



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2019-2020

(Reference: [Appropriation Bill 2019-2020 and Appropriation \(Office of the Legislative Assembly\) Bill 2019-2020](#))

Members:

**MISS C BURCH (Chair)
MS B CODY (Deputy Chair)
MRS G JONES
MS C LE COUTEUR
MR M PETTERSSON**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

FRIDAY, 14 JUNE 2019

**Secretary to the committee:
Ms Annemieke Jongsma (Ph 620 51253)**

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 9.31 am.

COOPER, DR MAXINE, Chair, Landcare ACT

FRANCO, MS MARTINE, Executive Officer, Southern ACT Catchment Group

LOLICATO, MR SANDY, Board Member, Landcare ACT, and Convenor,
Ginninderra Catchment Group

THE CHAIR: Good morning, and welcome to the first day of the public hearings for the Select Committee on Estimates 2019-2020. Today we will be hearing from a range of community and industry groups in relation to the ACT budget 2019-20. These include Landcare ACT and the Southern ACT Catchment Group, the Australian Breastfeeding Association, the ACT Gifted Families Support Group, the Young Women's Christian Association Canberra, the Belconnen Community Council, the Kingston and Barton Residents Group, the Master Builders Association of the ACT, the ACT Council of Social Service, the Youth Coalition of the ACT, People with Disability ACT, the Public Transport Association Canberra, and the Property Council of Australia's ACT office.

Please be aware that the proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard, and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice, it would be useful if witnesses could use the words, "I will take that as a question on notice." This will help the committee and witnesses to confirm questions taken on notice from the transcript.

Can you please confirm that you have read the privilege card that is on the table before you, and that you understand the implications of the privilege statement?

Dr Cooper: Yes, I do.

Ms Franco: Yes, I do.

Mr Lolicato: Yes, I do.

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

Dr Cooper: I will start. Landcare ACT is a peak body group, and the funding that we are talking about today is for our member groups, particularly three of the catchment groups. I wish to emphasise that we cover the whole of the ACT, and that our catchment groups work with our other groups, the Aboriginal group that we have and our rural lessees group, in a very integrated way; so any issues of funding have a knock-on effect to those other groups and right across the ACT.

In summary, the group sought funding of 130K each, 390K in total, for the forthcoming financial year. We have been advised—and we are very grateful and appreciate the government's support—by Minister Gentleman, in a letter dated 28 May 2019, and we can provide a copy—that each group would receive 90K, a total of 270K.

As you can see, that is shy of what we had requested. One of the things we are asking

about is that this money is not obvious in the budget. We think that, for the catchment groups, it needs to be obvious. Also, the money is for one year. While we appreciate this, we think that funding for the catchment groups over the years has contracted; it has reduced and reduced. There are all kinds of reasons for that, such as the commonwealth programming change. But it has continually been reduced. For this year and last year in particular, there were a lot of conversations going on. We would like a long-term commitment, which did occur in the past, for funding of these groups.

There are two things. We need core support, which is what I have just talked about. There are also citizen science programs, Frogwatch and Waterwatch, which need funding. I will now hand over to Martine, who will give you a bit more information; then Sandy will follow Martine.

Ms Franco: I will give a bit of background on who we are. The catchment groups have been running collectively for over 20 years. Ginninderra Catchment Group was established 21 years ago, and Southern and Molonglo followed not long after that. We were set up initially by small community groups, who foresaw that they needed overarching catchment groups to support their activities, to go for grants and to provide insurance. It has always been a partnership with government, right from the beginning.

We currently support around 60 Parkcare and Landcare groups, rural landholders in the region, Indigenous land managers in the region, and a range of other partners and stakeholders. We bring in around \$1.5 million collectively every year in competitive grants. That is money coming into the region, and that is a conservative estimate.

We also leverage millions of dollars worth of volunteer time, energy and resources to undertake environmental projects. We do a range of projects, all sorts of environmental projects, both terrestrial and watery. People often think catchment just means water but we cover a whole range of things, from erosion control to re-veg activities. Principally, we work with the community. All of our projects are initiated from the community. We do not do anything without it being in the interests of the community and the region.

We also undertake projects that are priorities of government. We like to play a brokering role, whereby we help government to implement their priorities with the community. We are the organisation that provides the intersection of those priorities.

Most importantly, we work across tenure, and we work at landscape scale. That is something that other agencies cannot necessarily do. We do not care who owns the land; we will work with businesses, we will work in rural space, and we will work in urban open space, hills, ridges and buffers. Initially, when we were set up, we used to do catchment-scale planning. We work across those tenures to plan what activities we can do in an environmental sense, across those landscapes.

