Community and Social Services inquiry into the 2010-11 annual and financial report of the Community Services Directorate. Today we will be looking at the Community Services Office for Ageing, Office of Multicultural Affairs and Office for Women. I welcome the departmental representatives and the minister. I presume that you have all read the privilege statement. If you have not, I would like you to take the time to read it. You are comfortable with that?

**Ms Burch:** Yes.

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

**Ms Burch:** If I could, chair. I apologise for being a few minutes late. I will make an opening statement, if I can, at this point, across all of the areas.

**THE CHAIR:** Sure.

**Ms Burch:** I would like to start with the Office for Women, which has continued to make significant strategic and policy progress in recent times. We have launched the second ACT women's plan and the ACT prevention of violence against women and their children strategy. Each of these is a major asset to the government and wider community in addressing a range of issues around women. This policy boost has continued to be supplemented by financial resources in this year's budget. We provided funding of \$424,000 to establish an intensive counselling intervention and accommodation service for men who use violence.

We also are providing effective grassroots funding. The ACT women's grants continue to assist community organisations and provide activities that focus on enhancing the status of women and strengthening their capacity to provide women's

services. The popular program runs alongside a range of other grants that honour the late Audrey Fagan, including the young women's enrichment grants. In fact, just last month I had the pleasure of meeting a 13-year-old girl who has used \$1,400 to make over 200 teddy bears for sick and injured children as they travel in an ambulance.

I turn to the Office for Ageing. That, too, has continued to make achievements. The reporting period saw a launch of the online seniors information portal, an excellent resource for providing seniors with a great deal of information on services and supports available to them. During the reporting period, Ageing was involved in a number of projects that have recently been completed and has been instrumental in working with Housing during the year, with the development of almost 300 older persons units. Ageing is also involved in the design of the Tuggeranong seniors centre, which had a grand opening just a short while ago. One of the biggest projects is the staging of the Older Persons Assembly in September. The collaboration across the community that went into this is testimony that staff within Ageing have good relationships that they have established with the sector across Canberra.

Finally, I turn to Multicultural Affairs. The work of this section underlines the maturity of the ACT community in relation to many issues that other jurisdictions seem to have difficulty in handling, particularly in relation to assisting refugees, asylum seekers and other humanitarian entrants as they settle in the ACT. In the last financial year, we saw work with community groups to deliver the access card to make it easier for asylum seekers to access existing government services. We are also helping people from different cultural backgrounds to adjust to life in the ACT, through the work experience and support program. In the 2011-12 budget we delivered an extra \$166,000 over four years to expand the WES program to meet the high demand.

Finally, I mention the National Multicultural Festival, consistently one of Canberra's biggest and most popular events. This year's festival, according to the information provided to me, saw a record of over 200,000 people—some say it is 240,000 people—who attended over three days. The 2012 festival is a mere 10 weeks away; I look forward to that as well.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, minister. I will start with the first question of the morning. It is on the Community Services Directorate annual report, volume 1, page 58, "Key achievements", "Industrial relations review of the ACT community sector".

**Ms Burch:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** There were tenders invited on 17 March.

**Ms Burch:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** And they closed on 19 May. Can you give us an update on what is happening there?

**Ms Burch:** Yes, I can. That tender was successfully put out in partnership between ACTCOSS and Jobs Australia. We formally launched that last week or the week before. That is a very positive program. Jobs Australia has significant representation

already across the community sector; it is recognised across the country. It will have an 1800 number for employers. It will be running workshops and other education activities and regularly visit Canberra to have face-to-face contact. At the launch, it had already started with an education workshop to the sector. I am not quite sure if you want to add anything, Ms Overton-Clarke.

**THE CHAIR:** Sorry, just a question: it was due to commence in September but when did it commence?

**Ms Burch:** We formally launched it in November.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**MS BRESNAN:** I have a supplementary. Was there a reason? I think it was meant to start in July; is that right?

**Ms Burch:** I think it was the detail of the tender and assessment process. I think it was more administrative; that is my understanding.

**MS BRESNAN:** So the delay was due to administrative reasons?

**Ms Burch:** Yes, unless there is—

**MS HUNTER:** Unless there is another reason?

**Mr Hehir:** I think the actual tender outcome was announced in August. It would have been the normal implementation arrangements. While we may have hoped for September some time, negotiations can take a bit longer than that. Certainly the tender was announced on 19 August.

**THE CHAIR:** But it did close in May, did it not? Is that an unusually long time for deliberations?

**Ms Howson:** Yes, it did close in May. Then there is a contract negotiation phase that follows.

**THE CHAIR:** I understand that. What I am asking is: is that an unusually long consultation time or deliberation time?

**Ms Burch:** What is that? Three months from close to announcement in August?

**MS HUNTER:** It seems like a long time.

**MS BRESNAN:** So the delay was for some negotiation reasons, was it?

**Mr Hehir:** I might ask Meredith Whitten to address that, minister.

**Ms Burch:** Sure.

**Mr Hehir:** Meredith was involved in the process in a bit more detail.

**MS BRESNAN:** Thank you.

**Ms Whitten:** The tender evaluation panel did consider the tenders in a fairly timely way, but then there were negotiations that needed to occur with Jobs Australia and ACTCOSS, working with Procurement Solutions—just a bit longer than usual.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay.

**Ms Burch:** It is a welcome service. Everyone at the launch was quite pleased.

**MS BRESNAN:** Absolutely. I was just wanting to find out what had caused the delay.

**THE CHAIR:** We will go to your substantive question.

**MS BRESNAN:** It is mentioned on page 58 of volume 1—the national equal remuneration case.

**Ms Burch:** Yes.

**MS BRESNAN:** I understand from past submissions to Fair Work Australia that the ACT have been supportive of it. I understand in relation to the Queensland experience that there have been some job losses in relation to the pay equity case in the community sector and that there have been some concerns expressed in the ACT that this might occur here. I am wondering if you have looked at or modelled what the financial impact will be here in the ACT and how we can make sure that we avoid any cuts to jobs from that.

**Ms Burch:** I will let Bronwen Overton-Clarke and Robert Gotts respond to that. Over the past number of months they have worked hand in hand with the sector on this.

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** It is very interesting working through the implications of the case, both through Fair Work Australia, obviously, and also through the body that I am a member of that is chaired through one of the senators—working through the implications and the rollout of the Queensland case.

One of the advantages that we have here in the ACT is that, being a small jurisdiction, we have, as you are aware, done a very extensive census of the sector. So we know exactly what organisations are paying in terms of the rates that they pay to their staff. That will be the major methodology that we will use in terms of the eventual rollout of the decision that is made by Fair Work Australia.

One of the lessons from Queensland is that governments gave money that did not necessarily flow on directly to the staff themselves. It is all of those sorts of mechanisms that we are working through at the moment. I will get Robert to talk in a bit more detail about that.

**Mr Gotts:** I am director of the equal remuneration project. One of the issues in Queensland is that the salaries that are awarded are at different percentages for

different classification rates. That means that someone on a SACS8 at the top level gets a higher percentage than someone at a SACS3 or SACS4 level. The practical impact of that is that, if the assistance is provided to an employer who has a low-classified workforce, the assistance might be greater, proportionately, than if it is provided to an employer with a highly classified workforce. That is because the way they did it in Queensland was to determine a percentage and just apply that percentage to the different organisations. It meant that in practice some ended up with more than was needed to pay the higher salaries and others ended up with less than was needed to pay the higher salaries. That was an administrative impact.

Here in the ACT, as Bronwen said, we conducted a census, so we have much better data on exactly what the cost to the sector is as a whole. As a result, we are able to estimate more precisely what the impact will be on each employer. Of course, we do not yet know the decision, so the final step is still to be taken.

**MS BRESNAN:** As you said, we are a smaller jurisdiction. Do you think we will be able to manage that process a bit better? Obviously, Queensland is a larger jurisdiction, but they did not have that information. Do you think we are going to be able to manage that so that we avoid that situation?

**Mr Gotts:** I do think so. I think it is partly the benefit of a smaller jurisdiction. I think it is also the benefit of seeing what happened in Queensland and preparing well here in the ACT—getting the data early so that we will be in the best possible position to work with the sector and determine what individual requirements are. I think it is a combination of seeing what happened and making sure that the same does not happen to us. And just our small size makes it a bit easier.

**Mr Hehir:** I want to add that one of the other aspects was, I understand, that Queensland decided to fund front-line services.

