



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL
TERRITORY**

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2015-2016

(Reference: [Appropriation Bill 2015-2016 and Appropriation
\(Office of the Legislative Assembly\) Bill 2015-2016](#))

Members:

MR B SMYTH (Chair)
MS M FITZHARRIS (Deputy Chair)
DR C BOURKE
MS N LAWDER

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

FRIDAY, 12 JUNE 2015

Secretary to the committee:
Mrs N Kosseck (Ph 620 50435)

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 20 May 2013

The committee met at 9.30 am.

DONOVAN, DR WILLIAM (BILL) FRANCIS, Chair, Policy Advisory Group, National Seniors Australia

McLEOD, MRS JUDY, Member, Policy Advisory Group, and President, Canberra North branch, National Seniors Australia

THE CHAIR: Good morning all, and welcome to the first public hearing of the Select Committee on Estimates 2015-2016. Ladies and gentlemen, there are only 11 days of hearings to go!

We would like to welcome National Seniors, who are with us this morning. In the proceedings today we will examine the views of eight community and industry representative groups in relation to the 2015-16 budget, as well as the expenditure proposals and revenue estimates for the Office of the Legislative Assembly and the ACT Electoral Commissioner. Please be aware that the proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published, and that proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed.

When taking a question on notice, it would be useful if the witness said, “Yes, I will take that question on notice,” so that we know that you know, and we know that we know. This will help the committee as well as witnesses to confirm questions taken on notice from the transcript.

Could you familiarise yourselves with the privilege statement, and could you please confirm that you have read the statement and understand the protections and privilege implications of the statement?

Dr Donovan: Yes, I have done that.

THE CHAIR: Before we go to questions, would you like to make a brief opening statement?

Dr Donovan: Sure. We welcome the opportunity to be here. National Seniors has over 200,000 paid-up members nationally. We are totally independent; we do not accept money from any government, so we have an independent view on things.

For the last six months in the ACT we have had two fairly large branches that meet regularly. I represent what is called a policy advisory group—each state has a policy advisory group for National Seniors—and I am the chair of that group. Judy McLeod is president of the north side branch and the deputy chair of the policy advisory group. We represent everybody over 50. That is a point we would like to make in all budget submissions to you—and maybe some of you come into our electorate!

THE CHAIR: I declare a conflict of interest. That could be me!

Dr Donovan: We want to make the point that when dealing with budget issues quite often people dismiss all older people as just age pensioners and a drain on the community, whereas with everybody over 50, some of us are self-funded retirees that

contribute heavily financially to the economy without getting anything much back. Also, a lot of people in their 60s and 70s are still running businesses, working, and particularly those who are volunteers are very productive in the community. The greater percentage of volunteers in the ACT are over 50. So we do not want to be labelled as one thing; we want to be considered as everything.

With that in mind, just briefly, we had two people at the budget lockout and we participated in post-budget discussions. We were very happy with certain aspects of the budget which fitted very well with what seniors wanted. I will give a summary of those. The state has kept the concessions for seniors, whereas some other states knocked them out when the federal government stopped funding them, and we are very pleased about that.

We wanted—and in the budget there is one—an equivalent of a one-stop shop for health issues. That is being funded and it will enable particularly older people who have trouble with communication to find out things. We like the idea of a pilot home-care unit to be established. The flexible bus service for seniors that was set up last year in a pilot fund is being funded permanently, by the look of it. In a general sense, more hospital beds is a good thing, in theory. We are not sure about the practice and the detail. There are a lot of other positive things in the budget but they are the key ones.

We have some issues with the budget and with what we would obviously like the government to do. We had a meeting yesterday and we consulted with our members. We have 70 or 80 at every meeting of the branch. One of the key issues is that a lot of people are being heavily impacted in our age group with both a low income and a fixed income, although “fixed income” these days means a declining income, because the rate of interest, if you are in cash, is quite often less than inflation, yet nearly all the ACT discretionary budget comes from things that impact heavily on people on low and fixed incomes, such as rates increases. In particular, a lot of our people live in big houses. They choose to stay in them and not downsize. They live in Downer, Dickson, Braddon, Hawker and Weetangera, and pay huge rates—\$3,000 to \$5,000 from a fixed income is a huge percentage. A lot of people are obviously asset rich and income poor.

With nearly everything that the ACT does, we can understand that you have to raise income from somewhere, and that we do not have industries, as other states do. We do not know how the ACT can improve its income. As National Seniors, we would be in favour of the GST being raised to fund income in the ACT, but that is just our view. That is not necessarily a good political view.

One of the key issues that we have as National Seniors, again, is in planning for people of retirement age. The whole planning system in the ACT is geared to things that are not suitable for most retirees. A lot of retirees in Canberra, particularly ones who are self-funded retirees, are used to a pretty good lifestyle in a fairly large house and grounds, and when they downsize, they want to retire to something that is single-storey, with a double garage, three bedrooms and two ensuites, yet all planning and housing here is geared towards multi-storey retirement villages, small two bedroom units—shoehorning two people who want to have two cars into a small area, as if older people do not need space that younger people want with their families.

With a lot of older people now, we have found that nearly a majority of our members are almost full-time grandparent carers of their grandchildren. They need space but they do not want gardens. They want to downsize and leave the houses. I do not know how a government should do it, but it should be encouraging people to downsize even more than they do now, so that other people can move into the big family homes in established suburbs.

There are a lot of other issues. Judy might want to add a couple of things before you ask questions.

Mrs McLeod: I am losing my voice. My big concern is the impact on fixed and low incomes of the increase in rates, registration and parking—all of these things that are really pushing people to have to reconsider what they are doing. My other big thing, which is associated with economics, I suppose, is an increase in utilities—gas and electricity. I know you say in the budget papers that you are not in control of the prices, but that does not stop—in my opinion, anyway—the government being able to give a subsidy, to help with that sort of thing. They are the two big issues I would like to add.

THE CHAIR: Thanks for that. How significant is the impact of all the increases in rates and charges on seniors?

Dr Donovan: As I say, when we talked to people yesterday, both collectively and individually, some people's rates have gone up from, say, \$1,500 to \$3,000 in a couple of years because of the value of the land that they are on in very established suburbs. A lot of seniors, particularly our group of seniors, live in these sorts of suburbs. They do not live in Gungahlin or the newer suburb areas; they live in the established areas around Civic, and it is very expensive. So it is not just the rates and taxes; as Judy says, it is the licence fees, the car registration fees and so on. They are a massive fixed bill on anybody that wants to remain independent.

THE CHAIR: Is there a suggestion on what could happen to ameliorate this impact on seniors?

Dr Donovan: I think that age pensioners—I do not know because I am not an age pensioner—have a discount on their rates bill, the same as they have discounts on car registration, on their first car, as I understand it. Obviously government could increase that for people. I know that, for example, when pensioners downsize, they can get stamp duty exemption when they buy a new, smaller place, as they downsize. Both of those things could be expanded, in our view. In particular, as I said before, the whole planning regime should encourage downsizing to more appropriate dwellings.

Mrs McLeod: I have a thing about all the categories of seniors—the pensioners, the self-funded retirees and the people in that group who are still working. It is quite discriminatory. If you are a self-funded retiree, as I am, you have nothing and you get nothing, but everything keeps going up. So you are then left, and actually forced to move.

MR DOSZPOT: Chair, could I have a supplementary on your question?

THE CHAIR: On this issue, yes.

MR DOSZPOT: In relation to your concerns about rates and the way that it impacts on the fixed income of self-funded retirees in particular that you are highlighting, has any submission been made to the government regarding how this could be alleviated? Has any suggestion or any submission been made as to what can be done?

Dr Donovan: As National Seniors we have not made a submission. This policy advisory group that we have established only came into being six months ago. We produced a submission on the budget that I sent in to the secretary of the committee, in terms of the main things, and we did talk about that issue.

People are ambivalent, as with a lot of things, because what benefits older people often is a non-benefit for people trying to get into the housing market. We can see that a reduction in stamp duty would improve things for first homebuyers and other people on lower incomes, but it disadvantages seniors unless they are buying and selling. Unless they can buy into something more suitable, they do not want to sell. So it is a sort of circular argument. But it has a massive impact and it is going to become bigger every year in terms of the percentage rise in rates. As I say, we understand the offset against the stamp duty. We do not know where the ACT is going to get its revenue from if it does not get it from ratepayers.

MR DOSZPOT: I have one further question. Just on that, I am shadow minister for ageing, and I hear this issue from a lot of my constituents, who are your constituents as well. You mentioned an example of an increase of \$1,500 to \$3,000 in the last four years. That is a doubling of rates, effectively, and this will potentially get worse with other increases coming in. Apart from the submissions that you have made or that you are making, is there any discussion with other jurisdictions as to how our situation compares to, say, some of the other areas, and how those states and territories handle these situations? Is there anything on which we can base some of the current experiences to assist further issues in this regard?

Dr Donovan: Yes, I understand that. Our national policy group works with us in all states and we do hear about that, but what often suits a bigger state does not have any real relevance to us. When I talked about rates doubling, it was more about the revaluing of the land that doubles the rates, rather than the percentage increase. That will keep going up as housing prices go up. So there will be a double-whammy for people.

Mrs McLeod: We do know that the Victorian government has done something regarding discounts on gas, which is one of the utilities we referred to.

THE CHAIR: Ms Fitzharris with a new question.

MS FITZHARRIS: Thank you. It is a bit of a continuation. I understand the issues that you have raised. I am just trying to get a sense of this. As you say, some of the increases are largely due to the increases in land values. Are you mostly talking about older people that are not on the pension?

Dr Donovan: No; for both. There are a lot of pensioners who qualify for the pension, but they might be in a \$1 million house in Hawker. We are referring to both. They find it very hard to make ends meet and they have to drill down on the value of their house to fund their retirement on top of the pension. But they do not want to sell because they might lose the pension—if they go into a cheaper retirement village, for example.

MS FITZHARRIS: With the issue around downsizing, there was an initiative in last year's budget around stamp duty, with major stamp duty concessions for anybody downsizing, not just pensioners. Did any of your members take up that initiative?

Dr Donovan: We know that pensioners do it, but everybody would love to have a stamp duty thing to help them to downsize in appropriate accommodation.

MS FITZHARRIS: That was in the budget last year so—

Mrs McLeod: Yes. We have got several members that did.

MS FITZHARRIS: I cannot recall off the top of my head how long that lasts for, and I could not find it quickly when I was looking, but I think it is more than one year.

Mrs McLeod: I think it is three. I read it last night.

MS FITZHARRIS: Three years, yes. In your view, what are the issues around downsizing? Is it that the supply of any particularly appropriate housing type is actually lacking? Again, it goes to the planning network. If you want to stay in an inner city area and the planning rules find that some people say they do not want more infill or high density but the trade-off is that people cannot downsize from large existing blocks to smaller housing types—the sort of three-bedroom, two-bathroom types that you are talking about—do you have any ideas or thoughts around how that intercepts with the planning system as well?

Dr Donovan: It seems to vary in suburbs. If you drive through Gungahlin, it is all full of two-storey, flat-type buildings or duplexes and a whole range of things all through the suburb, whereas as in older, established suburbs it is only allowed to be done within a certain distance of a shopping centre or a main road.

I happen to live in Weetangera and I happen to be one of the few people who were able to sell a huge house and move into one of these really appropriate townhouses. But those builders have now stopped building the townhouses; it is not worth their while, because of betterment taxes and everything, to build anything on a block but two-storey places, which do not suit older people. So they tend to build three or four two-storey places rather than three or four single-storey units, and that is what a lot of people want.

A lot of people are perfectly happy with going into a retirement village, moving into a multi-storey place at Kangara Waters and so on. We have got a huge number of members, particularly single people, that are very happy with that. But older couples with lots of grandparent and other responsibilities have a different view of life.

MS FITZHARRIS: I have a quick supplementary on your one-stop shop for seniors. I think you mentioned access to health services and that there is nothing like that at all that is available, you were finding. It was one of the—

Dr Donovan: There had not been, but in the budget there is a provision for that. Do you want to comment on that? It is called the extension of the one human services gateway. That was just my terminology—a one-stop shop. A lot of people that are older have trouble getting information out of the bureaucracy and get shuttled round different organisations. They want to be able to go to one and find all their answers.

MS FITZHARRIS: Do you mean just government-provided health services or all health services?

Dr Donovan: This is government-provided services in particular.

Mrs McLeod: Ideally it would be best for all health services.

Dr Donovan: It would be, ideally.

MS FITZHARRIS: Okay, thank you.

THE CHAIR: Ms Lawder, a new question.

MS LAWDER: Thanks. I am interested in the housing, but we have covered that a little, so I will just talk about the green waste bins. Why is it that seniors specifically would like to see green waste bins, as opposed to the rest of the general population?

Dr Donovan: Obviously we would like to see it for everybody in the population, but a lot of older people who are downsizing still have a courtyard garden and other things with a lot of things you have to get rid of. You have to pay for someone to come and take it all away if you are not able to do it yourself. But people living in bigger housing and everything who still stay at home and pay someone to maintain it still have the same issue. All the way around when we are travelling, we see green waste bins in a lot of other electorates—and even bigger bins. The ACT could probably save money by collecting waste every two weeks with bigger bins, for example. That would seem to be an efficiency that could be involved. It might cause a political uproar, but not everybody wants their stuff moved every week, do they?

Mrs McLeod: The request came from a bunch of people that were very strong. Shane Rattenbury came to a meeting when he was the minister for that, and he told us that about 90 per cent gets to be recycled anyway, but this group of people were very strong that other states have it and we should have it.

MS LAWDER: Have you had any feedback from people in retirement homes or group dwellings that have community gardens on how they deal with their green waste?

Mrs McLeod: Kangara Waters.

Dr Donovan: I know about Kangara Waters. They have their own gardens in the

retirement village, although that has fallen into disrepair. They had a big burst at it, but now it is not used much. They are relying on new residents to take that up and to recycle everything there. I do not know personally how they recycle all the garbage for the whole lot in terms of green waste.

MR DOSZPOT: Just a supplementary on that, Mr Chair?

THE CHAIR: Yes, quickly; then we will move to Dr Bourke.

MR DOSZPOT: Further to Ms Lawder's question on that, it is a question with a statement attached. A lot of the constituents that I represent from the older suburbs have a double problem. They may have downsized and gone to smaller houses, but they still have an enormous area in front of their house which they are responsible for under ACT rules. I should imagine that is part of the problem as well. They have gone to a smaller house; they have not got the wherewithal to park any trailers or anything; and yet they have to get rid of this enormous amount of leaves that accumulate on property which is not theirs. They have to handle it. Is that part of the problem as well?

Dr Donovan: Yes. That is exactly what the problem is. Personally I live in a four-unit complex and we have to look after all that. We either pay for it or deal with it. But I know a lot of other people in the same boat in organisations, both the formal ones and the informal unit blocks.

THE CHAIR: Dr Bourke, a new question.

DR BOURKE: Thank you. Dr Donovan, are you aware of the government program to retrofit suburbs to make them more age friendly, particularly the half million dollars in this budget for Kaleen and Tuggeranong valley, for new footpaths, widening footpaths, community paths, traffic islands, refuge spots, wheelchair ramps and other practices for best helping aged people?

Mrs McLeod: I actually had a look at that. We would have liked to have had an input into anything like that. It did not talk about the actual structure of the house, unit or whatever it may be. It talked about wider paths for wheelchairs, ramps and things like that, which concerned me greatly, but it did not talk about the actual unit itself—whether it is a two-bedroom or three-bedroom unit and how it is located. I realise it is a pilot study, as I read it, a feasibility study, in Kaleen and Tuggeranong.

DR BOURKE: And more focused on the public space rather than the private space, as I see it.

Mrs McLeod: Yes.

DR BOURKE: So that is out in the public arena.

Mrs McLeod: I felt it was there but we needed more expansion of what was there.

DR BOURKE: So you are saying that you would like to see a program like that for private homes?

Mrs McLeod: A units-type thing.

Dr Donovan: Yes; both private homes and units and so on.

Mrs McLeod: A mixture.

Dr Donovan: Unit blocks, yes.

DR BOURKE: Returning to your conversation about ideal housing for older people, what sort of square metreage did you have in mind? If you are looking at a double garage and three bedrooms with double ensuites, are you looking at about 150 or 180 square metres, or bigger or smaller than that? I am not sure. I just want to get a handle on the stats.

Dr Donovan: A lot of bigger housing is sort of 24 to 30 squares, and you are talking about moving down to about half of that, to 14 to 16 rather than the nine, 10 or 11 that most two-bedroom units are. So it is a bit of extra space. As I say, why should older people be seen as not requiring an office, a quilting room, a room for the grandchildren or a bit more space rather than being on top of one another—particularly couples; singles are a totally different issue, although one single here lives in a largish house.

DR BOURKE: Do you see that as being something that ought to be happening in the suburbs where people already live?

Dr Donovan: That is what everybody wants to do. You could buy nearly anything in Gungahlin, but what if you have lived in Hawker, Weetangera or Cook all your life—you have got all your social networks there: your bowling club, your church, your community—and you want to move? I was lucky to move from Hawker to Weetangera, but they are just not building. There is not enough of the type that people want in those established places to encourage it. I suspect people who live in Farrer and so on feel the same way; they do not want to move across to Dunlop, to west Macgregor or down to the end of Tuggeranong, for example.

DR BOURKE: You appreciate that there is a bit of resistance by other people in suburbs from time to time that you read about in the paper—maybe it is just people who write to the *Canberra Times*; I am not sure—to those kinds of more intense developments. How do you suggest we overcome that?

Dr Donovan: As Judy says, consultation. I know that everybody talks about it, and there is a huge amount of consultation; we get involved in a lot of it. But even more in the earlier stages or in the policy formulation before it is announced as a sort of development, it seems to be the only way you can get communities involved in helping. That is why I say that people do not want two or three-storey things with garages under, with cars coming and going all the time and with renters and so on. People do have protection on their thing, as you saw with the complaints about public housing in Gungahlin. Most suburbs in the older areas are heavily public-private mix; there are only a couple of suburbs that are not. In those, there seems to be good community cooperation, particularly in the mixed suburbs.

DR BOURKE: Yes. I saw an example of that kind of development occur in Aranda recently. Next to the Aranda preschool there were about a dozen townhouses. There was a previous set of townhouses that were demolished and a new set of townhouses put up. They were all two-storey units with garages underneath, as you described it. I understand it is primarily older people from Aranda who have actually bought into those—sold their bigger houses and moved into those places. That happens, as you say, in that RZ2 zone up around the shops. Do you think there is more room for expansion of that type of thing?

Dr Donovan: That is what we would see. I think that is a win for everybody. As I say, it is a win for families who want to buy into older established suburbs, particularly, for the school or whatever situation exists, and it is a win for the retiree who can stay in the location they want to, in the particular place they want to be. Even so, Kangara Waters is ideally situated for all people in Belconnen because it is in a lovely location. If all retirement villages were in as good a location as that, a lot more people would probably be happy with it.

DR BOURKE: But it was controversial when it was first developed, of course, because of its encroachment upon the lakeshore.

Dr Donovan: There are lots of things that are controversial when first done, aren't there?

DR BOURKE: Exactly.

THE CHAIR: We will have a final question from Mr Doszpot. Then we will move on to the next group.

MR DOSZPOT: I wish to follow on from Dr Bourke's statement about the issues with population density being a bit of a problem, especially in the older suburbs where new developments are being planned. Yarralumla is one of those where they are looking at building 1,800 new dwellings, predominantly units. As you point out, it is not exactly ideal for some of the people who may want to downsize and stay in the same area.

There have been a lot of arguments put but one of the comments I am very interested in your expanding on is that what has not often been explained is the additional burden that grandparenting still has. When you downsize you may still need to have room to mind the children of your children, to assist them in their capacity to be able to commence working and so forth. I think that is probably a very important aspect that needs to be expanded on, certainly from the people that I have spoken to. I do not think there is enough information in the public arena. Thank you for raising it. Could you expand on that a little?

Dr Donovan: Only to say that there is an example of that at the Jamison Centre. The original plan when they closed the motel was to build all these multi-storey buildings, flats and everything. Eventually there they have come to a compromise where they have put in a mixture of single level, dual level and other units. It is a much more appropriate development for the mix of people that are going into that type of

suburban area. It is close to shops, bus routes and so on. So it is ideal for some people to move into if they like that sort of thing.

Everybody wants to make a profit. The government wants to make a profit on land sales, rates and taxes and the developer wants to make a profit. But we at the other end want to get what we want. So there are compromises everywhere, I guess.

Mrs McLeod: I just add that the location should support grounds in a way that kids can run around when you have got them. That is what I was talking about.

MS FITZHARRIS: Can you respond to this very quickly—almost a yes or no answer? You mentioned earlier the feasibility studies in Kaleen and Tuggeranong for the age-friendly suburbs. That was discussed in the Assembly last week. We were told that it came out of a suggestion from the Council on the Ageing. Are you represented on the Council on the Ageing? You mentioned you had not been consulted on it.

Mrs McLeod: We are completely separate.

MS FITZHARRIS: But are you involved in the Council on the Ageing and have any connection?

Dr Donovan: We are not at the present moment. Council on the Ageing is heavily funded by government. So as an independent body, when we talked about amalgamating with them it did not work because we have an independent view of what we are doing as distinct from COTA, who has a conflict. Nevertheless, I know they have been consulted and—

MS FITZHARRIS: Sorry, the Ministerial Council on the Ageing; not the Council on the Ageing.

Dr Donovan: Sorry.

MS FITZHARRIS: Sorry, the ministerial council.

Dr Donovan: We have been talking—

MS FITZHARRIS: So no-one from national seniors is represented on the ministerial council?

Dr Donovan: I know, but we have been talking to the people that run that about being involved—

MS FITZHARRIS: Okay.

Dr Donovan: and we get all the paperwork and we are allowed to make submissions to it. They are working on that for us.

Mrs McLeod: We have someone who is going to go for it anyway, to be on it, yes.

THE CHAIR: We might bring it to a close there. Thank you for your attendance

today. I do not believe you have taken anything on notice; so there is nothing to respond to. Members, if you have questions once we have got the transcript, there are a couple of days in which to ask them. We would forward them to you if there are any issued. When the transcript is available we will send it to you. Could you check it for accuracy? We would welcome any suggestions or corrections that you would like to make.

Dr Donovan: Thank you very much.

FEATHERSTONE, MR NIGEL, co-founder and coordinator, the Childers Group
WHITE, MR MICHAEL, member, the Childers Group

THE CHAIR: Gentlemen, welcome to this hearing of the Select Committee on Estimates for 2015. It is a pleasure to have the Childers Group with us this year. There is a privilege statement on the table in front of you, the pink card. Could you confirm for the record that you understand privilege and its implications?

Mr Featherstone: Yes, I do confirm that I understand.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr Featherstone: Thank you. Yes, we would like to make an opening statement. Firstly, we appreciate the longstanding bipartisan support for the arts that has been in the territory for at least a couple of decades. We also appreciate, in terms of the budget, the recent investment in the Gorman and Ainslie arts centres and also the proposed support for the Canberra Theatre Centre. That capital works investment is certainly appreciated.

We have five main areas of concern in terms of the budget specifically but also in terms of the arts generally. The first area is the lack of any real growth to the ACT arts fund. Our understanding is that since 2005 the arts fund, which is the main way the government supports the arts, has not grown beyond CPI. This is a real concern for us in terms of two key areas. The key arts organisations that the ACT government primarily supports are constrained in their ability to engage with the community and to meet community need. Also, the key arts organisations are constrained in terms of being able to pay appropriate salaries. The Australia Council has found that generally the average artist in Australia earns around \$12,000 a year and the average female artist about \$5,000 a year.

The second key area in terms of the ACT arts fund is that the project round, which is the direct funding of individual practising artists, in the last 10 years has gone from \$1.1 million to about \$700,000. In that period of time the population has grown by about 15 per cent and costs for delivering arts projects have also grown but that category of funding has dropped significantly.

Moving slightly on, recently the ACT government has undertaken a review of its arts policy framework. We do have two key areas of concern around that policy framework process. One is that it was a very minimal consultation process. We understand that the final draft review policy will not actually be put out for consultation.

Thirdly, and we talked about this at the estimates committee last year, I refer to the importance of undertaking an economic impact statement. It was agreed that the government would do that. We believe that has been done as a part of the policy review but there is no mention of a document being made available by the government or artsACT. So we do not actually know what the outcomes are of that economic impact statement. We hope that the new arts policy will be warmly embraced and have a positive impact but because the consultations being a little bit rushed and minimal we are not overly confident that it is going to have an impact.

I guess I would say as a conclusion that we do regrettably feel that perhaps this budget lacks enthusiasm and any genuine leadership for developing the arts in the ACT region.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that. What would be an appropriate level of funding? You said it dropped from \$1.1 million to \$700,000. What would you suggest is an appropriate level and a pathway back?

Mr White: I am a newcomer to the Childers Group, although I have been involved in cultural advocacy through my work as a trade union official. I was secretary with the Actors Equity. I think one of the key things in relation to the money going to arts programs is that it is actual money going to practising artists. We would say that an increase of \$700,000 into that sort of arts program money would be really, really useful in relation to the actual money that is going to practising artists.

I served on the Cultural Council for a couple of stints and I also served on a round of grant applications. There is nothing more disheartening when you get a list of really worthy arts applicants and people who are asking for money, yet at some point you have to draw the line and say, “This particular group is being funded,” or, “That particular artist is not being funded,” often for the sake of not very much money. So that investment by government into practising artists is hugely important.

THE CHAIR: In the submission to the committee at question 4, dot point 2 you talk about making Canberra healthy and smart. How do the arts improve wellbeing and inclusion and how important is it to get the economic impact statement so that we have got some numbers behind it?

Mr Featherstone: It is a longstanding fact that community involvement in all art forms is absolutely paramount. We know, for example, that involvement in music as a child, as a baby, has longstanding lifelong effects on the physical make-up of a brain. We know, for example, that if a young boy is involved in QL2 or a program at the Canberra Youth Theatre, who has the confidence of being on a stage and performing in front of a group of people, it will have lifelong impacts. We know that is the case. We also know that there is a link between artists, creative industries and innovation.

I think we all know that and perhaps a slight frustration for the Childers Group is that we recognise—I think we all recognise—that the ACT community is one of the most culturally engaged and informed communities in Australia, if not the world. We should be recognising the link between the arts, health and innovation. I think we should just agree that that is the case. We do need those numbers and we do need the numbers in terms of economic impact. It is not the be-all and end-all but what does a \$1 million investment in the arts in the ACT region actually produce? I think anecdotally we know that it produces an enormous amount of activity. A year on we do not know what that study actually produced and what the facts and figures are.

Mr White: In relation to that, everyone realises and has an understanding that arts play a central role in our culture and our understanding of how the world works. I have recently been making visits to local MLAs and to some of our ministers. I actually believe that in relation to the arts every minister should be asking: what is the

role that the arts can play in my portfolio? How can it assist? Certainly in terms of community inclusion, I would be saying to the police minister: how can the arts best assist the sorts of programs that you are doing? For the health minister, I would ask: how can the arts help in health, youth work and education? It can play a significant role in all those sorts of things.

This would then lead to a kind of whole-of-government approach to looking at how the arts should work—breaking down a bit the Chinese walls between various departments and all that sort of stuff. That would be my challenge to all politicians: as they go around talking, they should be saying what the arts are doing in their portfolio or their shadow portfolio. How can that best be served?

THE CHAIR: Just to finish, you mentioned Gorman House, which is welcome, Ainslie and the Canberra theatre. There was no mention of the Kingston Foreshore arts precinct.

Mr Featherstone: Certainly the Childers Group is very interested in how the Kingston arts precinct might actually grow. It is obviously thrilling to have the Canberra Glassworks as an anchor organisation and to see Megalo there as well. So it is certainly heading in the right direction. In terms of what is next, we do not know. We would love to see it continue to be a fantastic nationally, internationally recognised precinct. What are the next steps is the question?

Mr White: Just on that, because of the particular nature of the ACT government—its local council role—that is why the investment in capital works like the Canberra Theatre Centre, Kingston arts hub, Street Theatre and all that sort of stuff is important. It almost goes without question that if you build these things, they are going to need capital works to have them maintained. It is kind of easy, I think, for politicians to say, “Yes, it is really important. This money is sort of being diverted in that way.” But you would not build these places if you were not going to have that investment in that sort of capital works.

As we celebrate 50 years of the Canberra Theatre Centre, it is fantastic that they are finally going to—I think last year they got new boilers. That is a fairly mundane thing but without new boilers you do not have good heating, you do not have air conditioning. So that, in a sense, should be a no-brainer for anyone.

THE CHAIR: That is just maintenance.

Mr White: That is just maintenance. So the real challenge for money in relation to the arts is into programs, into the work artists are doing, into art across the whole range, and we have got some internationally renowned artists in glassworks, as writers and as musicians. We have got lots of fantastic performers who unfortunately often have to leave town. It would be great to be able to attract them back and say, “We have a vibrant arts scene happening here. You can come back here and there will be good work for you to do.”

MS FITZHARRIS: A quick follow up to Mr Smyth’s questions. You mentioned a whole-of-government integration of art across all portfolios. Are you talking about the sort of thing Minister Rattenbury announced the day before yesterday about having an

artist in residence for the wetlands at Mulligans Flat and Gorooyarroo?

Mr White: Exactly. That is a great example. It might be a little bit off the page when you think what can an artist do there, but artists bring a whole range of skills in assisting people to understand what is happening in various places.

Mr Featherstone: Regrettably, it is well known that arts organisations find it incredibly difficult to build relationships with the education directorate. Some of our performing arts organisations find it incredibly difficult to find a way for dancers to work with dance teachers to put on classes, for writers to work in classrooms for theatre workers. Generally it is well known that it is banging their heads against a brick wall and mostly they give up. We raised that at the committee last year.

Mr White: I first came to Canberra to work with Jigsaw Theatre Company, which was the only professional theatre and education company in the country. It had a hugely long history and unfortunately it is now closed. Some of that was with the arbitrary decision in the education directorate about 10 or 12 years ago to withdraw something like only about \$180,000 or \$200,000 a year. For that organisation it was a major impact, so that was a great shame.

DR BOURKE: I presume you are talking about performance art rather than visual art, where there has been a long-standing artist in residence program in schools?

Mr Featherstone: There is. My understanding, Dr Bourke, is that is primarily funded by the Australia Council. If we lined up 10 artists across 10 art forms, I think they would say, regrettably, it is very difficult. I was talking to the director of a particular arts centre who asked, "Why is it still so frustratingly difficult to do work in the education sector?" Regrettably, it is a widely held view.

THE CHAIR: It is an issue canvassed last year as well.

MS FITZHARRIS: There is some useful information in your submissions around some questions we can follow up in this forum with the arts minister, but do you have a sense of any other models across Australia in terms of funding and leveraging public money through the government to get the best bang for your buck? Do you have any examples you are aware of that we could explore here?