Because of our trust and the embedded nature of our organisations in the community—our committee members are from the community, and many of them come out of these small groups or are rural landholders—we have had a lot of investment of time and energy from community members. We are very concerned that the constant erosion of our funding base over the years has meant that there is a real

risk that we will lose that goodwill and that we will lose that financial investment made into our organisations. Over the years we have had investment from organisations such as Icon Water, who have paid for us to do water education. That has now been lost. Water education was also being provided by the ACT government in the past, and we understand that there is no foreseeable future for water education activities in our organisations. This constant erosion of our funding base is really putting us at risk when it comes to being able to support our communities to do what we do best.

We are exploring where we have a capability to expand. Because of the trust that the community has in us, and the fact the community has confidence in us delivering projects with and for them, we are looking at a whole range of areas. We are looking at working in the justice system to deliver environmental projects—release programs, early release programs. We are looking at partnerships with developers. I do not know whether any of you have heard of the “bush on the boundary” kind of approach. We work in that space, and we have been key coordinators of those programs.

We are looking at how we can work in health and how we can help people to get health benefits regarding access to nature. We are also working very heavily on the new urban infrastructure, on the 19 healthy waterways projects. In particular, Southern has worked in that space to look at getting stewardship groups set up in that region. I will hand over to Sandy.

Mr Lolicato: I want to emphasise some of the reasons why the government should continue to invest in Landcare, why it is important. One of the key things is that we provide strong partnerships between the community, government and business. We deliver a whole range of different projects. One, for example, is bush on the boundary, which is some of the work that we do in some of the new developments that are being proposed around Canberra.

It is really not the time to reduce investment. I refer in particular to the critical issues around loss of species. I note the UN report on biodiversity that has recently been released. It is also at odds with some of the other aspects of government policy, particularly the importance of climate change and adaptation. The catchment groups in the community are very well placed to work with government on those areas of climate adaptation.

There is a lot of confidence out there on how we can deliver. A recent commonwealth Labor policy—unfortunately, it will not continue—involved significant funding around urban waterways. There was a lot of confidence in us being able to deliver in that area. We have the ability to deliver strong programs.

Dr Cooper: We seem to be able to be politically neutral. Recently, we have had support from the current government for continued funding. Also, a policy of Liberal MLAs in the Assembly involved just over \$2 million for four years for the group. We feel very heartened that there is such a swell of general overall support. It is not a contested space.

Mr Lolicato: I will add to what Martine mentioned. We have obtained a lot of significant environmental and social benefits from our work. It seems to be at odds

with the fact that the ACT government is—

MRS JONES: Scrimping.

Mr Lolicato: not funding it, particularly when you look at other states. For example, New South Wales have provided a significant amount of funding for catchment coordinators.

The other point that I want to raise is around other important programs that the catchment groups have been involved in, Waterwatch and Frogwatch, which were significant citizen science programs managed through the ACT government and the catchment groups. These have produced long-term datasets and they have involved a whole range of different volunteers, along with a significant education program. These have made significant inroads into informing decision-makers in a whole range of areas.

We understand that there is a potential commitment for funding for the next financial year, for 2019-20. We have not been advised in writing of what it is. I understand that there is still no commitment for ongoing funding for those programs. Previously, the Waterwatch program was funded over a five-year period. There has been no ongoing commitment. As I emphasised previously, this is not the time to reduce funding in this critical period. In the area of funding for Waterwatch and Frogwatch, we are really looking at an investment of \$350,000 per year, in order to work with government in delivering those important citizen science programs.

In closing, the key point that I want to mention is the importance of consistency and continuity in working with the community on delivering Landcare. This is in two areas. Firstly, there is the investment of \$390,000 a year for catchment coordinators. As you just heard, we have an investment of \$270,000 just for the next financial year. It is not the full amount; as Maxine mentioned, we appreciate that funding but it is not the full amount. Secondly, there is the investment of \$350,000 a year for Waterwatch and Frogwatch, and at this stage nothing has been confirmed.

THE CHAIR: What kind of an impact does the uncertainty in funding and the year-on-year funding have on you as an organisation?

Ms Franco: It has a very significant impact. My organisation, Southern ACT Catchment Group, runs on 2.2 staff members. It is a very little organisation. That is the biggest we have ever been. For us to only have one-year funding to run projects means that we do not support our community and the community get very concerned.

I support 26 member groups. They call me and say, “Can you do this and this?” I go, “No, I’m too busy trying to sustain funding for year on year after this year.” I am really concerned that there will be a loss of confidence in the community in our organisations and I am quite concerned that a lot of the investment in activities that we have done will not continue. Where I have got ongoing projects like erosion control activities that need constant monitoring and revisiting, we will not be able to do that in the next year if we have got \$90,000 to survive on and we are spending a lot of our time still lobbying for the next year of funding.