**Mr Gotts:** Yes.

**Mr Hehir:** And not other services. So those other services were much more heavily impacted. That is where you may have seen a significant proportion of the cuts actually occur. They went to a front-line model instead of advocacy, and other services are not getting a top-up. They are going to have to manage it within that. That would have been the other factor there.

**MS HUNTER:** And that is not the intention of the ACT government, minister?

**Ms Burch:** It is also worth noting now that, if you look at the income going into organisations and how it is split, there is a federal government component of that, and there is the ACT government's responsibility plus their own income as well. Some of the organisations will have to reflect on that and work out how they adjust or how they respond to that.

At the last community services minco we put a motion that was accepted for an officials cross-jurisdictional working group to look at the community sector capacity to help some of these reforms as they come through. The latest proposal is a six-year implementation as part of this. It is about the ACT chairing that officials group and

starting to work with the sector about what are the implications and what do we do to make sure that they can be in the best place.

**MS HUNTER:** I understand that group was set up. I have had a bit of a briefing about this. What other sorts of transitional issues have been discussed in that group?

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** There will be a national group but also in the ACT the minister is very keen to set up an implementation group as well. Whether that becomes a subgroup of the joint community government reference group or another that is headlined directly to the minister, we have not worked out. But, certainly, we need to bring the sector along with us in terms of how it is rolled out in the ACT.

The biggest issue, as you are aware, is what the impact will be in the ACT compared to other jurisdictions, because the census does show us that a high proportion of employers pay above the award rates. The sector is fully across that. Robert has been extensively briefing JCGRG. All the submissions are up on the Fair Work Australia site. There is a big difference, of course, between employers and employees. The new industrial relations advice service that we talked about earlier will be an important part of skilling up employees in the sector to be aware of their entitlements, but certainly at the employer level there is definitely good awareness about the situation and the ACT being different to elsewhere.

**MS HUNTER:** Do you think that is across all sectors? I have had some concerns raised in the disability sector. I am wondering whether they are as aware of the issues and what is going on here. They seem to have more concern about what impact it will have on their organisations and their staffing levels.

**Mr Gotts:** I have spoken to several groupings of the disability sector, including to the national meeting of their chief executives. The issues that they have are that their employees are classified slightly lower than employees in other parts of the broader community sector. I missed part of the—

**Mr Hehir:** My recollection—I am sorry, Robert—was that in actual fact before you take into account any overtime payments et cetera the DSOs in the community sector are very close, if not equal, to the DSOs in the government sector. So we are not anticipating a significant impact for that sector. We certainly are talking to them about it but, from our understanding of what they are actually paying, they are equivalent to government officers anyway. The intent of the Queensland case was about moving closer to what the government paid.

We are not anticipating a significant increase in difficulty. It is a difficult area as it is, but we are not anticipating an increase in difficulty given what the actual rates of pay are for the majority of organisations. The award is significantly lower, but the sector has a practice of paying at or close to government. We are not seeing additional difficulty; it is just the ongoing difficulty.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Hunter, that was your supplementary. Do you have a substantive question on community services or do you want to move on?

**MS HUNTER:** I do have one, and it is around the community services program. It is

on page 61. The contracts end on 30 June 2012. You have said in your annual report that CSD will put together and prepare a subsector procurement plan and then negotiate contracts for the continuation of services. I am wondering whether you can give a little more detail about what that involves and, I guess, a bit of a time line. I understand it obviously will be putting the services in place for three years. Can I have just a bit more detail about that?

**Mr Hehir:** I have met with a number of the organisations—not all of the organisations—around the community services program. At this point we have asked the people that I have met with to start their preparations for the procurement. We have advised that we do not intend to change the program. We would intend for this one to be done under the subsector process, which is a reallocation process, in effect.

We do not see at this point what a drive for any change would be. What we have, however, said to the sector is that we would like them to have a think about what it means to them in terms of a service and whether they actually see it as being a base funding issue—how they actually want it to be done. Over the next three years we would anticipate working with this part of the sector in terms of what sort of structure they see that payment coming through.

**MS HUNTER:** When you say “reallocation”, do you mean reallocation between organisations or within organisations about what they are delivering after discussions about what you want—

**Mr Hehir:** A reallocation to the organisation.

**MS HUNTER:** Within.

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** I might expand on that. Meredith and I met recently with ACTCOSS. We have at the moment four contracts, or four parts—four schedule 2s. I am talking to Ros about collapsing that into one. This work is happening in parallel with the outcomes—the purchasing framework and the outcomes-based work. We are really looking at how we increase the clarity between organisations and ourselves around outcomes that we want to achieve while ensuring that that does not increase and in fact minimises the administrative burden that they have.

Really, when you start to look at individual schedules, they have generally been built up over time. We are now in that space of having a really hard look at the outcomes that we want and that we are both seeking to drive towards. We are really looking at how we can make life administratively easier for them and create the outputs we want.

**Mr Hehir:** We are not intending to change the funding to each individual organisation. It will be the reallocation of their existing three-year contract back to that contract, hopefully with some simplification and clarity.

**MS HUNTER:** With the outcomes-based work, because it is happening in a couple of areas in the directorate, how far have you gone along that path as far as identifying the methodologies? What are you collecting? How are you going to know? I am still, I guess, interested in this particular area because it is quite complex and it has been out there for a number of years. Without some sort of longitudinal study, following people

through their lives, is it just taking ABS data that says: “People are living longer. They’re healthier. They’re happier. They’re not in jail”? Is it just doing satisfaction surveys? What have you got in mind to be able to collect that information?

**Mr Hehir:** The first exercise we did was to actually map the national outcomes that we have under our national agreements and the national plans. As you would be aware, the Australian government moved to an outcomes basis. A lot of our funding actually goes out to organisations to deliver under those plans. The first thing we are trying to do is align those outcomes to where the funding flows, if that makes sense.

We have chosen five major headings with the working group, which involves a significant portion of people from the community sector. Underneath there will be a series of, if you like, proxy measures as outcomes, but they will be agreed and they will have to be measurable. We are certainly going to have to establish a benchmark. In some cases there will be existing benchmarks because the data will exist anyway. It may be ABS data or it may be the data we are collecting for the national reports. So there will be some benchmark data. The intent is then to see how we would plan a pathway over 10 years for an improvement in that data. Some of it will be, in a sense, about how we are going to work across the entire ACT, but more of it will be about what the service’s contribution is going to be towards this. People are doing that work themselves anyway.

I think I mentioned at a previous hearing that YWCA, for example, are moving to results-based accountability. We are happy with that methodology. If that is the methodology that they plan to use, we will work with them on that. A number of other organisations are actually moving towards that outcome or a results-based approach to the work they are doing, rather than there being a series of outputs which do not necessarily tell us whether they are an effective service or not. I think the reality is that we are all moving along the same pathway. In fact, YWCA may have started the work slightly in advance of us. There are certainly a number of organisations which are working it through.

The key thing we are trying to make sure of is that there is a solid dataset that is measurable and that we can report on. Sometimes that will involve the use of proxy datasets, but that is okay. That is an established practice nationally and internationally. Where the outcome itself may be hard to measure, you tag a key indicator, or a lead indicator, and use that as your proxy data. That is certainly the methodology. We have chosen the five areas. I think the minister has been asked to provide that in relation to another annual report hearing, so they are on the way.

**Ms Burch:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. We will move on to Mr Seselja.

**MR SESELJA:** I would like to ask some questions about the Canberra Seniors Centre. I asked some questions of LDA yesterday, because I know they had some involvement in looking for a new site for the centre. What I was told by the LDA, or by LAPS, was that that is effectively now with the Community Services Directorate. Minister, I understand that there was a process that started in about April 2010 between a number of agencies and the Canberra Seniors Centre. I understand that that

proposal fell over in about March 2011. What I have been told by the seniors centre is that they got an email on 1 March saying that, in effect, the whole proposal for a new site had been abandoned and that a new, different process would have to be commenced. A contact in DHCS was nominated for further action. However, except for a chance meeting on 2 March 2011, and despite two emails specifically requesting an update, both of which have been ignored, no action or information has been forthcoming. Are you able to give us an update as to what has happened since March 2011 in relation to the Canberra Seniors Centre's efforts to get a new site?

**Ms Burch:** Bronwen Overton-Clarke or David Collett can probably talk in more detail, but I have certainly met with the Turner group. I went down to their rooms, their clubhouse, their seniors centre. There was a level of frustration with them. They had been working on a plan that did not come to fruition. I can understand their frustration. I gave them my commitment to continue working with them to find an alternative site, which is what they have an interest in doing. It is something that has been ongoing. I understand that, following my meeting, Bronwen Overton-Clarke made contact with them as well. I probably will not agree that since March there has not been any contact, but perhaps you can confirm that.