Mr Featherstone: In terms of public and private sector funding, in the last decade or so the Australian Business Arts Foundation existed nationally; now it is Creative Partnerships Australia. They had an office in the ACT that was funded by artsACT. When Creative Partnerships was created they took the ACT office away. There is no facility for an arts organisation to get philanthropic support; that office now exists in Sydney. It would be fantastic if there were some way to help arts organisations and artists to leverage their public funding with public sector funding. Sometimes we have this notion that there is not any philanthropic support in the ACT. That is not the case. The world has moved on and we should be able to leverage that. But there is no infrastructure.

Mr White: One of the things that is true of this town is that it is really difficult to attract corporate sponsorship to the arts. I know a lot of arts groups spend a lot of time

and a lot of hours of their CEOs and boards trying to attract money. It is even quite difficult for some of our flagship organisations to attract money. It is the national institutions where that sort of corporate money tends to be going towards.

MS FITZHARRIS: Do you make the distinction between philanthropic, which may be sort of high wealth individuals, as opposed to corporate, or is “philanthropy” your umbrella term for any sort of private sector support?

Mr Featherstone: I would say it is both. They have different flavours, but Michael is absolutely right in terms of it is very difficult. Most key arts organisations have a staff of about three or four. No-one would have in their job description to go out and get corporate funding. It is often reliant on a volunteer board member who may have connections with the private sector who then, in his or her private time, tries to engage. Generally it is the view that you may be able to get \$5,000 from a small company, but you might spend two years trying to get it.

THE CHAIR: Ms Lawder, a new question.

MS LAWDER: Thanks. In the survey response you sent back you mentioned the lack of arts funding growth leads to the inability of arts organisations to attract skilled personnel and then retain staff over the long term. Is that consistent across Australia? Do you have specific examples—without naming names—of where that has happened?

Mr White: Particularly in Canberra where the market you are competing in is often with the public service, when I am talking to people I am horrified that we have CEOs of some of our key arts organisations who are on salaries the equivalent of an ASO4 or an ASO5—quite low salaries—because the organisations find it extremely difficult to pay those sorts of decent wages. Some of these people are managing organisations with quite large budgets—moneys in and moneys out. Some of them might be a million-dollar or half-a-million-dollar industry, but the salaries they are able to be paid are unfortunately very low. You tend to get a fair bit of churn and people coming through because it can be an expensive place to live and they tend to move on.

For the sort of backbone of people and CEOs in our key arts organisations, we need to be able to offer salaries that will keep them and attract good people coming here. I think we have always suffered a bit in that way. That may well be the case everywhere else, particularly in small to medium arts organisations.

DR BOURKE: What do you see as the government’s role in dealing with that issue?

Mr White: In terms of money coming into those arts organisations, small amounts of money into each organisation can actually raise the salary of some of those key arts people and would be a great way of keeping them here and recognising the work they do and the extra hours they often put in.

DR BOURKE: But given the funding would be controlled by an independent board, it would be for the board to decide whether they use the funding to increase salaries or to indeed undertake other tasks or employ more staff.

Mr White: I would imagine if you went to any voluntary arts board in Canberra and said, “Could we have some extra money to pay our CEOs to recognise the work they do,” I am sure they would put some of that money into that area.

DR BOURKE: Are you focusing on the CEOs or people further down the pecking order?

Mr White: Mostly with arts organisations it is about who you have got. You have a general manager, you might have an administrative officer as well, but they are very small businesses, in a sense. They do not have large staffs.

Mr Featherstone: Dr Bourke, the Childers Group certainly recognises that the government is not responsible for setting salaries in independent arts organisations, but we do feel that the ACT government as being one of the key supporters of the arts has a responsibility to support the arts in a way and an ecology that can support appropriate salaries.

As Michael said, some directors of these arts organisations are running 24/7, almost literally. They have staff, board and volunteers, sometimes up to 200 volunteers per week. There are complex people coming through with a range of abilities, ages and needs. For someone to be earning only about \$80,000 to be responsible for that, that would seem to be a little problematic.

But there are also examples where some of our major arts organisations cannot afford a full-time marketing person; they might only have eight hours per week. In terms of engaging with the community, getting ads in the paper, getting radio interviews, getting mums and dads from Gungahlin to Tuggeranong to come and see shows, that is difficult when you have only got eight hours per week. As Michael said, the board would say, “We want to increase your hours, but we’ll have to cut programs.” When an organisation has only been funded \$140,000, if you are paying \$60,000, then how much do you have for programs? There have been cases, remarkably, where an organisation could only pay staff and did not have any money for programs at all.

DR BOURKE: Is there any opportunity to exercise some synergy between organisations across the sector in the territory to deal with those administrative staff functions like HR, marketing, strategic planning, which each and every organisation does on their own as virtually a small business? Is there an opportunity to get them working together to share the limited resources to get better bang for their buck?

Mr Featherstone: In theory, absolutely. It is a fantastic idea, and Gorman Ainslie arts centres are a good example, where a third of the key arts organisations in the ACT are in those two centres. You would hope various arts organisations could say, “Let’s share the photocopier. Maybe we’ll share a marketing person,” et cetera. In practice, sometimes it is a little bit different because they might be have a bit of Australia Council funding, so it is a case of who is your master in a way. Secondly, a theatre organisation may or may not be able to share with a visual arts organisation because the work is so different. In principle it is a fantastic idea and should be pursued, but the practice is slightly more challenging.

THE CHAIR: We will come back to Ms Lawder, because it is her turn.

MS LAWDER: In terms of the salaries, for example, is there a national benchmarking exercise that is undertaken? I absolutely empathise with your comment about low pay for CEOs, for example, when they are in charge of a reasonable sized organisation. I know in the community sector there is benchmarking which ACOSS coordinates. Do you have such a thing?

Mr Featherstone: Can I answer on a personal note? After 25 years of experience in the arts and three degrees, I am currently helping to facilitate a program in the ACT funded by the Australia Council. I am being paid the community award rate—as a 47-year-old professional arts worker I am being paid \$25 an hour. I know that is a bit better than the minimum wage, but it is incredibly low, I would have thought, for a professional working in the arts.

Mr White: The award that would probably cover the equivalent would be the SACS award, the social and community sector award. I even think they are underpaid as well for the type of work they do.

MS LAWDER: There have been some recent increases.

Mr White: There have been some slow increases. I think they have eight levels in their award. And even if you are a CEO of a community organisation level 8 your salary is not huge. It might still only be up around \$70,000 a year. Childers would always argue that the arts are a part of that community situation, so we would be arguing the need to bring all those wages up.

MS LAWDER: As Dr Bourke mentioned, boards have the capacity to approve all wages. I absolutely understand; I have been on that award myself when I worked in the community sector. But you have to balance the salaries versus the programs because it costs your organisation a lot of money when you have churn. There is another hidden cost there as well. Is there a survey of how many people are paid above the award?

Mr Featherstone: Perhaps it could come back down to this economic impact statement, but we do not know what the outcome is. There could be some good questions about benchmarking—where we are now, where we are in the future. I think every artist and arts work advocate in Australia and the ACT in particular would very much appreciate government support. Without government support we do not exist whatsoever. But perhaps there is a slight issue that, because we are all competing for funding, we are often really driven by having massive success. You really want to have a fantastic program that reaches thousands of people, is prominent, and is out in the public so you get the funding again. That is why a lot of boards would say, “Just work really hard and do really well, because we need funding next year.”

THE CHAIR: Dr Bourke to close.

DR BOURKE: Thank you, chair. I am wondering if you have a handle on the level of employment within the private and public arts sectors within the ACT, either in terms of numbers or gross income.

Mr Featherstone: We do not, and I think this again would come down to the economic impact statement. That would be great information. If it has been done, it would be great to know about it. If it has not been done, it would be great to know why that work has not been done. I think we can all see from the last half hour there is a lack of facts and figures for the arts. There was a terrific opportunity during the economic impact statement study to dig out some figures. They might exist, but artsACT has not made them available. There is nothing on the website other than Canberrans engage with the arts more so per capita than anywhere else in Australia.

DR BOURKE: Where do you get that from, the census?

Mr Featherstone: You can.

THE CHAIR: Members, any final questions? No. Gentlemen, thanks for your attendance today. I do not believe you took anything on notice. Members, if there are any questions when you get the transcript, if we could have them quickly, and we will get them to you, gentlemen, and if we can have a response within approximately five working days that would be kind. When the transcript is available, we will send it to you for corrections or suggestions. Thank you very much for taking the time to address us today. Thank you.

Mr White: Thank you, and thanks for the opportunity.

O'LOUGHLIN, MR LARRY, Acting Executive Director, Conservation Council ACT Region

BUTLER, MR GEOFF, weeds officer, Conservation Council ACT Region

THE CHAIR: Good morning gentlemen and welcome to the Select Committee on Estimates 2015-16 inquiry. Could you please indicate if you have read and understand the implications on the privilege card there in front of you on the table.

Mr O'Loughlin: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to make an opening statement before we go to questions?

Mr O'Loughlin: Yes. We have got a few things about the budget. In broad terms the ACT government and all political parties in the Assembly are very good supporters of the environment and this budget does provide ongoing funding for a range of government functions which are very necessary for protection of the environment. We welcome that ongoing funding and that high level of commitment from all parties and we look forward to it continuing. At the same time the budget sets out how the government is actually going to allocate its resources and its priorities for the following year. It is important to have a look at that and what it does for the environment.

There are about six items where we think there needs a little bit of attention through the estimates process to just explore a little further what the government is going to do. Our particular one is weeds. We think the way that the weeds budget has been underfunded is an issue, and we will come back to that. But I will just finish the introduction here.

We are concerned about the way biodiversity offsets are listed in the budget, that they are not transparent enough to achieve the outcome of the no net loss of biodiversity from an offset arrangement and that anything that is done with offsets needs to be additional to what was already going to be done. It is not like the government collects money from offsets and then puts it into other matters which they are already supposed to be doing. So we are concerned about that.

We are interested in the waste to energy facility that is proposed in the budget, \$2.8 million over two years for the preparation of a full business case for a waste to energy facility. Is it only waste to energy? It seems that is the only technology that is being considered, something within that realm, rather than alternatives such as a third green bin et cetera.

We do note that there was no additional funding for the Environmental Defenders Office. The Environmental Defenders Office is a very valuable organisation to a range of groups, including us. If we do not have an environmental defenders office, then we will go off and have to seek pro bono advice from other lawyers. They are very good but they are much more hard-nosed than the EDO who is prepared to work cooperatively. If we go to other lawyers they tell us what to do with government and it is not nice.

We will also talk briefly about divestment. The estimates committee last year made a very good recommendation and the government gave an interesting response but we think there is more follow-up work needed there. A year has gone by and the matter was meant to be under observation. We would like to know what observations have been made.

We would also like to talk briefly about the one-stop shop. There is funding for a one-stop shop in the budget, yet at the federal level the one-stop shop arrangements have not been agreed, and at the federal level both the ALP and the Greens do not support a one-stop shop arrangement. It is a little odd that in this budget there is an allocation of \$300,000 for establishment of that.

We will go back to weeds. We have our weeds officer here, Geoff Butler, who knows weeds much better than I. He can talk about that. In broad terms we are very concerned that the funding has been reduced. We see weed management as an investment. If you spend money on weeds in a year then you reduce your problem for future years and by underfunding weed management you create a massive issue which a future government will have to deal with. Or do we just give up and say that we are no longer the bush capital, we are the weed capital? It is inappropriate not to have that investment. I will let Geoff talk because he is more passionate than I am.

Mr Butler: There is a saying that goes, “One year’s seeds, seven years weeds.” I would go further than that and say for some of the species that we are dealing with in the ACT it is one year’s seeds, 50 years weeds because their soil viability is long term. This year the ACT weeds environmental budget for its priority weeds program has been cut by \$700,000. This is an enormous cut and it relates to about 53 per cent of discretionary funding and 43-odd per cent of the overall budget.

For the last five years we have had a level of weed budget centred on about \$2 million. That has enabled the ACT weeds strategy to be put fully into place. We are now addressing all of the strategies and objectives of that strategy in a very thorough way and it is the first time for five years that we have been able to build up to that level of weed monitoring and weed control.

Stop-start management of weeds is just not a way to handle this. If we do this the amount of weed management in the field this year is going to be cut by something like 50 per cent. That means that certain areas of the ACT are not going to be touched. The weeds that are there are simply going to multiply again and we are going to be back to where we were a decade ago. This will only take a two to three-year span to be back at that sort of position.

I guess our biggest concern is that the cuts to the weed budget this year do not appear to have any scientific evidence or base to make those particular cuts. If you ask any ecologist they will tell you quite openly that weeds are arguably one of the worst things that we have in our environment and will affect not only biodiversity but also our agricultural areas and of course landscapes generally. It is absolutely essential that we keep this budget up to where it is so that we can maintain into the future that level of addressing the ACT weeds strategy’s objectives.

If we do not, then I really do not know where we are going to actually be cutting the

efforts in weed management. It is probably going to be in the paddock more than anywhere else, and that is where we can least afford it. I have seen some of the weed mapping that was sent out to the Weeds Advisory Group of which I am a member, the ACT Weeds Advisory Group, and it was really quite a shock to see just how much cutback there is going to have to be this year.

I guess one of the concerns we have too is that there was over \$7 million found for tidying up the city area. It is an assumption but we believe that the money is being taken to weed the roundabouts and nature strips and is being taken away from the broader environment.

I think we have also got to mention things like ParkCare. The amount of hours put in by ParkCare each year is something like 5,000 hours in weed management. Some of these groups have developed absolutely wonderful weed strategies for their areas of interest, which I am sure some of you have seen, and I feel that we are going to be letting them down to a large extent if we suddenly take away that amount of funding from the overall weeds budget.

I think the transparency of this has been a problem too. There was no stakeholder consultation in making this cut. Certainly as a member of the Weeds Advisory Group we had no idea whatsoever that this was coming. We are a technical, professional group of people. Some of us volunteer, some of us are within government, some of us are from universities. It was not even drawn to our attention that this was on the cards.

This was a real shock because, as I say, for the last five years we have had that perfect budget level of about \$2 million. Weeds management can be a bottomless pit—and I am the first one to recognise that—but that \$2 million has kept us stable and enabled us to do so much. In fact one ranger said to me at one stage, “We used to take a hundred litres of herbicide into a nature reserve and we would use the whole lot in one corner of a paddock. Now we take a hundred litres into the field and it is doing the whole reserve.” I think that is the sort of fact that we should be looking at because that is how well we have got on top of weeds around the ACT.

As far as monitoring goes, we have now got good photo points. We have got government agencies that have done reviews of weed control around the ACT and they are saying now that the regrowth of native vegetation in reserves is quite phenomenal where the weeds have been knocked out. We can give you photographic evidence of those sorts of things if you desire.

What we are asking for really is that the ACT government should consider adding that additional \$700,000 back into the weed budget. As I have reiterated a few times, this will keep us at a stable level. It will not enable us to go too much further into control in the sense that we get new incursions of weeds and so forth all the time. They have been addressed. We have to keep some contingency for that but it will enable us to keep all the weed levels across the ACT at a stable level.

THE CHAIR: Thanks for that. We will go to questions. We might change the order and start with Dr Bourke and work our way back.

DR BOURKE: I turn to page 2 of your submission in regard to waste resource

recovery. I am particularly looking at waste to energy options. Which other waste to energy options would you be suggesting that the government investigate?

Mr O'Loughlin: I would not necessarily suggest any waste to energy options because there are a number of fundamental principle policy themes that need to be dealt with first. If we are burning our waste are we actually reducing our waste or do we start to build up a need for a fuel source which then is met through waste and there is no impetus to actually reduce waste? It is a concern when people start to mix up the waste policy with the energy policy. So we would say, "Don't burn the waste for energy." There are a whole lot of other things that need to be done first.

There was a plan once upon a time, introduced by somebody a long time ago, called no waste by 2010, and that had a set of plateaus which would be reached by additional government funding all the way through. There was a funding stage in about 2005-06, at the time of the functional review, which was about an additional level of construction and demolition waste management and also community education to further drive down the amount of waste to landfill. That did not go ahead and the whole policy has languished since that time.

Some of the initiatives which were available and on the table were things such as a third green bin. That might not necessarily be the solution but there are some parts of the waste stream that could be better dealt with than by burning. That would include things like the putrescibles, the combustible materials, which could be used to compost and refresh soils in other places.

If you start burning waste you do end up with something somewhere that you have still got to deal with and what is in that toxic sludge, those little black pellets at the bottom of a device, still needs to be dealt with. What is the level of toxicity of them? Have all the heavy metals gone into that or what?

We think there needs to be a range of things like product stewardship. Do we need to have things like polystyrene? If New York can ban polystyrene from July 2015 why could not the ACT? Then you have one less product in the stream. I am not sure what you get from burning polystyrene but I suspect that there will be dioxins in it. There is no safe level known of dioxin contact for humans. In fact the ACT does not even have a level set as far as we know.

I should say that with all of these items that we are raising we will try and provide papers to the committee. We are seeking advice from the government to see if there are more answers than are revealed in the budget and we will provide a paper on that.

DR BOURKE: So you do not support the use of gas production arising from landfill?

Mr O'Loughlin: Yes. That is not burning waste; that is a material that is already coming off. They are putrescibles.

DR BOURKE: It is waste to energy, though, is it not?

Mr O'Loughlin: It is waste to energy but it is not burning the waste to produce it. It is a breakdown which is going to occur anyway, and capturing the methane is a very

good thing to do because it is 27 times worse than carbon dioxide for greenhouse emissions. Yes, that is a good thing to do but that is something that could also possibly be managed if we had an earlier stage separation of those things. They could have been composted in proper vessels which would have dealt with it better. That is fixing up previous problems, I suppose you would say.

In regard to this one about actually setting up a facility to burn waste for energy, we are spending \$2.8 million in this budget for a full business case, how much the full product will cost, and the machine at the end. It will be something in the order of \$15 million to \$20 million, I suppose. If the government are prepared to do that why are they not prepared to consider other options such as composting the waste, a third green bin and other things? We think they have missed those steps and gone straight to burning the waste for energy.

DR BOURKE: Are you talking about home composting?

Mr O’Loughlin: No, not necessarily. On a municipal level it works in a range of places around the world. It is successful but it does require infrastructure to go with it.

DR BOURKE: You are concerned about home composting?

Mr O’Loughlin: Home composting is very smelly. There is a lot of methane from that. You need worms.

DR BOURKE: So the waste to energy combustion issue is a problem for you. The waste to energy via methane production through composting is okay. Are there any other waste to energy mechanisms that you are aware of that are municipal?

Mr O’Loughlin: Not really. It is just a way of dealing with it. “Waste” is a bad word to use. It is really a resource. All of those things that go into the waste room actually were really useful once and we need to think about how we can get extra use out of them. With regard to burning it, although it seems to be a solution in terms of reducing the volume and reducing the need for landfill, maybe we should not have put the things into the stream in the first place. Maybe they should not be there. If there are some things that only are once through, then maybe we need to think about whether we need to have those products in the stream at all. That is the polystyrene example.

THE CHAIR: Before we go to Ms Lawder, I have a comment.

Mr O’Loughlin: I know we can talk about this for hours. I am happy to talk separately.

THE CHAIR: San Francisco have declared they will be waste free by 2018 or 2020. They have adopted no waste and have achieved it or are close to achieving, unlike the home of no waste which has abandoned it.

MS LAWDER: I want to go back to weeds; it is lovely to see someone so passionate about weeds. What are the most common ones that are generally being addressed in the ACT?

Mr Butler: Back in 1997 we put out a brochure which dealt with things like *Cotoneaster*, *Pyracantha*, poplars—those sorts of plants which were issued by Yarralumla Nursery at one stage for people's gardens. We found that they were becoming a problem. I think, because of the amount of work we have put in on education on those particular weeds, they are now well known and no longer such a problem as they used to be. There are a few that are still in public plantings and the birds are still spreading those, but there is a phase-out for all those plants. We are concerned now about the new ones that are coming in.

Some of you may have heard about the recent arrival of Madagascan fireweed in the ACT, which was brought in from turf brought down from the Nepean-Hawkesbury district. These are the new ones that are well adapted to our environment and they are coming in from other places. Things like African lovegrass, which is still spreading dramatically here, and serrated tussock have been here for quite a while. We are still trying to get on top of those, but we have made major inroads.

There is a suite of other weeds that are just sitting there not far over our borders. They are heading this way and a lot of them have the capacity to infest most of the ACT. It is not going to be isolated little pockets; it is broad scale. I could put together a small list of all those species and get it to the committee, with some comments on each one of them, if you like.

MS LAWDER: In the Murrumbidgee River corridor specifically, what is the most prevalent weed there?

Mr Butler: Without a doubt at the moment it is African lovegrass. Unfortunately, it was sown in some quantities in the Monaro. It has travelled down the river. It is now onto the side of the river and is moving out all over the place. If you look around the ACT now, the mowing—keeping the city tidy—can be a major means of spreading weeds around the ACT. I have seen African lovegrass in Kingston and Manuka—all of those places. Every nature strip is just 100 per cent lovegrass. It is getting onto the sides of roads everywhere. That is the worst one in the corridor at the moment.

MS LAWDER: I think you said this already in your opening statement but, generally speaking, keeping those weeds down in the suburbs is not going to help the broader rural area.

Mr Butler: I think it has to be a combination. I picked on the amenity of the urban areas being catered for in this year's budget, and there is absolutely no problem with that. Things like African lovegrass, I hope, will be subject to part of that clean-up. So we are not attacking trying to keep the city a little tidier than it is. It does help in some respects. I guess you have to be careful in those instances, though, that the mowers are not going to be taking the seeds of those species further and further around the city. That is the major thing.

MS LAWDER: Thank you. You also mentioned in your opening statement that the cut did not appear, to your knowledge, to be based on any scientific basis. Do you have scientific reports? You talked about 100 litres covering more now. Apart from photograph evidence, do you have another evidence base for that?

Mr Butler: Yes. The parks and conservation research area recently put out a paper. They had done a survey of a number of nature reserves in the ACT. It was led by Michael Mulvaney, I believe. They have long-term data of what is present in the reserves. They have been back to where the reserves have been sprayed or dealt with for weed management. The ratio of native plants now to weeds is very significant. I am sure that report can be obtained from the parks and conservation service.

MS LAWDER: Apart from the mowers, are birds another big carrier of things like African lovegrass?

Mr Butler: Not so much African lovegrass. They usually carry the fruits. Another one that is becoming much more common now in the ACT is Chinese pistachio, an absolutely beautiful street tree. Because of the more intense urban development we need smaller street trees. That is an absolutely perfect tree, but the fruits are carried everywhere and they are now exponentially rising in the reserves around the ACT.

MS LAWDER: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Ms Fitzharris.

MS FITZHARRIS: Can you tell me where you found this \$700,000 cut? Is it per annum or over the forward estimates? Where have you identified that? You talk about environmental weeds. Is that a subcategory of weeds in general, or do you just mean any weed? Do you make any distinction between what is in the urban environment and what is in the parkland environment? Has the cut come more from the parkland environment than the urban one?

Mr Butler: The way we estimated the cut was through advice from the TAMS financial officer who gave us the figures of the 50 per cent and the 43 per cent discretionary and overall funding. We based it on last year's funding level, and that brings it down to a \$700,000 cut.

MS FITZHARRIS: So that was in the budget lock-up?

Mr Butler: No, this is subsequent inquiries since the budget has been announced. We have been following this through fairly thoroughly.

Mr O'Loughlin: We started the process of discussion in the budget lock-up and then we followed through. They went, "Oh, we don't know," and went away. They did not have an answer for us at the time.

MS FITZHARRIS: In terms of the budget documents that we have to look at we will not be able to see that anywhere?

Mr Butler: Not easily. We could not. That is why we had to make the inquiries.

MS FITZHARRIS: There are some questions we can follow up on with the minister when he comes in. Could you talk me through the endangered species and habitat and the offset plans, particularly as they relate to the Gungahlin strategic assessment?

Could you explain, from your point of view, how that is working, how the offset management plans are developed and what is left of the Gungahlin strategic offsets to roll out?

Mr O’Loughlin: The Gungahlin strategic offset plan had a document attached prepared by Umwelt which set out what the offset should be for the future years. They set it out into about six areas and said how much each of those needed as an offset. There was an amount for the first three years, which was establishment and capital costs, and an amount for the next 17 years—so there are so many hectares and this much per hectare for three years and then for 17 years.

Doing the calculations we tried to measure against the budget how much had been allocated. It is not clear. Part of the reason it is not clear is that in the Umwelt document they said that nothing would be allocated to Kinlyside because it is in private hands. They just said, “The landowners can keep doing that.” They are very good landowners and they are running a privately held nature reserve, effectively.

But in the budget it says that there is an allocation for Kinlyside. We are trying to unravel that figure at the moment to see how much is there. Leaving that aside, our estimation of the amount in the budget, compared to what was in that Umwelt document, is \$1 million short. It is not transparent how offsets are run. It is supposed to be additional—it is something that the government is not already doing, so it is actually an improvement. But we do not have a clear plan as to how that is going to be delivered for each of those areas. Particular ones where we have no plans are broader Kinlyside, Justice Robert Hope Park, Isaacs reserve and the Pinnacle nature reserve. So there are missing things.

Again, we are seeking further information. When we have a little more information, we are prepared to share that with the committee; we would like to do that. But we are trying to go through it and not just come out and say these things. On appearances, there is a less amount. Maybe something has happened somewhere.

MS FITZHARRIS: What do you think of the amount that is in there this year, though?

Mr O’Loughlin: It needs to happen, but then again, the process by which offsets operate means they are not just another bucket of money for government to dip into to do things with that they should be doing anyway. If offsets are going to work they have to be additional to what was already happening. That is the whole idea of offsets. Otherwise people can pay to destroy biodiversity and we just do not want that to happen. It has to be about net gain. Probably that will never work. We really think there are fundamental issues with offsets. But if the government is going to set up rules for doing it, it has to follow its own rules.

MS FITZHARRIS: So the \$6 million in this year’s budget you see as a net gain?

Mr O’Loughlin: No. If it is against offsets, it should probably be \$7 million. You could say that it is \$6 million more, but it was meant to be \$7 million—I am not sure; it is a semantic one.

MS FITZHARRIS: Do you have a view on the extension of the predator proof fence from Mulligans Flat around Goorooyarroo?

Mr O’Loughlin: I think the Goorooyarroo-Mulligans Flat landscape experiment is a wonderful thing. It is one of the things that Canberra should be proud of. Enhancing that is a really good thing. In the long run, are we just going to establish little exclusion zones where we can look in and go, “Oh, that’s what nature used to look like”? Or are we actually using it as a model for going, “Okay. How do we get better on this? Do we need to contain our cats? Do we need to manage other things so that curlews can continue to live in the environment?” There could be an issue about establishing exclusion zones and so on. We have islands off the coast; we can just put everything out there and the rest we just destroy in here in the middle. But, yes, it is good.

MS FITZHARRIS: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I will defer my question to Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: Thank you. In your opening statement you mentioned divestment and said that there was at least one recommendation from estimates last year. Can you expand on that a bit?

Mr O’Loughlin: Divestment is about encouraging companies and governments not to invest in fossil fuels because of a number of reasons. One, it is a moral thing. It is like saying: do we want to keep going with climate change, which is contributed to by fossil fuels? Another is that possibly these investments are going to end up as stranded assets, as in they are not going to be useful if the world takes action on climate change. The ACT government and all parties in the Assembly are to be commended for their commitment to doing something about climate change. But if we are committed to doing something about climate change, we should not be investing in the things which are contributing to climate change.

We would like to know whether the ACT government is in a position to say it can reduce its investments in fossil fuels. We know roughly what those investments are. We know the companies that they invest in. We do not know the quantum. We do not know the number of shares. But there are some very major fossil fuel companies which the ACT government invests in. We are saying there should be divestment. The ACT should align its climate change policy with its investment policy. Do not on one hand say, “Oh, we want to do something about climate change,” and on the other invest in the companies that are contributing to it.

MS LAWDER: So it is a walk-the-talk kind of thing.

Mr O’Loughlin: I suppose so, yes. But it is also a process thing. It could be that you look at that and go, “Why isn’t that more transparent? Why can’t we find out a bit more about what the government is actually doing?” Is the Treasurer being advised, “Treasurer, there is an issue with these assets and one day we might need to get out of them; here is a process for doing it”? That would be a responsible Treasurer giving that advice and we would like to know if that is happening.

MS LAWDER: I guess what you are saying is that the Treasurer has an obligation to maximise the revenue coming in from those investments, but you are concerned they will become stranded assets and not actually used to maximise—

Mr O’Loughlin: That is one part of it. It is about climate change as well but, yes, there is a danger that it will not be good investment. You can make money out of things other than fossil fuels. The ACT divested from tobacco some years ago. It is possible to make divestments based on government policy. We want to know if there is a pathway being mapped for that and if they could declare it.

MR LAWDER: You are not aware at this point if there is a pathway?

Mr O’Loughlin: No. We are told, “We’re looking at it.” The government responded to the committee’s report last year, saying this was under observation. Presumably that means there will be something further to report this year.

THE CHAIR: Just a supplementary. Is there any government that has divested itself at a state, territory or national level?

Mr O’Loughlin: The famous one is the Norway sovereign fund, which of course is based on their oil reserves. It is a very large fund and they have decided to get out of coal investments. That announcement was just made in May, I think. That is a massive decision. Governments are starting to realise, especially if they are going off to UN meetings and saying, “We’re going to do something about climate change and decarbonise,” that it would be the sensible thing. We should do it with our investments too.

THE CHAIR: We have come to the end of our time, but just a last question from me. Given the arrangements that now exist with the additional minister, is there still a need for a single nature conservation agency, or are you happy with the current arrangements?

Mr O’Loughlin: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Yes you are happy or yes there should be?

Mr O’Loughlin: No, there is still a need for a single conservation agency, as has been agreed by all parties and is in the parliamentary agreement between the Greens and the government. It is a matter which should be implemented. There are multitude examples. We could take another half an hour and scratch the surface on the dysfunctional arrangements within government on nature conservation.

THE CHAIR: Thanks for that. You have taken on notice or offered to provide the committee with some information on weeds and the papers to back up some of your statements in the submission. We look forward to receiving them as quickly as you can. Members, if you have further follow-up questions when you receive the *Hansard*, if we could have those quickly that would be appreciated. When the *Hansard* is available, we will forward that to you for your proof reading and possible corrections—so if you could send those to the committee. We thank you your attendance today.

Meeting suspended from 11.03 to 11.14 am.

RAMSAY, REV GORDON, Executive Minister, UnitingCare Kippax
RICHENS, MS MEG, Executive Officer, UnitingCare Kippax
WILSON, MR MARK ALEXANDER, Service User, UnitingCare Kippax

THE CHAIR: We will reconvene. Good morning, and welcome to this hearing of the Select Committee on Estimates 2015-2016. Could you please confirm that you have read the pink privilege card, which gives you protections as well as obligations?

Ms Richens: Yes.

Rev Ramsay: Yes.

Mr Wilson: Yes.

THE CHAIR: All have read it and understand it; thank you very much for that. Please be aware that today's proceedings are being recorded and then will be transcribed by Hansard and published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live.