Mr Lolicato: And to add to that, our volunteer base are very passionate, they are very skilled and they are keen to get the work done. They just need to have the support base around them. We acknowledge that there is some good support by the ACT government through park care and urban landcare. But catchment coordinators and catchment groups are critical in finding that strong coordination, strong direction for Landcare. At this stage this uncertainty makes it difficult for them to do their work.

Dr Cooper: I am reasonably new in the chair role but we have spent, I would, say 80 per cent of our time since I have joined trying to get funding because if you do not have funding out there for the community you cannot have the community working to achieve the outcomes they need. I emphasise that this is a community-based program with environmentally good results. It is not necessarily just an environmental program. It is much bigger.

MRS JONES: How many members are you representing across the 26 organisations and others? Do you have a number?

Ms Franco: We have 60 member groups across the three organisations. That does not include the landholders and Indigenous groups. We also work with Boora Ngunnawal.

MRS JONES: Are you able to work out, even on notice, how many people are engaged through those organisations?

Ms Franco: I would have to take that on notice.

MRS JONES: Please do.

Ms Franco: Yes. Each group has roughly five to 10 members. There are individuals in there too. I will have to take that on notice.

Dr Cooper: The membership is not necessarily ones that come every time to an activity. Sometimes people will come spasmodically as well. It is not easy sometimes to say who has really been involved.

MRS JONES: Have you ever accessed or have you ever investigated accessing other philanthropic money?

Dr Cooper: Yes. That is going to be another course of action. But it is also good to walk into accessing that with something already solid in your hand.

MRS JONES: So you can say that you are going to be there for the long term?

Dr Cooper: There are two issues. It is the quantum but it is also the commitment longer term. It would be better to have a small commitment longer term than not knowing either right now.

MRS JONES: I do not think it cost government any extra, given that it seems to occur every year anyway.

Ms Franco: Can I add to Maxine's comments? In terms of philanthropic funds, we do not have trouble getting competitive funds to run projects. Project funding is something—

MRS JONES: It is practical.

Ms Franco: Yes. I wrote six environment grants last year. I got all six environment grants. We have a very high success rate in our project delivery.

MRS JONES: And I think because what you are doing is so practical and so easy to understand—

Ms Franco: That is right. That does not provide core support. I think philanthropic funds will not provide core support either.

MS CODY: Has your funding only ever been ACT funding or was there commonwealth funding? Is there still commonwealth funding?

Dr Cooper: We will be trying to pursue that through gaining grants but at the moment things are uncertain in that area. Certainly at the moment their priority has not been for fundamentally core business, a coordinator or somebody to pull it all together. There has been a shift from program to project. With project funding, you actually need a leader, a coordinator.

MS CODY: Currently your program-based funding is ACT government funding only?

Dr Cooper: For the past year it has been. That was the funding we got.

Ms Franco: Last year, through lobbying, we got one years worth of funding but actually that again was not to support our core activities. It was explicitly outlined that we would do strategic-level projects. We have done those strategic-level projects and we were not able to support our members in that last year as well. Previous to that we had five years of certainty in five-year periods, block—

MS CODY: From the ACT or federal?

Ms Franco: From the commonwealth government, yes, under the national landcare program. It is the caring for our country program and HT program. All of those programs had delivered money to those groups to run coordination, and that is now not occurring for the groups since last year.

MS CODY: Did you also receive ACT funding in those blocks?

Ms Franco: No.

MS CODY: The ACT funding has now picked up since the commonwealth dropped off?

Ms Franco: Last year they gave us money for strategic projects only and now we

have been promised \$90,000 each to do additional projects. We have not actually gone into those negotiations to know what we need to deliver for that \$90,000.

Dr Cooper: And while, of course, it is important where funding comes from there is a real issue out there which is the environment and the communities in the ACT still needing support.

MS CODY: I am not arguing that.

Dr Cooper: No.

MS CODY: I wanted to understand where the funding actually was.

Dr Cooper: Where it has all shifted, yes.

Ms Franco: It is complex, yes.

Mr Lolicato: And, to add to that, some of the states actually, when they looked at this a few years ago, came on the front foot and put some funding on the table because they saw that the commonwealth was not going to be able to fund that core catchment coordination funding.

MS LE COUTEUR: What have the other states done, because I understand it has stopped Australia wide?

Dr Cooper: It is a mix. It is an absolute mix.

Ms Franco: It is a mix but particularly Victoria and New South Wales have a coordinator program where they provide local coordinators, and the main reason for that is that those coordinators can focus on local priorities. That is one of the reasons why we think it is a territory priority to focus some of their investment on local groups and local priorities as opposed to commonwealth priorities.