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** Yes. I have been talking to David Rymer just about avenues in terms of the business plan and his proposals. Both David Collett and I have talked to him about the fact that these things do take time in terms of potential sites. Of course, at the moment they own their own building and that is an asset that they have. We are working with them. I will just ask David to elaborate a bit more.

**Mr Collett:** It is an ongoing process. Sites for community facilities in the inner north are not easy to find. We have explored with the Economic Development Directorate the options for sites in Dickson and we have looked for other available sites. At the same time, the Canberra seniors have been working on their user requirements brief. We have encouraged them and supported them in that. We will be continuing to work with them through the new year.

At the earlier meetings, earlier this calendar year, it would be fair to say that both Bronwen Overton-Clarke and I made it clear to the Canberra Seniors Club that this would take some time to do. They do not have a proposal in terms of a site of their own. We will need to find a site. We will need to check that it is suitable. In the meantime, they continue to operate effectively, albeit with some issues in terms of car parking and access from their current facility.

**MR SESELJA:** Will they be reimbursed for the user requirements brief that they prepared?

**Mr Collett:** It has been made clear to them that that was something that we expected them to do as their part in moving towards a feasibility study for a new facility. That has been made clear to the senior staff within the Canberra Seniors Club, both by Bronwen Overton-Clarke and me on a number of occasions.

**MR SESELJA:** They believe they were told by the department that they would be reimbursed for that, around \$8,000. Is that not the case?

**Mr Collett:** As I say, we have reiterated our position on a number of occasions that they would not be reimbursed for that. Bronwen and I have been both been at meetings where we have both made it clear to them that that is not the case.

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** Yes.

**MR SESELJA:** So at no stage have they been told that they would be reimbursed that \$8,000 for their user requirements?

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** I think at the first meeting we all agreed it would be a good idea for them to specify in a users brief what their requirements were going forward.

**MR SESELJA:** Yes. Okay.

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** My understanding from that meeting was not that we said that we would pay for it.

**MR SESELJA:** Okay. On the process leading up to March of 2011, the last process, they were saying that they were close in October of 2010. It said:

At a meeting of 20 October 2010 a proposal was read out which appeared to meet all of Canberra Seniors Centre's requirements.

However, it was stated that the document could not be released, because I have been asked to add a further short paragraph and an undertaking was given that the final proposal would be supplied in the next two days. Despite a number of requests, the proposal has never been received. No minutes were ever prepared for any of these meetings.

Firstly, did that meeting of 20 October 2010 take place, and were minutes of it prepared?

**Ms Burch:** Clearly we need to take that one on notice, Mr Seselja. I do not know if anyone has got their diary tattooed in their memory at the moment.

**MR SESELJA:** Okay. Were they—

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** Can I just add, Mr Seselja, that I am sure that the meeting did take place. As David said, both David and I have been at meetings with them. So I am sure that they are correct in saying that. We have not taken minutes. To date the meetings have been around them being very clear and discussing what their user requirements are so that we can get to a place where we can move forward. I think that they are envisaging that the government processes will work in a quick and seamless way for them, and, as David has outlined, we need to work closely with other directorates to ensure that we can find a space for them.

We probably could have been clearer with them, although I have reiterated a number of times to them, as has David, that these processes take time. We have talked about different processes in terms of the budget process and we have been clear to them about what we are going forward with this financial year. But I think they are in a hurry and we are not meeting their needs right at the moment; but we are working

closely with them to make sure that we can work with them for the new process.

**Mr Collett:** Could I add another clarification. Whilst I do not have a photographic memory, I do assume, as Bronwen did, that the meeting did occur at that time. The Community Services Directorate did not have a proposal to put to the meeting. The Canberra seniors club had been in discussion over a period of time—a number of years—with both the university, with private consultants and lobbyists, and other directorates, around the possibility of sites in the town, within Civic, on the outskirts of Civic and as far away as Dickson.

We have not been involved as a directorate in the development of any of those proposals. They have been proposals that essentially have been brought to us by the Canberra seniors club. So we have not prepared a proposal for them which is close to completion and we have not given them an undertaking at any time that we would give a proposal to them within two days or within any time. We have said that we do not have at the moment a site that would suit their purposes. We are happy to work with them and continue to look at opportunities through the redevelopment of other sites or the potential to use other community facilities land in north Canberra. They have been clear about what they think are their locational needs, and we continue to work with them around that.

**MR SESELJA:** Okay. Finally, since March 2011 what communication has the directorate had with other agencies, such as LAPS, to identify a site for them and, apart from the minister's meeting in July, what other communication has there been with Canberra Seniors Centre on this issue?

**Mr Hehir:** That is quite an extensive list. Can we take that on notice and we can document the meetings?

**MR SESELJA:** Sure.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Hunter, I think you had a supplementary?

**MS HUNTER:** Yes. It raises for me the issue about community facilities land within the inner north. We have got an increasing population within the sort of city and Civic—people of all ages but also people who are ageing in this case. Is it a concern for the directorate that we seem to have a shrinking supply of community land in order to ensure we have got the facilities to meet the needs of people?

**Mr Hehir:** We are always looking for community facilities land. As you would be aware, the existing community facility land in north Canberra really came about through a process which mapped what was there rather than necessarily a refresh in deciding what was going to be used. The territory plan came into place decades after north Canberra was built. We could look back with a little bit of hindsight and say that maybe the original planners and builders did not leave enough, but it is not necessarily a useful exercise. Community facilities can be built on a number of different land uses. It is just that getting the agreement to it going on a higher value land use can be problematic.

I also think we need to think about what the form is and how we utilise our existing

sites out there. That is certainly work that we are discussing with EDD. It does not necessarily have to be the pro forma that was in place for a particular community. North Canberra is changing. The community is changing. The physical form is changing. I think we have to think about how we provide community facilities within that context as well.

So it is not just a case of the land; it is also about how we have to change in response to the overall physical form and higher density and also the needs as they change over time. It is an ongoing piece of thinking that we have to do, but certainly—

**MS HUNTER:** So you have started that thinking?

**Ms Burch:** If I can just make a comment; if we look at north Canberra, it has the highest proportion of facilities on community facilities land, as I understand it, and as we go through redevelopments such as the Northbourne flats and the Bega—

**MS HUNTER:** So to build it into those redevelopments, yes.

**Mr Hehir:** It is what we have got there. A lot of it is built on. So as we redevelop it we need to think about what needs to be there and we are actually thinking about that as part of our processes.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay. I have got a number of supplementaries on this as well. Can I just ask why there were no minutes taken of the meeting?

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** Because it was an exploratory meeting. It was an initial open discussion about where we might go to. There were no undertakings apart from us all agreeing that it would be useful for the club to start identifying their user requirements.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay. Were there any file notes taken?

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** No.

**THE CHAIR:** Nothing at all?

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** No.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay. Is the government's proposal to the Canberra Seniors Centre going to mirror the model implemented at the Tuggeranong centre—not your proposal, but the proposal that is being discussed to date: is it going to mirror what has happened at Tuggeranong or would it mirror what has happened at Tuggeranong?

**Ms Burch:** I will let others talk to this. Tuggeranong is a government-owned facility. Turner's is their facility. They own the land. They own the building. So any proposal that would change that is a significant change. From the conversation that I have had with them they are very clear about an interest in ownership and what their user requirements are.

**THE CHAIR:** But given that they have got their own land—

**Ms Burch:** Some land, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Given that they have got their own land, wouldn't it be incumbent on the government to support them just that little bit extra, because the additional money that would have been required to get the land is not there like it was with Tuggeranong? Is there any further opportunity that this centre could pursue?

**Mr Hehir:** Certainly one of the reasons we are looking at community facility land is that it is actually relatively low value. We would certainly be willing to—

**THE CHAIR:** Sorry; what was low value?

**Mr Hehir:** Community facility land typically has a lower cost per square metre than other land uses.

**THE CHAIR:** But there is a cost?

**Mr Hehir:** Sometimes yes, sometimes no. We often direct grant community facility land for minimal cost. It is quite a common process to provide it at zero or low cost.