The committee would like to welcome Kippax UnitingCare to the inquiry today. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Rev Ramsay: Thank you. As always, UnitingCare Kippax appreciates the opportunity to appear before you today. I have handed over a statement. I will not read it, but I do want to acknowledge that we welcome a number of the initiatives that the ACT government has placed in this particular budget, the stimulatory effect on the economy in difficult times, and we welcome some of the initiatives, such as those on domestic violence, public housing and the additional funding for the concessions program. We think they are welcome initiatives.

We do remain concerned about the level of funding, especially around the emergency financial and material aid program. That is particularly important in light of the history of both the levels of funding and the levels of demand that have been on that service for a number of years.

In previous years we have welcomed the opportunity to speak, and we have also had the privilege of bringing along some stories of people who are living in financial vulnerability. That reflects the fact that budgets are not primarily about money; they are primarily about society, community and people.

Today we are pleased to have Mark Wilson with us, who is going to be sharing part of his story on the impact and the importance of timely support for people who are having financial difficulties at times.

Mr Wilson: I am a service user at Kippax Uniting Church. I am 41 years old. I am a full-time single father of a six-year-old girl. I have been looking after her since the day she was born. Up to when she was seven months old, I worked full time. I have always had a full-time job. I stopped work due to illness. I had a ruptured intestine which I believe was due to stress, from doing 80 hours a week and trying to bottle-

feed a newborn baby with three-hourly feeds et cetera—fun and games.

Since then people like Kippax Uniting Church have just been a godsend to me. If it was not for their help, not just with food but with respite care after getting out of hospital, helping my daughter and redirecting me in the right direction to access other organisations to try and help us, I do not think we would have survived.

I went from earning about \$1,600 or \$1,700 a week to earning about \$250 to \$300 a week, to try and support my daughter full time. I also have two other children. I still pay maintenance for them and I take them every weekend. If it was not for Kippax, we would not survive week to week. As I said, it is not food; it has been clothing for my daughter, and swimming programs. I could not afford to pay for swimming lessons. Everyone says, “It’s Australia; your kid’s got to learn how to swim.” It is \$300 for a term. That is a lot of money.

Generally speaking, even with the help of Kippax, someone in my family always has to go without, which is me, because my children never miss out. I do not drink, I do not smoke and I do not do drugs. I put my money in the right direction. Without the help of Kippax, there is no money and there is no direction for us.

It is a struggle. Every day is a real struggle. But my daughter is happy and I make do. Kippax has helped me not only with food. My daughter has mental issues, so I have had to uproot her from the school she was at to send her to another school that had LD support, which is nine suburbs away from my home. Kippax have helped me to get her onto the disabled bus, because it was a struggle just trying to drive her back and forth to school while also trying to look for work. Now that she is six I have to return to part-time work. It is a juggle. It is a real struggle at times. If it was not for the help of Kippax, I do not know where I would be. I have no family support. They are more family to me than anyone else on this planet at the moment. I have a brother and that is about it. But he works, so he has commitments. He cannot give up his money and time for me, so I really do utilise Kippax.

Quite often, at least once a month, I will go in there for food support, emotional support and advice on where to go. They support my family during Christmas with food and presents, just to make up the loose ends when I cannot afford to do it. They are great. I could not survive from week to week. Even the thought of not having someone like Kippax behind me—I do not know how I would survive, in all honesty.

As I said I went from working for 20-odd years full time to, all of a sudden, being unemployed, just due to illness. I went from one side of life to the other. I was earning big money. I was on nearly 100 grand a year, and I went to 15 grand a year. It is a big difference. But my bills are still there. They did not evaporate.

They have helped me to access my super. I have had to access part of my super for hardship. My car blew up and I had no way of buying a new car, or any car—at least not a car that was roadworthy. I believe in doing the right thing. So Kippax have been great in so many different areas of my life.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for having the courage to come and have a chat with us this morning and put that on the record. You said you have two other children. How old

are they?

Mr Wilson: Grace is 13—she will turn 14 in August—and Zach is 12. He will be 13 in September.

THE CHAIR: And how old is the little one?

Mr Wilson: Six.

THE CHAIR: The assistance that Kippax gives you is the difference between living and not living? Eating and not eating?

Mr Wilson: Food is obviously a part of it, but there is a lot more to it than just food. It is about knowing how to access certain services when you need to. As a single father, I find the system to be very geared up towards single mothers, so it is very hard to access a lot of systems as a single father. If it was not for the advice that Kippax gives me as to which direction to take, who to contact and what information I need to provide to contact that, we would struggle in a lot of areas—not just food but clothing, electricity and gas. They have put me onto essential services that I never knew existed. They have helped me get into housing. Before, when I was sick, I was renting privately. I was paying \$400 a week rent, so they did all of my applications for housing and got me into housing. I paid \$400 a week rent on the pension for six months before I got into public housing, so you can imagine what was not left over.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. Members will have other questions, I suspect, as we move along. Gordon, looking at your submission, under orders of priority, (a) was support for those dealing with financial hardship. Is there enough from the government to assist you to do what you need to do?

Rev Ramsay: We have mentioned for a number of years that we believe that the emergency financial and material aid program is underfunded. In particular, the level of support has remained the same for a number of years, while the increase in demand has been substantial. We have made the point for a number of years that effectively we believe our particular area of the program is probably about \$100,000 underfunded for us to be able to meet the current demand. The impact is that it means our staffing levels have had to decrease in the emergency financial and material aid program. Because staffing levels have gone down, it means that people have a longer wait before they are able to receive the most timely form of support. We know that the longer that people have to wait, the more difficulties there are for them in moving out of that financial crisis.

THE CHAIR: What increase is there in that funding in this year's budget?

Rev Ramsay: The EFMA program is funded just at the CPI, or at the indexation level, which is slightly under the CPI.

THE CHAIR: You still feel that just your area is \$100,000 underfunded?

Rev Ramsay: Indeed; that is right.

MS FITZHARRIS: Thank you, Mark. Many of your comments struck me. Also, when you talked about the thought of not having someone like that behind you, it is hard to measure that, but it is the fact that you know someone is there to help you out whenever you might need it. In terms of the services that UnitingCare put you in touch with, are they a combination of ACT government services, commonwealth and other community sector organisations?

Mr Wilson: Yes.

MS FITZHARRIS: So they help you to navigate all of that?

Mr Wilson: Yes, and they also supplied me with respite care when I got out of hospital. They paid for taxis so that I could take my daughter to child care. Every time I get out of hospital I have over 1,000 stitches down the front of me, so I cannot really do very much. They supply gardeners, someone to come and mop my floor and someone to help me get my daughter organised for school. It is not just about pointing me in the right direction as far as organisations are concerned; they have literally been my mum and dad. They have held my hand.

MS FITZHARRIS: Family care; great. Can I go back to the EFMA as well. Can you explain what that money does? That would be really useful.

Ms Richens: The EFMA program does provide food for families, but we also have a series of voucher systems that allow families to purchase food for themselves. There are the Woolworths voucher cards. We also have Foodbank voucher cards that allow people to access food from a Foodbank service that is closer to them than we are. We provide some support in pharmaceutical purchasing if they require regular medication that they are not able to afford. We have some clothes on site, but we also have an arrangement with the local op shop about enabling people to access clothes there, either at the standard price or at a discounted price from an op shop, which is kind of entertaining.

The EFMA money is used primarily for people who are in financial hardship of some sort or another. The role of the EFMA program is that immediate catch of people who are falling through the other nets of services. The critical thing around the EFMA program is that it is the safety net for people for whom other services are not actually able to meet the immediate demand. We can then do, as Mark has been saying, that process of connecting into the web of services that exist and making sure that the actual support network is functioning well.

MS FITZHARRIS: Does the emergency financial aid relate basically to cash or is it largely in the form of vouchers and goods?

Ms Richens: We do all of our financial aid in the form of vouchers. The material aid comes in the form of food and clothing.

MS FITZHARRIS: Do you have a food pantry?

Ms Richens: Yes, we do.

MS FITZHARRIS: Is that part of that? Is that solely part of that? Is it solely funded through the EFMA program? How does that work?

Ms Richens: The pantry is funded through the EFMA program. The funding breakdown at the moment is that about 90-odd per cent comes from ACT government funding. The remainder, seven to 10 per cent, we fundraise for or have donated through that process. So the pantry itself is primarily funded through EFMA, and it is used by EFMA clients, but there is also the opportunity for some of our clients in other spaces to access that service if they need it. We cross-refer internally to ensure that people get the range of support that they need, that we are in fact providing wraparound support to people in those situations.

MS FITZHARRIS: Other community sector organisations that have food pantries are not funded to do that through EFMA? Is that right? There are only three providers across the territory.

Rev Ramsay: That is right. Through the EFMA contracts there are three providers. There is ourselves, St Vincent de Paul and the Salvation Army. They are the three that fall in under this particular funding stream. There is a range of other support services that are funded through CSD, Community Services Directorate, and some of those are picked up in terms of food bank type pantries. So there is a range of different forms of support. Some of them provide food that can be purchased at greatly reduced cost. Our particular model where we are is that with the pantry the food that is there is given out. So there is often a stepped process back to ongoing sustainability of the way that people are able to live. And there is a range of organisations and individuals who donate food to us as part of the pantry as well.

MS FITZHARRIS: I am just trying to understand how that is distributed across the whole city. Do the Salvation Army and St Vincent de Paul have a locational role, like you do, in a sense? And with all the material aid that is being provided by community sector organisations throughout the ACT, it is clear they are not all being funded through EFMA.

Ms Richens: That is correct. There is a range of different ways. In terms of food support, there are a number of agencies that provide food that is donated to them. There are some free food services that are funded through other parts of CSD. So there is a range of different bits and pieces around this.

The interesting thing is that, while we are primarily focused on providing service in the west Belconnen area, we have people who participate in the EFMA program from right across Canberra. In the six months to the end of 2014, for instance, we had people from Banks, Narrabundah, Calwell, Lyneham, Dunlop, Kambah and Ngunnawal. Those are in addition to the people who are coming out of the local area that we service. So while ours looks like a place-based service, it has a whole-of-ACT impact. Both the Salvos and St Vincent de Paul have a more distributed process; they work through a range of different centres.

MS FITZHARRIS: The review that you mentioned, where is it up to?

Rev Ramsay: The review was first mentioned to us just over two years ago. We were

informed last year that it was getting close to having the terms of reference talked about with us. That was the terms of reference; we never saw actual terms of reference. We have been in conversations. We now understand that rather than there being a review, as has been talked about over the last two years, there is going to be a conversation over the next couple of years as to what EFMA might look like in the future. Our concern is that while that happens, effectively over a four-year period, funding is slated to remain the same while the increase in demand is significant. For the period of the second half of last year there was a six per cent to nine per cent increase on the equivalent period for the year before. The demand keeps growing while that review or conversation is ready to take place.

MS FITZHARRIS: So you do not have too much clarity on that at the moment?

Ms Richens: No. We had an initial meeting between the three agencies that are funded under EFMA and CSD which looked at what might happen in the next two years—how might we progress a conversation around what might happen to EFMA over the next two years. We have not heard anything since.

MS FITZHARRIS: And just relating to food—

THE CHAIR: Sorry to interrupt, but before you go to food, what is your preference—a conversation over two years or a review with defined terms of reference?

Rev Ramsay: To be perfectly honest, I think either one is okay if we are involved from the beginning as part of working out the terms of reference or the nature of the conversation so that it is done collaboratively, with best practice and good evidence. The key thing that we are particularly concerned with at the moment is that while that is being prepared or happening, the funding is under significant pressure. We really appreciate the additional \$50,000 that was announced in the second half of last year and paid earlier this year—that made it possible for us to basically get through—but the chance for it to continue at this level without having significant impact on people living in financial vulnerability is a real concern.

MS FITZHARRIS: I have had a couple of visits to food pantries where the people that are operating them are saying that you have people coming from throughout the city but there is possibly some use of the free food pantries where people are, to put it in simple terms as it was put to me, sort of taking advantage of a free product. The upside of that is that there is probably something else going on so you have the opportunity to start working with families and people about what else there is, but on the flip side they said that in some cases that may be taking away the availability for people who have a different need and perhaps more need. Are you able to comment on that? It was raised a couple of times; people sort of said, “We just need to mention this.” Is that happening? What is the reality around that?

Ms Richens: I think one of the critical pieces of background information in relation to what you are talking about is that when you look at what is happening with our EFMA program, for example, we have gone from the equivalent of 2.7 staff down to the equivalent of 1.8 staff in order to shift how the resources are deployed. That means that there is a longer period before people can get an appointment with us. So

people are coming to us in an emergency and we are saying, “That is great. Come back in a week and a half.” In the interim, we will provide an emergency hamper which has sufficient food for two to three days to get people through. But the longer the period of delay because we are shifting the balance of resource distribution, the less likely it is that families are going to be able to get what they need right now from us. Consequently, yes, they may well shop around.

The process that matters in that space is being able to say that we understand that the social environment is such that there are some families who are going to be in need, we understand that there are a limited number of resources available to distribute to those families, and we need to look at two things. One is the breadth of distribution of those resources across the families that are in need. The other one is the depth of response to each family. It is not always possible to suggest to a family that they should only get service in one place, because that one place may not be able to provide sufficient. It is possible that there are some families who are accessing more than one of these services. I am not sure that that is necessarily an indicator that they are exploiting the system. It may be but I am not sure that it is.

THE CHAIR: Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: Thanks. I want to ask about the community sector reform program and the 0.34 per cent levy which was introduced a few years ago. It is my understanding that the continuation of that in this year’s budget for two years was perhaps unanticipated by the sector. I have seen some comments by ACTCOSS and NDS, and it is in your submission as well, that you do not necessarily feel that you have had a benefit commensurate with the imposition of the levy. Have you been able to participate in any of the training modules or any of the touted benefits of that levy?

Ms Richens: Certainly we have had some staff who have participated in the training modules that have been made available. My understanding is that the levy has not been fully expended, so the critical issue for us is not whether we are able to participate in what is out there, because we do take as many of those opportunities as we can, but whether the money has been expended for purpose.

MS LAWDER: What would you do with that money if you did not have to pay the 0.34 per cent levy?

Ms Richens: The baseline for me is that we would be able to look at bolstering the professional development commitment that we make in our budgeting process but also we would be able to look collaboratively with a range of other organisations around immediate need for workforce development. For example, in the west Belconnen network trial that we are conducting as part of the human services blueprint implementation, there is the opportunity to make sure that development is specific to place and ensure that the workforce processes are relevant to the needs that are expressed by the local community and the people who are living in that space. So we are ensuring that our skill set matches the types of responses we need to be making.

Rev Ramsay: The other particular thing is that by the time the levy is removed, the indexation is less than the increase in the cost of the wages. At the moment, because the levy is happening, we need to draw funds out of other parts of the service to be

able to even continue the same level of staffing.

MS LAWDER: Your understanding when the levy was first introduced was that it was a temporary measure—is that correct?

Rev Ramsay: Our understanding is that it was anticipated to be for a particular period of time. That particular of time has now been completed. That was one of the reasons why, along with that cost, we shared some concern that it was continued in this particular year's budget. We were not anticipating that.

MS LAWDER: In the other consultative groups that you are part of with the government, it was never flagged that it would be continued?

Ms Richens: Not with me.

Rev Ramsay: Meg is more involved in those consultative groups than I.

THE CHAIR: Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: A supplementary off Ms Lawder, if I might, chair. In regard to the extended funding for the human services gateway and the strengthening families programs, you say it needs to be well targeted and effectively applied. What concerns do you have about the targeting and effective application of that program?

Ms Richens: The implementation of the blueprint is a process that is going to take a reasonable amount of time to demonstrate the change in the outcomes that are achieved. My concern in that space is to ensure that the funding is used in line with the blueprint design and in a way that is most likely to contribute to the types of outcomes the blueprint is trying to achieve. It is making sure we continue to operate that process in line with the design process. The design was done very collaboratively between the vast range of players who contribute to achieving positive outcomes for people in our community. It is about making sure that we keep that consistent in the process of implementation and working.

DR BOURKE: Do you have a proposal as to how that might be achieved?

Ms Richens: Not a specific one at this stage. The process for me would be about how we ensure the collaboration continues and how we make sure the communication continues to ensure those processes are consistent with the original blueprint design.

Rev Ramsay: From my perspective as part of the better services task force, I think that is the key thing—to keep the focus on the importance of that ongoing collaboration and the co-design of things and to acknowledge that the community sector is an equal partner as part of this. That is going to be important for us to be able to contribute the wisdom the sector brings to this sphere and make sure it is done in an equal and collaborative way.

DR BOURKE: Would you be looking at a process kind of assessment or an outcome assessment, or some combination of both?

Ms Richens: I think a combination. In terms of determining value and identifying change, we need to be doing both the process implementation assessments and the outcomes assessments at a later date. We need to be able to look over time at what are the indicators towards change in outcomes, because it will take us time to get to change in outcomes. We need to be measuring against the indicators as we go.

DR BOURKE: For my major question, talking about affordable housing and homelessness, would you suggest there are different subgroups within those categories of people that are more or less catered for or do you think this is the overall issue?

Rev Ramsay: Firstly, we think the investment in public housing renewal in this budget is a really welcome step. That is important to acknowledge. Part of the renewal of the public housing stock will mean it is better able to target particular areas. We are pleased, for example, that, with the renewal of public housing, it will be better for people who are living with disabilities. There will be a range of particular areas where that is going to make a really significant difference. At the same stage, the reality is at the moment that our affordable and public housing stock is insufficient for the needs in this particular community. It is straight numbers at the moment—we simply do not have enough public housing or affordable housing at the moment. So it is targeted, but it is also general.

DR BOURKE: My interest there was around affordable or public housing particularly for older women, which is a sector I think the YWCA has had a recent project on. Can you comment on any other specific groups which may not be traditionally considered when we are talking about public housing?

Rev Ramsay: I think public housing for people with disabilities is a really key area. That is not our primary area by any means but it is certainly our observation that that is one of the historic areas that needs to be picked up and picked up well. One of the things Mark was pointing out before is that difficulty around housing for young parents and being able to work out where it is that people can live as well. It is not necessarily so much the targeting of particular groups but the understanding of the location of public housing in places where people are able to live and to continue to build their important relationships and support. That is as much of a focus for us as well.

DR BOURKE: Thank you.

MS FITZHARRIS: Mark, I want to follow up on your comment around services for single dads. I know when I had kids there was a playgroup I could go to run through the child and family centres where—

Mr Wilson: Yes, they are available.

MS FITZHARRIS: Are there ones more for dads?

Mr Wilson: Yes. They are not sexist, those sorts of groups, so that does not matter. But it is more, for example, if I needed to find emergency accommodation for me and my daughter—impossible in this town. There is no place for a single father to go with

his children to have a roof over their heads—they have to be separated. Or you go hang out at Ainslie Village with “desirable people” to have around a baby.

MS FITZHARRIS: Are you familiar with the Canberra Men’s Centre?

Mr Wilson: Yes.

MS FITZHARRIS: I think they have a few houses but not really—

Mr Wilson: How long do you want to wait? I found it quicker to get into public housing than I did to even be considered to be talked to by them. It took me nine months to get into public housing once I stopped work. At that time I was still paying \$800 a fortnight, earning \$970 a fortnight and raising a baby. Without places like Kippax, the services out there for single men are non-existent. You pick up the phone and say, “I’m a single man raising a daughter,” and all you hear is “Beep, beep, beep.” It is like the truck reversing over the cat.

MS FITZHARRIS: Do any of you have a sense of anything specific that can be looked at?

Mr Wilson: In my opinion it would just be being able to access the same services as any single mother.

MS FITZHARRIS: Very good point. It is reasonable.

Mr Wilson: I do not think being a single parent should be sexist; I think a single parent should just be a single parent. When people hear “single parent” they look at me and go, “But you’re a male. How is that possible?” Obviously I was the best choice and I was prepared to sacrifice what I had worked for for 21 years for the benefit of my children. To me that is more important than an income or a flash car or a nice watch or something like that. I can buy all that stuff again down the track; I cannot buy my children.

THE CHAIR: We have to close there. Mark, if you had one piece of advice or one request of the government, what would it be?

Mr Wilson: We need more help, and not just in funding of places like Kippax. I have over 100 grand sitting in super. I cannot access more than 10 grand a year, but I know as a previous business owner that if I could access my super I would buy my own backhoe and bobcat excavator again and you guys would not even be talking to me. It is my money; I earned it. I have worked hard to get to it. People are telling me I need that money when I retire. With two major operations under my belt and my life expectancy very low, I am never going to get to spend that money; I am never going to get to retirement. My life expectancy at the moment is around 60. Give it another couple of years and it will probably be less.

Why do I need a retirement future when I do not have that future anyway? Would I not be better off providing a future now for my kids? My two stepsons are 18 and 19 and working in the same industry. I could give them jobs. They could continue the business. I think a lot needs to be done for people in my situation, not just help

through Kippax but accessing what I have already earned—my super. Medicare is shocking at the moment; everyone is going public health. If you look at places like France where it is all on medicare, there are no waiting lists and everyone gets looked after. You can take a year off work and be sick and you can still pay. The Australian system is less than Third World as far as medical goes. Our social services, even though they are great, are not enough compared to other countries.

THE CHAIR: We have to finish there. I do not think you have taken anything on notice. Members, if you have further questions, get them in quickly. If they appear, if we could have an answer within five days, that would be good. As soon as the transcript is available we will forward that to you for any corrections you may want to suggest. Thank you for your attendance today.

Mr Wilson: Thanks very much.

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

CUZZILLO, MS REBECCA, Policy and Development, Youth Coalition of the ACT

THE CHAIR: Good morning and welcome to the first day of public hearings of the Select Committee on Estimates 2015-2016. Could you confirm for the transcript that you have seen the pink privilege statement on the table and that you understand its obligations and protections?

Ms Robertson: Yes, I have read this statement and understand it, thank you.

Ms Cuzzillo: Yes, I have read the statement as well.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms Robertson: Yes. Thank you very much for inviting us to appear here today. I want to start by acknowledging the traditional owners and continuing custodians of the lands of the ACT and pay my respects to elders, ancestors and family.

I do not think that sorting out the ACT budget in an environment where there are some big challenges for us is the easiest job to do. I certainly do not envy you as MLAs in sorting through this process. But we certainly took the approach, I suppose, that we have been pushed as the community sector in the last couple of years to look at providing advice to government about how to best invest the resources that we do have. It is for that reason that we took the approach in our submission to the budget that we believe we should be targeting the resources that we have in the things that will have the biggest impact.

We have been talking about early intervention and prevention work for a number of years. Have we got the balance right in terms of investment? We would argue probably not and very much we took the approach of looking at social determinants of health. For that reason, in terms of young people, it is the things like education, jobs, housing—very basic things—that we are concerned about in terms of our responses as a community. This is because not only of the experience that individuals who are falling through gaps in our systems are having but also because we are looking at long-term investment. If we put the resources and supports in place to keep young people engaged in school and give them the opportunity to find employment, they are not going to experience dependence on our systems later on necessarily.

Looking at the budget release, I want to acknowledge that there have been some really good moves forward. We were really pleased to see some investment in domestic violence prevention and support. Does it go far enough? We know that domestic violence is something that is a key cause of homelessness in our community. Are we putting the right amount of money in at the right end to prevent it and to support the community to address domestic violence before people need crisis intervention support? We probably think that balance is not quite right.

I think that that speaks to the opportunity that we have at the moment. I use the analogy that on we are on a bit of a cliff's edge around the opportunity to step up the trust and relationship the government and the community sector have with each other.

We did hear the speakers before talking about community sector indexation, which is something we mentioned in our survey. I think the thing that the community sector was upset about with the indexation was that it came as a surprise. It was not seen as something that was a negotiation. It was around a formula that we negotiated a number of years ago about how we would work together. The sense is that we should by now have quite an evolved and trusting relationship.

In terms of knowledge about what works to help people, where we might invest resources, where we might make a difference, I actually think we have a lot of that knowledge. What we do not have is the trust and the mechanisms to really pull those resources. I guess in that sense I feel like it is worth saying that, if every industry was held accountable in the way that community services are, I think we would be looking at a very different kind of process around budgetary allocations.

I suppose that our mission over the next period of time is to keep challenging the government and the community to look at whether we are really mobilising the resources that we have in the right way. If we are going to support young people who are falling through the gaps in education, are education people to do that on their own or are there other resources that can come together? I do not know that we are thinking strategically as a community about how to do that and I do not know that we have got the right resources in place to support the people who are working and connecting with people in the front line who can make a difference. I am going to invite Bec to speak a little more about education as part of the opening statement.

Ms Cuzzillo: In our submission to this budget we talked about social determinants of health, as Emma said. We see education as one of those key social determinants. We know that poor educational engagement leads to negative outcomes later in life. It is well documented and well researched. When there are worse health outcomes there are less employment opportunities. It leads to housing stress and homelessness. These things cost the community down the track later; so that is why we want to talk about early intervention and prevention and see investment in that area.

We know that education is key to ensuring future employment but also improving all those other areas of people's lives. For some young people education is that key to breaking the cycle of poverty. In particular, in our submission we highlighted both children and young people in the out-of-home care system as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people for whom we see that big gap in education in the ACT.

We know that most young people in the ACT will have a good educational outcome but the people that are not achieving in our education system really are not achieving. They are really a fair way behind. It is in respect of the known trajectories for young people who disengage from education that we believe that is where your specialist youth services and youth workers bring a different set of skills and a different set of knowledge to the table to help support those young people to stay in school.

One of our key things that we want to see happen in the community and in government is that working together of schools and community services—building those relationships. We see schools as communities. We see schools as first-to-know agencies for all sorts of things in young people's lives. But both schools and

community services are really stretched to do that support. We know, in the current context of moving towards principal autonomy in ACT schools, that community services are going to be key in that. But if we do not have the relationships there and if there is no capacity to build those relationships in the schools and in community services, we will not see that coming together happening to support the young people that really need support to stay in education.

That is probably one of the key things that we are working on with our members and working on with the community. We would love to see some investment in the schools go into that as well. Education is one of the ACT's best assets. We talk about that a lot. We talk about how great and how high our attainment is here but I think it is unacceptable that there are young people in our community, when we rely on education as one of our biggest assets, that are not achieving in that system. That is probably where we sit on education. It is definitely one of our key things at the moment.

THE CHAIR: Thanks for that. You used words about being on a cliff's edge, the need for trust and a mechanism. In your documents you talk about the lack of respect. How do you change that? How does the government do this better?

Ms Robertson: It has been an interesting journey we have been on, as you all know, because we invited you to come to Youth Week and to listen to young people speak. I think that when people who are experiencing our services and our service systems tell their story you get quite a different reaction. I think that is an interesting thing. I have been to a number of meetings in the last couple of weeks that are around things like the justice reinvestment strategy or the blueprint for youth justice. It has been really interesting for me to hear people within bureaucracy talk about actually putting the right amount of resources in to support someone who is exiting detention or to keep them out of the statutory system.

But people are talking about how intensive the work is and how resource intensive it is—and exhausting. I feel that that is something we are very familiar with in the community sector. We have known it for a long time because that is the work that we have done and the way in which we work. But clearly when we have been saying that and talking about resources, that has not translated if it is being talked about now as a more recent discovery, I suppose.

I think we have to review the mechanisms by which government purchases services from the community sector. I think there are some really big challenges out there for us about looking at our models, looking at our business models and so forth. That absolutely needs to happen. But I think equally that we are not the private sector in this. We are not for-profit agencies. Ultimately, I believe that people who work in the bureaucracy are also there because they want to serve the community and do well. People who work in the community sector are also there doing that. We actually need to make sure that those relationships are able to be trusting and build.

Human services work is all about relationships. We know that. It might take six months but if you do not build a relationship with a young person who is disengaged from school, it is not even possible to start to make a change in their life. I think equally that those relationships between our agencies and government need to be

worked on.

There has been a lot of pressure on us as the community services sector to better collaborate, be more efficient and so forth. I think people have risen to that. I also think that for many years we have developed practices where we have been incredibly efficient because we have been resource poor. Some push back—not push back, but I guess working with government to see how that looks when we include everyone in that pool would be really valuable.

THE CHAIR: You spoke early in the introduction about the balance between early intervention and prevention still not being right. Is there a need then for a dedicated early intervention and prevention strategy? Is it correct to say, “Here is a component of the funding; this is what we want the money dedicated to to take the pressure off the downstream effect”?

Ms Robertson: We have certainly in previous budget submissions called for a dedicated strategy. As we see it, that is needing to be a whole-of-government approach. I think we are seeing some good pieces of work where government agencies are working together. I think the strengthening families project is showing some good signs and has confidence from sections of the community that have a lot of mistrust of government services. They are willing to engage and to give it a go.

I think we have seen some good work done under the youth justice blueprint where government agencies have come together and worked well. Is every government agency invested in putting money into the one strategy? The strengthening families project has come out of that belief that there are people in our community who are struggling, who end up in all the different pockets of the service system; so it makes sense to leverage that together. It makes sense if you are supporting a woman who is escaping domestic violence with her kids that the housing response is a part of that but it has to match up with what is happening in terms of the educational support for the kids, family and so forth.

If we continue to do that stuff in a disjointed way, we miss those windows of opportunity. I think what happens is that eventually they will get access to all those things but there is kind of an order and a timeliness of things. We talk about the right services at the right time but I think we also have to talk about for the right length of time. If we miss one aspect of that need, it kind of undoes everything else.

MS FITZHARRIS: I go back to education. It is a really comprehensive submission but I suspect the response might be on a lot of things that a lot of this is going on. Collaboration, like you recognise and you know firsthand, is a lot of hard work and time consuming. It is not front line. It is not out there working with young people or with clients for all community sector organisations. Is there anything specific or in general terms? I guess most particularly in the education area what specific thing could you share with us that is like a concrete sort of program that is currently not being done that you know will get results or you know is getting results in other jurisdictions?

Ms Robertson: It is hard to pick one specific thing. I will go back to our conversations we have been having with young people about a range of things.

Interestingly, they raise education in schools consistently. We know that almost all young people will have contact with the school system at some point in time whereas we hope they do not have contact with other statutory services and so forth. Young people consistently talk to us about wanting to know about stuff earlier. In our recent report where we had conversations with young people about mental health, we asked them the question, “What age should people be talking to you?” They said, “Look, there is no set age. Talk to us about this right from the get-go.” It should be in an age appropriate way, of course, but it should not be hidden, I suppose.

I think what happens with schools is that teachers get overwhelmed. They have got a whole lot of pressure. Every second day someone says to me, “We should be getting teachers to teach this stuff.” So I think that is overwhelming. I feel that the “school as community” notion has been around for a long time but we have not got that right. So the opportunities for young people to go to a trusted place, have it be safe and be about them and then learn about a whole range of things, is the mix we probably have not got right.

I also think that support for families and engaging families are key. There are demographics within the community that do not join P&C councils. As a result, they do not get to influence the culture in the school. That structure is not particularly friendly. There was something that one of the workers from Gugan said to me a couple of months ago. We were talking about literacy. They said to me that behind every child who is struggling with literacy you will probably find a parent struggling with literacy. So why are we missing that opportunity to actually support an entire family to experience change together so that they get to be a part of each other’s solution as well?