MRS JONES: Can you maybe take on notice any information you have about other landcare funding across the country?

Dr Cooper: That is in a paper that we provided to the department.

MRS JONES: Can you provide that to us?

Mr Lolicato: We can table that paper. We can send that through to you.

Dr Cooper: One last thing, if I may, just for clarity. Landcare ACT is the peak body. We are very small. We are not asking for funding. It is for the member catchment groups. We get a minutia from the commonwealth to keep us going.

THE CHAIR: We will wrap up there. Thank you very much. If witnesses have taken any questions on notice today can you please get those answers to the committee secretary within seven working days, day one being Monday. Thank you.

Mr Lolicato: Thank you for the opportunity.

Dr Cooper: Thank you very much.

Ms Franco: Thank you very much.

FOX, MRS MEGAN, Regional Representative ACT and Southern NSW, Australian Breastfeeding Association

THE CHAIR: Can I please confirm that you have read the privilege card in front of you and that you understand the implications of the privilege statement.

Mrs Fox: Yes, I have read the privilege statement.

THE CHAIR: Do you wish to make a brief opening statement?

Mrs Fox: Yes, I do, please. The Australian Breastfeeding Association began as the Nursing Mothers Association Australia in 1964. We will be celebrating the 50th anniversary of providing mother-to-mother support in the Canberra region this October. We offer a range of local and national services to support families on their breastfeeding journey, including face-to-face support, telephone counselling, breastfeeding education sessions for expecting parents, and breastfeeding information via our website. Our services are delivered by volunteers who have completed or are studying a certificate IV in breastfeeding education.

In Canberra we organise regular events and activities to bring mothers and their babies and children together. Partners, grandparents and friends are always welcome at our group meetings, too. Our mission is to support, educate and advocate for a breastfeeding inclusive society.

We welcome the budget announcement to expand the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children, and we support the initiatives to improve access to maternity services across Canberra. Research shows that improved access to community peer support increases breastfeeding rates, with consequential benefits for babies, mothers, the health and productivity of the nation, and the environment. Yet women tell us they receive inconsistent information when seeking breastfeeding support from healthcare providers, which impacts negatively on their reaching their breastfeeding goals. A lack of knowledge of normal infant feeding behaviours and unrealistic expectations about life with a breastfed child further undermine women's confidence to breastfeed.

We are therefore disappointed that recommendations in our budget submission appear to have been overlooked. We see nothing to suggest that funding has been set aside to fully support the national breastfeeding strategy at the ACT level. Objectives of the ACT's 2010-15 breastfeeding strategic framework were not met, because of a lack of funding to support initiatives. It is important that funds are made available in this budget to improve breastfeeding outcomes for ACT families. We also expect a formal method of referral to our association's peer support services in the community-based maternity services model to address the current ad hoc referral processes in the ACT.

Last October the Legislative Assembly passed a motion to investigate the establishment of a human milk bank in the ACT. Despite a real need and overwhelming public support, there appears to be no money in the budget to enable this.

The ACT can lead the nation in breastfeeding support, promotion and protection by

implementing the recommendations of the national breastfeeding strategy. The Legislative Assembly is one of the most supportive breastfeeding workplaces in the ACT, but you need to ensure that all women in the ACT receive the support they need to meet their breastfeeding goals.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. What funding have you received in the past, and how has that changed?

Mrs Fox: Currently we receive a service funding agreement from the ACT government, which is about \$17,000 per year. That is just to provide us with finances to produce resources to share with the community and try to let people know that we exist. It does not allow us to spend any money on local administrative work or delivering our core services. We basically run on a volunteer basis. Within our organisation, we do fundraising to cover the cost of an eight hours per week administration person, to free up our 40 volunteers from doing admin so they can focus on the service delivery. We do that background support, but that is fully funded by our own fundraising and initiatives.

MRS JONES: So you would characterise the situation at the moment as disappointing?

Mrs Fox: Yes.

MRS JONES: Within the current referral situation, why is it that you are not getting the referrals? I can tell you from my own personal experience that ABA was very important to me in establishing the knowledge of how to breastfeed, and I know there are members in this place, including some very recently, who have been through the process of working out all these details, which are not particularly easy or natural, especially for older women who have not been around a lot of breastfeeding mums. Tell me what we need to do to fix the referrals process.

Mrs Fox: Within the breastfeeding-friendly hospitals initiative, which some of our hospitals in Canberra belong to, step 10 is linking women with the community supports to breastfeeding. That is inconsistently done. It often depends on who is actually providing you with your maternity services. Often their personal experience will dictate whether they refer or not.