**THE CHAIR:** Based on that, Mr Hehir, why can't a direct grant be made to this group?

**Mr Hehir:** I think we are not saying it cannot be; what we are saying is that we are having trouble finding a piece of community facility land in the areas they have nominated. That is the core difficulty we have got. If they wanted to surrender that block to us and we could find an alternative block that met their needs, I suspect that we would be happy to prepare a proposal for the government's consideration around it. It is not out of the ordinary for us to be working around those sort of issues.

**THE CHAIR:** So has that option been put to them?

**Mr Hehir:** That is the option they came to us with; that is my understanding.

**Ms Burch:** Yes. This is their proposal to us.

**Mr Hehir:** My understanding of the proposal is just that—that they would hand back that site in exchange for another community facility site and then we would have to talk about what the construction aspects actually are. They want to own it, which means that they are down a particular path, which is not the path that was followed for Tuggeranong, where we own the facility. That is the distinction we draw.

**THE CHAIR:** Fine. I understand that. But what I cannot quite get my head around is the fact that there is a group of senior citizens who have come to you with a proposal—

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** No, they have not. That is the whole thing.

**THE CHAIR:** They have come to you for a discussion regarding a proposal.

**Mr Hehir:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** I was told that it was a proposal they were bringing to you, a minute ago.

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** Their user requirements they have brought to us.

**THE CHAIR:** User requirements, okay. We are using terminology here as well. A group of senior people have come to you with a request, for the want of a better word. There were no minutes taken about what advice was given to them. The perception of what advice was given seems to be differing. I am just trying to understand what sort of advice these people have been given. I guess they are wondering about that as well. Can we get some clarity on this?

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** I think we are getting timing a bit mixed up here. At the initial meeting they had not done their user brief. That was an outcome of the informal meeting that we had—that it would be a good idea for them to start working on what they might require into the future. Since then we have not met with them, but they have sent in their user requirements and we have been working with them to identify, as David has said, how we might go forward into the future.

**THE CHAIR:** So what is the position now in going forward to the future? What is the next step as far as you are aware?

**Mr Hehir:** At this point, as David has said, we are working with EDD around land identification. My understanding is that we have been unable to identify community facility land. That means we are going to have to look at what other options there are and then talk to them about what the impact of those other options potentially is. We need to do that in order for them to make a decision about how they want to proceed and whether they want to put a formal proposal to government around it.

As far as I understand it, we have not given up the search. As Ms Hunter indicated, unoccupied community facility land in the north is not that common. We have not been able to identify a piece that meets their needs. That means we are going to have to look at alternatives.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay. Ms Hunter.

**MS HUNTER:** I want to move to the issue of the social compact and also the *Engaging Canberrans* manual. These are quite important documents, one articulating the relationship between government and the community sector and the other obviously setting out ways to engage with a whole range of individuals and different groups.

We have seen a lot of review, reform, tendering processes and so forth go on recently; I think the youth and family area and the homelessness area are examples. I understand that ACTCOSS has done a bit of a report on the compact—it is before the JCGRG—to see how to move that forward and to implement it. I am just wondering how you think the social compact, for instance, is going and how you are promoting it

with all officers at all levels within your department; also when there are people who feel that it has not quite gone the way that they believe it should have gone how they can take that issue up and what is your response.

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** There is a third document I would add to that suite, which is the funding manager's guide, which has been recently completed and is both for the government sector and non-government contract managers. As co-chair of JCGRG with Ros Dundas, we have been working closely over the last couple of months to identify how we might, on the back of the survey that was done about the compact, promulgate all of those documents, both within government and outside. I will get to the resolution bit in the end. What we have done is recently meet with the Chief Minister's Directorate and work through how we can better promote all of those documents through a specific site that is actually geared towards both non-government organisations and contract managers within government.

So we are looking at reforming their have-your-say site. It is a good time for them to be considering new proposals, because they are completely joining together the have-your-say site and the community engagement site. They are really happy to work with us to give a much higher profile to the compact and also those two companion documents.

Ros has been also working with other non-government members on the bit that was never finished in the compact, which is the dispute resolution component, as well as refreshing the whole document. In fact it is coming forward to the last meeting of the year, next week, and we are looking at launching the site early in the new year. With that, of course, goes, as you said, the training for contract managers, both inside government and out. We are very cognisant of that, because of the turnover that we do have in both sectors. That is why documents such as the funding manager's guide become really crucial documents, because they are systemising how we go forward with our contracts.

We are expecting that site to also have the service funding agreements on it, which are at the moment sort of buried down in the Procurement Solutions site and so forth. So it will really become a much higher profile area both for government and non-government members.

**MS HUNTER:** It used to be some years ago that the funding managers did meet to try to share their practices—

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** Yes. That still occurs.

**MS HUNTER:** to try to get some consistency.

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** That still occurs, yes. Our area actually chairs that meeting across government. And you are right; it is all about consistency and how they are actually worked through.

**MS HUNTER:** Who has been involved in the refreshing of the social compact? The original compact was a riotous group of community people and government people.

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** Yes.

**MS HUNTER:** Then the next one was more an internal government process.

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** Yes.

**MS HUNTER:** So what process are you adopting this time?

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** It is through JCGRG. My understanding in terms of how ACTOSS has been doing it is also through the peaks. What we did this year was to review the compact. It is still sound. It is still as it should be. So we are not actually changing it. We are literally updating it. The proposal that we have not even put to the minister yet is to redo the foreword and to just have the tail end of it redone. So we are not looking at changing it. We are all very comfortable with the document.

**MS HUNTER:** So it is the dispute resolution part which has always been pushed to the side a bit?

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** Yes. We have done some best practice research within our area, which we have recently given to ACTCOSS. So it is really about the principles of dispute resolution because of course the compact is not just for funded organisations and the contract rationale and clauses; it is actually about how government works with non-government in a broader way.

One of the areas of feedback from the survey which was really interesting was that government members felt that non-government organisations actually had quite a lot of power because of their capacity to go to elected members. And that was quite a surprise to the non-government sector.

**MS HUNTER:** It would be a big surprise to the non-government sector, who do not hold the purse strings. They certainly do not hold the contracts and manage them.

**THE CHAIR:** There is just a bit of housekeeping. We started 10 minutes late. We are sort of keeping to time, but we are about seven minutes behind. We have had a number of questions on ageing, but we will have a couple more and then we will move on to women. We will extend the period of hearings by 10 minutes and probably take a 10-minute break.

**Ms Burch:** If we can, because Mr Hehir has to travel.

**Mr Hehir:** I have got a flight, so I am—

**Ms Burch:** We are happy to, if we can, compress the morning tea. That would be good.

**THE CHAIR:** That is not a problem from our point of view. We will move on to ageing. We have had a number of ageing questions already, but we have got a couple more, I believe. Page 69 of the Community Services Directorate annual report refers to the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing. Minister, the ACT ministerial advisory council's term was extended by one year to December 2011. Can you

explain why?

**Ms Burch:** That was a request from the council. They were very keen to be part of the implementation of the positive ageing plan. And I was supportive of that. The council that I have had over the last couple of years have been incredibly strong and forward thinking and have done a great job. Their term comes to an end. It is open—and I think it is closing on 16 December—so there will be a new council in place for the new year. But they are a very valuable and worthy council. They are strong advocates. They do not just provide advice to me; they provide advice across government agencies as well.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Bresnan.

**MS BRESNAN:** Primarily my questions relate to the strategic plan for positive ageing. The first one is about the seniors information portal. I would be interested in getting a bit more information about how you are promoting the portal to the older community in the ACT other than through the website itself. How is it being promoted?

**Ms Burch:** It is promoted in different forums. Certainly at seniors groups and seniors activities it is promoted. COTA promotes it as well. But Ms Whitten might be able to talk more on that.

**Ms Whitten:** On page 304 of the annual report there is reference to the first action in relation to information and action 3 in relation to the seniors information portal. In terms of promotion, the role of the Office for Ageing is about promoting positive ageing. There are a number of activities during the year, including Seniors Week. The Older Persons Assembly was an opportunity to promote the online site with the retirement and lifestyle expo as well. So there are a number of ways that we do it.

**MS BRESNAN:** What about just through general promotion? Obviously not everyone is going to go to those sorts of activities.

**Ms Whitten:** Sure.

**MS BRESNAN:** The information is getting out to the broader community about it?

**Ms Whitten:** The minister talked about COTA's role as well. What we know in terms of older people is that they source a lot of their information through newspapers. Just on Sunday there was some promotion in the *Canberra Times* about the work of the Office for Ageing. The *Chronicle* is also a key source of information for older people. So there is a range of areas that we have used.