MS FITZHARRIS: When you refer to young people and finding a place that is safe, are you talking about a particular demographic? Are you generally talking about kids from families that might be under pressure? Or are you talking about all children? Are you finding that all kids want to find that regardless of what job their parents have or—

Ms Robertson: Yes, I think all kids need to feel safe in order to learn. But I do think that there are some inherent things like racism in our community. Consistently, young people from diverse cultural backgrounds talk to us about racism in schools being their number one problem. They feel like they are constantly asked to be the bigger person and not react, but there is not a push back to people who are making comments or making the environment uncomfortable for them.

Those are very big picture systemic things. But if we listen to young people, they speak to those things that are issues in our community. They want to change them. I want to tell the story of the 10 year old who spoke at “just sayin”. Her mother had grown up in out-of-home care. When she found that out, she wanted to talk to her peers and her community about the experience of children and young people in out-of-home care. She has this idea to do an event around schools. I just think it is fantastic that young people want to make change in their own community. But what I see happening is that we are going to make it so bureaucratic for her as a 10 year old that I am not sure we will get her there.

So what are we doing to actually grow communities' capacity to look after each other? Young people want to be able to help their friends. They want their families to be able to help them. Until we actually give that permission and support those communities, I do not think we will see the significant changes we need.

Ms Cuzzillo: You have asked about practical examples. One of the things that came out of our mental health research with young people was that a lot of them drew the comparison to the way that children and young people are taught about physical health. From a very young age we are taught to eat healthy and get fit. That happens for all young people no matter what age they are. But we are not talking about mental health in the same positive way. We are talking about illnesses and we might be talking about the kind of negative aspects of mental health issues that we have in our community. We are not talking about what young people can be doing in their lives day to day to make sure that they do not experience those issues and that they learn how to support their peers. It is not happening, especially at that younger age. This is what they identified. That is something that we thought was a really great comparison, and practical.

MS LAWDER: I would like to talk a lot more about homelessness, as you can probably imagine, but in the interests of time I will go to something that might be a little shorter. A few years ago, with a bit of fanfare, there was the ACT social compact. I will quickly read from it:

The *Social Compact* clearly promotes the critical relationship between ACT Government and the community sector. It articulates respect for the diverse roles we all play, our ability to come together constructively and work in the interests of the ACT Community, and the importance of transparent relationships between government and community organisations. The Youth Coalition recognises the importance of this document in assisting organisations to work collaboratively at all levels.

Emma Robertson, Director, Youth Coalition of the ACT.

In light of your comments about the community sector reform program, is there still such a thing as a social compact?

Ms Robertson: It is funny, just before we came in, I said, "I should have brought a copy of the social compact," because I do like to bring it and remind people physically that it is there. I think the answer is yes. Our experience is that some sections of government do that stuff really well and others do not at particular points in time. I think that government workers are under constraints and pressures as well and that perhaps sometimes we are not privy to what those are. So we do not necessarily understand what is happening.

I think a really big area that government needs to look at is how we do community engagement and consultation. It is something that we have talked about a lot. We have got a community engagement manual that gives us guidelines, and consistently we come up against opportunities where those things are not followed. Again the pressures that are on the people doing that work within government are unrealistic.

Is that about some kind of broader systems planning? I do not know. But I do know

that I do not think we are engaging the community in the way in which we would like to. We constantly talk to young people and the sector as well about things like time to talk. I can say Youth Coalition staff are very engaged with the timetotalk website. I am not confident that other people in communities see that they get to have a say like that. And so I think, yes, we miss out on those sorts of opportunities to involve people. It is like Bec is talking about. People actually do want to be able to make decisions and choices and be part of solutions in their own lives.

I think we are doing a lot of spinning, a lot of feedback. A lot of processes happen at the very end of the calendar year for us. We get hammered around consultation stuff, and it means that the quality of what we are finding out is not robust, and people become quite cynical.

MS LAWDER: With the 0.34 per cent levy, have you benefited from some of the training modules, for example, that have been produced with that levy?

Ms Robertson: We, as the Youth Coalition personally, have received one of the packages to do some work with Deloitte Access Economics, and that was a process where we did not initially get offered that. It was one of those things where someone else dropped out. We are very appreciative of that. I guess that the thinking from the sector—and we had quite a robust peaks meeting the day after the budget came out—is that we actually need to be in there directing that funding as well. I think some people have benefited; some people have not.

Is it enough and sustainable, a lasting investment? We are probably not there yet, but I can say that the sector and particularly the peaks as a group are keen to make sure that we do utilise that to the best benefit. That might well be around looking at how we as an industry, I suppose, or a sector, who I understand are the third biggest employer after the two tiers of government that we have in the ACT, are heading in the future and how we will contribute and interact together.

DR BOURKE: Just going back to your submission, which highlights how capital infrastructure spending can be really prioritised for creating jobs, would you like to expand on that for us, please, particularly in relation to jobs for youth?

Ms Robertson: Yes. Again we were looking at the reality that we do not have a huge amount of cash in the ACT to just throw at new things. Our belief is that government as an investor makes a significant contribution to money that is available in the territory in terms of things like infrastructure projects. They are a way bigger spend than some of the services we have just been talking about. In an environment where we can see that things like jobs are going to make a difference in people's lives in terms of breaking cycles of poverty, that can be used to leverage impact, I suppose.

We talked about two things in the submission. One was that in an infrastructure project there might be some priority tied to employment for people who are experiencing things that would normally exclude them from the workforce. I think there are programs happening in other jurisdictions. I have looked a little into what is happening in Victoria, where they use the term “social procurement”. That describes a whole range of things, one of which is that they have targets in procurement. People have to articulate how they will ensure 10 per cent of the employment is in

apprenticeships that are completed, for example.

My understanding from a brief conversation I had with someone at the budget lock-in is that there are some things we are doing in the ACT around procurement that look at social impact and invite people to offer what else they bring to the project. I guess our call would be to make it quite specific and targeted.

The other thing that we put in there is about looking at young people exiting out of home care and, particularly for those with a long experience of out of home care, what role the territory, as the parent, might play in that transition to employment. I guess our thinking on that is that, for most people with families who are well supported, your parents' network is how you get your first job. For those young people who have been disconnected from family and community and we have replaced that, are we doing that follow-on and support? Again we know really well the trajectories for young people who have had significant out-of-home care experience, but I think we need to do better.

THE CHAIR: Unfortunately we are running out of time. I am going to have to draw it to a close there. Thank you for your attendance today. I do not believe you have taken anything on notice. Members, if you have questions that upon contemplation arise from today, I am sure the Youth Coalition would be happy to answer those if we were to forward them. A transcript will be provided. If you could review it and suggest any corrections or alterations, again we would be interested in your views. With that, we thank you for your attendance today.

Ms Robertson: Thank you to all the members of the committee.

DOUGLAS, MS LOUISE, President, RSPCA ACT

VEN DANGE, MS TAMMY, Chief Executive Officer, RSPCA ACT

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon, and welcome to the Select Committee on Estimates 2015-2016. We would like to thank, on behalf of the committee, the RSPCA for their submission and for attending this afternoon.

Be aware that the proceedings are being recorded and will be transcribed by Hansard, as well as being broadcast and webstreamed even as we speak. You have the privilege statement in front of you. Could you please confirm for the committee that you have read the statement and understand the protections and obligations of privilege?

Ms Ven Dange: Yes, we have, thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that. Would you like to make an opening statement before we move to questions?

Ms Ven Dange: Yes. Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today. We recognise that this is a privilege and we appreciate that.

On 16 July 2014 RSPCA ACT inspectors seized 125 animals from a single family home in Kaleen. The conditions in that house were so bad that one animal died upon arrival, 26 fowl had to be euthanised immediately due to medical reasons, and one guinea pig died later that week. This was just one of the many cases we saw this year. In fact, as of Wednesday, our inspectors have brought in 799 live animals. I cannot tell you the number of dead ones that arrived. That is compared to 34 last year. So it is a significant change from the previous year. Many of these animals have been successfully rehomed, but seven dogs are still waiting for court dates before we know their fate. There are two in particular that have been here for at least 270 days so far.

Incoming animals have increased in other areas as well. In fact RSPCA ACT has already broken this year the record we set just last year for the highest number of kitten adoptions in one year—862 kittens.

Why has there been such a huge increase in incoming animals in one year? Some would say that we are doing a better job, but I do fear it is also representative of an awful trend in our community that will likely only get worse and perhaps more violent without intervention.

RSPCA ACT is part of a federation. While we share a common mission for the prevention of cruelty to animals, we are actually financially independent from any other RSPCA in the country. All of our funding is generated here and it is kept within the boundaries of the ACT, with very few exceptions.

We will be celebrating our 60th birthday this year. Each year we care for about 7,000 animals. We are the only permanent place where someone can surrender a stray animal other than a dog. Domestic animal services is the other one that will accept dogs. We have the only vet clinic that provides ongoing treatment for wildlife. We employ the only full-time animal welfare inspectors in the ACT. We are also the only known public vet clinic that offers payment plans to people receiving financial

assistance from Centrelink.

For the 2015-16 ACT government budget, we asked for additional funding—not as a charitable handout but as proper compensation for some of the outsourced work that we do on your behalf, just as other councils do in other communities. We are very thankful that that request has been approved. It translates to about 17 per cent of our total budget next year, which is about a two per cent increase from the previous year. The rest of our funding is directly generated from the community.

What you may not realise is that RSPCA ACT has lost money by providing certain services that are actually outside our core expected work, where our primary focus is on the prevention of and intervention in cruelty to animals. Services such as intake care and return of stray animals equate to about half the animals we see every year—almost 3,000. These are traditionally animal control and enforcement activities that are usually delivered by councils. While they may be outsourced, there are few outsource providers that would be expected to lose money in the delivery of these services.

This has in effect meant that RSPCA has actually been subsidising the ACT government all these years. After incurring budget deficits for eight out of the last 10 years, RSPCA can no longer afford to do this, particularly on services that we do on behalf of government. Therefore had we not received that additional funding we would have had to drop services. These are services that the Canberra community has grown accustomed to us providing but which are really the responsibility of the government. Without obvious alternative service providers, particularly for stray animals, we were really worried about what was going to happen.

If this current trend for unwanted, abandoned, abused and neglected animals continues to rise, the cost of providing these services for everyone will rise. But we can change this awful trend, just as many places have done, even in communities in the United States. However, no single organisation—not the RSPCA, not the ACT government or any other individual rescue group—can do this alone. It will require a collaborative effort, not only for funds for the daily care of these animals in need but to invest some serious resources in preventive measures.

Some of these resources are not necessarily monetary, such as the establishment of working groups to tackle cross-agency issues that involve animals. Significant changes to the Animal Welfare Act and the Domestic Animals Act are needed to make it easier for teams to do their jobs. I refer also to the implementation of education and desexing programs, especially in high risk areas.

To reverse the trend we must reach out to the source of the problem and make it stop. And the problem is not animals; the problem has always been people. Animals do what animals instinctively do. Too many times, though, they suffer because of what people do to them.

RSPCA ACT has actually budgeted for us to do some of this work next year, but we know it will take several years before this preventive investment starts to show any progress. So please understand that until that happens, or until the ACT government is willing to help us with some preventive investments, we will have to continue to ask

for money each year, at least in the medium term, to take care of the most basic needs of these animals in our community. Because what would Canberra be like without the RSPCA ACT?

THE CHAIR: Dr Bourke, you might like to ask the first question.

DR BOURKE: Thank you for coming in to talk to us. You have talked in your submission as well as in your speech about developing a collaborative approach to reduce costs. You also talk a little in there about redirecting services to other entities. Which other entities would you specifically be referring to there? Are you talking about the TAMS domestic animal services or other NGOs?

Ms Ven Dange: A couple of things have already happened. We have already been able to remove stray livestock from our portfolio. For the longest time we have had goats, sheep, pigs and whatever coming into the shelter, which are very costly to take care of, and we do not really have the appropriate facilities for them. So that has been moved recently to the rangers. That is a good example of being able to move on some of those services. ACT Wildlife has also taken on a good portion of the day-to-day caring of wildlife, and that has been fantastic. For anything that requires more than three days of care, unless it is going to a breeding program, we will provide the ongoing vet treatment for it, but we have been able to move the caring costs to ACT Wildlife, which has been fantastic.

Those are examples of other organisations that have been able to take on some of those responsibilities. In particular, the stray animal side is generally a council responsibility. With respect to the dogs and cats that we see every year, it is almost 3,000 animals. That is about half of what we have coming into our shelter, and it is an extremely resource-intensive role. We do not mind providing those services if we are fairly compensated for them. The challenge has been that we have been losing money on these services over the years and we are at a financial breaking point as a result.

It is not to say that we would not provide the services moving forward; it is to say that in the absence of additional funding we cannot. So we have had to focus back more on our mission statement.

Ms Douglas: ACT Wildlife is an example of a rescue group whom we have worked very closely with. There are a number of others that we are developing relationships with. In some cases that has enabled us to shift some of the work in their direction. We have very good relationships with rescue groups, but the overall message is that there are not a lot of other options in the ACT for an organisation with the kind of expertise and facilities that we have, to take on the services that we currently provide. That is a really interesting question for everybody to confront, the government included. If we are not to provide those services on whatever basis that might occur, it is a very interesting question in terms of who would provide those services into the future.

DR BOURKE: Apart from those existing services, you mentioned a need to move upstream to a more preventive approach. Who do you think will be providing that? Is it something you would see as your work or that of other entities?

Ms Ven Dange: We believe it is a collaborative job; we can only do so much by ourselves. As a good example of what we budgeted for this year, we are planning to offer 250 free cat desexings this year in our budget. That is something we have already budgeted for. We have five full-time vets on board and about eight nurses, so we will suspend our other activities for the month of September to allow us to do that. It will be for extremely targeted neighbourhoods identified by our inspectors, mental health, ACT housing, or based on trends where we see large numbers of kittens coming into our facilities.

We have applied for a grant as well from an independent source to try and subsidise ACT public vet clinics to help us with this. They will not do it for free but we are hoping we have enough from a grant so that we can subsidise them and then they will help us, so that we can double that number. It is an example of the community getting engaged.

There are also all sorts of needs around educational programs. We were looking at something the other day about the ridiculous number of cases going through court right now. We have already prosecuted eight this year and we have 22 other ones going through court and a lot more cases being put together as we speak. We can see that the majority of neglect cases actually involve women, and the majority of the cruelty cases actually involve men. There are sources in certain neighbourhoods where they are generally coming from, and we need to do something around that, especially the neglect cases. It is a lot easier to deal with neglect than it is with abuse, from an education point of view. So we need to start doing some preventive things in that space, to try and help these numbers.

When we look at the legislation, that is definitely a collaborative effort between us and government. There are two significant areas of the Animal Welfare Act and the Domestic Animals Act which I think would make these numbers go down fast. One is the way that we handle animals as evidence. Right now, until a court case has been decided, we have to hold onto that animal until their fate is decided. However, in other jurisdictions, such as Colorado and California, they are able to go through a civil case that allows some sort of reasonable doubt, and to go through a process and say, "We think that this makes sense." As a result, while the animal is being held in care of someone else, all that you are going to have to pay is a daily boarding cost. That will go into a bond and if at any point you quit paying for that the ownership would be transferred to the organisation like the RSPCA.

That would prevent us having to hold animals for over a year for a court matter to be decided. Just the other day we spent \$30,000 on three animals and at the very last minute the owners pleaded guilty. So there is no incentive for them to not give up the ownership of the animal earlier, and as a result we are all incurring this cost.

The second bit of legislation that would be very useful would help us limit the number of animals that people can have in a single family home. We have had four cases this year where we have brought in over 90 animals from a single home. We do not act until there is a welfare issue. So if we go into a particular home and there are 90 animals, there are no welfare issues and it is not a dog or a cat, we cannot do anything about it. But when they get that 91st animal and suddenly they are not feeding them, they are defecating on top of each other, the cages are not appropriate and they are

starting to cannibalise each other because of lack of food and water, that is when we have to get involved and we already have a mess. There is no preventive way in the legislation for us to do anything about it. There are a large number of other ideas around legislation. That has to be done collaboratively with government, obviously.

THE CHAIR: Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: I want to ask something maybe slightly off topic. With cases like the recent television program expose about the greyhound racing industry, do they cause spikes in activity for the RSPCA? With people calling, is it volunteers or paid staff who deal with those calls?

Ms Ven Dange: Thank you for asking; that is obviously very topical for us right now. It does increase the amount of work in calls that we get, not always resulting in leads that we can use. It is the same thing in the newspaper. Whenever we have a cruelty case in the newspaper, somebody will say, “Oh, my neighbour has that problem”—like hoarding. That is a good example. When we had a hoarding case of 200 and something animals in a house, that was a true hoarding case. Right after that, we started getting all these calls, with people telling us, “Oh, my neighbour’s house is like that”—or family support services, ACT housing or somebody. So it is increasing those numbers for sure.

As far as who is actually doing the work, it is all paid staff. We have 57 people on our books. Seventy-five per cent of our budget is payroll cost. Last year we cut out a whole layer of management and really focused on the front line. I have people that are interns reporting to me directly because I have no-one in between. It is just a matter of trying to get the work done with the amount of animals. This is something that has to be done with people. You cannot automate these systems; it is a very intensive labour job. It is the same thing with our inspectors; those are all paid employees.

MS LAWDER: I and, I am sure, my colleagues have had our fair share of emails of that type. When you get those calls about the neighbour, there is that follow-up process, so there is a spike of work. But then there is a spike of follow-up work as well—is that right?

Ms Ven Dange: That is right. We do have a backlog right now. It is really hard in this community.

MS LAWDER: Do you go for corroboration of the reports or can you act on one report? How do you assess them?

Ms Ven Dange: Every call will be treated differently depending on the severity. Because we cannot get to everything the minute they call, we have to put them in a priority list. We do get to everything eventually, but it does not mean we will get it done right away if it is not a priority call.

There are some cases that take 12 to 15 visits within a week because we are working with AFP and this person has been known to be dangerous—there is an animal somewhere in this house or somewhere nearby; maybe the police have spotted it; maybe ACT housing have spotted it; maybe we are doing something with the police

and it will take up the entire day of all the inspectors to deal with it. There are days where we will have 90 animals coming in the door. It will take not just the inspectors but our entire vet staff. It will take about every animal care assistant we can afford—and even my EA, volunteer coordinator and someone taking photos for evidence. So it pretty much takes up the entire organisation.

Once they are in our facility, we have another challenge: how do we keep these animals healthy, fed, clean and things like that when we have just doubled the number of animals in our shelter at once? That requires an influx of casual staff. We have had to hire one person just recently to look after the inspector dogs and make sure they are getting all the attention they need so that they do not go mentally insane while they are in our facility for a year. These costs go up and down like a yoyo. Like I said, legislation that would, except in the hoarding cases, allow us to do something before it gets out of control—even things like working with ACT housing and their tribunal about limiting the number of animals in public housing in particular—would certainly reduce all of our costs. It is a huge challenge for us resource-wise when we have these influxes of activity for better or worse.

MS FITZHARRIS: I want to ask about the preventative measures that you mentioned. Are you able to give us a couple of examples of those? You also mentioned being able to work in high risk areas or with high risk groups of people. Can you also explain where some of those might be?

Ms Ven Dange: The first question was about other legislation. I have already mentioned two. Other things that would make our lives a lot easier include being able to get reimbursement for costs from those who have been accused or have been proven to be guilty.

MS FITZHARRIS: I suppose it costs a lot to take a case to court. You bear all the costs for that, is that right?

Ms Ven Dange: We are sharing that cost. The DPP is acting on our behalf, which helps tremendously. We bring the brief and the evidence together, we record the interviews and we gather everything together and present it to the DPP. They tell us whether or not we have a case worthy of taking to court. So we do not do that completely.

But we bear all the medical costs, so just about every cruelty case that we have. There were 799 live animals this year; I cannot even imagine all the dead ones that have come in through the inspectors. Those animals all required additional medical treatment. In the case of those three animals that we held for nine months before the lady pleaded guilty, that was \$30,000 on boarding and medical costs. We had a case you might have read about in the newspaper about a puppy that was so hungry he ate a bunch of fishing hooks and ball bearings. We did two surgeries on that dog. Even though we were able to re-home him as soon as he was feeling better, I think we spent \$6,000 on that one dog.

We are incurring all these medical costs, which is why we have probably one of the largest vet clinics in town. On top of that, we are providing public vet services, especially for those that no-one else will take, to try to prevent more neglect cases

down the road. That is an example of legislation that would help us.

THE CHAIR: Could you take on notice to provide the committee with a list of legislative suggestions that you have in mind?

Ms Ven Dange: Yes.

MS FITZHARRIS: And have you raised them previously with directorates?

Ms Ven Dange: We have. We are also working with a pro bono law firm, King & Wood Mallesons, to help us put together an entire proposal for you. There are little things in there, and I have used the example before, like cockfighting spurs and the way it is actually written in the legislation. We have come across cockfighting spurs, but because of what the legislation defines it as we cannot actually do anything with that information because it is not perfectly written in the right way. There are little things like that which would be a quick fix. Then there are the other ones I have talked about like using civil law to help us reduce these costs by making owners take cost measures immediately rather than waiting until down the road when they say, “Okay; I’ll plead guilty now” when we have already incurred \$10,000 in boarding costs.

Ms Douglas: It is probably worth saying that we are having very constructive discussions with the legal policy people within TAMS.

Ms Ven Dange: I think it is a matter of bandwidth at the moment for them, so that is the challenge they have at the moment. Sorry; now I forget the second question.

MS FITZHARRIS: The high risk.

Ms Ven Dange: I would hate to completely throw them into a bucket and say that it is largely ACT housing, because it is not, but there are certainly a large number of individuals that we deal with that ACT housing will be dealing with too—and sometimes that mental health will be dealing with and that AFP will be dealing with. So there is a lot of cross-agency type communication that occurs. We have recently signed an MOU with the AFP, which is helping us quite a bit. We are trying to get that in place with ACT housing and mental health as well. It allows us to more easily access the space, which we cannot do right now without getting locksmiths involved, even after we have a search warrant. So the high risk areas, honestly, a lot of it has to do with ACT housing and lower income communities, but not always. Certainly the possum beater that got away with not even a conviction notice was in a normal house. The hoarding case in Kaleen was in a normal house. These are people in our community, and we just have not been talking about them up to this point. Now we are actually showing the world what is really going on. It does exist in our community.

THE CHAIR: The survey you have given to the committee talks a lot about expenses and costs. How much will you receive from the government in 2015-16, and what is the shortfall for the services you provide?

Ms Ven Dange: Last year we received about \$600,000. In the documentation we originally submitted to the minister’s office, we thought we were short about

\$250,000. That was before all these inspector cases came through. We have made some changes already to some things that we did. We thought the shortfall was about \$150,000, but that is based on a guesstimate of animals, given that things have changed so much for us in one year. We think that we have at least 700. It is hard to tell. We have not actually had that formal meeting with TAMS yet to know for sure, but we think we have 700, and there is possibly another \$50,000 bucket allocated for some of our inspector work. I will not know till probably next week if that is the case, but that would cover that shortfall. The question is: is that a one-off or is that something that the government is going to consider continuing to do? If it is just a one-off, that is going to be a bit of a challenge.

THE CHAIR: And the issue of the new premises and potentially moving—where is that at?

Ms Ven Dange: We have asked the government to put everything on hold for us right now. Our reserves have been depleted so heavily in the last few years that we are at serious financial risk of not even being here next year if we go in the wrong direction just a little bit. We have asked the government to put our negotiations for future facilities on hold at the moment. We are not in a position to put any effort into that right now—to review what has already been talked about but not signed, anyways, and to consider even the operational and financial implications of a move. There is no doubt we will still have to raise money for whatever facility it is. Despite the amount of money the government might give us, it is not going to be enough. Right now, we are just trying to cover our basic costs; we cannot move any further.

THE CHAIR: We might leave it there unless someone has a further question. Thank you very much for your attendance this afternoon.

Ms Ven Dange: You can have the notes.

THE CHAIR: You have some notes? Fantastic. If you could give those to the secretariat, that would be kind. The questions or the requests for information that you have taken on notice—could you provide those within five working days if that is acceptable.

Ms Ven Dange: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Members, if you have further questions once we have received the transcript, if you forward them we will forward them on. Again, if we could have answers within about five days, that would facilitate the work of the committee. A transcript will be provided when it is ready. Could you read it and if there are corrections or additions you would like to make, the committee would be happy to receive and consider those. Thank you for all your good works and your attendance here today.

We will now suspend till 2 pm, when we have the Speaker, followed by the Electoral Commissioner, followed by YWCA Canberra, followed by the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body.

The committee suspended from 12.44 until 2 pm.

Appearances:

Dunne, Mrs Vicki, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Office of the Legislative Assembly

Duncan, Mr Tom, Clerk, Clerk's Office

Skinner, Mr David, Director, Governance and Communications Office

Duckworth, Mr Ian, Director, Business Support Office

Szychowska, Ms Valeria, A/g Director, Hansard, Technology and Library Office

Carr, Ms Melody, Chief Finance Officer, Governance and Communications Office

THE CHAIR: Welcome, and good afternoon to all for this afternoon session of the first day of the public hearings of the Select Committee on Estimates 2015-2016. Speaker, thank you for attending with all your staff. Proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. They are also being broadcast and webstreamed.

Please confirm you have read the privilege statement and understand its implications.

Mrs Dunne: I think I have it read once or twice, yes.

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

Mrs Dunne: Thank you, chair, for the opportunity to speak. I note you are sounding rather chipper but your voice is croaky already. I hate to think what it is going to be like in a fortnight's time.

Thank you for the opportunity, and I will make an opening statement that traverses quite a few issues. A lot has happened since I appeared before last year's estimates committee. In some areas we all, including government and administration, are learning new ways of doing things.

One of these ways relates to an important statutory requirement that applies to the appropriation of the Legislative Assembly. I think this is the third or fourth year where there has been a separate appropriation bill, but this is the first year where I have made a request for appropriation that has not been agreed to by the executive. Unfortunately we stumbled at the first hurdle, with the result that the statutory requirement was not complied with, certainly not in the spirit of the legislation. Under section 20AA of the Financial Management Act there is a requirement that, where an appropriation bill is presented to the Assembly which does not contain the recommended appropriation that has been transmitted by the Speaker, the Treasurer must immediately present to the Legislative Assembly a statement of reasons for departing from the recommended appropriation.

Two funding proposals which formed part of the appropriation I recommended for the Assembly and which were endorsed by the Standing Committee on Public Accounts were not included in the appropriation you have before you today. These relate to the

creation of a senior security manager position and enhanced library services, which was the subject of a recommendation from last year's estimates committee. Despite these two proposals being excluded from the office's appropriation bill, the Treasurer did not immediately present the required statement of reasons in respect of these two excluded proposals, and this was a breach of the relevant provision. I note that two days later the Treasurer tabled a statement in an attempt to meet the spirit of section 20AA; however, that statement did not, in my view, adequately address the basis of the decision not to fund the proposals I had advanced on behalf of the Assembly.

I am particularly concerned that funding was not made available to provide additional staffing capacity in relation to physical security requirements at the Assembly. This proposal was predicated on the findings of a detailed assessment undertaken by a specialist security firm, and it is not the first time this recommendation has been made. I make the simple observation that the Office of the Legislative Assembly's capacity to effectively manage the risks encountered in the physical security arena is limited by the failure to obtain funding for this proposal.

The reason I raise these process issues in relation to the appropriation of the office is that, as Speaker, I am committed to advancing the separation of powers doctrine so far as the interaction between the executive and the legislature is concerned. We have made significant steps in this direction over the years, especially with the passing of the current OLA legislation and the setting up of the separate appropriation.

The intention of sections 20 and 20AA of the Financial Management Act is to establish separate and distinct decision-making and accountability processes for the funding required to support the operations of the legislature, and this is consistent with Latimer House principles, which have been supported by a resolution of this Assembly. To maintain the legitimacy of the separation of powers and to underscore that the government is accountable to the Assembly in these matters, the government of the day must comply with the relevant statutory arrangements.

Further, the spirit of the statute, in my view, requires this compliance to be done in a way that provides sufficient detail for members of the Assembly to evaluate the funding processes and the basis for any decision to deny a funding request. I will be interested in the views of this committee in due course.

I also take the opportunity in this hearing to flag an issue I otherwise may not get an opportunity to address. As Speaker, not only do I have statutory responsibilities in relation to the office of the Legislative Assembly but I also have particular functions in relation to the Auditor-General and the Electoral Commissioner in their roles as officers of the Legislative Assembly. I wish to raise a number of concerns with this committee about the operation of section 25(2) of the Auditor-General's Act 1996, which sets out a requirement that the Speaker must, if requested by the public accounts committee—and I have been—engage under contract an appropriately qualified person to conduct a strategic review of the Auditor-General.

One of the concerns I have with this provision is that it appears to require the Speaker to act as an agent of the territory in direct procurement of a service and to enter into a contract on behalf of the territory. This is a most unusual circumstance and I have not

observed a similar set-up in any part of the ACT public sector.

I am the first Speaker to operate under these provisions, since they only came into effect a year ago, and I am concerned that because there is no official administrative support infrastructure there is a risk that these requirements may not be obvious to future Speakers. It is my view that the processes embodied in section 25(2), which occurs outside the normal administrative remit of any public sector agency including the office of the Legislative Assembly, are not especially transparent and there is a risk of noncompliance with government procurement and government agreement-making requirements.

I am also concerned that this provision grants the Speaker a power to commit expenditure of funds on behalf of the territory while the umbrella framework, the Financial Management Act, vests no such power in me. There is also a question about from where funding for this strategic function might be appropriated. The funds cannot be appropriated directly to the office of Speaker, which is not an appropriation unit, nor should they be appropriated to the Office of the Legislative Assembly, which is not charged with administration of this particular function.

Mr Chair, the principle I am talking about also applies to other functions, such as the appointment of the Auditor-General, the appointment of members of the Electoral Commission, including the commissioner himself, and the appointment of an independent auditor to undertake the financial audit of the audit office. With the exception of the appointment of the Auditor-General, which does not occur until the next Assembly, I will either have undertaken or be in the process of undertaking all of these functions.

I am working through these issues with the statutory office holders and with officers of the Legislative Assembly who are the staff of the Office of the Legislative Assembly who are here. I want to record my observations with this committee in the context of the upcoming appropriation. I hope I will be able to say something more about these issues during annual reports hearings later in the year and give the Assembly an update on some issues that have concerned me.

I turn to the main appropriation, and I suppose the issue which is of most interest to most members is that which relates to accommodation. As members will be aware, we are going to move in October 2016 from 17 to 25 members, a 47 per cent increase. Since that legislation has passed, the Chief Minister and I have considered a number of different accommodation options. After reviewing all the options and the costs, the Chief Minister and I agreed that the least costly option would be pursued. This option involves relocating parts of the Office of the Legislative Assembly to premises across Civic Square in order to make additional space available in the Legislative Assembly for new members and their staff.

Funding for this proposal was included in the appropriation bill and the total cost over the two-year life of the project is \$6.7 million and consists of two distinct components. The first is the relocation of several areas of OLA into the north building at \$1.497 million. The second component is more extensive and involves the remodelling and refurbishing work at the Legislative Assembly to accommodate an additional eight MLAs and their staff and to modify the chamber. The budgeted cost

for this amounts to \$5.244 million over two years.