MRS JONES: Absolutely, and I can say that the breastfeeding specialists in the hospitals, though they are extremely well meaning, do not always have the broad experience that the ABA ladies have of different types of problems and how to overcome them. Have you approached or tried to have contact with the women and children's hospital, Calvary, John James or the maternal and child health nurse organisations?

Mrs Fox: Yes. We have had success in the past 12 months, particularly with the maternal and child health nurses. We now have our written material included in all the first home visit packages that go through. However, that often is seven to 10 days after birth. Antenatally would be ideal to make the connection, to be able to provide some information and support to prepare—

MRS JONES: Are you willing or happy to do phone support for women who are still in hospital?

Mrs Fox: Yes. Our 24/7 breastfeeding helpline, which is nationally run, is available to anybody who calls.

MRS JONES: Because most women go into hospital with a phone of their own now.

Mrs Fox: Yes, and the feedback from our helpline statistics—we take a survey every 12 months of the sorts of calls that are coming through, and the queries—is that increasingly we are seeing women calling from their hospital.

MRS JONES: Also, are you interested in a conversation with the hospital about their processes for establishing feeding? I will give you an example. Last year I had a baby, and she was in the nursery because I had a very significant operation. It took all the capacity I had to fight through the system to get that baby into my room. It was no ill will on anybody's part; it was just that there was no set pathway for that situation.

Mrs Fox: Yes, we would definitely be happy to have that conversation. We have a good relationship with the internationally board-certified lactation consultants at the hospital, so we regularly communicate with them. However, basically the feedback is that there are not enough and people cannot see them and cannot see them in the time that they need to.

MRS JONES: Would your volunteers go into the hospital or is that not realistic? Or do they need to be funded to do so?

Mrs Fox: Our capacity at the moment is that we cannot do that.

MRS JONES: Is it because of funding?

Mrs Fox: No. Our volunteers are women who have breastfed. The majority of them either have young children and are caring for those children 24/7—

MRS JONES: While they are on the phone, yes.

Mrs Fox: or they have returned to work, and they have a passion for breastfeeding and fit their breastfeeding volunteer work in around their work commitments.

MRS JONES: I just think it would be incredible if a closer partnership could be had between these very professional lactation consultants and these extremely practised, practical breastfeeding guides that you have. If that could be better enmeshed, I think it would make a huge difference to women.

Mrs Fox: I think you have identified a real key, which is one of the parts of our submission, both in the ACT budget considerations and also within the national breastfeeding strategy: the need to ensure that all people, all health professionals who are interacting with women of a reproductive age, get breastfeeding education. The majority of them do not get that education through their training or ongoing training.

MRS JONES: True. But I would just argue, before I finish up, that it is actually a very detailed knowledge, and I am not sure that you can educate every healthcare professional about the fine details of attachment, position, how much capacity a particular woman's breasts have for milk production and whether they are maximising that or not. That is actually a very detailed skill set.

Mrs Fox: Yes.

MRS JONES: While you need to be sent in the right direction—absolutely—by all professionals, I would be very surprised if we could ever get everybody up on that knowledge.

Mrs Fox: Absolutely. But we need to educate them on who to refer them to to get that information.

MRS JONES: Yes, and at least the ABA is well known, so it is probably just a matter of a bit of effort.

Mrs Fox: Yes.

MS LE COUTEUR: You have calls to action in your submission. No 9 states that there is a lack of equity for access to lactation support and expertise. I was wondering whether you wanted to say more about that. However, given that we are in the estimates committee, how could the ACT government address that?

Mrs Fox: We could certainly have more of the maternal health nurses trained as international board-certified lactation consultants and have them available. Ideally, we could have every midwife in the hospitals actually trained to that level so that it is not a matter of waiting to see whether I can get the one lactation consultant that is available shared across the number of women that we have. We have very limited private lactation access as well within Canberra. There are a few lactation consultants operating in Canberra, but then people have to pay out of their own pocket to be able to access that support.

MS JONES: And that is the inequity, yes.

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes, that is the inequity. You talked earlier when you answered Mrs Jones's question about having only a very small pool of volunteers. My question also related to access and equity. If you had more support for program funding, would you be able to grow your pool of volunteers? Clearly, there are a lot more than 50 women in Canberra who have breastfed.

Mrs Fox: Absolutely. Yes, it is—

MRS JONES: I mean, some of us are not all that excellent at it—

MS LE COUTEUR: No, I was going to say that for some of us it just happened. We do not have anything particular to say, but—

Mrs Fox: As Mrs Jones alluded to, it is difficult for health professionals to learn the

skills and be able to educate women and support women with breastfeeding. Similarly, to become a breastfeeding counsellor, there is quite a requirement. To become a breastfeeding counsellor, our training requires a person to have breastfed a child for six months. It is then about a 12-month process to complete the certificate IV. Then we have a commitment on the end of that certificate, because we operate it as a traineeship; so it is at no cost to the counsellors to actually participate—

MRS JONES: They will stick around.