One of the outcomes from the Older Persons Assembly which was held on 30 September was the need to look at a diverse range of how we communicate, when we communicate and in what format we communicate. So that is one of the outcomes that we are looking at and that the government will respond to as part of the Older Persons Assembly.

**MS BRESNAN:** That probably goes to my next question. It mentions here that the

Women's Information Referral Centre has broadband for seniors computer literacy. Obviously one of the issues from the Older Persons Assembly was that a lot of older people do not have that computer literacy. Is expanding that role something you are looking at, obviously through different opportunities, so that people can get that experience and be able to use computers?

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** Yes. We have an age-friendly network, which is responsible for implementing the actions of the first action plan from the strategic plan. That comprises ACT government directorates as well as COTA, MACA, the advisory council, the commonwealth and National Seniors. What we have been talking about is the other methods by which older people receive information, and the libraries are a key part of that. The Women's Information Referral Centre and the Citizens Advice Bureau I think are also sources of information, depending on particular groups in the community. So they are the kinds of avenues we are using.

**Ms Burch:** Just on that, at the opening of the Tuggeranong 55 centre the other day, they were talking about running computer courses in the seniors centres. I know Woden does run computer courses. As Meredith was saying, it is about the office going out to those seniors centres and reminding them if they run computer courses that this would be a good site to look at and explore; similarly through the University of the Third Age. So it is just about making sure that if you are in front of a computer, if you are learning computer literacy, this is a site that may be of interest for you in that process.

**THE CHAIR:** I do not have any other questions on ageing.

**MS BRESNAN:** I do.

**THE CHAIR:** It is over to you again.

**MS BRESNAN:** Action 19 talks about the Canberra age-friendly city survey and that the Centre for Mental Health Research was awarded the tender to undertake it. I would be interested to know whether the survey has been completed and particularly whether it looked at any particular areas. Given the Mental Health Research Centre is undertaking an independent survey I am interested in some of the specifics it has looked at.

**Ms Burch:** Ms Whitten can talk to that, but I think it is very close to a final report. But Meredith can give you some detail.

**Ms Whitten:** The report has been completed and is on its way to the minister. I am sure the minister will not mind if I broadly talk about it.

**Ms Burch:** No.

**Ms Whitten:** It was a very comprehensive report, and we are asking the minister to release it publicly. Some of the findings are that overall older people in Canberra consider that Canberra is a fairly age-friendly city for them. The areas of interest for older people are in relation to public transport, and we are working with ACTION and TAMS around some initiatives around that, and—I am just remembering—footpaths.

That also came up in the Older Persons Assembly, in terms of the ability for older people to walk around their suburbs. Some suburbs have footpaths. Some have them on one side of the road. Some have none—a new suburb. So it is really about working with TAMS about what options we can do. But overall the survey was distributed through COTA, seniors clubs and retirement villages. Sorry; I just have to remember.

**Ms Burch:** And there were questions about how they feel safe, how they feel included and part of the community. From memory there were those sorts of questions in there as well.

**Ms Whitten:** So it is very comprehensive and it reflects similar themes to the strategic plan themes. But it is actually based on the World Health Organisation's principal theme, which goes a bit beyond our themes.

**MS BRESNAN:** You said it is going to be released publicly.

**Ms Burch:** That is my intention, yes—unsighted, unseen.

**MS BRESNAN:** Of course.

**Ms Burch:** Certainly it is my intention. It will form the basis of the next strategy around positive ageing, the age-friendly city, the Older Persons Assembly, learnings from this current strategy. Having talked with Alan Hodges and the council, there are some planks that will be quite critical in the next forward strategy.

**MS BRESNAN:** Obviously I am not pre-empting when it will be released. You mentioned how it was distributed through COTA, seniors centres and aged care centres. It would be interesting if the report was clear about how that information was disseminated. We have a core group in the ACT who are quite actively involved. I think the Older Persons Assembly was really successful in getting out to other people who might not have that active involvement because of being socially isolated. Was that something that was looked at in the survey?

**Ms Burch:** Certainly I remember launching or promoting it, and it was open. Whilst we put it through those stakeholder groups, there was open access more broadly should people want to be involved. But it is always—

**MS BRESNAN:** It is difficult.

**Ms Burch:** It is always hard. The ones that are actively engaged—

**MS BRESNAN:** They are very active.

**Ms Burch:** are very active, and others not so. But again we will make the report public and then we will think about how we summarise it and promote those messages out to older Canberrans as well.

**MS BRESNAN:** And you said it obviously will help inform the new strategy.

**Ms Burch:** Yes.

**Ms Whitten:** The intention is that the survey results will inform the next action plan of the positive ageing plan and also the outcomes of the Older Persons Assembly. With the establishment of the new Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing, we will work together in developing that next action plan based on that information. The survey was an important benchmark survey, because it goes to Canberra's membership of the World Health Organisation aim for an age friendly network, so we were required to conduct the survey.

**MS BRESNAN:** I will ask one more question on ageing, if that is okay; I know we need to get to women. It is just on the Older Persons Assembly. Do you expect that you will be able to report on the outcomes by the set time frame? Is that going to plan? And has there been any early feedback?

**Ms Burch:** What I have put out to all the participants is a letter with just a thankyou and a summary. I think I provided a copy to members as well.

**MS BRESNAN:** Yes. I have seen that.

**Ms Burch:** We are finetuning that. I have had a couple of emails from somebody who said, "But my idea didn't get up on the final 24 or a dozen." Other than that, the feedback has been very positive. As far as the timing of the final report goes—how are you doing with that, Meredith?

**Ms Whitten:** I think that the resolution did talk about the end of this year.

**MS BRESNAN:** Yes.

**Ms Whitten:** However, my recollection of the actual day was that both the Chief Minister and the minister suggested that it would be in the early new year, given that there was a need for the government response to be developed. We have already started that conversation with our directorates, because a lot of the actions or outcomes are required to be prepared by other people. We have had a good conversation about that and we know that we can achieve some actions following it.

**Ms Burch:** I think the original concept was that we would have the assembly and report back within X number of months. But given that it is the first and it cut across so many different areas of government, I thought it was far better to get a sensible response in the early new year.

**MS BRESNAN:** There is just one other thing I will be interested to get your views on. Obviously people who were not successful in being delegates were able to provide some input to those delegates who were selected. I am just wondering whether you have had any feedback on how that worked. I have had one person say to me that it was a difficult process because they could not get the input to people, because they did not necessarily know them or just through reasons of isolation.

**Ms Burch:** It goes to your earlier point about those that are actively engaged knowing different people.

**MS BRESNAN:** Yes, particularly with delegates. Is that process something you think can be improved, or did you feel it was successful?

**Ms Whitten:** The important thing about the nomination process was that we did ask people who were nominating what their areas of interest were so that we were able to get that initial flush of ideas so that those ideas were available to us to have a look at. In terms of making connections between delegates, I think that would be something that we would need to look at for the next time.

We developed the plan for the day looking at what happened in Scotland and their previous assemblies and also working with a small steering committee comprising members from ACA, COTA and the combined Canberra seniors club representation. So along the way we were informed by a range of people. I am sure we can have a look at those people who nominated but were not successful in being a delegate and how we can work that through a bit better next time.

**MS BRESNAN:** That has just been one issue that has been raised with me.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Bresnan.

**MS BRESNAN:** Sorry; it is just that—

**Ms Burch:** I think it is important. It is about a community assembly and those that want to participate and were successful in being in the room. But I am quite happy to think about how we can open up more broadly if people want to get engaged.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, minister. We will move to the Office for Women. My first question is on page 67, “ACT women’s return to work grants”. It states:

In 2010-11, 124 women received a return to work grant ...

Of those women, how many have secured employment as a direct result of the grant received?

**Ms Burch:** We provide return to work grants. I might ask Veronica Wensing if we track employment stats post that and, if we do, how long we do that for.

**Ms Wensing:** We do track afterwards. It is important, first of all, to bear in mind that most of the grants are awarded for undertaking things like training, which then takes a period of time. We did do a phone-based interview in 2010, I think. I will just go to the exact details. From memory, I think 72 per cent of those women had returned to work, and the remainder were either still studying or had not returned, for a range of other reasons.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. On that same note, of the total of the 373 grants received since the grants were introduced in February 2008, how many women have secured employment?