A project control group headed by the Clerk has been established to oversee the project, monitor the costs of the works and ensure they are completed on time so we can start in November 2016 with a fully functioning 25-member Assembly. I have been receiving and I will continue to receive regular updates from the Clerk as the work progresses. The Clerk has undertaken to keep members and Assembly staff informed throughout the project. I thank all the members and staff who have given time to the project consultants to date. I also thank the Chief Minister for the collaborative way in which this project has been undertaken.

I requested for the office and received appropriation funding in relation to an upgrade for the expansion of the audio system to the tune of \$312,000 for capital; the development of a procedural information production system with \$348,000 in capital funding and between \$12,000 and \$24,000 across the forward estimates in recurrent funding for the production of key Assembly documents; and on-costs for MLA staff. Members will recall that the last appropriation included an appropriation for extra staffing, but it did not cover expenses of the territorial entity in relation to the increase in staffing, like IT et cetera. Although we have on-cost cost cover here, it does not cover things like furniture.

I will also touch briefly on some recommendations from last year's estimates report. Last year the committee made a number of recommendations in relation to the Speaker or the office. The first was a recommendation about outreach, and I am happy to report that I have been able to implement a number of additional activities in this area. The office has also been involved in expanding some of its offerings, including production of video, which has been deployed on the Assembly website, and additional electronic resources on the Assembly website.

There was a second recommendation in relation to an open day, and the open day will happen in September this year. There will be a range of activities, including the great democratic sausage sizzle—legislators cooking sausages—so it will be a great day. There will be another of the events to mark the 800th anniversary of the Magna Carta—a debate with teams to be captained, I understand, by Mr Coe and Mr Rattenbury. I can hardly wait for that. A range of other activities are planned for that day.

Another recommendation from last year's report was in relation to research services along the lines provided by the commonwealth parliamentary library. As I mentioned earlier, I submitted a budget proposal to the government as a direct result of this recommendation, but it was not supported in the cabinet process. A recommendation was made in relation to the Assembly investigating whether it would be possible to purchase services from the commonwealth parliamentary library. In accordance with this recommendation I wrote to the presiding officers of the commonwealth parliament on this matter but have yet to receive any advice.

There were two recommendations in relation to staffing in the committee office. There has been no change in the thinking of the Clerk or me in relation to the staffing of the committee office at this stage. There will be a review of staffing in the light of the 47 per cent increase in members and there may be some changes. That is all I can

say on that. I am happy to take questions.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The shortfall in the senior security officer and the library funding—how much was that?

Mrs Dunne: David, can you answer that?

Mr Skinner: I will consult my papers, Mr Smyth.

Mrs Dunne: I cannot remember. It was a SOG C and on-costs, so about \$100,000 plus on-costs for the security.

Mr Skinner: In relation to the Assembly library services proposal, there was recurrent expenditure of \$364,000 in 2015-16, going up to \$536,000 in 2018-19, with a one-off component of \$38,000. As the Speaker has indicated, the security manager position was essentially a SOG C position, so it was in the order of \$120,000 plus the on-costs.

DR BOURKE: How much were the on-costs?

Mrs Dunne: There is a standard formula for on-costs.

Mr Skinner: There is a standard model, Dr Bourke. I will pull out that paperwork.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to take it on notice and provide a written reconciliation of those proposals?

Mr Skinner: I do not think we would have any objection to providing the proposals. We can provide those on notice.

THE CHAIR: Is that okay, Dr Bourke?

DR BOURKE: If you cannot find it now, yes.

Mr Skinner: I can give you the precise numbers, if that assists?

THE CHAIR: Okay.

Mr Skinner: It is initially \$130,000 in 2015-16, rising up to \$140,000 in 2018-19. That is the recurrent cost through the outyears.

DR BOURKE: And that is with the on-costs?

Mr Skinner: That is with the on-costs.

THE CHAIR: Notwithstanding the statement under section 20AA not appearing, could you elaborate on what the complexity of this is? We have only recently passed the Office of the Legislative Assembly legislation itself, so it is new ground for all of us.

Mrs Dunne: Yes, it is new ground, and that is the thing. In 2011, when we passed the OLA act, we put in the provisions for a separate appropriation, and the provisions so far have worked. A budget is formulated, I consult with the public accounts committee—sorry, it is not the public accounts committee. I knew that you were there. I forgot which hat you were wearing, Mr Smyth. I consult the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure about whether that is an appropriate budget, and then when we are all agreed I write to the executive and say, “This is the budget.”

In the last two budgets I have had an opportunity to present that at budget cabinet, and this year is the first time that the government has not agreed with the Speaker. When the government and the Speaker do not agree on these things, the government are required by the legislation to make a statement why they have not appropriated it. And the statement that eventually appeared was a little thin on detail.

THE CHAIR: That is something the committee may take up with the Chief Minister and Treasurer. But in the next section there is, for instance, the review of the Auditor-General’s Office and the notion of your procuring a service on behalf of the territory. In your opinion how should that work?

Mrs Dunne: I do not know the answer yet—and we are working through it—but what actually happens at the moment is that all of that work is done in my office by me, with the assistance of my senior adviser who, as you all know, is a very capable officer but he is not a public servant. So we are doing procurement for a public service entity but it is not being done by people who have essentially authorisation under the Financial Management Act. And it puts us in a very odd place.

We were actually having a discussion with Treasury in relation to the strategic review. If the Auditor-General received appropriation to cover the cost of the strategic review, where would the money rest? There was a view quite rightly that perhaps it should not rest with the Auditor-General because that would create a conflict of interest. At a stretch it is a conflict of interest. So they wanted to appropriate the money to the Office of the Legislative Assembly but the Office of the Legislative Assembly has no responsibility in this space. So it falls in a hole.

What I am proposing to do later in the year, after we have had a full cycle, is to sit down with the Clerk, my staff, the Auditor-General, the Electoral Commissioner and go through the process of what we have learned this year. And part of what I have to do is to come up with a series of procedures, because the next person who occupies my position is going to get blindsided. Suddenly there are things that they do not know that they had to do. I knew that I had to do them because I was there when the legislation was formulated but there are a few clunky bits in the legislation that might require some revision. I do not know what it is yet. All I know is that we have an uncomfortable arrangement.

THE CHAIR: Just for the record, how many officers of the Legislative Assembly are there?

Mrs Dunne: Three: the Auditor-General, the Electoral Commissioner and the Ombudsman. But the Ombudsman is a commonwealth officer on a contract and those problems do not arise for the Ombudsman.

THE CHAIR: Who negotiates that contract?

Mrs Dunne: That contract is ongoing and was negotiated with CMD some time ago. It is not a problem. There are provisions in the officers of the Legislative Assembly act which would be implemented if we had a standalone, independent, ACT-appointed ombudsman but at the moment they are not operative because we do not.

THE CHAIR: But is it appropriate that an officer of the Assembly arrives as the product of a contract let by the government? What input do you have into that?

Mrs Dunne: It is the review of the office, and it has to be done through the Government Procurement Act. I am not prepared to just go and make up my own rules for something as important as the strategic review of the Auditor-General. There are rules which are set down which I am happy to follow but it does create a few intricacies. I am in the process of drawing up a contract for someone to conduct a financial audit of the Auditor-General. I am an officer of the parliament but I do not actually have any powers. I do not have any powers to pay people money or anything like that. So it is a bit clunky, yes.

THE CHAIR: Interesting.

Mrs Dunne: Yes.

MS FITZHARRIS: It is fair to say, in relation that issue, it is an implementation issue of the legislation that you have identified now and that you are going through each thing for the first time?

Mrs Dunne: Yes, we are going through it for the first time and we are just finding some things that are clunky. I have actually asked the Clerk to speak with the Clerk of the Victorian Legislative Assembly, because their Speaker has a similar role, and find out how they manage it and the extent to which the roles are similar and whether we can learn anything from the Victorian experience as well. But they are just a few implementation issues and I just want to put them on the radar.

MS FITZHARRIS: What is the enhanced library services proposal? You mentioned that it was \$364,000 in the first year, going up to \$536,000. That is, what, an additional three going up to five?

Mrs Dunne: It was originally 1.7 FTE in this financial year and then the proposal was that when we went from 17 to 25 members there would be another research person. So it would be 2.7 by the end of the budget period.

MS FITZHARRIS: Could you just take me back a step in terms of the additional staff that the Legislative Assembly will need as a result of the expansion of the Assembly, where the additional staffing requirements for that entire—

Mrs Dunne: That is a work in progress at the moment. The Clerk might like to speak about that.

MS FITZHARRIS: So that will be in next year's budget? We anticipate having funding in there for that? That will be standard timing for that, will it?

Mr Duncan: I have engaged a consultant to give me some advice about the impact of an increase in the Assembly and what it might be. I see it as a two-stage process because there are some impacts we will probably be able to ascertain now but there will be some impacts that will not be discernible until we have the 25-member Assembly operating. We will get a sense then of what kind of committee structure we will have, we will get a sense then of what kind of sitting pattern and sitting hours we will have. It may well be that I will have to revisit the staffing complement. If we end up sitting longer hours, longer days, if the Assembly chooses to create eight standing committees—not that I would recommend that but it will just depend what—

MS FITZHARRIS: Are you going to recommend 12?

Mr Duncan: I am going to recommend the status quo, but it all depends on the makeup and we cannot predict what that is going to be. So I envisage a two-stage process. I will be probably arguing for some increase in some areas. Depending on what I receive in this report, I will be suggesting some increase but perhaps a second go once the configuration of the Ninth Assembly is determined.

Mrs Dunne: But just going back to this time last year, the estimates committee recommended that there should be increased research capacity in the library and there was general agreement that that would be the case. The administration and procedure committee agreed with that. We also agreed that it could not be a big step up but it should be a gradual step up. The step up was 1.7 now and another one after November 2016, and that was the gradual ramp-up. It is quite clear to us that we would need extra library staff if we have more members.

MS FITZHARRIS: I have a further question on the expansion of the Assembly. It relates to outreach. I guess I have been struck, as a new member, when people ask, "Where is your office?"—I am not going to ask about electorate offices. I am not going there.

Mrs Dunne: You can go there.

MS FITZHARRIS: People say, "We went to parliament. So where are you?" I am quite struck by how many people do not even know where the building is. The open day will help with that, I think, to some extent but what opportunities do you see to talk in a non-political way about the expansion of the Assembly and to use the refurbishment of the building as something that could increase people's awareness of the building and the work that everybody here does?

Mrs Dunne: I must say that I have not really thought about that particularly, but I am happy to take it on board as a challenge. You are right. Since I have been Speaker, we have had a lot of community groups through. We have purposely had community groups through. You ask the question, "How many of you knew where the building was before you came tonight?" And one or two people put up their hand. "How many of you have been here before?" And often no-one puts up their hand. We are not well known in the community. I see that as part of my remit, to let people know where we

are and what we do and why it is important. That is part of the outreach program.

MS FITZHARRIS: What are you getting, through the outreach program, about the expansion in particular?

Mrs Dunne: I have had one email about the expansion.

MS FITZHARRIS: Whether people have cottoned on to this?

Mrs Dunne: No. Actually, I do not think that they have. I think some people have cottoned on to—and this not me, the Speaker, speaking; this is my experience of talking to electors—the redistribution. I do not know that they have actually cottoned on to the fact that it means more members. But about the expansion of the Legislative Assembly, I have had had one email saying, “It’s too expensive.” I did write back and say, “It could have been five or six times more expensive than that.”

MS FITZHARRIS: I will leave that challenge with you.

THE CHAIR: A supplementary and a new question from Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: You spoke about people visiting the Assembly and whether they had been here before, but what kind of outreach programs and education programs have there been and how many and how would you gauge the success of those?

Mrs Dunne: I do not have the figures off the top of my head but that is usually reported in the annual report. But the outreach program consists of the education programs which are aimed at schools and community groups like the University of the Third Age. There are the public service seminars, there is the school debating, then there is the new citizens introductory nights and then there are a range of community groups that come in for a drink with the Speaker and members and a tour of the Assembly as well. We had 1,700 people overall through the building as discrete visitors last year, which is on par with what we have had over other years. They were down at one stage.

The other thing is the constitutional convention which is also aimed at schools. We have a number of official delegations, parliamentary groups who come through, who are visiting as well from various parliaments across the area and we have the public service seminars which have a number of people from the ACT public service who come in once every couple of months for a day and it is a four-day program.

MS LAWDER: I will move on to my substantive questions. I refer back to your opening statement. I think you said \$5.244 million over two years for the—

Mrs Dunne: That is for the work in this building.

MS LAWDER: So that is a capital—

Mrs Dunne: That is all capital, yes.

MS LAWDER: What was the recurrent amount for?

Mrs Dunne: The recurrent amount covers the rent which is, yes, \$304,000 rising to \$334,000 at the end of the outyears and that covers the rental on North Building for the people who are moving out of here to the North Building. I suppose there will also be, which is not directed in here, depreciation but that has not been quantified. We do not fund it. We do not fund depreciation.

MS LAWDER: And I think the Clerk mentioned the engagement of a consultant to go through some of the changes. What is the scope of work of that exactly?

Mr Duncan: This is for staff of the Office of the Legislative Assembly. I engaged a consultant to look at particularly where the pressure points might be for the staff and what extra services we might need. One obvious one is payroll. There are going to be eight new members and each member is going to employ X number of staff, three or four staff. That is an extra amount of pay to prepare and things like that. So I am anticipating that there might a recommendation that we will need to have an increase there. That consultant has met with all the staff groups of OLA, all the directors of OLA, and I am anticipating that that will form the basis for a budget submission later this year to go to Treasury and say, “We think this is where the impact will be.”

MS LAWDER: And is there another parliament that you are drawing examples from with the benchmarks?

Mr Duncan: They have certainly looked at the Queensland parliament and the Northern Territory parliament where they held discussions with both Clerks there and they looked at the structure of the Queensland and Northern Territory parliaments—Northern Territory because they have 25 members and they are unicameral; Queensland because they are unicameral. They are a lot larger than we are. They have got 89 members but they have got similar sorts of pressures that we have as well. Yes, they are certainly looking at other parliaments to see how to benchmark against those.

MS LAWDER: And during the refurbishment, from what you know so far, will any of the existing members have to relocate temporarily?

Mrs Dunne: I have discussed this with Mr Smyth. Mr Smyth will be the person who is most affected because his own private office will actually back onto a building site. It may be problematic for him. I know that Mr Smyth is reluctant to move but there are issues about access control and ensuring that you do not have leakage into the secure areas of the building from the building site and we may have to do some access control issues there. It may necessitate that Mr Smyth moves but I have not had that discussion. We have not got that far to have that discussion with Mr Smyth but I put him on notice now. Even though he may not want to move, it may be that he has to. But that is the only one.

DR BOURKE: Where in the Assembly would you move him to?

Mrs Dunne: There are a couple of empty offices. The education office is moving out and there is an office on the far side where most of the other opposition members are, and there is also the office vacated by Ms Berry.

DR BOURKE: Madam Speaker, there were some changes as a result of the remuneration tribunal decisions last year which have impacted upon the administration required by the office, in particular the new office support allowance, the communications allowance and the change regarding vehicles. Can you tell us whether there have been any teething troubles? Have any issues arisen from these changes or has everything been all hunky-dory and clear-cut?

Mrs Dunne: I think it is fair to say there were little happy dances all around the place. I think they were led by Mr Duckworth when he realised there would be a decreasing amount of dealing with car leases, for instance, and also the old discretionary office allowance, having that arbitrated by Assembly staff rather than members making their own decisions about what they do. Generally speaking, I think that has led to an outbreak of joy.

There were discussions before the beginning of this financial year we are currently in about the office services allocation—which is \$2,000 for non-executive members, except the Speaker and the Leader of the Opposition get a bit more—and how that should operate. The Remuneration Tribunal said in its determination that there should be an office services allocation which should cover the costs of running a politician's office—photocopying, computers, IT and that sort of thing. The Clerk, Mr Duckworth, my staff and I had lengthy discussions about the best way for that to operate.

The view taken was that that would not be policed and there would not be guidelines in the way there was for the previous office services allowance—that there are quite straightforward and simple guidelines. The other thing was that members would be warned if they exceeded their \$2,000, and they would be billed. So if you photocopy, use the printer or something like that and you spend more than the \$2,000 that is allocated then you would get a bill from the Assembly. If you went out and bought some software—for instance, I have got IT access through my Apple phone which costs me a couple of hundred bucks a year—added all those things up over the year and exceeded your \$2,000, you would be billed for it. That was the general view of how it would operate.

I have not spoken to many people who have come close to spending their office service allocation. I have not spoken to members of the government backbenches about how they think their office service allocation is going. At the end of this financial year we should perhaps be having a look at it to see whether or not it is pitched right.

DR BOURKE: The amount seems to have been set reasonably arbitrarily, given there was no benchmark previously.

Mrs Dunne: It was not set arbitrarily. I had a discussion with the Clerk about the sorts of things that might be included in it and the things that would be excluded. I suppose there have been a few teething problems along the way where people are used to DOA covering various things and they suddenly say, “That isn't covered so I will have to deal with it myself.” There have been those sorts of teething problems as well.

DR BOURKE: Have many members had concerns about that interaction, as you have just described, between the communications allowance and the office allowance?

Mrs Dunne: I do not know that they are concerns. It is a learning experience. People have discussed this with me and have asked, “Is this something that reasonably fits here or does it reasonably fit there?” I think those things have generally been worked out. I am comfortable with the decisions that were made at the beginning of the year that it is not the job of OLA staff to say what you can and cannot do. There are general rules and those rules are applied, but there is not second-guessing about what you can photocopy and things like that. It is such a small allowance that it is just not worth policing minutely.

DR BOURKE: You mentioned the reduced amount of administrative workload for some sections of OLA. How is that being translated into greater efficiency or additional tasks being undertaken?

Mrs Dunne: Mr Duckworth, for instance, was doing happy dances because he is not doing car leasing, but he is now responsible for project managing an expansion of the Legislative Assembly. There is always a job to be done. We are not in business-as-usual circumstances, so you cannot quite measure that, because one task went away and another one immediately appeared.

Mr Duckworth: Let me chime in. Certainly in our business unit we identified work that was able to be no longer performed in terms of some of the reporting on DOA study travel arrangements that were discontinued and the phasing out of vehicle leases. We certainly identified some work, as Madam Speaker just indicated. Corresponding with that, I see new responsibilities. We have done some work within OLA to tackle the administration of travel arrangements, for example, and they have had an impact on that position. We have also, with the advent of the additional staffing dollars that were available to members from January this year, seen a growth of about 12 or so staff on the payroll and that is having an impact. There have been some identified reductions in work at the administrative level and, as Madam Speaker indicated, they have been consumed by new work.

MS LAWDER: Following on from Dr Bourke’s question, you mentioned the office support allocation. It is my understanding that I am not overspending, but if members had been reaching their limit, the Clerk’s office or someone would have advised them earlier that that was approaching; is that correct?

Mrs Dunne: I understand that some members have reached it and that arrangements have been made to pay for extra printing.

MS LAWDER: But it should not come as a surprise that—

Mrs Dunne: No. We all get a report once a month to show how we are going.

MS LAWDER: So no-one is going to be surprised?

Mrs Dunne: No.

MS FITZHARRIS: A further supplementary: are the photocopying facilities in the building able to be used under the communications allowance and allocated to that

allowance?

Mrs Dunne: No. You take us back to where we were at the beginning of the year. We did actually canvass that; I canvassed that as an option. We talked about if people photocopied and exceeded their allowance perhaps they could be billed at a higher rate to cover the cost of the building and things like that. The Clerk rightly made the point—and I thought it was one that I had to agree with—that we were essentially undermining the printing businesses in town if we were printing hundreds of thousands of pieces of things on printers in here. At the moment we pay—what is it?—2c a page for a black and white copy. If you print something back to back, it is 4c. Even if you charged a premium for being billed and whatnot, that is still much cheaper than you could get it done through instant office printing. That undermines a Canberra businesses business model. So we agreed not to go down that path.

I think there is a fine line sometimes about what a member is communicating in terms of doing their business, communicating with their electorate about what they are currently doing and what is, essentially, correspondence with constituents. I will give a personal example of an issue coming up in a suburb, a major traffic study that affected two suburbs. I wrote to people in the affected area saying, “Are you aware of this major traffic study that affects this road and divides two suburbs down the middle?” I basically directed them towards the study. I was not necessarily asking them for their views on it or anything like that. That is constituency work, alerting your constituents to what is going on. It has nothing to do with what might be more political, where you might be asking people for their views on a particular subject or how they vote or something like that, which clearly falls within the remit of your electorate communication allowance which you receive tax-free in the first instance.

MS FITZHARRIS: That may be contrary to some verbal advice my office got, but I am writing separately to the Clerk about that. To the extent that you may receive a bill for overprinting, that bill cannot be paid by the communications allowance?

Mrs Dunne: It is paid out of your pocket. Quite frankly, it does not matter where it comes from—once your money appears in your bank account. Money is infinitely fungible. It does not matter where it comes from.

MS FITZHARRIS: I understand the point about the printers, but it might seem to the community that MLAs have printers in their offices and they have an allowance to print, but instead they are forced to leave the building in order to print material. Is there a system—

Mr Duncan: If I can add to what Madam Speaker said, in some ways, our hands were not tied, but the Remuneration Tribunal set up this system. They changed the discretionary office allocation and instead, after many years of lobbying by the Clerk, Speakers and members, gave members a communications allowance and they gave them \$15,000 a year. In giving the members that \$15,000 rise they recognised that there were some things that could not be given to members to pay for that were better suited in leaving with the Office of the Legislative Assembly to administer, and they were stationery, basic IT equipment, extra Citrix tokens—or, as Madam Speaker says, if you want to rent a laptop or a mobile phone and you want to get access to your emails and things like that—and basic copying.

The thinking behind it related to if you wanted to write an MPI letter or if a constituent wrote to you and said, “I want to do something,” and you wrote back to them. But if you were communicating with the electorate in large numbers, I think the intention of the Remuneration Tribunal was that that would be paid out of your communications allowance. The figure of \$2,000 was arrived at, basically, on what members were spending on stationery over the last three or four years, what members were spending on IT over the last three or four years and what members were spending on basic photocopying over the last two or three years. That is how we arrived at the figure. The rem trib says that is what you should get an allowance for and the rest should come out of the communications allowance. Everything that was in the DOA now will go into the communications allowance.

Mrs Dunne: My feeling is that most people are not particularly spending up to those limits. It seems to have been a fair guess. It was not a case of “suck it and see”. There was some analysis, and it seems to have got there.

THE CHAIR: Going back to the physical changes in the Assembly, how many staff will end up over in the north building?

Mr Duckworth: At the moment it is about 30 staff. There has been a decision taken to include some capacity in the new floor space for possible expansion. The Clerk referred earlier to the fact that we may not know until the Ninth Assembly what the growth might be. There are about 30 staff going at the moment. It will be basically the Hansard, Technology and Library group—I will come back to that in a minute—the Business Support, HR and payroll team, and the governance and finance group. The two staff in Hansard, Technology and Library at the moment who look after technical support and IT support on site will effectively have bases in two sites. They will still be predominantly here. There will be 150 to 160-odd people in this building that they will be providing their support to, but they will also be providing support across the road.

THE CHAIR: Two questions arise out of that—one which I guess shall not be spoken about and the other is how sustainable is that long term? Where do we get to a point where, to co-locate all members and staff in the long term, we move to a new building?

Mrs Dunne: I honestly do not believe that is a long-term sustainable issue. We looked at various options. We did not look at an option of a new building when we looked at options for 25 members, but we did look at options of moving the executive out or moving members out to electorate offices. We also looked at another option which was to put another floor on top of the chamber to make it more sustainable.

My starting point was that I actually thought moving the staff out was the least desirable option. It just became the least costly option. Part of the thing that drove up the cost is that this building does not comply with the Australian building standard. If we did a 49 per cent refurb, it becomes extraordinarily expensive. It goes from a \$10 million build to a \$40 million build because on the first and second floors you have to basically replace all the glass because it is three-millimetre glass and you cannot build buildings with three-millimetre glass anymore. That is just an example.

Mr Duckworth: Just to clarify for the record: Madam Speaker just mentioned, correctly, that we would have that big impost. We currently comply. It is just that we would not comply if we play with more than 50 per cent. So there was a trigger point that—

THE CHAIR: We currently comply with all the legislation because—

Mrs Dunne: Because we do not tinker too much.

THE CHAIR: This is the way it was when we were built.

Mr Duckworth: When we were built, yes.

THE CHAIR: But if we have a major build then there are some acts that we would not comply with which necessitate greater works.

Mrs Dunne: Yes.

THE CHAIR: What changes will there be to the practices of management of the OLA because of the 30 staff over the courtyard, and what considerations have been given to changes to parliamentary practice that might have to occur? Somebody asked me this morning whether we are considering electronic voting for members in the enlarged Assembly.

Mrs Dunne: I would suggest that would not happen. The Clerk and I at one stage ran a stopwatch essentially over divisions. From when you lock the door until the declaration of a vote it is on average one minute and 16 seconds. Okay, if you are going to add another eight people to that list, it might blow out to one minute 30 seconds for a division. I think you would have to have a lot of divisions before you could justify electronic voting.

Also, electronic voting is not something that goes with the Westminster system. The Code Napoleon countries tend to have electronic voting, and Westminster parliaments tend not to. I am not a big fan of electronic voting because then you get the option of abstaining. In Sweden, Lithuania, Norway and places like that you get to abstain. I do not know that members should be allowed to abstain. That is my view. But there are things—for instance, in the budget statement there is a statement that says we are looking at options and there will be a discussion probably initially with the administration and procedure committee about some modifications to standing orders. At the moment, for instance, at question time everyone gets to ask a question and there are three supplementaries. That takes about an hour and a quarter now. You could end up with an hour and three-quarters question time. Or do you want to make some modifications? The options are: do we ask fewer supplementaries or do we set a time limit on question time, which means that not everyone would get to ask a question every day?

There are options there. I think that is something that has to be worked through. In a sense, we can work through it but we cannot really change it because it becomes a decision that has to be made by the next Assembly. We can do a body of work with a

series of recommendations but a lot of those would have to be adopted by the next Assembly.

Mr Duncan: To answer the first part of Mr Smyth's question, the management group, the directors, are acutely aware that we are going to be co-located in two different locations, and we will try to make sure that the whole office knows that they are together, and working together to support members.

I have a monthly management meeting, so I will start to have monthly management meetings over at the other building to make sure that there is a presence there. I will be getting 10,000 steps for sure every day because I might be across there quite regularly. It is acutely an issue, in that we want to make sure that the office remains committed to working as one office and that just because they are in another building it does not mean they are forgotten.

In terms of the procedural changes, I am working on a submission to the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure looking at what changes to standing orders we might make. But Madam Speaker is right; it is essentially a matter for the Ninth Assembly. But members of the Eighth Assembly can certainly make recommendations to the incoming members of the Ninth Assembly. Some of these changes will need to be made on day one or in week one, if we are going to implement them. You would want to have all of that work done in the Eighth Assembly so that the Ninth Assembly is ready to proceed on the basis of having 25 members.

THE CHAIR: I am intrigued by the notion that it has to be left to the Ninth Assembly, because, as you say, on day one the existing standing orders will provide for question time.

Mrs Dunne: There is no question time on day one.

THE CHAIR: Isn't there? All right. On day one we just meet, do elections of Speaker and Chief Minister and then adjourn. But the question for the first full sitting day will be exactly that: do we have such a question time? If you assume there are seven ministers and a Speaker, it leaves you with 17 questions. Would you have a question time with 17 members asking questions? Under the standing orders, you will have to do that.

Mrs Dunne: Yes. If the Ninth Assembly did not do anything about question time, the first question time, sometime in late November or early December, would have 17 members asking a question each, with four supplementaries. That would take a long time, and the Assembly might be happy with that. Personally, I do not see that as a problem. Ministers may feel differently.

Mr Duncan: Let me put it to you, Mr Smyth, that if the Eighth Assembly adopts some standing orders, and the Ninth Assembly elects 10 Labor members, 10 Liberal members and five independents, I think the standing orders will operate in a much different fashion under that scenario than if it was 12-12-1. That is why I say it is really for the Ninth Assembly as to how it is going to run its question time procedures, its adjournment procedures, its matter of public importance procedures and its

speaking time procedures.

THE CHAIR: But if that is the case, and normally we refer changes in standing orders to admin and procedures and they can do an inquiry as such, it may take months to sort some of that out.

Mr Duncan: That is why I am saying that the Eighth Assembly could recommend something for the Ninth Assembly.

THE CHAIR: Wouldn't it be wiser for the eighth to, in anticipation, have something in place? Often we put in temporary—

Mr Duncan: I will just be providing advice, Mr Smyth. It is up to the members of the Eighth Assembly as to what they do with that advice.

Mrs Dunne: It is an option that we could change the standing orders in anticipation, and there could be wide discussion about that. But then you might have quite a change in personnel, and they might say, "We don't like those standing orders." And that is their prerogative.

THE CHAIR: And it is their prerogative to change—

Mrs Dunne: The experience in 2008, when there was a substantial change, was that there were changes made to the standing orders on the second sitting day, on the first morning, which came into effect essentially straightaway, and that affected sitting times and the like. So it is not unprecedented that there might be whole-scale changes to standing orders as the first cab off the rank.

THE CHAIR: With other procedures beyond question time, how are they likely to be affected?

Mrs Dunne: Speaking times are probably an issue. At the moment we have, for instance, 15 for the proposer, the person opposing and the first crossbench member. But if you had, for instance, five crossbench members from two or three different organisations, that might be a problem because you might end up with quite lengthy debating times. That is one that springs to mind.

Mr Duncan: Sitting hours might be affected. If we do have significantly more speakers on bills and motions before the Assembly, that will affect either the days of the sitting or the hours of the sitting. The Assembly might need to think about whether we continue to sit for 13 weeks a year, whether we sit for three days a week or whether we start earlier or finish later—those sorts of things. Do we still have a two-hour break between 12.30 and 2.30 or do we shorten that? They are the sorts of things that we would need to figure out, depending on how the Ninth Assembly operates.

THE CHAIR: Which then might have an effect on staffing et cetera.

Mr Duncan: Which will have an effect on staff. That is why I indicated that I will have to have two looks at the staffing—one now, when I have some known things, and the second when I see how the Ninth Assembly is operating.

THE CHAIR: Dr Bourke had a supplementary.

DR BOURKE: Mr Smyth has traversed much of the ground that I had intended to go over. It is basically around the issue of why this Assembly should not set up some standing orders for the next Assembly, given that this Assembly changes standing orders for this Assembly which then impacts on the next Assembly anyway. It would seem to be a fine line. If it is a question of timing, you could leave it to the last sitting day before rising before the next election, if that is how you want to do things. I do note within the standing orders that under “supplementary questions”, 113B says that the Speaker “may” allow two extra supplementary questions. So the Speaker at that time, if they did wish to—

Mrs Dunne: Thank you for reminding me of that, Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: “May” not allow—

THE CHAIR: The very definition!