Mrs Fox: So then the requirement is to maintain support for the organisation for another two years. Realistically, we are looking at four-year commitments from somebody to become a volunteer with the Australian Breastfeeding Association—

MRS JONES: Yes, but the knowledge that you have—

Mrs Fox: at a time when their life is going through such flux—

MRS JONES: Yes, is quite busy.

Mrs Fox: So you get people who really want to do it and then find out that there is such a lot of training. That commitment then often prevents them from being able to do what they want to do.

MRS JONES: Has there ever been any interest from the ABA in taking some of these women who are highly committed, who have been through this training, into more medical training? One of the things that occurs to me is that it is very difficult for someone who has maybe only breastfed one baby or who does not have that 10,000 hours of experience of different babies—let us say, different behaviours and so on—to then do the medical training to become the expert. The lived experience is so incredibly deep for someone like that. For example, I have helped many women learn how to breastfeed and there are awkward conversations. There are so many fine details to get right.

It has often occurred to me that if only we could get some women who had started out as the breastfeeding experts to then get the higher level of medical training to be in the wards, they would be prized by the community and by the health system. Have you ever thought of, or developed, a package to get those women into the sort of more full-time health workforce?

Mrs Fox: You would be surprised how many of our volunteers are in those roles already.

MRS JONES: Yes, alright.

Mrs Fox: The difference is that we offer peer support—

MRS JONES: Yes, I understand.

Mrs Fox: So we do not provide medical advice. It is a very clear distinction between what we do and what the medical teams do. That is where it often becomes very

difficult for those people who carry both roles to be able to differentiate. “Am I speaking as a breastfeeding counsellor supporting you mother to mother or am I now a medical—”

MRS JONES: But in a way is that not a failing of modern health that we cannot have systems that completely incorporate both? Is it not a kind of masculine approach to separate out this medical professionalism versus peer support? In reality, pastoral care is a lot of what nurses end up doing, as well as their medical training. I do not know why we have to silo that so specifically.

Mrs Fox: No, we should not need to. From our perspective, from the perspective of the Australian Breastfeeding Association and our volunteers, it is a very core principle. It was started right at the beginning of our organisation that we are peer support. That does differentiate us. That is why, I guess, we do not—

MRS JONES: Push, yes.

Mrs Fox: We lean more towards offering support by training medical people on what they need to know about breastfeeding rather than training our people up to then become the medical experts in breastfeeding, so—

MRS JONES: No, I understand that. I just wish there were more of a combination of the two.

THE CHAIR: Going back to the national breastfeeding strategy, you mentioned in your submission that there is no evidence of funding for that in the budget. Just to clarify around that strategy, presumably that is something that the government has signed up to and should be implementing. That is not something that you as an organisation are implementing. What is your involvement?

Mrs Fox: No, the national breastfeeding strategy is from the federal Department of Health. My understanding is that it has been through COAG health and there is in-principle support from all states to implement that. There was a previous strategy that was from 2010 to 2015, which expired. The intent with this one is that it will be an enduring breastfeeding strategy.

The Australian Breastfeeding Association sat on the stakeholder engagement component of that and the expert advice committee to the national breastfeeding strategy. We understand that it is imminent to be released. It is going through final approvals.

MRS JONES: Megan, before we let you go, what is the number for people to call, so we have it on the record, to seek breastfeeding advice from the ABA?

Mrs Fox: Our national breastfeeding helpline is 1800 686 268. It is 24-7. It is not just for mothers. We get lots of call from the dads, from grandparents and from other people wanting support.

MRS JONES: I cannot thank you enough for the work that you do. I think it is incredible.

Mrs Fox: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: If there are no further questions, we will wrap up there.

Mrs Fox: Thank you so much.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. I do not think you took any questions on notice, but for any questions on notice, answers should be given to the committee secretary within seven working days, day one being Monday.

Mrs Fox: Thank you. I do not think I did.

SINGER, MRS ELIZABETH, President, ACT Gifted Families Support Group

THE CHAIR: We will now hear from the ACT Gifted Families Support Group. Please be aware that proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice, it would be useful if you use the words, "I will take that as a question taken on notice." This will help the committee and witnesses to confirm from the transcript the questions that are taken on notice.

Can I confirm that you have read the privilege card and that you understand the implications of the privilege statement?

Mrs Singer: Yes, I do.

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

Mrs Singer: Yes, please. Thank you for inviting the ACT Gifted Families Support Group to appear before you today. Why should gifted children be allocated funding and reported on as an item in the ACT budget? All children in ACT schools should be taught and be able to access learning based on their readiness to learn. To assist education authorities with this, ACARA has identified and targeted three areas of student diversity that need to be addressed by school systems, principals and teachers: students with a disability, students for whom English is a second language, and gifted and talented students.