**Ms Wensing:** I do not think that an assessment has been undertaken on the full 300-plus figure.

**THE CHAIR:** Is it going to be undertaken?

**Ms Wensing:** We are currently trying to work out the best way to make those assessments. Some women move on as well. We are about to undertake another phone assessment. We have to be very strategic about the time frame that we are targeting back to. As I said, it takes a while for these women to undergo their training or undertake the courses.

**THE CHAIR:** I understand all that. I am simply wanting to know how you measure the success of the implementation; that is all.

**Ms Wensing:** That is being done by phone follow-up, so it is fairly resource intensive in terms of officers from within the directorate tracking back those women by phone and having conversations.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Ms Bresnan.

**MS BRESNAN:** My question is in relation to the prevention of violence against women and children strategy. I am wondering whether you can provide a bit more of an outline about the reporting process and mechanisms for the ACT in relation to the strategy and whether there will be public progress reports in relation to this.

**Ms Burch:** There will be reporting. As we do with all our implementation plans and strategies, there will be reporting across, I think, five key areas within that. Natalie?

**Ms Howson:** As part of the implementation process, we have established a governance group. It is a joint governance group co-chaired by Justice and Community Safety and the Community Services Directorate, but it also has a number of members from the community sector that sit on that governance group. The terms of reference for that governance group will be to monitor and oversee the implementation of the ACT implementation plan and feed our own achievements through to a broader reporting process established under the national agenda. That is supported by governance arrangements through senior officials and ministers.

**MS BRESNAN:** One of my questions was about the governance group. Who is going to be the lead agency in terms of progressing and monitoring the strategy?

**Ms Howson:** That would be our directorate, the Community Services Directorate.

**Ms Burch:** We did launch at the same time—within the short period we have included within our strategy there is the JACS family violence prevention plan as well.

**MS BRESNAN:** What is the current status of the strategy and also the national plan with COAG?

**Ms Howson:** I might ask Veronica to respond to that. She is on the working groups and can give you the detail.

**Ms Wensing:** The governance group has met twice and we are further developing the implementation plan for the immediate actions in the strategy for the ACT. The national implementation plan has not officially been endorsed by all ministers across Australia at this stage. It was discussed at the Select Council on Women's Issues meeting a couple of weeks ago and was endorsed in principle. Some jurisdictions, I understand, still have to take that national plan through the cabinet process in order for it to be completely and finally endorsed.

**MS BRESNAN:** Do you know some of the reasons why they might not have? Is it just the usual process?

**Ms Wensing:** Some of those reasons would be due to changes of governments in states and territories—states, particularly.

**Ms Burch:** My memory of the last meeting of ministers for women—which was here in Canberra just recently; there was a teleconference that you both attended, I think—is that there was broad endorsement around the table across all governments supportive of it. But different governments have changed and, with their cabinet processes, sometimes it just takes that extra bit of time.

**MS BRESNAN:** I have got my other question to ask. It will be a quick question, because I know we have got to move on. On the Ministerial Advisory Council on Women, I would be interested to know how many nominations have been received and when the new membership is likely to be announced.

**Ms Wensing:** Twenty-four nominations have been received. We expect that the minister will be in a position to make announcements in February and March. The idea was to have that tie in close to International Women's Day.

**MS BRESNAN:** Great.

**Ms Burch:** Twenty-four nominations show the interest of Canberra women in being part of the broader voice. That is good.

**MS BRESNAN:** Obviously, you cannot give us too much information about the nominations, but is it a broad cross-section?

**Ms Wensing:** Yes, it is.

**MS BRESNAN:** Thank you.

**Ms Burch:** And that is all part of that final selection process about who is nominated finally for inclusion on the board.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much. We are now back on time.

**Meeting adjourned from 10.47 to 11.03 am**

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Manikis, thank you for joining us for this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Health, Community and Social Services inquiry into the

2010-11 annual and financial report of the Community Services Directorate. We have looked at Community Services, the Office for Ageing and the Office of Women; now we are looking at the Office of Multicultural Affairs. I draw your attention to the privilege statement that is before you. I mentioned it to all the other government representatives. Mr Manikis, are you comfortable with the privileges instructions?

**Mr Manikis:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much. Minister, would you like to make an opening statement?

**Ms Burch:** No; I covered it earlier, thank you, chair.

**THE CHAIR:** I would like to go to the first question, on page 12 of the multicultural affairs strategy *Languages for all Canberrans*, a discussion paper released for public comment in December 2010. It received 37 submissions. What was the tenor of the submissions?

**Ms Burch:** Mr Manikis can talk to that.

**Mr Manikis:** We did receive 37 submissions. There were a wide range of issues that were canvassed. People were coming at this language issue from different perspectives. We had the academics in town who, in their submissions, as I can recollect, talked about linking our language policy into the policy documents at the national level as well as the international level—the United Nations—and making sure that any policy the ACT put forward was contextualised within that United Nations framework. There were also many submissions, in that 37, from ethnic language schools or community language schools that essentially raised issues around the importance of transferring language from one generation to the next and talked around resources and the requirement, from their perspective, for more resources. You would expect that from an open call for submissions around this.

**THE CHAIR:** What is the status of the policy? Are you working on a policy at the moment?

**Mr Manikis:** Yes. The policy has been through several iterations. We had a writing team that included Dr Mandy Scott from the University of Canberra, who is a leading expert in this area, as well as Dr Marina Houston, who is also quite well regarded in this field, who has been working with the Office of Multicultural Affairs staff in putting together an early draft of this policy with a view to ensuring that we pick up, as much as we can, the comments and views that have been put forward in those 37 submissions. The document at the moment is in an early draft form. We are very mindful that it will need to be finalised early next year.

**THE CHAIR:** Have you got a time frame for that? Have you got a date?

**Mr Manikis:** By 30 June 2012 is the time frame.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Mr Manikis:** Hopefully we will have something to government early in the new year.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you have any funds that have been directed to this policy?

**Mr Manikis:** At this stage we have language funds that are in the existing budgets across the administration, certainly with Education and Training—

**THE CHAIR:** Has that had to come away from some other activity that is currently happening?

**Mr Manikis:** Not at all. We just need to wait and see what comes out in the languages policy. What we will do then is move forward from there, either seeking extra budget moneys to enhance what is there already or redirecting funds. It will be in tune with what the community has put through those 37 submissions.

**THE CHAIR:** I applaud the new initiative, but if the new initiative is new and requires additional funds have you asked for additional funds at this point?

**Ms Burch:** We do not have a policy, so it is not 100 per cent clear whether there are additional funds. My understanding is that part of the policy is all about buy-in, commitment and approach across, for example, education and others. I am sure there is some interpretation aspect of that as well. It is around how, as through a number of our other policies, our directorates and different components within those actually apply this policy intent within their existing resources.

**THE CHAIR:** I am glad to hear you mention education. One of the other areas related to this is the situation of proposed cuts to a consultant and advisory position in the area of English as a second language, which is an education issue—

**Ms Burch:** It sits within the education directorate, does it? Is that what you are saying?

**THE CHAIR:** It does. But it also affects people who require English as a second language.

**Ms Burch:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** I am wondering what you are aware of regarding proposed cuts there.

**Ms Burch:** The detail of what happens within the education directorate would not be for me to answer. As far as how we as an Office of Multicultural Affairs—

**THE CHAIR:** It is not what happens. Are you aware of it happening?

**Ms Burch:** I am not aware of the detail about what goes on in the education directorate. I was going to go on to talk about what we are responsible for and about supporting our community organisations—supporting them with their languages through language grants, radio grants, the Ethnic Schools Association, linkages to interpreter services and discussing with the new and emerging communities what their interpretation needs are, for example, with Dinka, with our Sudanese, which is the

youngest.

**THE CHAIR:** But don't you think it is just as important for those people, apart from getting support for their own languages, to learn English as a second language? That should be part of an interest in multicultural affairs I should imagine?

**Mr Manikis:** And it is. And, as the minister has mentioned, we do direct resources to community organisations for English classes. That occurs. The education department has, as you have pointed out, discrete programs within the school settings that assist new migrants that need language classes—

**THE CHAIR:** And they are about to cut them, Mr Manikis. What I am asking the minister is: what attention is she paying to the requirement for ESL teachers? As multicultural minister should you not have some interest in this?

**Ms Burch:** As multicultural minister I have an interest and a commitment to support language diversity, language maintenance and language acquisition across the community. I am responsible for that through OMA. I am not responsible for that through the education directorate.