Mrs Dunne: The next time you rise: “I don’t have to do that.”

THE CHAIR: The very definition of a brave Speaker!

DR BOURKE: We shall see what happens.

MS LAWDER: Speaking of options—

DR BOURKE: I was thinking of the next Assembly, not this one, as well you know.

Mrs Dunne: I am glad you made that clear.

THE CHAIR: It is the current rule. The second part, before I go perhaps to a substantive question, is that you talked earlier about community engagement. I notice you are doing updates of what is on in the Assembly. How is that determined? Did the stations approach you or did you approach the stations? How widespread is that? What are you doing?

Mrs Dunne: It started during the last sitting week and it came from a staff meeting in my office. Someone suggested that sometimes people did not quite understand what was going on and what was happening. I do know that Speaker Bishop, for instance, does a much more substantial “What’s on in parliament today” on sitting days. A staff member in my office suggested that as a model and we talked about it.

I had a conversation with the media adviser to the parliamentary Liberal Party about this and he said that he was happy to facilitate. He made some approaches and the radio stations were quite keen on the idea. We will review it. We have done it for a week. On the ABC on the Tuesday I gave a pre-recorded review of what was happening in the Assembly for the week, which is a bit difficult because you really cannot talk about what happens on Wednesday on Tuesday morning because you do not know what is going to be discussed on private members’ day, and I did raise that

as an issue.

MS LAWDER: I was going to say that I would have to listen so that I knew what was going on.

Mrs Dunne: Ms Lawder, I did give a little sneak preview because I knew that I was going to move a motion on the Magna Carta. But I did not know anything else, so that was as far as I could go. That is possibly a problem with that model. It is only for a couple of minutes; you go on and say, "Today we're going to discuss a children and young people's bill, a feed-in tariff bill and a University of Canberra planning bill." You then say, "Question time is at 2.30. Members of the public are welcome in the gallery." It is just another opportunity to have it before their minds that laws are made and budgets are passed and it affects people in Canberra.

THE CHAIR: Are any of the radio stations now broadcasting the Assembly live or is it just—

Mrs Dunne: No.

THE CHAIR: on webstream still?

Mrs Dunne: It is just webstreaming. 2XX at one stage was rebroadcasting question time and the adjournment debate but they were being paid for that and we stopped—

THE CHAIR: They were being paid for it?

Mrs Dunne: They were. It was a longstanding—

Mr Duncan: A pretty modest amount.

Mrs Dunne: It was a modest amount. It was a longstanding arrangement but then they wanted to shift the time and it became less and less advantageous that we should subsidise them to broadcast question time at unreasonable hours. We did explore it with other places, mainly community radio, and there was some interest, but they needed some sort of subsidy to do it and we do not have the money to do that.

THE CHAIR: Was the live broadcast on budget night by the ABC your initiative or their initiative?

Mrs Dunne: The ABC came to us.

THE CHAIR: So it was their choice to broadcast the Chief Minister's speech but not the Leader of the Opposition's?

Mrs Dunne: I presume so.

THE CHAIR: All right. On a slightly different tack, because I always like the numbers, on page 39 of what is now—

Mrs Dunne: I was waiting for the numbers.

THE CHAIR: budget paper A, you have discussed your fungibles. How are your intangibles, and why have they gone up 721 per cent?

Mrs Dunne: Melody, I think he wants you.

Ms Carr: Intangibles have gone up for the 2015-16 period because of the new audio project. It has been classed as an intangible asset.

THE CHAIR: Exactly what the notes say, so well done. Why is something that is quite solid an intangible and why is it not on—

Ms Carr: It involves a lot of software. There is a methodology that you go to under accounting to see what is capitalised and what is expensed.

THE CHAIR: Okay.

Ms Carr: If there is a software purchase and implementation into designing that software, it all counts as an intangible asset.

THE CHAIR: All right; that is reasonable.

Mrs Dunne: You cannot touch coding, I think. You cannot feel coding.

Mr Duncan: That is right.

Ms Carr: No.

Mrs Dunne: Coding is probably the simple way of looking at it.

THE CHAIR: On page 38, what is the 11 per cent increase in superannuation?

Ms Carr: The 11 per cent increase will relate to when there is a wage indexation or wage increase and you will have a related higher superannuation cost to match that.

THE CHAIR: All right. So that is simply playing out—

Mrs Dunne: That is the two EBAs coming into—

THE CHAIR: The EBAs, yes.

Mr Duckworth: Can I perhaps intervene to make the comment that we find that with our superannuation scheme memberships, particularly for older staff, there are people in the CSS and the PSS, the commonwealth schemes, who come into the organisation on a transfer or promotion and replace people who are in schemes that cost a whole lot less.

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Duckworth: So our superannuation cost for a very small agency with just 40-odd

staff can actually fluctuate quite wildly. Larger agencies will generally find that those changes just do not show up as a blip on the radar.

Mrs Dunne: That is probably an indication of the interchange between this parliament and the federal parliament. People come down here to do committee work for a while and bring their big fat CSSs with them.

THE CHAIR: All right. And the 13 per cent increase in supplies and services—what is driving that?

Ms Carr: The increase there would be possibly related to some of the projects that are in place. That would be part of it—the new projects. They will have recurrent fees for Shared Services, ICT and a number of things. I am happy to take that question on notice, but if you would just bear with me I can probably—

Mrs Dunne: I know, for instance, that there is a service contract with the audio and there is also the accommodation rental, which is new.

THE CHAIR: Who actually is your landlord?

Mr Duckworth: Property ACT.

THE CHAIR: Property ACT? Did we get a good rate?

Mr Duckworth: We get the same rate as the people who are leaving.

THE CHAIR: It is a soft market out there. I would have thought you would have got a much better rate, Mr Duckworth. I had greater expectations of you. The same rate? I am shocked.

Mr Duckworth: The government drives a hard bargain.

THE CHAIR: Yes. My last question—others, I am sure, have lots of interesting numbers—is in relation to the cash flow statements on pages 41 and 42. We have gone from having \$198,000 in cash to just \$21,000 in cash. What is the reason for that?

Ms Carr: The cash that is needed for the end of this financial year is because there are 27 pay periods, so there is a larger amount of money needed to sit in the bank to pay for the pay period that will occur on 1-2 July. Then it drops back where we keep a bank balance of about \$20,000 in our bank account.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Fitzharris with a supplementary; then Ms Fitzharris with a new question.

MS LAWDER: The audio project—can you explain exactly what you are replacing, what are the components of the audio project.

Mrs Dunne: It is going from analog to digital. That is what I know.

Ms Szychowska: Thanks for the question. The audio project which we have got funding for next financial year will include the replacement and/or consolidation of the existing audio equipment. That is things like microphones on desks, the amplification speakers on the floor of the chamber and in the galleries and the hearing loops—improvement to that. And Madam Speaker is correct that we are moving from the old analog, unsupported, obsolete, legacy technology to more supportable, scalable digital technology.

MS LAWDER: Had you put in funding bids for it before or is this the first time and you got it first?

Mrs Dunne: It has been a bit iterative.

Ms Szychowska: We have a project plan that was developed by Val Barrett, the current incumbent of this position. We had a consultant come in who was a former manager of the Hansard office to prepare a five-year plan, and this is part of that plan.

MS LAWDER: Will it have any effect with the *Hansard*? It has been suggested to me that some other jurisdictions have their *Hansard* available quicker than we do in the ACT. I am not sure, but that is what I have been told.

DR BOURKE: I cannot imagine how that is possible.

MS LAWDER: Will it have any flow-on effects on the availability of *Hansard*?

Ms Szychowska: Not this particular project, because it is based on technology. The *Hansard* function is quite separate. It is handled in a number of ways. Did you want me to go into detail about how that works?

MS LAWDER: Sure.

Mrs Dunne: There are people in a box who tape what you say.

Ms Szychowska: Because of the limited resourcing that we have, we have a number of functions and resources in place to transcribe what is said in the microphone. In the case of this hearing, what is recorded in that booth is sent across the road to a transcription external provider. They then provide us with an uncorrected proof. We, in this case, will send it to the committee office, and they will seek to get corrections to it. In some cases, these transcripts are sent to our editors and the editors will go through a first pass to make sure that grammar, punctuation and things are in the right order; then we produce the final.

We are doing it as efficiently as we can with the resourcing that we have got. I know that the other parliaments will probably do it differently. They have probably got multimillion dollar systems behind them to process that, so we really cannot compete with that. But for a small legislature, I think Val Barrett has said in previous years, we are doing pretty much what the larger parliaments are doing, with the same functionality but with a smaller budget.

MS LAWDER: So the transcription is a physical transcription? There is no voice

recognition component?

Ms Szychowska: Yes, and it is done by an external provider, with the exception of question time. We get the editors upstairs to do question time, and that is specifically to ensure that it gets sent out to members and staff within, I think, about an hour.

MS LAWDER: Thanks.

THE CHAIR: Any questions?

MS FITZHARRIS: I would like to follow up Mr Smyth's previous question around the expansion. I have made a couple of comments in the chamber around community expectations around how organisations communicate with them. It is partly about social media. I know there have been discussions about the Twitter policy so that there is a simple way of getting that sort of information out now.

But particularly in relation to committee work, have you given any thought to how committee work and the standing orders behind that which support committee work can allow for greater timeliness of meetings and use of electronic media, particularly between members? For example, correspondence may be received by a committee and may be readily available with the committee office but may not be able to be formally received by a committee unless members can physically meet with one another. In terms of community expectations around how government and the private sector are able to communicate in almost a real-time way with the community, perhaps some of our processes, some of the standing orders, might be a bit behind that expectation. I understand the long history of parliaments and all the various sorts of contestable—

Mrs Dunne: That is very good, yes.

MS FITZHARRIS: All that sort of thing. But I just wonder. It is difficult for governments. I recall many years ago, in what was the department of broadband and communications, if you wanted to send a tweet out from that department, it had about 20 people that needed to be involved. That has improved. But still my observation so far is that the processes in the Assembly are even a bit behind that.

Mrs Dunne: I understand the point you make, Ms Fitzharris, and there have been changes. When I first became a member, it was impossible for members to meet except physically in the one room. It is now possible to have phone hook-ups and things like that, which is an improvement. That was considered pretty out there.

MS FITZHARRIS: Radical.

Mrs Dunne: Radical. In relation to perhaps publishing submissions, correspondence and things like that, I understand the point about it being timely, but it also has to be remembered that these things, if they are published, are subject to privilege, so you have to be sure that what you are publishing is appropriate to be published and you are not giving somebody a free kick or defaming someone.

MS FITZHARRIS: Yes.

Mrs Dunne: There needs to be a process that you go through. Often it is the way with members that if you go into a meeting where you have to think about whether something is published, that is when you look at it rather than the week before when it arrived.

MS FITZHARRIS: Yes.

Mrs Dunne: It means we have to change our practice. I am open to having discussions about doing things more efficiently. The committee chairs meet a couple of times a year, and I would be happy to have a consideration of those issues. Let's have a look at it. David has some things to add as well.

Mr Skinner: This issue around Twitter activity did come up at a recent meeting of committee chairs. There was an undertaking, I understand, at that meeting for committees to go back and pass some resolutions enabling a set of pro forma tweets to be promulgated without having to come back and get authorisation in every instance.

MS FITZHARRIS: Yes.

Mr Skinner: I think that was a procedural mechanism to enable those tasks to be delegated beyond the committee in a very structured and systematic way that did not allow, for instance, the public affairs officer or some external person to the committee to make public comment on behalf of the committee. So I understand that that has occurred in some cases but not necessarily all cases.

MS FITZHARRIS: Yes.

Mr Skinner: So the system that we have in place is that the public affairs officer will generate Twitter activity when committee secretaries communicate the activities that each committee has about their public hearing schedules and so on. We have a very simple approval process, which is that once that has been prepared in accordance with those guidelines, it is the Clerk that then approves them. So we can have tweets out very quickly.

MS FITZHARRIS: Yes, and they are going?

Mr Skinner: Yes. So that might be something again to follow up at the next meeting of committee chairs just to see how that is working on the ground and whether committee members are happy with the results they are getting. But I think it is accepted that our communication strategy is that we use Twitter to drive website traffic and that we use that to leverage—get submissions, read submissions, talk about public hearings and all that sort of stuff. It is something that we are very conscious of and I guess it is just a matter of seeing that those processes are actually in train.

MS FITZHARRIS: That one was good. I guess I am thinking about broader issues around the community understanding.

Mr Skinner: Yes.

MS FITZHARRIS: If there is a report that gets published that is in response to an Auditor-General's report that was made in 2012 or 2013, it is hard to—I mean, I understand how difficult it is to keep up with it. But are there any other thoughts or does any other jurisdiction do it in a different way? I obviously appreciate long traditions and holding on to some of those.

Mr Skinner: Yes, and one of the very difficult ones with submissions, of course, is that until they are actually authorised by the committee itself, they do not have a status as a document given to the committee.

MS FITZHARRIS: But my understanding is that they cannot be authorised except in a face-to-face meeting.

Mr Skinner: That is my understanding too.

Mr Duncan: That is correct.

MS FITZHARRIS: Thanks.

Mr Duncan: Just to add to that, for every 100 submissions, you might get just one submission that makes an adverse mention of someone or says something defamatory. That is the reason why. The other 99 could be authorised straightaway, put straight up on the web and everyone can see them and track the progress of inquiry. But from time to time you are going to get a submission that is a bit—the more contentious the inquiry, the more likely it is that the submissions are going to be a bit racy or—

MS FITZHARRIS: Yes.

Mr Duncan: I guess that because we confer absolute privilege, it means that in respect of whatever is published on there, no-one can sue or take any further action in relation to that submission. That is why there are some fairly cumbersome processes in some senses in terms of getting the message out there. But I guess that is the reason—

MS FITZHARRIS: I am probably thinking of more routine correspondence that is in response to a committee—a letter to a minister; the minister then responds and then it is a sort of a slow process from there. Anyway, I am thinking about those things; so I was curious on your thoughts about them.

Mr Duncan: Yes.

MS FITZHARRIS: The committees do a lot of interesting work. Every so often you will find that something will pop up. The more high profile ones tend to get a higher profile. People pay more attention and they move a bit quicker.

MS LAWDER: I was interested in page 38 of the budget paper. Can you explain to me about depreciation and amortisation? It goes from \$100,000 this year to \$184,000, \$330,000, \$326,000. In layman's terms, is there a purchase or retiring of assets associated with that? Can you explain the trend there?

Ms Carr: Depreciation and amortisation between 2014 and 2015, it would be increasing. The amortisation is related to your intangible assets. As we increase our intangible asset you would see that rise there. But you have also got an increase in our other assets for this period, 2015-16. Once they are recognised as a non-current asset we will start depreciating them. So we are increasing our assets over the next 12 months in relation to our projects for the procedural—

Mr Skinner: Information production system.

Ms Carr: information production system. We probably will not recognise the accommodation expenses until that is completed, until the end of 2015-16. So that is where you will see, moving forward into 2016-17, that the depreciation goes up to \$330,000. That is when we will start recognising that asset—when it is completed. Does that answer your question?

MS LAWDER: Yes.

DR BOURKE: Madam Speaker, in regard to the accommodation for the media in the new reformatted Assembly, when will that be?

Mrs Dunne: We have some space notionally set aside. It will be on the ground floor facing into the alley—basically where Mr Duckworth is now. So the media will have—

THE CHAIR: Where they started.

Mr Duncan: Back where they started.

Mrs Dunne: Back where they started. But we are also considering how much of that space we will need and whether it will continue to be provided free of charge.

DR BOURKE: Pardon?

Mrs Dunne: Whether it will continue to be provided free of charge, because at the moment the media outlets use this building—they get it free. We are considering the options because space will be at a premium in the building. We will be looking at options to see whether the media outlets will pay rent for it. Then they can decide whether they value the space as much as they seem to at the moment.

DR BOURKE: How does that work in other parliaments?

Mrs Dunne: Most other parliaments charge, as too do the courts.

DR BOURKE: Who will be making that decision?

Mrs Dunne: Probably me in consultation with administration and procedure. It will be part of the refurbishing project—

Mr Skinner: The project control group.

Mrs Dunne: The project control group will probably have a view about that as well.

DR BOURKE: So ultimately it will be an issue for admin and procedure?

Mrs Dunne: Yes.

THE CHAIR: A last question, unless Mr Hanson has a question.

MR HANSON: No, I do not.

THE CHAIR: On page 39 on the balance sheet, the second-last line, the accumulated funds. Last year you managed at the close of the year to accumulate \$2,000. Somehow by the end of—

Mrs Dunne: \$2 million?

THE CHAIR: No, this year.

Mrs Dunne: \$2,000, sorry.

Mr Skinner: Yes, \$2,000.

Mrs Dunne: Sorry, yes.

THE CHAIR: But by the end of next year you will have accumulated \$2 million. What is causing this accumulation of funds?

Ms Carr: The accumulation of funds will relate obviously again to our accommodation project that is recognised as an asset, a non-current asset. They are aimed also at other projects that we have been funded for. So it will increase the balance of our accumulated funds. It actually counts the capital injection that is used to pay for the assets.

THE CHAIR: But surely it is all expended by the end of the coming year in anticipation of a larger Assembly. So what do the numbers in the outyears represent then?

Mrs Dunne: No, it extends over into 2016-17.

THE CHAIR: All right. But at the end of—

Mrs Dunne: There will be a lot of work that will be done between August and November.

THE CHAIR: But at the end of 2017 you have still got \$1.6 million in accumulated funds and in the outyears. Are they capital works as well?

Mrs Dunne: Yes.

THE CHAIR: What are the capital works in 2017-18 and 2018-19 that—

Ms Carr: There are no capital works in 2017 or 2018 but the capital works actually—the accounting practice is that when the asset is completed in works, it gets moved from the capital works in progress and put into property, plant and equipment as a non-current asset there. It is still the same amount of money. It is just moved to a different section and it will still flow through into your accumulated funds for that reason.

THE CHAIR: For that reason.

Ms Carr: Yes.

THE CHAIR: All right.

Mrs Dunne: Could I just correct the record?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Mrs Dunne: Apparently the Clerk said that I said, “Most parliaments charge.” It turns out that “most” is a slight overstatement. The federal parliament, the Queensland parliament and one other, which we cannot recall, charge.

Mrs Dunne: So it is slightly less than half; it is not most.

DR BOURKE: So most parliaments do not charge.

Mrs Dunne: Most parliaments do not charge but it is an increasing trend.

THE CHAIR: Which you may or may not contribute to.

Mrs Dunne: Which we may or may not contribute to.

DR BOURKE: Trend would require some evidence of change, Madam Speaker.

THE CHAIR: It being 3.30, our time with the Speaker is now at an end. I think you have taken a couple of questions on notice. If we can have a quick answer to them we would be grateful for that.

Mrs Dunne: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Members, when the transcript has arrived if you have further questions could we have them quickly? We would ask the Speaker and officials to respond within five working days.

Mrs Dunne: And could I recommend the open day in September, the great democratic sausage sizzle and MLA guided tours?

MS FITZHARRIS: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that. We will provide you, Madam Speaker, with a copy

of the transcript when it is available. If you have any corrections or additional information you wish to provide, the committee will look at that and do something with it, no doubt. With that, we thank you and we will now suspend until 3.45 pm when we have the Electoral Commissioner before us.

Sitting suspended from 3.30 to 3.43 pm.

Appearances:

ACT Electoral Commission

Green, Mr Phillip, ACT Electoral Commissioner

Hickey, Mr Scott, Chief Finance Officer

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon all, and welcome to the final session of the Select Committee on Estimates 2015-2016. We would like to welcome the ACT Electoral Commission staff to our hearing. In front of you there is a privilege statement, on the pink card. Could you please indicate that you have read and understand the implications of the statement?

Mr Green: Yes, we have.

THE CHAIR: Fantastic. After your introductory remarks, if you take a question on notice, could you actually use the words, "I will take that question on notice." It allows us to track it in the *Hansard* and ensure that you understand what you have taken on notice and that we get the answers we are expecting. With that, would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr Green: Thank you. I have officers from the ACT Electoral Commission here today. I might point out that Scott Hickey, our chief finance officer, is actually a contract officer, not an employee of the commission. As part of our officers of the Assembly arrangements, because we are now looking after our own finances for the first time, we have taken Scott on as a contractor to be our chief finance officer.

The only remark I would like to make in advance of taking questions is simply to point out that there are some items that are not yet in our budget for the election year. That was because we were waiting on the passage of legislation through the Assembly. You might recall that in February this year the Electoral Amendment Act 2015 was passed. It increased the rate of public funding from \$2 a vote to \$8 a vote at the next election. So in next year's budget we will be asking for something in the order of \$1.44 million in order to cover the increase in the cost of the public funding rate.

Another impact of the increase in the size of the Assembly from 17 to 25 members is that, because the Assembly has not changed the rate of administrative funding provided to parties per MLA, that means because the size of the Assembly is going up the administrative fund amount will also have to increase as a result of the increase in the size of the Assembly. We estimate that in 2016-17, that being the year of the election, the administrative funding amount will need to go up by approximately \$0.119 million in that year, and in 2017-18 and the outyears that amount will increase to \$0.179 million per annum. That is also indexed by CPI.

That is all that I wanted to say by way of opening remarks. I am happy to take questions.

THE CHAIR: Perhaps we can start with the redistribution. How much were you given for the redistribution, how much was expended and has any been returned to the government coffers?

Mr Green: I might have to take that on notice. I can report that I think we are underspending the amount we were given, and we will be underspent in the year as a result of not spending all the money we were given on the redistribution. We only had one round of objections and we did not have a public hearing, so that saved us some money with respect to the amount we estimated we would need. It was a fairly low cost exercise. We had one notice in the newspaper and we put on our website a redistribution tool. People were able to go and draw their own boundaries and use that to make submissions. That cost a certain amount of money but it was very well received. If we can take that on notice, I will get back to you with actual figures.

THE CHAIR: All right. Is there any further work that needs to be done in relation to the redistribution or is it now done and dusted, and all we need is an election?

Mr Green: We still have to finish the official report to the Assembly on the redistribution. That has been drafted but we still need to get that through design and printing. We are anticipating that will be tabled by the Speaker in the next sitting week of the Assembly, which I think is in August. There will be further expense in getting that published but we are not printing very many copies so that will not be a huge expense.

That is the last thing to occur before the redistribution proper. For the election itself we will obviously need to get our systems up to date in terms of being able to cope with five electorates and 25 members. That work has started and we have funding for updating our ICT systems, which previously were coded for having three electorates but we will be updating all of our systems to have five electorates. The cost of that is not huge because we are updating those systems anyway, to make them fit for purpose to account for the new technology, new hardware and so forth. All of that is well in hand and I am very confident that we will be fine for the election.

MR HANSON: I have a supplementary. With the way that you have drawn the boundaries, if there was any controversy, it seems to be up north, with the bits like Evatt, McKellar, Lawson and Kaleen going into Yerrabi. Did you look forward beyond 2016 to have a long-term view when you drew these maps? Eventually, with the demographic growth, Gungahlin is growing and they will be absorbed back into Ginninderra; is that the long-term thinking?

Mr Green: The legislation does not permit us to formally look forward like that. The legislation requires us to look at the estimated enrolment at the time of the next election. So the main objective for the redistribution is to ensure at the time of the next election, in October 2016, that each electorate would be within plus or minus five per cent of the average enrolment at that time. We were mindful, though, in drawing the boundaries that the redistribution committee and the Electoral Commissioner are required to take account of existing electoral boundaries. Looking at boundaries past and boundaries future is something that we take into account.

It was inevitable that both Belconnen and Tuggeranong had to be split by the redistribution, simply because they each had more than one-fifth of the total enrolment in those two districts. We were mindful, when we were looking particularly at the split of Belconnen, that as Gungahlin grows in size and population that will mean that in future it will probably be possible to transfer some of those Belconnen

suburbs back to Ginninderra. But it really is dependent entirely on population growth and urban growth. That is something that will be up to the next redistribution committee to look at when we come to do that before the 2020 election.

I think you could expect that, as Molonglo grows, as the Molonglo valley grows and as Gungahlin grows, that would tend to allow the suburbs that are in Belconnen but are part of the Yerrabi electorate to go back to Ginninderra. Similarly, Kambah might be able to go back to Brindabella. But that is something for a future redistribution committee to look at.

THE CHAIR: Ms Lawder had a supplementary and then Ms Fitzharris.

MS LAWDER: Yes. With the redistribution and leading up to the next election, I notice in your changes to appropriation on page 25 of the report, for the year we are currently in, you had an ICT systems upgrade for the 2016 election, and funding has now been rolled over to the upcoming financial year. I have a couple of questions. How confident are you that it is going to be completed? What other impacts are there, like staff training? What is the range or scope of that ICT system? Will it be a big change from what is currently there? What is involved?

Mr Green: What we are looking at with our ICT systems for the 2016 election is more an incremental improvement than a radical improvement. We are looking at updating and reusing our electronic voting and counting system. We are looking at using the same scanning of ballot paper system that we used at the last election. We are upgrading the electronic system that is used in polling places for marking people's names off the electoral roll. Other elements of the polling place management are computerised in polling places. We have a suite of databases that we use back of house that do things like manage the electoral roll, manage our staffing—and a whole range of election management systems that are in use in that process.

The funding is aimed at getting those systems upgraded rather than replaced. So it is not looking at any radical changes; it is simply making them fit for purpose. When we first bid for these in the budget, we had to make an estimate of which financial year the money would be expended in. It has turned out for various reasons that we were not able to spend as much in the current financial year as we were expecting to. We are now looking at spending that money in the next financial year. We still have 18 months or more before the next election.

THE CHAIR: Only 491 days.

Mr Green: Not that many; whatever it is—15 months. We will certainly deliver those systems before polling day, because that is our job and that is what we will do.

MS LAWDER: So there is no cause for concern given that you thought you would have done it last year but you have not because other things came up?

Mr Green: There is no cause for concern. One of the things that happened in this particular financial year was that our Deputy Electoral Commissioner unexpectedly was taken ill and then retired. So we did have a few months during the year when we had a changeover of someone in that key role of Deputy Electoral Commissioner.

Some of our projects were delayed as a result of that, but we have now employed additional staff. Rohan Spence is now Deputy Electoral Commissioner. He is permanently in that role. We have recruited someone as operations manager, which was the job that Rohan was doing. So we are very confident that in the next financial year we will make up that lost time.

MS LAWDER: It contains no real step-change for staff; it is pretty much the same system?

Mr Green: Yes.

THE CHAIR: A new question from Ms Fitzharris.

MS FITZHARRIS: Thank you. I want to ask a couple of questions around your electoral education program. Could you run through that for me and what it looks like in the context of an enlarged Assembly and what your role is to communicate, apart from the boundary changes? Do you have any role in additional education activities because of the enlarged Assembly or is it just the same?

Mr Green: I would not say that the enlarged Assembly has given us any additional educational activities to do. We will be doing our normal education in schools and in the community functions that we do now, with one new thing that I will talk about in a moment. For the election itself, because of the increase in both the size of the Assembly and the change to five electorates, as part of the education and information program that we always do for every election we are going to give quite a big focus to those changes so that people will be aware of those changes well before polling day.

For example, we do two household mail-outs in the course of the election—one before the roll is closed and then one after nominations are closed. Our current intention is that we will be putting maps of the new electorates in both of those mail-outs that will go to every household. We are certainly wanting to stress that the boundaries have changed and make that a big feature of our information campaign.

One new thing that we are hoping to implement, but it will depend on whether the schools are interested in taking up this proposal, is that we are currently examining whether we could implement a project that we are calling schools vote, which is modelled on a Canadian system called student vote, which has also been taken up, I think, by Queensland, whereby schools run an election in parallel to a real election, with the same candidates, the same electorates, the same boundaries and everything else. We are in the process of working up a proposal for that. We are going to put it to schools in the ACT to see whether they have any appetite to take that up. We are hoping that we will be able to get that off the ground.

MS FITZHARRIS: Is that for all schools?

Mr Green: We will offer it to all schools and we will see what happens.

MS FITZHARRIS: Is there a certain take-up rate that you will need to have in order to roll the program out?

Mr Green: Yes.

MS FITZHARRIS: Do you know what that might be?

Mr Green: Not yet. We are still working through that.

MS FITZHARRIS: Could I say congratulations on the redistribution. One thing that struck me was that a few people I spoke to said how much they liked the names of the new electorates. In terms of enrolments, can you give me some information around people turning 18 and what the levels of enrolment are there and the work that you do particularly with people that are new to the electoral roll?

Mr Green: The electoral roll in the ACT, as for most of the country, is managed by the Australian Electoral Commission under a joint roll arrangement. They have, since the last federal election, implemented a new way of keeping the rolls up to date whereby they directly enrol people when they do things like take out a driver's licence or they interact with Centrelink. There are a few other data sources that they use where they automatically enrol people. That has increased the rate of people being on the roll compared to the system where you require people to fill in a form. By automatically enrolling people, that is increasing the proportions of people on the roll.

MS FITZHARRIS: How does that work with the driver's licence? If you are young and you get your driver's licence but you are not yet 18—how old do you have to be to get a driver's licence?

THE CHAIR: 17.

MS FITZHARRIS: Will it automatically happen or will you tick another box?

Mr Green: People can be provisionally enrolled for federal and ACT elections from 16. With respect to the way that the AEC enrolls people, I am not sure whether they provisionally enrol people at 17 or whether they wait for them to turn 18. But by the time they turn 18, the way it works is that the AEC will contact people by writing to them, emailing them or SMSing. I am not entirely sure whether they do all of those three things yet. I know that New South Wales does something along those lines because they have a similar program. People then have an opportunity to opt out if they are not qualified. That is designed to prevent people from being incorrectly enrolled. But the system is designed to ensure that what they are doing is enrolling people who are qualified, so they need evidence that they are citizens and residents and that they are the correct age. Once they have been written to, a certain period of time elapses and then they automatically go on the electoral roll.

With our election in October 2016 it is anticipated that there will be a federal election sometime around that time because that is when three years from the last election expires. Experience indicates that the best way to get our roll up to date is to have a federal election close to ours. That not only gets people on the roll in the ACT but it gets people on the roll right across the country. People who have left the ACT who might not have updated their enrolment will have an incentive to get on the roll for wherever they have moved to. So that has an effect on cleaning our roll up.

MS FITZHARRIS: And vice versa—people moving to the ACT.

Mr Green: Exactly.

MS FITZHARRIS: When might you know about the schools vote?

Mr Green: We will very shortly be writing to the education directorate to see if we can get some in-principle support for pursuing that. I am hoping in the next few months we will work through that.

THE CHAIR: Just to follow up on that, when would you release the results of the schools vote?

Mr Green: After polling day for our election.

MS FITZHARRIS: Do you envisage a role for MLAs in that?

Mr Green: Yes, we do—voluntarily, obviously; it would not be a mandatory thing. But the way we see this is that it is not only an educational process for students to become familiar with the political process but we are also hoping they take it home and discuss it with their families and that might actually help the families gain more knowledge about the electoral process as well. So we would be encouraging schools and students to contact MLAs, to contact parties, to look at party platforms and to examine issues and effectively put themselves in the shoes of voters and look at issues and make decisions about whom they would vote for.