Families report to our association that gifted children in our schools are not getting their learning needs met and they doubt that all schools are spending an appropriate level of funds on their learning needs. As gifted and talented children do not have their resources set aside in the budget as a separate line it is hard to get information about the accuracy of these reports.

But these things are true: decades of research demonstrate that gifted students are a distinct group in the student population with unique characteristics and education needs who deserve standalone recognition in the ACT budget papers. It is surprising that a document that gives explicit acknowledgement to other subgroups in the ACT student population, like students with a disability, does not give appropriate acknowledgement to gifted students.

Multiple methods exist to measure gifted students: the number of students who are identified as gifted, various indices of their learning achievements, the number of students who have been accelerated in the current school year, and the numbers of dedicated gifted classes in the various stages of education.

Gifted students are served better when teachers and school psychologists have undertaken training in the education of gifted students. As such training is not offered or accessible at a university in the ACT, it is a priority that the ACT Education Directorate fund this purpose.

In a report published by the Grattan Institute in 2018 a study based on NAPLAN data

said that New South Wales talented students are systematically identified, grouped and accelerated. According to the report card New South Wales teachers receive extra support on how to teach gifted students, including specific teaching materials and professional learning. For ACT students, while ACT high school students are achieving, they are on average more advantaged. When you take into account that advantage, the territory trails the national average considerably in student progress.

As our budget submission stated, principals, teachers, school psychologists and Education Directorate staff need training in the education of gifted and talented students as it has often not been made available to them in their pre-service degrees. We need to fund this if the ACT Education Directorate is not going to ask the universities to change what they do.

I have with me today the outline of two such units that are available to pre-service teachers at the University of New South Wales, if the committee would like to see the things our teachers are not learning. Also, the New South Wales Department of Education Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation has just released a literature review called *Revisiting gifted education*, and I also have a copy that the committee might like to look at.

But I ask: if the ACT government is not providing clear descriptors to schools for their use of funding for gifted and talented students and is not then reporting how the funds are being used to meet the needs of those students, who is going to do it?

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Do you believe there is sufficient recognition and support for gifted and talented children in the ACT government education system? Do you think there are enough opportunities in government schools for children who wish to be extended in the classroom?

Mrs Singer: No, I do not think there is enough. I think that that comes down to two issues. The first issue goes back to teacher training. The research tells us that if we have a teacher and we train them about gifted education they will correctly identify roughly nine out of 10 students as gifted if they have the gifted students in their classroom.

If the teachers do not have that pre-service training they are picking up three out of the 10, so the ones they are missing are from the backgrounds where their parents are not likely to pick them up: where English is a second language, where they are from low socioeconomic families. It is that thing.

It is not that we do not have these great teachers who have spent four years at university; it is that we have had these great teachers who have spent four years at university and we have not taught them about these students so their ability and capacity to do that is reduced.

New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland have set up a system where they have some selective schools but they have a common identification process for all students, in all schools across the entire state. In the ACT we have schools that are more principal-led and individual schools are all doing different things and have different methods. Some may have regular identification protocols, some may allow you to go

and sit an identification process—Lyneham High’s elite program is one that comes to mind—but some do not have a clear step.

The 2014 ACT Education Directorate policy on gifted and talented education asked all school principals to create a gifted and talented policy and put it up on the school website. Unfortunately, not all schools have done that yet.

MS LE COUTEUR: For the later aged kids there are the H courses. Do you think they are hitting the mark for your cohort?

Mrs Singer: In years 11 and 12 there are some H courses. They are good for the children who do them, and I know quite a few children who have been through that system. But we are not enriching the children beforehand. For example, H maths last year, if you look at the Board of Senior Secondary studies report, there were no female students in the cohort; they were all males. We have the same number of gifted girls with that potential as we do gifted boys. What happened? Where did we miss out?

If we had some sort of funding and had target measures put aside then we would pick that up earlier. But it is coming too late at years 11 and 12. We need to find these children younger, particularly from low SES families. For example, some primary schools struggle with putting gifted programs in their classes, but they allow students to go to an external program called a gateways program a couple of times a term. But the cost of the gateways program—

MRS JONES: It is \$100. I know, I paid it last term.

Mrs Singer: Yes, and if you have two kids it is \$200. I know of a few really great principals who have taken one or two students from a low SES background and paid for it, but they cannot cover all the low SES students. We should have an opportunity in our schools to say, “Well, why can’t our schoolteachers who have training in gifted ed do those days?” We could get all the children of our gifted students who want to do archaeology together and all the children who want to do something else and it is covered in your public education learning fee; you do not need the extra money. Where is that resource allocation going for these students?