**THE CHAIR:** So you wash your hands of what education does?

**Ms Burch:** I am not washing my hands of it, Mr Doszpot. I really object to your inference in that.

**THE CHAIR:** I cannot infer anything else from your comments.

**Ms Burch:** Well, you—

**THE CHAIR:** I am asking you—

**Ms Burch:** Do I have an interest—

**THE CHAIR:** Will you—

**Ms Burch:** in people's acquisition and maintenance of language? And I have clearly said yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, what I am asking you is—

**Ms Burch:** Yes, Mr Doszpot.

**THE CHAIR:** will you take up the cudgel on behalf of the people who have asked you to look after the retention of the ESL teachers. If it is funny, Ms Burch, I am sorry.

**Ms Burch:** Mr Doszpot—

**THE CHAIR:** I am asking you a serious question—

**Ms Burch:** No; what you are doing—

**THE CHAIR:** I am asking you a serious question.

**Ms Burch:** What you are doing is asking me an emotive question—

**THE CHAIR:** I am asking you—

**Ms Burch:** by talking about picking up the cudgel. I take offence at your emotion in this. You have asked me—

**THE CHAIR:** My emotion?

**Ms Burch:** You have asked me—

**THE CHAIR:** It is my turn to laugh I think.

**Ms Burch:** You are the one using that language, Mr Doszpot.

**THE CHAIR:** I did learn English as a second language, Ms Burch. If that is a problem, I have got a problem. The point I am trying to get across to you is that ESL teachers are being cut. There are grave concerns from the multicultural community on this. There is a letter to the minister on this. There is also concern by the Australian Education Union. The only person who does not seem concerned is the Minister for Multicultural Affairs.

**Ms Burch:** No—

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Ms Burch:** I have not said I am not concerned, Mr Doszpot. I have not said that.

**THE CHAIR:** Your laughter did not exactly fill me with confidence—

**Ms Burch:** Your language in asking me to pick up—

**THE CHAIR:** So you are picking on my language now? Thank you.

**Ms Burch:** No; I am—

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you; I take that as a—

**Ms Burch:** What? What are you going to take that as? You asked me to pick up a cudgel. You asked me to pick up a bat. I take offence at that, Mr Doszpot.

**THE CHAIR:** I am flabbergasted, quite frankly. I am asking you to look after ESL—people who require ESL. That is what I am asking you to do. I have not asked you anything that would or should cause you either mirth or the sort of reaction you are giving me. I have asked a question—

**Ms Burch:** I did not like the tone and the language you were using in that request, Mr Doszpot.

**THE CHAIR:** Let us get back to the question. What are you going to do about—

**Ms Burch:** Mr Manikis—

**Mr Manikis:** We have not received any complaints from the community—from the multicultural community or the Australian Education Union. We have not received complaints from community organisations or from any of those communities that have members attend the ESL classes.

**THE CHAIR:** You have not received any?

**Mr Manikis:** We have not received one complaint.

**THE CHAIR:** You have mentioned Ms Mandy Clark.

**Mr Manikis:** No; Mandy Scott.

**THE CHAIR:** Sorry; Mandy Scott.

**Mr Manikis:** Dr Mandy Scott.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Mandy Scott, I believe, belongs to the Canberra multicultural forum—

**Mr Manikis:** That is right, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** The chair of that has written to the department of education. I am surprised that they have not raised it with you.

**Mr Manikis:** Well, they have not—they might have written. What date was that, chair?

**THE CHAIR:** It was 7 November.

**Mr Manikis:** So it would have been about two weeks ago or so?

**THE CHAIR:** Correct.

**Mr Manikis:** We have not received any complaints.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay.

**Mr Manikis:** We have not received any information to do with cuts to ESL programs—from the community or from community organisations.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Manikis. Ms Burch, I come back to the question I asked you at the outset: are you going to pick up the cudgel and have a look at what

can be done to top this cut of an ESL teacher that is currently on the board?

**Ms Burch:** I am quite happy to engage in a conversation with the minister, the new minister for education, on this matter.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. That is the only answer I wanted in the first instance. Ms Bresnan.

**MS BRESNAN:** On page 12 it lists some of the highlights in terms of the multicultural affairs office, including that 30 per cent of well women's checks are going to multicultural women. This is a question that I asked Health as well. They also comprise 30 per cent of women's return to work grant recipients and 10 per cent of women's micro-credit loan recipients. Are these targets that have been set as part of the multicultural strategy or something you have planned to do? When you achieve these results do you try to then increase them in the following year or keep them at the same level? What is the formal process around that?

**Mr Manikis:** I am just trying to find the stuff on page 12.

**MS BRESNAN:** It is basically the same—

**Ms Burch:** It is the second dot point on page 12.

**Mr Manikis:** Yes.

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** The information actually comes out of the women's area, so what we are trying to do is target women who are more disadvantaged, particularly in terms of the return to work grants. Multicultural women have a strong take-up of the return to work grants, and also the micro-credit loan recipients. It is quite common in other countries that women have quite a business focus. In fact, at the multicultural roundtable that the minister hosted early this week, that came through quite strongly. So we are seeing a take-up of micro-credit loans from non-English-speaking women, and we, of course, want to encourage both of those.

**Mr Hehir:** There is quite an active process in this. One of the ways that we increased the numbers—I think it was in the return to work program—was that we engaged with the Sudanese community. So we specifically targeted a group of women who may not have been engaged in other services and we specifically promoted the grants to them. So that has helped to promote that.

We also take a broader approach. With the recent WES program, the work experience and support program that we run, again, we worked with the south Sudanese community on that particular promotion and a reasonable proportion of that graduating group are women—10 out of the 20. So that was a good representation. We also have in other areas quite a consistent approach with that. We are doing some work around Northbourne Avenue in terms of postcode 2612.

**Ms Burch:** The home to work.

**Mr Hehir:** Yes, the home to work, which also has quite a specific women and also

multicultural focus to it, as well as an Aboriginal focus. We always try to keep those groups of potentially high levels of disadvantage in mind with a number of our programs, and we will actively promote into those groups.

**MS BRESNAN:** These programs operate across different departments but obviously the office is quite involved in this. Is it something that you aim to keep being involved in and increase that participation, keep it at the same level or determine whether you will target perhaps different groups?

**Ms Burch:** I would say it is something we do, and we do keep an eye on it. Certainly through the Office for Women there is an eye on it as well. If we saw that there was some slippage, we would then respond with a targeted strategy about making sure we maintain it.

**Ms Howson:** The relationships that we have with the multicultural advocacy bodies are also very positive, and they are extremely active. Ms Overton-Clarke mentioned a roundtable that we had yesterday, and it was really evident that those people make it their business to be informed about what government programs are available for their constituents and ensure their access to them.

**Mr Manikis:** The strategy is a whole-of-government document. We do have a roving eye across the whole of government and the programs, and they include the functional areas within our directorate as well as education, health, justice et cetera.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Manikis. Ms Bresnan, do you have another question?

**MS BRESNAN:** Yes, it is a follow-up question. It is about some of the things which are identified in the multicultural strategy. You mentioned the cross-government involvement. You mentioned education as well. One of the goals in the strategy is a goal of having all years 3 to 8 students in ACT government schools studying a second language. Is that something you have been able to achieve?

**Mr Manikis:** That is, again, a Department of Education and Training responsibility.

**MS BRESNAN:** But it is mentioned as a goal in the multicultural strategy.

**Mr Manikis:** That is right. They are in the process of implementing that at the moment, I understand. As I say, they would be better placed to answer the details of how that is travelling. Even with that program, there are communities that are interested in adding languages to that program. There is also the matter of how that program is being implemented across the schools in terms of promotion. I think there are a limited number of languages. I think there are eight or 10 languages that are funded at the moment. What we hear is what the community wishes to have added in terms of languages to that program. But it is quite popular.

**MS BRESNAN:** With respect to your answer to this question, obviously it is in the strategy; as you said, it is across government. But it is something which is developed by the Office of Multicultural Affairs, the central agency.

**Mr Manikis:** That is right. We coordinate it.

**MS BRESNAN:** What involvement have you had? You said it is DET's responsibility; I understand that. But what role do you play? You have these goals which you have developed and they are across government. How are you making sure that they are being achieved?

**Mr Hehir:** One of the key ways that we deal with it is actually in the annual report process. You will see that there are reports against strategies. So each directorate in their annual report will actually report their progress against their responsibilities within those directorates. In actual fact, it is a faster way of getting the information from the directorates than it is by asking them to send the information to you. We all take our annual report process seriously, and requirements are specifically included in the annual reports around reporting on these matters. At the back of the ETD annual report you will find a section which outlines how they are progressing as of 30 June against the actual strategy.