MS FITZHARRIS: And MLAs get to hear from the school students, I guess. High school and college students or are you talking primary schools as well?

Mr Green: We are talking primary and high school.

MS FITZHARRIS: Primary and high, government, non-government?

Mr Green: Years 4 to 12 is what we are looking at. And government and non-government we will be offering it to, yes.

MS FITZHARRIS: Government and non-government sector as well?

Mr Green: We would be offering it to non-government schools as well. It may not happen but we are seeing if it will flow.

THE CHAIR: I was just concerned that, if you released the results early, it might affect Betcorp or something and then the punters voting on the ACT election.

Mr Green: No.

MS LAWDER: Was electronic voting available for pre-polling at the last election?

Mr Green: Yes.

MS LAWDER: Was it available the election before that as well, electronic voting?

Mr Green: Electronic voting has been in place since the 2001 election—2001, 2004, 2008, 2012, four elections worth. At the first two elections we provided electronic voting at the four pre-poll voting centres which then turned into ordinary polling places on polling day. We had another four polling places on polling day as well making a total of eight on polling day. We found from that experience that setting up electronic voting centres just for election day was more work than we felt we got a return on from investment. For the last two elections we have restricted electronic voting only to pre-poll centres but they were also open on election day as ordinary polling places. So anyone who went to those places on election day was able to cast an electronic vote.

THE CHAIR: Five locations last time?

Mr Green: Six locations last time. They took between a quarter and a fifth of all the votes in the ACT.

MS LAWDER: And is my recollection correct that the last election had the biggest take up of pre-polling so far?

Mr Green: It goes up every election. Not just in the ACT but in every jurisdiction in Australia and New Zealand it was the same. Pre-poll voting just keeps going up and up.

MS LAWDER: One of the advantages, of course, with electronic voting is for people with particular disabilities. Are you planning it for people with a disability and for people more generally as well? I know you said there were some difficulties but are you looking to expand the use of electronic voting in the 2016 election?

Mr Green: What we are hoping to do is increase the number of pre-poll voting centres which will have electronic voting in them, to extend those to other districts in the ACT. For example, Weston Creek might be somewhere where we could put an additional pre-poll voting centre.

MR HANSON: How many? What sort of scale? When you are talking about more pre-poll, what total number?

Mr Green: Last time it was six, this time we are looking at seven to eight. It depends in part on whether we can actually hire the premises. That is an issue for pre-poll voting centres.

THE CHAIR: Why is that? Pre-poll used to be basically for people who are interstate, ill, older, unable to get out on election day because of work commitments, maternity and whatever. But we seem to almost be extending the period. Two weeks is a long time before the election. You are picking up a quarter of the vote in pre-poll. Is that skewing the election result? Is it worth doing? Is it ease and convenience of the commission? What is the reason?

Mr Green: I think it is an ease and convenience for the voters. It is very popular. It is

not just the ACT; it is everywhere. I think people are expecting to be able to vote early. If we were to restrict the number of locations I think people would still come. So extending the number of locations is really a convenience thing. It is a trend that is right across every jurisdiction in Australia and I think it would be very difficult to rein it back.

MS LAWDER: I think you said—can I just check?—that partly it is about resources on the day. Is that what you said? Sometimes you have trouble—

Mr Green: The reason why we have decided not to put electronic voting facilities into ordinary polling places that are not pre-poll centres is that setting up electronic voting is quite a complex process. It is based on a local area network with personal computing equipment. It is quite resource intensive to set it up. So our assessment is that it will cost too much and be too much of a logistical problem for us to do it just for one day whereas a pre-poll voting centre gives 2½ to three weeks worth of polling. So you get a much better return on your investment doing it that way.

MS LAWDER: And even taking into account the resource intensiveness required to collate the paper votes you still feel it is not?

Mr Green: Yes. The thing we do with paper votes in terms of counting them is use an optical scanning system and that is something we have introduced. It is new for the last two elections. We think that is the most accurate way that you can count the paper ballots. We are always going to have paper ballots no matter how much electronic voting we have. There will always be postal votes. There are always people who do not want to use electronic voting. So it is something that we are going to have to have anyway. But we find it is very efficient, it is very accurate.

We have to wait for a week after polling day to allow postal votes to come back through the mail anyway and the way we have timed resourcing is that we get the scanning process finished on that Friday after election day when postal votes come in so that we can have the final result on the seventh day after the election, on the Saturday after the election, which, with our kind of timing and system, is really the earliest we can do that. It is a very efficient process.

MS LAWDER: And is the length of time that pre-polling is open in the act or is that a gentleman's call?

Mr Green: That is in the Electoral Act.

THE CHAIR: Supplementary, then Dr Bourke.

MS FITZHARRIS: I think my observation is that voters like the pre-polling that you talked about. Do you know if there is any work being done, given the increasing trend on how it impacts on election campaigns, ie, in terms of significant announcements that candidates and/or parties wish to make? They are making them before the pre-polling period opens so that when you start voting you have all the information in front of you. I guess that is the theory around full democratic voters, that you have full information. Do you have an observation or do you know of any studies about whether it has had an impact?

Mr Green: I am not aware of any recent studies looking at that particular question. It sounds like a question for a political scientist rather than the Electoral Commission.

MS LAWDER: I asked about people with a disability and voting. Traditionally schools are one of the main polling places but not all schools are necessarily disability friendly. What work are you doing in that disability access space?

Mr Green: The electronic voting system in the pre-poll centres is particularly designed to cater for people with disabilities. We make sure that the pre-poll voting locations are all fully accessible. The system is able to be used by people who are blind or vision impaired because they can put on headphones and use a keypad and they do not need to see the screen. It will talk them through it. We also provide assistance in all of our polling places for people who are unable to vote without assistance. We have that facility for people to be assisted if they need to be assisted.

The aim of choosing polling places is to attempt to choose polling places that are fully accessible. It is simply the case that not all schools anywhere in Australia are always fully accessible as far as polling places are concerned. So we do have a rating system for all our polling places where they are rated as either fully accessible or accessible with assistance and we widely publish that information on our website and through relevant groups.

We are a member of the Australian Electoral Commission's advisory group for disability services for people voting and using electoral services and we are working with that group to see what other things we can do to assist people with disabilities. We have actually got that on our list of things that we are going to do between now and the election to see what new and better things we can use from that group, and we are talking with electoral commissions across Australia to get ideas about ways in which we can provide better services for people with disabilities.

One thing we are going to be putting in all polling places will be a plastic—what do you call it?—magnifying thing that you put over your ballot paper and it—

THE CHAIR: Magnifying sheet?

Mr Green: A magnifying sheet, yes. We are going to provide those in all polling places, yes. We are very conscious of the needs of people with disabilities and we are really wanting to do things.

MS LAWDER: Is all your advertising open and closed captioning?

Mr Green: Yes, we do.

MS LAWDER: And so the work you are doing is broadly consistent with the rest of Australia?

Mr Green: Yes.

DR BOURKE: Do you think there is a need to directly inform voters about the new

electorates that they may be in?

Mr Green: Yes. That is going to be part of the information campaign we will be conducting before the election. We do not really have funding in this next 12 months or so to do a widespread information campaign just on the electorate boundaries, and my feeling is that if an election is not in the immediate offing any money that we might put into a mass communication campaign is probably not money well spent. People tend to focus on elections when they are about to happen. So we will be putting particularly our mass advertising budget into the month or two leading up to polling day and that is when we will be going out to households. We are going to do two household deliveries to every household in the ACT, which will include maps of the new boundaries.

DR BOURKE: Is that going to be direct mail or letterbox?

Mr Green: Letterbox.

DR BOURKE: And will your office be moving and will counting procedures be conducted in the same place as last time or something different?

Mr Green: Every election we need to move somewhere larger because our normal accommodation space is not big enough to accommodate us when we increase the size of our staff. As we get ballot papers and computers and everything, we just need larger accommodation. We will not be going back to where we were last time because there is another agency in there and that is not available. We are currently in negotiations with ACT Property Group to try and find us somewhere for all of 2016.

DR BOURKE: And you mentioned that campaign of a month or two before the election, letting people know what the new electorates are. Will you also be doing a voter registration campaign?

Mr Green: That will be part of the process leading up to the election. With the way that the electoral roll is now being maintained with the direct enrolment process, we are finding that the roll is more up to date more of the time, because we are not waiting for people go out and enrol when an election is happening. They are actually being enrolled as they get their drivers licence or as they interact with Centrelink and so on. So the need for doing a last minute enrolment campaign is somewhat lessened but we will be doing an enrolment campaign in the lead-up to our election as we always do, as part of our mass communications campaign.

If a federal election is held at about the same time as our election, which it is due to be—who knows if it will be early or late, but it will be around the same time as ours—we will benefit from any national enrolment campaign that happens because that will also have a corresponding effect on our roll as well.

DR BOURKE: And going specifically to the conduct of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body elections last year which you took care of, did you learn anything from that about voter involvement within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in the ACT?

Mr Green: We did. We made a big effort to improve on the turnout compared to the previous election. We did get a much higher turnout in percentage terms. The absolute numbers were still quite low and we would like to see the numbers increase at the next election. We went to a lot of effort working with the community to get information out to the community about the election, the fact it was happening, and to encourage people to engage with it. But it is a voluntary election. So there is not that stick of fining people as there is for an Assembly election. Because it is a voluntary election, it is difficult to get people out.

DR BOURKE: And even in compulsory elections it is not 100 per cent of the people who vote.

Mr Green: No, that is right.

DR BOURKE: What is it in the ACT, about 80 or 90 per cent?

Mr Green: Turnout at the last election was just under 90 per cent.

DR BOURKE: And how many were formal votes?

Mr Green: That would have been about 96 per cent. I think there was about a three to four per cent informal vote.

THE CHAIR: Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Since you have become an office of the Legislative Assembly, have you got adequate resources for doing what we talked about earlier with the changes in finances and the fact you manage your own finances? What other changes have occurred and what adjustments might need to be made?

Mr Green: The biggest change to the commission on becoming an office of the Assembly has been the financial aspect. We had to do our own budget process. At the end of the financial year we are having to do our own financial reporting. The Auditor-General will be doing an audit of our finances, working with us, which is a new process. Previously we were part of the JACS portfolio and we reported through JACS, so it is not something we directly interacted with the auditor's office upon. That is certainly causing us extra work that we have not had to do previously.

In terms of our normal day-to-day operations, we were always an independent statutory office, so the fact that we are an office of the Assembly has not really changed the independent nature of the commission. We have always been independent and we are still independent. But the new functions under the Financial Management Act have increased our workload.

MR HANSON: In terms of the independence, which I suppose was the objective and where you do not see any difference, all it has done is given you a burden in terms of administration. Do you sense that is a duplication in terms of what was previously done by JACS?

Mr Green: I would not put it in those terms. Taking us out from the directorate

portfolio and creating us as an office of the Assembly has strengthened the commission's independence. It has highlighted the fact that we are totally independent not only from the directorate but from government and ministerial control. I am very supportive of the change to create the commission as an office of the Assembly.

THE CHAIR: On page 28, in honour of Mr Hickey's appearance, the changes in equity, can you take us through how moving from JACS to the OLA has affected the staples—for instance, the increase-decrease in net assets due to admin restructuring? You finished the year with \$839,000 but by the end of the coming year you have zero.

Mr Hickey: When you refer to the figure for the following year being zero with the figure for 2014-15 being \$839,000, because the administrative arrangements will be completed within 2014-15, we are not expecting there will be any further transfer of assets for the upcoming year. Those figures basically go into the opening balance of the Electoral Commission for 2015-16.

THE CHAIR: Does that then explain the zero numbers against the opening accumulated funds which in this year are zero but in the coming year, when all the transactions are finished, you start with \$731,000 and then there are numbers in the outyears. What is the reason for the decline in the outyears from \$731,000 down to \$165,000? Is that because you build up towards an election and then it dissipates?

Mr Hickey: I will have to go back and confirm 100 per cent, but I believe there is a growth. Just give me two seconds, if you can.

THE CHAIR: You can take that on notice and get back to me.

Mr Hickey: Yes. I will have to take that on notice to confirm.

THE CHAIR: That is fine. The operating results for the period are all negative numbers. What does that indicate?

Mr Hickey: That seems to be flowing in in relation to being funded on a cash basis and employee entitlements flowing through.

THE CHAIR: The balance at the end of the reporting period declines. Those numbers are linked to the opening equity in the balance at the start. When you do that question on notice, can you also give us consideration of how that works?

Mr Hickey: Yes. We will take that on notice as well.

THE CHAIR: That is fine. Thank you. Ms Fitzharris.

MS FITZHARRIS: I want to talk in terms of your resourcing around an election period, in particular how it relates to the 100-metre rule around polling booths. I was recently away with a commonwealth parliamentary group and we were discussing this. All other participants, who were largely from other commonwealth countries, did not have such a rule and asked how it works and how it is enforced. In the context of having the election next year, what is involved in you enforcing that rule, and what are your thoughts on the rule itself?

Mr Green: The 100-metre ban on canvassing at polling places has effectively been in place since the first Hare-Clarke election in 1995. It is part of the suite of things that makes Hare-Clarke what it is. Because we do not have ticket voting and we have Robson rotation, using how-to-vote cards is probably more confusing to voters than allowing them to have how-to-vote cards, simply because the order of names on the ballot paper will, in most cases, be totally different from the order of names on the how-to-vote card.

The intent of Robson rotation and the ban on how-to-vote cards is to effectively give voters the power to choose which candidates they want to vote for rather than giving the power to parties, for example, through the Senate ticket vote method of allowing parties to influence the order in which candidates are elected in the scrutiny. As part of that *raison d'être* for Hare-Clarke, the ban on how-to-vote cards I think is one of those elements that makes Hare-Clarke what it is. In that sense, as someone who supports Hare-Clarke, I think it is something that should continue.

MS FITZHARRIS: But it does not stop how-to-vote cards?

Mr Green: No, it does not. But you will find that most voters do not take how-to-vote cards with them into a polling place because of the 100-metre ban. In terms of enforcing the 100-metre ban, that tends to be a self-regulatory thing. The various party workers out and about on election day will very quickly jump on transgressions from the other side and report them to me; often personally. We have an officer whose job it is to monitor that and to use our resources to deal with any reports of breaches of the 100-metre ban.

We have polling area managers who are responsible for about eight to 10 polling places each. They are out on the road all day on election day. They visit each polling place. One of their tasks when they visit each polling place is to look at the 100-metre ban compliance as they are approaching the polling place. If reports are phoned through to us of breaches of the ban, the polling area managers will be sent out to have a look at that.

We also are able to contact the officers in charge of each polling place who are able to go out and police the enforcement of the 100-metre ban. We do not have 80 people whose job it is on election day just to go out and walk around the 100 metres, because in most cases they would have nothing to do. It self-regulates and it all seems to work out in the end.

MS FITZHARRIS: Is the 100 metres generally from the polling booth or is it from the building in which the polling booth is located?

Mr Green: It is 100 metres from the building in which the polling place is located, unless the Electoral Commission has determined the grounds of the building to be the start of the 100 metres, which we tend not to do. What we did for the first time at the last election, and we will do it again at the next election, is we published maps where we got people sitting down with Google Earth and Google Maps and mapped out where the 100 metres was. We published that on our website and gave that to all the parties.

MS FITZHARRIS: Do you see any other options, for example, banning any advertising or any handouts on the day of an election? Other countries and jurisdictions have that sort of—

Mr Green: Tasmania has more things banned than we ban in the ACT. If I understand it correctly, it is a curious thing that you are not allowed to put up signs from midnight on the polling day, but you can put signs up the day before and have them remain up all day. To me that seems a little bit pointless.

MS FITZHARRIS: I think New Zealand, for example, has everything down on the night.

Mr Green: I think that is right, yes. I would be concerned that our constitutional right to free political communication might enter into consideration if we were to talk about increasing any further restriction on canvassing on election day. I am not a lawyer, but I would have thought that would be a relative consideration. Personally, I do not see a need for it, particularly as a quarter of our voters vote at pre-polls. If you are going to prevent people from getting political messages on polling day, are you going to extend that to three weeks before polling day as well? I think that would be a very difficult thing to do.

THE CHAIR: Supplementary from Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: On the specific issue of the 100 metres, its intent is to stop people getting flooded with information. Is the 100 metres working? Is that the right distance? Should it be 150 metres, should it be 50 metres? It is a little bit arbitrary and would depend on the geography of each polling place. Do you think that is the right distance or do you think pushing it out a bit further might further clarify the issue that people are not trying to, as I have noticed on polling days, really push the limits a little bit?

Mr Green: This was the subject of a committee inquiry, the size of the 100-metre limit and whether that was sufficient. I cannot think what they recommended now. I think they recommended looking at whether it was worth extending that. We have modelled the impact of increasing that 100-metre limit, because 100 metres is effectively a 200-metre radius around the polling place. If you went to 200 metres, it becomes a 400-metre circle. If you increase it to 250, it becomes half a kilometre. By the time you draw those circles around every polling place in the ACT, there is not much of the ACT that is not covered by it.

Being mindful of not wanting to infringe the constitutional right of free speech, I do not think you could enforce a blanket ban on canvassing right across Canberra. If you increase it from 100 metres to something significantly bigger, you are going to cover almost all of the urban area of the ACT. I think that would be a problem. You would start to get people in shopping centres not able to have signs in the windows for and against particular candidates or issues. It would become a problem.

Yes, you get people at 100 metres standing there wanting to hand out how-to-vote cards as people go through. If you were to increase it to 200 metres, they would

probably do the same. I do not feel 100 metres is necessarily a problem. I think it works as well as it can do. By increasing it to 200 metres, you would get further away from where people might be inclined to park the car to go to a polling place and they would be less likely to be walking past people the further out you put it. But the bigger you make it, the more of the urban area you cover.

MR HANSON: The point you made about the constitution and the freedom of political activity is interesting. How is the 100 metres constitutional, because that is putting limits on.

THE CHAIR: And how do the limits in Tasmania work?

Mr Green: I am not a lawyer or a constitutional lawyer but this obviously is an area of interest of mine. My understanding of the case law around this issue is that it is okay to have reasonable and practicable limits around these things. So it is okay to have some regulation of the area of political communication, and it is where you draw the line that the court cases will revolve around.

THE CHAIR: Ms Lawder, a new question.

MS LAWDER: If you thought 100 metres did not really work or there were other enhancements the Electoral Commission felt would be worthwhile, is there a process where you recommend changes? How often do you do that?

Mr Green: After every Assembly election the commission makes a detailed report to the Assembly. We have a provision under the Electoral Act where we can make special reports to the Assembly in addition to our annual reports, and they are required to be tabled in the Assembly by the Speaker. We have done that already for the 2012 election and some quite detailed amendments to the Electoral Act were made, partly in response to the commissioner's report on the election. It is something we routinely do. We have a very high success rate of our recommendations being enacted by the Assembly. That process works very well.

MS LAWDER: With the 2012 changes, like finance reform and other things, do you have a view of how that went? I guess it was covered in your report after the election, but has it been as ongoing since then?

Mr Green: The campaign finance reform changes have bedded down now, and I think everyone has got into a routine with complying with those laws. The changes introduced on 1 July 2012 were quite significant, so there was a learning process with the commission, the parties, the candidates and other participants to get those things up and running. That all seems to be going quite smoothly now. We had amendments passed to the Electoral Act earlier this year that changed some of those campaign finance regulations. For example, we no longer have a ban on how much people can donate. There is no longer a ban on people other than ACT electors being able to donate to political parties for ACT election purposes. The implementation of those laws seems to have gone quite well.

THE CHAIR: Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: I will go to those funding reforms as well. There were some changes around the disclosure for donations. Could you just walk us through those, Mr Green?

Mr Green: Do you want me to walk you through all the changes?

DR BOURKE: There was a change about small anonymous donations or something of the like, as I recollect?

Mr Green: Yes. You are asking me to remember a lot of detail; you might help me out if I forget things.

The law introduced this concept of small anonymous donations where the parties were not able to keep more than \$25,000 worth of small anonymous donations in a financial year. If they kept more than \$25,000, they would have to pay up any excess over and above \$25,000 to the territory. That has not happened. But there was a loophole in that particular provision because the Electoral Act allows people to give anonymous donations up to \$1,000 or just under \$1,000 and for the parties to be able to retain those moneys. So there was this \$750 gap that was not being regulated at all. That got fixed up. That is a change that is, I think, a good change.

There has been the removal of the caps on donations that I mentioned. That is, in a sense, one area of regulation that we do not have to concern ourselves with anymore that we had to concern ourselves with previously. We do have the cap on election expenditure that will start on 1 January 2016. We are gearing ourselves up for that.

In February this year we did have quite significant changes passed to the Electoral Act which meant that we have had to update all of our information to all the various political players who have a responsibility for submitting returns to the commission. We are just finalising, as we speak, the manual that we will be giving out to all the political participants who are due to give us annual returns for this current financial year. They will be due by the end of August. One of the changes was to give parties and MLAs an extra month in which to get us their annual return. It was the end of July; it is now the end of August. And where the commission had a month in which to publish those returns, we have now given ourselves seven days in which to publish those returns.

One of the things we have been working on has been to streamline the way in which we get information from, particularly, political parties. We are automating that so that we are getting spreadsheets from parties in such a format that we can plug those into our systems and get them up on our website very quickly. That is one of the things that we have done with the additional funding that we were given—automate that process. Now we think we can receive the annual returns by the end of August and have that up on the website and available for people by 7 September.

DR BOURKE: You mentioned that you were still in the process of getting those guidelines or that manual published. Are there any other manuals or guidelines that arise from those changes that have not been published yet?

Mr Green: We have been able to publish the manuals for everyone who needs manuals in terms of any returns that are due as the year goes by.

One of the other changes that were made was in relation to the fact that there was a requirement previously for parties and others to disclose receipts of gifts of \$1,000 or more within 30 days of receiving the gifts. One of the changes that were introduced earlier this year was to make that a quarterly return rather than triggered by the date of the donation. Now, within a month of the end of each quarter, parties have to give us details of all the gifts they have received of \$1,000 or more. We have been working with parties to give them information where they need to be able to fill in those returns. We have had briefings where we have actually got in all of the financial controllers of the various parties and associated entities where we have sat down and had a roundtable or we have talked through the changes. They have been able to learn from each other about ways in which they could comply with those conditions.

The biggest change now that we will still need to work on with informing the parties and others is the cap on expenditure that is going to start next financial year on 1 January.

DR BOURKE: So the period of time for the capital expenditure starts from this 1 June.

Mr Green: Yes.

DR BOURKE: For the election year?

Mr Green: That is right.

DR BOURKE: There seemed to also be some discrepancies in MLA disclosures between the requirements of the Legislative Assembly and the Electoral Commission. Does that ever cause any problems?

Mr Green: The Electoral Act disclosure requirements are legislated and enforceable. The provisions that the Assembly imposes on itself are not legislated for. It is not really something that is directly within the Electoral Commission's purview. So there do from time to time arise occasions where things are disclosed to the Assembly that are not disclosed to the commission. The media is very good at picking those up, bringing those to our attention and working those through. My experience is that the two different disclosure regimes do draw out any potential discrepancies, and everyone concerned is very diligent about getting those things corrected on the public record. So I think that at the end of the day having the two different schemes improves things rather than causes confusion.

DR BOURKE: And of course they are actually reporting for two separate purposes, so it is not surprising that there are occasional discrepancies which are fit and proper.

Mr Green: That is right.

THE CHAIR: Mr Hanson, to close.

MR HANSON: I remember reading an article that you were investigating money that had been transferred between the Labor clubs and the 1973 Foundation, an amount of,

I think, \$2.5 million. Is that investigation still ongoing, or has that been resolved?

Mr Green: That has been resolved. One of the recent changes we have made has been to put on our website an ongoing report of outcomes of compliance investigations. We are doing that as an ongoing thing, but we will also be including that information in our annual report. With that particular example, my understanding of what occurred was that the Canberra Labor club transferred a sum to the 1973 Foundation which was disclosed by the 1973 Foundation as a capital injection, so that was disclosed, but the way the law works is that they should not only disclose it as a capital injection but should also disclose it as a receipt. The only mistake that was made was that they disclosed it once when they should have disclosed it twice, but they did actually disclose it so it was not really a case where the amounts were not disclosed; it is just that there was really a technical issue around the way in which it was disclosed.

THE CHAIR: Any other questions, members? Ms Lawder?

MS LAWDER: I found it strange that I could not get a map of my entire electorate with the electoral boundaries from the Electoral Commission. Why is that so?

Mr Green: We have not done that. We have not had a huge demand for that. If you have got a demand for that, we could look at whether that is achievable.

MS LAWDER: It seems like all the other electorates are within the map, but because Brindabella has such a large geographic area it goes off and is not really on it. I feel at a disadvantage.

Mr Green: Okay. Let us investigate, and we will let the committee know whether we can actually do that. Would there be interest in members from other electorates getting a map that is just their electorate?

MS FITZHARRIS: If it was not going to be enormously—

MR HANSON: If it could be published with a limited expense, sure.

MS FITZHARRIS: Yes. If it was not an enormous imposition on the commission, that would be useful.

DR BOURKE: If it is cheap and effective, commissioner.

Mr Green: Okay. We will make inquiries of the Surveyor-General's office and see what is possible. We will let you know.

THE CHAIR: Our time is at a close. Thank you very much for your attendance today. You have taken a couple of matters on notice. If you could proceed with those, we would appreciate, where possible, answers in five working days. Members, if you have further questions that arise from your reading of the transcript when it arrives, again, could they be forwarded quickly, three days after the arrival of the transcript, and we will forward those to the commissioner and his offices. When the transcript is available, we will forward that to you for any comment or correction that you would like to make. The committee will consider that. Thank you for your appearance here today.

Mr Green: Thank you.

CRIMMINS, MS FRANCES, Executive Director, YWCA Canberra
LE, MS JOANNA, Director, Corporate Relations and Communications, YWCA
Canberra

THE CHAIR: On behalf of committee members, welcome, ladies, to this hearing of the Select Committee on Estimates 2015-2016. If you take a question on notice during the hearing, if you could say, “We will take that question on notice,” that allows us to search the *Hansard* and also remind you of what you have offered to do for us. In front of you is a pink statement, the privilege statement. Could you please confirm that you have read the privilege card and that you understand the implications and protections of privilege?

Ms Crimmins: I acknowledge that I have read the privilege statement.

Ms Le: I have also read the privilege statement.

THE CHAIR: Fantastic. Thanks very much for that. Before we go to questions, would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms Crimmins: Yes, I would like to make an opening statement. Good afternoon and thank you for inviting YWCA Canberra to present its feedback on the 2015-16 budget. I would like to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land that we meet on today and pay my respect to the elders past and present.

YWCA Canberra is a feminist not-for-profit organisation that has been providing community services and representing women’s issues in Canberra since its establishment in 1929. Established in the 1800s, we are one of 11 affiliate member associations of the Australian YWCA movement. Through our national member association, YWCA Australia, we are part of a world YWCA network that connects 125 countries across the globe.

We have a rich history in supporting women, girls and their families in Canberra through the Great Depression, the Second World War and the rapid social and cultural changes Canberra has experienced in recent years. Today our 350-strong staff team provides Canberrans with leading and innovative children’s services, community development services, housing and therapeutic services, youth services, personal and professional training and women’s leadership programs. We are a membership-based organisation that is non-religious and encourages the participation of women and men of all cultures, beliefs and ages through our programs, member activities and services.

The 2015 ACT budget made some excellent steps in the right directions to solve some of our community’s most confronting problems. We applaud the ACT government for demonstrating leadership and courage in tackling these issues, notably the ACT government’s allocation of \$615,000 to primary violence prevention initiatives.

In April this year a report from Our Watch into youth perceptions of respectful relationships found incredibly concerning data, including that one in three young people do not think that exerting control over someone else is a form of violence. One in four young people do not think it is serious if a guy who is normally gentle sometimes slaps his girlfriend when he is drunk and they are arguing. One in four

young people think it is pretty normal for guys to pressure girls into sex. This follows two other evidence-based reports on the attitudes of young people that have similar findings.

This data clearly demonstrates that it is vital for the school curriculum to include primary prevention programs that work with young people before these attitudes become entrenched. Further, evidence from school education programs that have been running in the USA has shown positive change in the social norms. We know that primary prevention programs in schools do make an impact, ensuring that children have access to the skills and resources they need to understand and engage in respectful relationships.

Over the last few months we have been working with the ACT government Education and Training Directorate and others to explore various models of respectful relationships programs. The YWCA Canberra's award-winning, evidence-based program, respect, communicate, choose, has been delivered to over 900 students in Canberra and Adelaide. All of our resources are aligned with best practice for primary prevention, reflect the current literature, incorporate information on gender equality and are designed to align with the standards of the national school curriculum.

Most recently, at the request of Minister Corbell, we proposed a costed train-the-teacher model for respect, communicate, choose that could be deployed to all public primary schools in the ACT and would empower schools to run the program independently within a 24-hour period. We look forward to again meeting with the Minister for Education and Training to learn more about her plans for this significant financial investment and how we can share what we have learned through developing this best practice evidence-based program.

I would like to note that we were very pleased to see the allocation of \$250,000 in funding to tertiary service providers featured in the budget. We know that front-line services supporting victims of domestic, family and sexual violence are already stretched beyond their capacity, and this additional funding will ensure fewer women in need will be turned away.

However, this funding still will not meet current demands on front-line services. Far more support is still needed. I also note that this additional funding is only for a further 12 months. With the current awareness of domestic, family and sexual violence we will continue to see the demand increase well beyond this 12-month period and therefore we need to ensure the funding continues to be a priority well beyond the 2015-16 budget.

The second area of importance addressed in the 2015-16 ACT budget is housing affordability and homelessness. Again, YWCA would like to congratulate the ACT government on the renewal of public housing as it will contribute to the overall accessibility and quality of our public housing stock. However, this investment will not increase the overall number of public housing stock available in Canberra, which will therefore have no real impact on reducing homelessness or increasing access to affordable housing.

The issue of affordable housing and homelessness needs long-term planning and

investment by the ACT government with a particular focus on providing adequate services for women escaping family violence. Currently services are not sufficiently funded to support women and children after the initial crisis period, which is typically three months. Research demonstrates that if services are resourced to work with women and children over a longer time, their health and safety and outcomes are improved.

In addition, women who are engaged in the justice system are not referred to homelessness services. These women experience poorer outcomes in terms of employment, health, parenting and financial independence, and, as a result, these women often return to violent relationships they were trying to escape and experience secondary homelessness.

While we are pleased to see that the budget's urban renewal program increases funding to improve the quality and diversity of public housing, this will not address the issue of the lack of affordable and appropriate housing in the ACT. YWCA Canberra would like to see the ACT government make substantial additional investment to increase affordable housing stock and reduce, respond to and prevent recurrence of homelessness.

The fact that we have one of the most expensive housing markets in the country, coupled with a lack of affordable options, means we are effectively pushing women and children back into violent households. The recent violent deaths of three Canberra women this year are testament to this unacceptable situation and we need to do more. The YWCA Canberra calls on the ACT government to put in place the financial and social supports to ensure that women and children can maintain stable housing and have economic, social and psychological resources to establish a safer life after violence.