**Ms Burch:** But building on that, OMA will collate all the various directorates' annual reports and there is a role for Nic to have a watchful eye on where progress is slipping or moving.

**Mr Hehir:** That is right.

**Ms Burch:** And we respond to that accordingly. But we have found the intention through the annual report is not about double handling bits of information as well.

**MS BRESNAN:** No, I understand that.

**Ms Burch:** But certainly the office has a watchful—

**Ms Howson:** A watching brief.

**Ms Burch:** Yes, that one.

**Mr Manikis:** We also feed back to the various directorates and the areas within directorates feed back from the community as well. For example, if we had received that email that the chair quoted from this afternoon then we would have sent that off and had a conversation with education.

**THE CHAIR:** I am surprised, Mr Manikis, that the chair of the multicultural forum would not be discussing these sorts of points with you.

**Mr Manikis:** He discusses a lot of points but he did not discuss that one.

**THE CHAIR:** I have a supplementary before I get to my substantive question—a supplementary on what Ms Bresnan asked. Minister, should ethnic schools be under education instead of multicultural affairs?

**Ms Burch:** I know we manage the contract. They had two funding streams. In conversation with the chair of the association—I think it is now the community languages association—it seemed most useful to have a single contract. Education

provides funding to us. We supplement that funding, plus the other funding that we put into ethnic schools as well.

**THE CHAIR:** I will move on to my substantive question. Minister, on page 73, the ACT Muslim Advisory Council—were members of this council appointed by you or your predecessor in the portfolio?

**Ms Burch:** They were appointed by my predecessor. I have worked with the council probably for a good lot of this year about how we go through work plans. As part of that we have agreed that one of the early priorities is around membership and the election of the chair and deputy chair. We are working with the council about reviewing membership. Mr Manikis can probably give us an update on that.

It is a partnership. Some organisations have raised their interest in being represented on it. There are people from organisations on it. But it was not originally set up as a representative model. These were appointed as individuals, as leaders, within the community. We are just going through that. The council itself is a number of years old now. I have been very clear about that: it is a number of years old and it is time to reflect and look at where we progress from here.

**THE CHAIR:** Before we go to Mr Manikis, I have a number of questions to you on the council. How often do you meet with them?

**Ms Burch:** We have just reviewed the terms of reference for that. There are second-monthly meetings. I would probably meet with them three times a year, or thereabouts. But I talk with the chair and members at other opportunities as well.

**THE CHAIR:** How long has the chair been in position?

**Ms Burch:** Since day one. I think it has reflected the maturity of the council now that they have identified as a priority membership and a chair renewal process.

**THE CHAIR:** How was the appointment of the chair made?

**Ms Burch:** It was with my predecessor, and I am not quite sure of the process of my predecessor. That is when he was appointed.

**THE CHAIR:** Are you aware of any concerns about members of the council—that they would like to see self-determination as to who the chair of the council is?

**Ms Burch:** Absolutely. That is why I have just said the work plan has articulated a renewal process, an election process, for the chair. I have taken that from the council, I have accepted it and we have agreed it is a priority.

**THE CHAIR:** It is a priority, but it has taken 10 years since the council has been in place I understand.

**Ms Burch:** I do not think it is that long. This is the first time it has been raised with me in a formal work plan. I accepted it at the meeting where it was presented, and we are moving on it. So I think it is good.

**THE CHAIR:** I believe that they have informed you that they want to appoint their own chair, but you refused to do that.

**Ms Burch:** Mr Doszpot, I am not quite sure where you get that from because it is wrong. When I came in and started meeting with this group I met with them around a number of things. My very early conversation was: “Let’s reflect on what this council is and what achievements you’ve made. But what do you see for yourself in the future from here?” That conversation was around membership and how we go about process and a chair. I said, “Let’s put that in a work plan, a clear, articulated document that says that these are the things that we see as a priority and this is what we want to work through.” That is what we agreed, I think, at the October meeting—or was it earlier, September? I am not quite sure.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay. Mr Manikis.

**Mr Manikis:** Can I just say that what we have got here is individuals on the council who have raised the issue with both the minister and me, and not too long ago. This is a phenomenon that has arisen not too long ago.

**Ms Burch:** Yes.

**Mr Manikis:** In the meantime, following on from the conversations that the minister has had with the group, we have written to all the members asking them to nominate particularly younger people and women to replenish the advisory council. This particular advisory council has been appointed until October—

**THE CHAIR:** Who have you written to?

**Mr Manikis:** The members of the advisory council.

**THE CHAIR:** The members of the advisory council?

**Mr Manikis:** That is right.

**THE CHAIR:** To replace themselves?

**Mr Manikis:** No, not at all—to nominate young people and women to be added to the council.

**THE CHAIR:** To be added to the council; thank you.

**Mr Manikis:** Because this council has been nominated or appointed until October 2012.

**THE CHAIR:** When was this council appointed?

**Mr Manikis:** Last year in November.

**Ms Burch:** I reconfirmed their membership and at that point we started the discussion

about: "I'll confirm you in. But let's start this conversation about how we renew, how we broaden, how we go forward."

**THE CHAIR:** I understand. My question relates to what I asked you: how long has the council been in place overall?

**Mr Manikis:** I think 2006.

**THE CHAIR:** I said 10 years. It is—

**Mr Manikis:** It is five years.

**THE CHAIR:** Five years; thank you.

**Ms Burch:** A bit short of 10.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, it is. Thank you.

**Mr Manikis:** Five years. The council—

**THE CHAIR:** So why is it that the council's chairmanship has always been made by the minister?

**Mr Manikis:** That is the terms of reference. That is how the minister of the day wished it to be.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay. And you are re-examining that at the moment; is that correct?

**Ms Burch:** As I have said, it is in the work plan to look at membership and a process around the selection of chair and the appointment of deputy chair, which will strengthen up, again, governance, alternative leadership.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Ms Bresnan.

**MS BRESNAN:** Hopefully it will be a quick question. It is in relation to the changes to the specialist arts officers that are being made. I would just be interested in finding out whether the office been consulted at all. Has it been involved in any discussions about that? Obviously multicultural and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups will be affected by that.

**Mr Manikis:** We have had some discussions.

**Ms Burch:** I would have to say that I have spoken with multicultural groups. They are very enthusiastic, particularly the ones down around the Tuggeranong area, about having local access to multicultural groups and community arts.

**MS BRESNAN:** You say you have had some discussions. What discussions have they been?

**Mr Manikis:** I have had discussions with some of the people involved that have come

to my office and also with the arts—

**Ms Burch:** I was going to say that it is the artists that have been involved. Has the Community Arts Office had a formal relationship with OMA before now?

**Mr Manikis:** Not necessarily, no.

**MS BRESNAN:** I am sorry; I did not hear you.

**Ms Burch:** I do not think the Community Arts Office historically has had a formal relationship of moving arts into—

**MS BRESNAN:** No, I realise that. I was just asking because it impacts on the communities you represent. That is why I was asking about that.

**Mr Manikis:** We have had individuals, as the minister has mentioned, from right across Canberra who see it as an additional resource in their region. They look at the prospects of what they can do in their region. There has been a positive response by some members of the multicultural community that have come in contact with us.

**THE CHAIR:** Just a supplementary on that. Minister, I have received a copy of a letter which I believe you received from a constituent who wrote to you as Minister for Community Services. I will quote a paragraph: “But the problems I have had from my multiple sclerosis functioning as a professional artist did not exist for me before my help from Caro Roach, the Arts Ability officer. I really thought that Australia was heading slowly down a road of helping disabled people to become part of the community, and this decision is a backward step for this.” She goes on to say that she cannot believe that a position that really needed two or more workers to take on the immense workload, instead of being upgraded, was cut.

**Ms Burch:** Mr Doszpot, the position has not been cut. The resource is being maintained. We have had this conversation in this place before. Those existing groups will continue to be supported. The resources going into Tuggeranong and Belconnen effectively increase the resource that we can target toward including people, and that includes people with a disability.

**THE CHAIR:** So have you responded to this particular constituent do you recall?

**Ms Burch:** I have, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much for attending this meeting of the Standing Committee on Health, Community and Social Services. We thank you for your input. There will be more questions, no doubt, coming to you in written format.

**Ms Burch:** We have already seen pages and pages of questions on notice.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much.

**The committee adjourned at 11.34 am.**