The third area relates to therapeutic services for children and young people and support for parents. Counselling services to support children and young people are only available as a free and immediate service through the school counselling service, which has limitations. Counselling support is only available during school hours and school terms. Counselling services tend to focus on individual students rather than involving the whole family.

A significant amount of school counsellor time is devoted to the assessment of students with disabilities. Although this is vital for students with disabilities, it often leaves little time to work with other students, particularly those who require early intervention support. Some children and young people will not access the counselling service for reasons of confidentiality or because they have disengaged from school. And the service has limited capacity to provide longer term counselling support.

Through our participation in the Child, Youth and Family Gateway and re-engaging youth network boards it has become increasingly clear that a significant gap exists between the availability of therapeutic counselling services for children and young people and their families in the ACT, and community demand for these services is growing. ACT school principals regularly identify this as a growing concern in both primary and high school that impacts on student engagement and student attendance.

YWCA Canberra has extensive experience in providing services to support children, young people and their families. We currently deliver a small therapeutic counselling service, circles of support, which caters for children and young people aged eight to 15 years old and their families. The service aims to strengthen family relationships and improve family members' wellbeing. It is a child and young person centre, it is family focused and it is strength based.

Some of the issues that circles of support can help address include family communication problems such as constant arguing, challenges around step-parenting and second marriages, trauma associated with family violence or abuse, school social problems such as bullying, behaviour problems at home and school, and feelings of anxiety or depression.

Currently we deliver circles of support by outreach in family homes or in counselling rooms located in Turner, Woden, Lanyon and Kippax. It is a free service funded by the ACT government Community Services Directorate's child, youth and family services program. However, this program funding ends in June 2016 and is only currently funded to \$270,000 per year. Evidence shows that early intervention through therapeutic counselling has long-term positive effects on children and is beneficial to the individual and the family.

Since its inception, the program has had a considerable waiting list. In light of this and the lack of government funding for such a service, YWCA Canberra has invested its own resources to expand this service to further demonstrate its impact. This budget is very modest, and short-term investment in services to support people experiencing domestic, family and/or sexual violence and in drug treatment services will only allow services to reduce their waiting lists. There will still be an unmet demand. Thank you. That ends our formal statement.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that, and thank you for all the good work that the Y have done in our community. What is the level of unmet need and how do we determine it? Is there any process at the moment where the government, in conjunction with the community service, actually tries to work out the depth of the problem? Because until you know how big it is, it must be very hard to plan how to defeat it.

Ms Crimmins: The program is funded to only provide three social workers, three qualified counsellors. We can take 16 caseloads. We have a three-month waiting list. After that we would not want to keep people in active holding and we try to find an alternative. Most of our referrals do not only come from the gateway itself; they actually come from the school counselling service, because many of the issues that the children are facing are connected to their families. So we need a better way to have connected up services or somehow extend school counselling services to include the family unit. That is a significantly funded program of \$16 million, but when it can only deal with an individual and a child while they are still engaged with school, it does not meet the needs of their family as well.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that. How big is the domestic violence problem? How big is the problem that drives housing and homelessness and how big then is the problem for therapeutic services? There are elements, but there is no—

Ms Crimmins: It is elements and it all has a common link of violence.

THE CHAIR: integrated plan, is there?

Ms Crimmins: To put it in perspective, we have 13 houses that are on headlease from the ACT government. All of those 13 are to house families and all have domestic violence as the root cause of their original homelessness. As to the extent to which the perpetrator is still involved, over the last two weeks we have had to seek police help to evict two perpetrators who have recently returned. That just gives you the extent in a two-week period. In those 13 houses we have 48 children and they have many complex needs. Therefore, in terms of the lack of therapeutic services or parenting services, once you reconnect those children in schools, we need to look at a way of connecting up all of those services.

THE CHAIR: If there was a very long piece of string, how many houses could you fill?

Ms Crimmins: The wait list is enormous. We have an outreach program as well. We try not to take more than 10 families on outreach. There is also then the challenge of those people who are fleeing domestic violence who come from interstate and vice versa.

THE CHAIR: So how many families would be on the wait list for housing?

Ms Crimmins: We have been informed by ACT housing that there are virtually no houses left in the system.

THE CHAIR: All right. But how many people are—

Ms Crimmins: In terms of transitional housing, the average time of families in our home is from 18 months to two years. That is way beyond the normal transitional housing time frame, but we have nowhere to transition them to.

THE CHAIR: As a consequence, at the start of the problem, those people are either not leaving domestic violence situations or are couch surfing—

Ms Crimmins: Couch surfing, yes.

THE CHAIR: living in cars and doing whatever?

Ms Crimmins: Yes.

THE CHAIR: You said you had a wait list. How many families would you have on your waiting list?

Ms Crimmins: We only get the wait list from First Point, so we do outreach to those families to try to maintain some type of safe housing alternative. The challenge that we face as a community is that for families that have a large number of children, particularly if they are adolescent children and male children, the refuges cannot take

them.

THE CHAIR: How many families are actually on your waiting list? Do you have a number?

Ms Crimmins: We have 10 families on outreach, but that is our maximum capacity for what we are funded to do. The wait list at First Point is significantly higher.

THE CHAIR: Do you know what that number is?

Ms Crimmins: The current wait time, I believe, is over 12 months.

MS LAWDER: More like 18, I think, on average.

Ms Crimmins: 18 months, yes.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Fitzharris.

MS FITZHARRIS: I just wanted a quick supplementary on that. With the houses that the women are leaving, do they remain occupied by the perpetrator?

Ms Crimmins: That is often the case with many of our clients. A lot of the time when women arrive, it is their last resort and they have left the family home. We know that with the women who try to maintain and stay in their family home, often the perpetrator returns.

MS FITZHARRIS: Are there any programs to turn that around in a sense?

Ms Crimmins: There are some trials going on at the moment involving keeping the family, the victims, in the home. But that involves putting—

MS FITZHARRIS: Finding somewhere for the—

Ms Crimmins: No; it actually involves putting security on the home. There are actually CCTV cameras being put in the home to provide that the home becomes a secured environment. That is only a new initiative. It started in Victoria and I think they are trialling it in Queensland.

MS FITZHARRIS: I see.

Ms Crimmins: It is only very new and I think we need to wait and see what occurs from that, because it implies that you are only safe when the camera is monitoring you in your own home. You will leave your home at some point.

MS FITZHARRIS: And presumably that is another impact of homelessness—

Ms Crimmins: Yes.

MS FITZHARRIS: for the perpetrator to have left. With the trial, do you know if there is housing provided for the person leaving the home?

Ms Crimmins: No, I am not aware of that.

MS FITZHARRIS: Sorry; I just have a subsequent question. Thank you, and I thank you in particular for your advocacy around respectful relationships, which I think has resulted in this funding in this budget—not precisely what you had put forward, but I hope you have a role in developing up what that looks like. Are you able to talk a bit more about what you know about that at this point?

Ms Crimmins: At this stage we do not know too much about that. I have got my first presentation to ETD next week, on Monday.

MS FITZHARRIS: Great.

Ms Crimmins: But we have proposed a model where we can provide the education to the teachers.

MS FITZHARRIS: Yes.

Ms Crimmins: We would like it noted that it is really important that anybody delivering this training has actually been educated in or has an understanding of women's experience of violence and an understanding of gender equality. And that has to be embedded throughout the whole program. It is more in depth than just talking about respect in general; you actually have to make sure that the person delivering it has that extensive training. We believe it can be delivered over two days if they are a qualified teacher or a social worker. But it is the education on understanding violence, men's use of violence and gender equality and what that looks like.

MS FITZHARRIS: We had some evidence earlier today that almost all children will have some interaction with a school. Therefore the school is seen as a place where every problem can be at least accessed. What are some of the difficulties of that for schools, for teachers and for organisations like yours—around putting a fair amount of focus on having that door as the way into helping to get services to kids and families?

Ms Crimmins: I think the issue of preventing violence against women, and then their children, is that it really is changing social norms. If we look as a community, as a country, it really is the largest social norm or cultural norm that we do have to change. While I appreciate that schools are asked to do sunhat awareness and many other campaigns, and how to be prepared, I think as a community we need to recognise that this is the largest area of social change we need to tackle as a community. There are two elements of that. There are the social norms around men's and women's roles—educating young men on masculinity and what gender stereotypes are. But then we also have to work on the society—the other section, around seeing women in leadership, pay equity. There are two things at play; it is not the sole responsibility of schools. But I do believe that if we are actually going to start changing those social norms it needs to start with educating children. I would see that as the highest priority if we are going to ask schools to work on some of the other social issues that we face as a community.

MS FITZHARRIS: Do you see the learning around respectful relationships to be something that—some of the other evidence we were hearing about today was in relation to the fact that in the end teachers are asked to pass on all this sort of information, to be the vessel providing it, to children between nine and three, and then there are families and communities that help with that. Would you eventually see a world in which you did not need a program like this—where it was just part of what teachers did normally, what families do normally? Do you see a path to it being effectively mainstreamed in the future?

Ms Crimmins: Yes, that is what we have got to work towards, but I think we have to recognise that mainstreaming this—

MS FITZHARRIS: We are not there yet.

Ms Crimmins: We are not there yet. And it absolutely has to be long term, and any program that is put into the schools needs to include evaluation. When we look at cutting costs, evaluation is the first thing that people cut. That has been one of the faults of many people who have run education in schools on this issue—the evaluation has not been done to the level it needs and it has not been tracked. We do need to have in this program the ability to track people who have done it and track them as they progress into high school. It needs a longitudinal evaluation if we are going to see any impact on this.

MS FITZHARRIS: Just another follow up. The coordinator-general for family violence who has been appointed—have you had some interaction with the person herself or with what her mandate is and how she will operate?

Ms Crimmins: Yes. I have had one phone call in her first week, and we are planning on connecting. I do commend it; I think it is a very good decision to do that and there is the Domestic Violence Prevention Council report that came out of the extraordinary general meeting. Those recommendations are calling for some very big commitments and very big changes. If we are going to achieve a whole-of-government approach, that role should be empowered to connect all of the directorates to recognise that they actually have a contribution to make to the prevention of violence.

MS FITZHARRIS: Thanks.

THE CHAIR: A supplementary from Ms Lawder, and then a substantive question.

MS LAWDER: On the supplementary, just quickly, you say the Productivity Commission's report earlier this year said that 2,300 people are on the waiting list for public housing.

Ms Crimmins: Yes.

MS LAWDER: This is an increase of 900 since 2010. It occurred to me for the first time, when you were speaking about the program in schools about gender stereotypes et cetera and modelling behaviour, is there an implicit concern that, for example, the majority of teachers are women and there will not be enough men modelling appropriate behaviours?

Ms Crimmins: I have not seen that in any of the research around school programs. In our particular program, we advocate that both a man and woman facilitate the program, for that very reason. There is certainly evidence. In the literature review we have conducted, a particular academic, Michael Flood—his most recent area is how to engage boys and men in being active participants in preventing violence. That is a significant part of the work and research that we have put into our program and how you engage boys—I guess that is the area we work with—and young men in the prevention of violence. There have been some very good case studies to show how that has been effective in America, which have been included in that literature review that we have put in our program.

MS LAWDER: My assumption is based on not very much at all, nothing scientific, but I would have presumed that historically many of the male teachers tend to be principals compared to women.

Ms Crimmins: Yes.

MS LAWDER: So again that is not necessarily modelling that best.

Ms Crimmins: All of the research completed—Our Watch are just completing a very comprehensive literature research again and there is the one that came out of VicHealth—clearly demonstrates that the underlying issue is gender equality, with gender inequality the basis of violence against women. There is about to be released a very comprehensive framework of how we can address that, and one of the key findings is education in schools. But then it also goes to community awareness, and public awareness campaigns are a part of that.

THE CHAIR: Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Was that your substantive?

MS LAWDER: That was my supplementary.

THE CHAIR: All right.

DR BOURKE: Sorry.

THE CHAIR: A substantive from Ms Lawder and then Dr Bourke.

MS LAWDER: You mentioned housing affordability and homelessness and you referred to increasing housing market responses to housing needs in the ACT. What does that look like in practice?

Ms Crimmins: We would like to see some exploration of what we can do to make housing more affordable, whether that is reducing red tape or something else. We have developed a small house of our own where we did not have to pay for the land because it was left to us. We are a tier 3 community housing provider. What is

stopping us building more of our own homes for families and women? Is it the cost of land? We are not eligible for land rent as a tier 3 provider; only tier 1 providers are. Again, that is something that could be explored. In particular, our area of interest in our own housing development has been for older women. I think that if you looked at the preferred model for older women, you would see that they are little houses, little homes. We could have some exploration on design, uses of land and how we can build those. Allowing community providers other than tier 3 to access land rent in the ACT would be a significant initiative for us to be able to then self-fund developing homes ourselves.

MS LAWDER: Thanks.

THE CHAIR: Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: I will just take a supplementary there.

THE CHAIR: You may have a supplementary before your substantive question.

DR BOURKE: How successful has Lady Heydon House been?

Ms Crimmins: It is full, and we have not had a vacancy. It is something that we would like to replicate, but we just have not had the opportunity. We also are now managing Betty Searle House, which is another affordable house that we headlease from the ACT government. We have had that for 12 months. Again, the older women in there are women who would be on the public housing wait list, who are eligible for that. So when you call it affordable housing, it is more at the rates of 25 per cent of their income.

Again, the common link for all of these women is that either they have currently experienced domestic violence or they have been a former victim of domestic violence. Again, with the demand for that house, we did have a tenant recently whom we were able to relocate somewhere else, but we have got people waiting to go into that spare room.

DR BOURKE: But the style of accommodation you are offering at Lady Heydon is different from what they would be able to access in public housing—is that correct?

Ms Crimmins: Yes. Ideally, I do not think anybody would elect to live in a group house model, but with the small studio model we have been able to maintain the tenancy of the women in there. You do have to make sure that you do tenancy mix in terms of making sure that people are compatible. But within our house they still are separate units so they can still come and go without interacting with the other tenants. And there is a small studio kitchen in each of the rooms.

DR BOURKE: How much demand do you think there is in the Canberra community for that specific type of housing for older women?

Ms Crimmins: I think we could fill a few more group houses. Ideally, though, it would be great if we could have smaller units. The studio units with a larger kitchen are what I think would be more ideal rather than one common roof—if we could have

smaller dwellings that were more independent rather than a group style with a common kitchen and sharing the common laundry.

DR BOURKE: That is an interesting commentary. The National Seniors people who came in to see us this morning were telling us that older people really want larger places so they can have their grandchildren there.

Ms Crimmins: If there is somewhere to have a grandchild, and our studio apartment would allow for that if you had a sofa bed in the room. But in terms of the women that we house, there is the maintenance issue: if you have too large a property, I would imagine that the maintenance issue would be a challenge.

DR BOURKE: So you have seen the affordable housing options which are available in Canberra as being a useful adjunct to public housing?

Ms Crimmins: Yes, but the problem is a lack of affordable housing.

DR BOURKE: I am particularly thinking about the social housing provided by organisations such as CHC.

Ms Crimmins: We do transition some of our families through there. Now that NRAS is no longer occurring, I do not know how they are going to continue doing that.

DR BOURKE: Sure.

MS FITZHARRIS: Are you aware of any planning issues around that sort of development that may prevent some of those new housing types being built? National seniors this morning spoke to us about a lot of older people who have lived in some of Canberra's older suburbs. They want to stay in the suburbs and the locations that they have been in for a while, but there are some restrictions around redeveloping infill in established suburbs. Have you come across any of that in terms of looking at new properties?

Ms Crimmins: In terms of looking at new properties, in our partnership with CHC, who helped us develop it, we acknowledged that it was great to see the Downer precinct. I think, yes, we would see that as a positive step. The feedback from us is that people want to remain in those suburbs. I think that we can see more of that occurring where it is available, and I think the Downer site is a good example of that.

MS FITZHARRIS: Are you involved with CHC on the Downer site?

Ms Crimmins: Yes, that is who helped us develop our group house, yes.

THE CHAIR: Unfortunately, we have run out of time. We will call a halt to the questioning. Thank you very much for your attendance this afternoon. I do not believe you have taken any questions on notice, so you are off the hook on that. But if members have additional questions once the transcript has arrived, you have got three days in which to get those questions in. If we forward any questions to witnesses, you have five working days in which to answer them.

When the transcript is available we will send it to you. If there are any corrections, additions or alterations you would like to make, if you inform the committee we will take them on board. With that, we would say thank you very much for all your good works and your appearance here today.

Ms Crimmins: Thank you.

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

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

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon and welcome to the public hearing of the Select Committee on Estimates 2015-16. In front of you on the table is the privilege statement. Could you please indicate that you have read the statement and understand the implications of privilege?

Ms Collins: Yes, I have read it.

Mr Little: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to make an opening statement before we go to questions?

Mr Little: We would like to say thanks very much for the opportunity to come and talk with the committee today and to explain, or inquire about, some of the opportunities where we can see better outcomes for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

THE CHAIR: We will go straight to questions. Within the budget was there anything that you saw that you liked? Was there anything that you could not find and would like to see included at some stage?

Mr Little: Basically, I think our disappointment was that we could not see a whole lot in the budget. That may be buried within the detail. We saw a couple of things—in particular, the prevention of or decrease in smoking. We think that is just a small portion of the need in the ACT community. It did not basically reflect the commitment by the government to the recent signing of the whole-of-government agreement. That has a whole series of community priorities developed in consultation with community, but it also has some clear alignment with the COAG targets. I guess that I and my colleagues were somewhat disappointed.

There were other things in there. Economic participation was another one that we saw that was not quite clear. We felt that more of the detail should have come to the surface and more of the communication of what the government's intention is. That would give some confidence in community that this agreement, whole-of-government agreement, is taken seriously.

THE CHAIR: The whole-of-government agreement has a number of a priorities.

Mr Little: That is correct.

THE CHAIR: Is there a time frame against which these will be delivered? If there is no funding within the budget, how will they be delivered?

Mr Little: We would like to know for sure but we are at the point of trying to get some more information about the details from the directorates to say how these

investments have connection to these particular activities. I use as an example step up for kids. We know that that is consistent with one of our priorities. But that is pretty much a mainstream program and we know that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are targeted in that. We want to be able to see the detail and have some confidence that the issue of families, which is central to the agreement—strengthening families—is addressed. We want some confidence ourselves, but also the community, that those very concerning issues are going to be addressed.

Our priorities are aligned with our strategic directions, which go through to 2017. The community priorities are directly linked with the whole-of-government agreement. It has the same time line. So we expect that whenever government is thinking about addressing the concerns or needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, that is coming from us. Through consultation, there should be some action that can reflect that it has taken those things into consideration, particularly in the budget process.

MS FITZHARRIS: You mentioned economic participation. Could you talk us through what sorts of things you mean and what sorts of initiatives might be considered in the future?

Mr Little: I am not sure whether you have the priorities but they certainly can be obtained. Some of the economic participation stuff was fundamentally about having some roundtables to further discuss how to increase local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses. There was a forum only a few weeks ago on economic participation. One of the things was about the establishment of an ACT Indigenous business chamber. We understand that there are some supports that can be obtained from the directorates to help us facilitate a process for that. At the end of the day we do not see that as being a huge cost. It might need some collaboration.

Another economic priority under economic participation and encouragement is the promotion of tourism. Tourism in the ACT involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is not significant. It is not prevalent in the current budget. It does not feature as far as we know, unless we drill down into the detail of capital investments like light rail, the city to lake developments or any other developments—the Majura Parkway and those kinds of things. We have not seen anything significant in the budget to give us some confidence that there is going to be some employment and training opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

MS FITZHARRIS: One of the earlier witnesses spoke with us about social procurement. Have you had an opportunity to engage with the people who work in that area in the ACT government?

Mr Little: We have some small business that provide services and the ACT government contracts them. There is a register of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses with Supply Nation. I understand that there are some negotiations. At the federal level that is an arrangement for procurement. But I think that some of the other kinds of services and training and employment opportunities in construction, development and those kinds of areas are some of the things that we have been advocating for for some time, particularly with a long-term project like the bush healing farm where we could have young people in training now to have qualifications to actually build their own facility.

We also have an old persons accommodation project where we have identified the site for five residents. That is going to take some time to come up. We would like to see that there are opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to gain the skills to be able to build that or at least procure for that as contracts.

Ms Collins: I also think that procurement happens at the directorate level. It is very silo affected. There is not a whole-of-government approach to procuring goods or how to go about it all, even for those decision-makers to know where to go to find a list of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are in business and who can provide a service, program, whatever. So there are a couple of barriers there that need to be addressed. There needs to be a more coordinated approach.

MS FITZHARRIS: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: As a supplementary to the original question, who would establish the chamber? Are you expecting the government to establish it or just to provide some assistance to establish it?

Mr Little: Some assistance. We have sought some assistance. In 2012 we had a forum. We sought some collaboration between the Indigenous business council of Australia and Supply Nation. We are starting to re-establish those connections. But our understanding from the forum we had a couple of weeks ago is that the ACT and regional structure has merged. There was in there an Indigenous business chamber of commerce, I think it was called, or business council. I cannot remember the exact name. The idea of an Indigenous business chamber came up because that particular model was not having the effect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

THE CHAIR: Dr Bourke and then Ms Fitzharris.

DR BOURKE: How active has IBA been in Canberra as a supporter of Indigenous business?

Mr Little: IBA?

DR BOURKE: Yes.

Mr Little: Indigenous Business Australia?

DR BOURKE: Yes.

Mr Little: Yes, it has been on a smaller scale. It is always an opportunity but I think mostly their picture is really big. IBA has been supportive in Woden and the investment in Scarborough House as far as I know and some other activities generally relating to something as big as a project like that. But we are fundamentally talking small to medium businesses that are able to access procurement and so on.

DR BOURKE: Are you saying that that is not the area that IBA is involved with? It is not involved in small business; it tends to be large business?

Mr Little: Yes. I think more locally the services that are provided from business hubs in Canberra, such as the Innovation Network and so on, are all available to give support. Going into business is quite scary for some people. They do not know how small they want to get into it unless you have got some fairly solid advice and support around you. There are a number of social ventures around which are quite small, really. But the new business chamber—what is it called?

MS FITZHARRIS: Canberra Business Chamber?

Mr Little: Canberra Business Chamber, yes. There are some moves for us to have a meeting with Glenn and co to say, “We need to have a look at what the function of that chamber is and how we can get it going.” Then we need to ask whether we still need to pursue the other or can they come together because the landscape has changed, the environment has changed.

Ms Collins: That is more focused towards existing businesses. IBA run those workshops for those individuals who are considering business and provide specific training to allow you to think about your business idea, develop a business plan and give you some support in that. But I guess that existing businesses are looking at a representative body that can talk about business and what it means. Also, providing another aspect of support is what is missing for our ACT community.

Mr Little: IBA are in collaboration with the Melbourne Business School. It runs the MARA program, of which I am a participant. But also some of the local businesses from the ACT and region have already participated in that program.

THE CHAIR: Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: In the covering letter that you put in front of the agreement that you provided to the committee, at point 3 you talk about the establishment of an independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled child support organisation, which would work in relation to children coming into the foster care and protection environment. I note from the “a step up for our kids” strategy that a quarter of the children in the care and protection system are from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and that they are overrepresented. Have you put your proposal about an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander controlled organisation to the government or is this the first time that you have raised it?

Mr Little: It is not the first time but it is an ongoing concern for us that, in order to develop a discussion paper or business plan for any sort of proposition like this, the elected body does not have the capacity to sit down and carry out its functions under the act to present good business cases to the government. We draw on the support of directorates, and sometimes the idea might be in conflict with the directorates’ strategic plan as it sits now. But now that we have this priority embedded in the agreement, we will be pursuing the support to be able to develop and design that kind of project. It is one of those projects where there is a long-term vision and it will take some consideration and investment over time, and a lot of collaboration and partnership work.

MS LAWDER: Apart from perhaps talking with the government about it, have you

had any discussion with one of the existing organisations in that space about auspicing, mentoring or something like that?

Mr Little: We had some initial conversations with SNAICC, the national body for child care. We thought about things like population and the numbers of children in care, plus the support that is available for families so that they do not get to that point. It is a bit like thinking about prevention and diversion. We think that is going to be of assistance for us, but at the moment a lot of the children are in care and it is a problem because there are not enough carers around with a cultural environment and so on. We are going through that program of cultural advisers as well.

This is a long-term vision. We have a limited number of organisations at the moment that have the capacity to provide the service and to manage such a service. So we are looking at different models. At the moment they are conversations. This is certainly a priority that we would like to get progressed, and in a fairly short period of time, at least in the agreement time. We set out each year what we want to achieve within those priorities. In the early stages there are conversations about development and design of a model, and then we need to see what can be worked forward from there.

Ms Collins: There need to be conversations with community around that. For that organisation to be sustainable and effective, it has to be community driven. Our community organisations are working to capacity. And there are not many of them, as Rod has alluded to. This initiative is so important. It is about how you go about developing something that will make it work while providing good energy and effort in order to have something that will make a difference and that is lasting. If we are going to do something that falls down then where is the achievement? It is not worth anything. That does take time.

Looking at the capacity of the elected body, that is another initiative that is so important regarding how we determine the journey that occurs. How we can support that and advocate to government for that needs to be discussed more.

Mr Little: Yes. The model that we are looking at for this is a business kind of model. It might come back to getting support from the chamber, IBA or other experts. At the moment we have a discussion paper out about the use of Boomanulla Oval. That could contribute to healing families and bringing families back together, cultural activities, cultural participation, having a place to meet and so on. That might have a more immediate effect regarding a long-term desire for that kind of building.

The model that we are talking about is a business model that manages a facility, but with the people within there actually providing the service, so that you would have a number of organisations running their own bit and then trying to manage the operations as well as trying to provide a service and come up with other service programs.

With the overarching thing, I mentioned three. The older person's accommodation is something that needs to be managed. We are thinking about community control, but ACT housing also has some stock that used to be Aboriginal housing, and that could form a business model of management for those kinds of facilities, along with one for Boomanulla.

THE CHAIR: Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: I will ask a supplementary, if I can. That is one of the reasons why you are looking at a regional childcare organisation rather than an ACT organisation, because of the small population that we have here and the limited availability of good talent for the board to ensure good governance and accountability? Being able to draw from other communities, you can get more people in and get more economies of scale and good governance happening there?

Mr Little: Yes, absolutely. There is the relationship between governments at the moment in terms of private child care—we understand that—and placements and so on. So there are some arrangements. We could build on that, from a regional perspective. We have another organisation that provides regional services—the health service. Cross-border stuff is something that is worth exploring. I think that the business model is something we can explore. We certainly have the support, and the offer of support, to develop from SNAICC. Frank is always there to have a conversation with.

DR BOURKE: What you are talking about is more of a concrete proposal for a multi-tenanted facility which has an overall management?

Mr Little: Yes.

DR BOURKE: Are there any models for that elsewhere in the country that you can think of?

Mr Little: Yes, it is almost like a cooperative model. You would have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experts and you would have experts from mainstream as well. We have in the ACT a business person who manages serviced apartments, so managing property is one of those key elements of that business model.

DR BOURKE: Coming to my substantive question, there has been a move to expand human rights legislation in the ACT to encompass Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural rights. Does the elected body have an opinion on that move?

Mr Little: Absolutely, we do.

DR BOURKE: Tell us about it.

Mr Little: I think we initiated this when we were first approached because of the Victorian exercise. In that example, Victoria's human rights act contains recognition of cultural rights. Australia and also the ACT have taken up a commitment to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. With the articles in the UN declaration, there are six for the state of Australia and/or its jurisdictions to implement. We know that the Australian government has committed to that at the UN level, and again last year it reaffirmed its commitment to implementing the declaration. We saw this as an opportunity, and we had some discussions over a long period of time.

Ms Collins: That is from last term.

Mr Little: From last term, about the interpretations of what the declaration might mean and what sort of commitments or impacts legally or financially it might have on governments, which is always a question when asking for something like that to be introduced. But after lengthy discussions there was an openness for both parties to say, “This isn’t too bad.” I guess it gives more impetus to the commitment to reconciliation, if you like. It is taking it a little bit further, and having recognition of fundamental human rights. Equality and recognition of people’s heritage and cultural rights are fundamental to it, and there is the mechanism for it.

We had a break period at one time because there were questions about self-determination. We said, “That’s what we’re doing.” Part of the declaration says that we are able to establish our own institutions, our own education systems, practise our cultures and religion and spiritual practices, like any other ethnic group. Those were the things that I think we got to. We do not think it is going to be an imposition of a government’s legal or financial burden. I think it is a game changer in terms of how we do business—understand, and make contributions to a more harmonious society. Those are my dreams.

DR BOURKE: Have you heard any news from Victoria, where it has been implemented, on how this has benefited the Victorian community, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal?

Mr Little: Yes, we have. There was a point where I consulted with a human rights lawyer down there, who helped to do that one up down there. They will be reviewing theirs next year. Now they are waiting to see what happens in the ACT, which I think is good. The feeling, from talking with the lawyer down there, is that there is a commitment from government. There is a change in the way that people treat one another and behave towards one another. But the recognition is extremely valuable. Aboriginal people in Victoria feel that their rights are being recognised. For anybody, and for whatever right it is, if it is being respected, recognised and valued, that makes an individual so much more valuable.

Ms Collins: Looking at the United Nations declaration, which is at an international level, and bringing that into the ACT, there has been a significant amount of work that the elected body has driven, but there is still much more work to be done once that is passed around education and interpreting what that means for our people, for our organisations and for the elected body. It is great progress, but there still is some work to be done on how we use it to our advantage—not only to our advantage but to that of the wider community, to make some sense of how we can work together.

Mr Little: I think it complements two other things. One is the constitutional recognition conversation that is happening at the moment. It might add to that conversation. Also, race relations in the country is another conversation that it can contribute to. There is a roundtable on race relations being held next week, facilitated by the human rights office. We always find that it is a privilege being in the ACT in being able to test the waters on some of these things. I think the community is brave enough to test those, and on a lot of other things at different levels.

MS FITZHARRIS: Are you involved in any formal way in the recognition—

Mr Little: Constitutional recognition?

MS FITZHARRIS: Constitutional recognition, yes.

Mr Little: We have written to the committee and we have held a community forum here which was facilitated by Professor Mick Dodson. There are still a lot of conversations to be had around that. That was an open forum; non-Indigenous people attended as well.

THE CHAIR: Our time is at an end. We thank you for your appearance today. I do not think you have taken anything on notice. Members, when we get the transcript, you have a couple of days in which to put further questions through the secretariat, and we will forward them to the elected body. If we do give you any questions, if you could answer them quickly that would be much appreciated. When the transcript is available we will make a copy available to you so that you can check it. If you feel the need to make any corrections or additions, please let the committee know through the secretariat.

Members, the chair's award for the day goes to UnitingCare Kippax for their innovation in bringing Mr Mark Wilson with them to tell his story, and to Mr Mark Wilson for his courage and generosity in sharing his story with us. I think it is a great way to go about humanising the estimates process. So well done to Kippax UnitingCare today. Thank you very much to the elected body for attending as well. There endeth the day.

The committee adjourned at 5.48 pm.