MRS JONES: New South Wales, you said, systemically identifies and supports students. How? What is the process? I will give you an example. One of my children recently attended a gateway program. It was a big deal for us. You have got to take them to a different school for the day. Mine had to have a support worker because she has emotional issues. It was a complex process to get her there. One of the reasons that she potentially is struggling emotionally is that she is gifted and therefore is not responding in the same way as neurotypical kids in the class.

My question to you is: what is the process? Is it a broad-based screening? I remember when Minister Berry was first appointed minister she talked a lot about getting kids screened for all sorts of things earlier in their lives because of the cost of taking kids to a psychologist, for example, to get screening if you have got autistic characteristics or things that make you less neurotypical. Can we not find a way of picking that up earlier? What does New South Wales do?

Mrs Singer: That is why I brought along information on some of the courses from the University of New South Wales. A lot of the universities have courses. A lot of their teachers are trained. The best approach is not looking at one particular thing. There is a particular graded parent survey that you can do and you can ask these targeted questions of parents to help pick it up.

MRS JONES: That is not a very expensive process?

Mrs Singer: No. You can ask teachers, once they have had the children for a term, to do a survey, and there are a couple of really good graded surveys that are out there.

MRS JONES: And when you say “survey”, it is not so much of a tick the box, it is: this child responds in X way to social situation, this child responds in X way to a new situation. It is not what you might think of as a survey. It is almost like a screening process using the knowledge of the parents or the teachers. That is right, is not it?

Mrs Singer: It is a particularly well-designed process. And it has even got a graded scale on the really good ones, 1 to 10, rate your child 1 to 10. There is further research that came out of Western Australia about how you identify six and seven-year-olds, and it actually drew particular attention to the parent surveys because there has—

MRS JONES: They know their children best, don't they?

Mrs Singer: Yes, but there has been this divide between parents and teachers. Maybe the parents might up-score their children but what they have found is that the parents down-score their child on this sort of survey.

MRS JONES: They are usually brutally honest about what they are dealing with on a daily basis at home, I would think.

Mrs Singer: Yes.

MRS JONES: Is there a product that the ACT government could pick up and use as a broad-based parent survey and teacher survey to pick these kids up younger? I am thinking this is not a very expensive request if the thing exists already. You said you brought some stuff with you. Did you want to table it?

Mrs Singer: I did. I did not bring any of the surveys.

THE CHAIR: Did you want to table the documents that you brought?

MRS JONES: Take it on notice.

Mrs Singer: I could take it on notice and send you a couple from a few years ago. There are quite a few around. It would be easy for people in the Education Directorate, if they had that gifted education training, to know which of the current ones are the best ones, which ones look at which things. We have got a very diverse ethnicity in our schools. Some of our schools have 70 different nations. They know which surveys look at that, and that would be the way to go. But I will send you a couple, take that

on notice.

MRS JONES: It is for our education and for us to be able to put something reasonable in our report, which means that the people here get an idea of what that looks like and how that works.

THE CHAIR: Did you want to table the documents that you said you brought today?

Mrs Singer: Yes.

MR PETTERSSON: In your submission you talk about different measures that are included in the budget, students from low SES backgrounds and English as a second language. You mentioned that gifted and talented students should be measured as well. Why do you think they should be measured?

Mrs Singer: Because that is the best way we have to track them. They are a unique group. They have unique needs. Until the BSSS report came out at the end of last year I had no idea that we did not have any female students in the H maths courses. We cannot address a problem with funding until we are saying, “We are spending this much money and this is the outcome.” At the moment we have got that disconnect.

I can pull some things out of the BSSS report. I can maybe pull some things out of the annual report of the Education Directorate. There is normally a sentence on gifted education. With all these measures that can help us improve what we are doing in the ACT for gifted students, we are not aligning them and we are definitely not aligning them with funding.

THE CHAIR: Just to clarify, you mentioned earlier that when teachers have training they can identify eight or nine students, and when they do not they only identify three or so, and those that they usually identify are from higher SES backgrounds as well.

Mrs Singer: They only count the three, that is correct.

THE CHAIR: Of those who are being identified, are you aware whether the Education Directorate tracks those students at all?

Mrs Singer: No, they do not track gifted students in the ACT.

MRS JONES: Do you meet with the Education Directorate ever or on a regular basis or with the minister?

Mrs Singer: We try to meet with somebody from the Education Directorate as often as they will have us.

MRS JONES: And how often is that?

Mrs Singer: It is fairly irregular at the moment. The person who is responsible for gifted and talented education, it seems to have gone through frequent changes over the last few years. I am still catching up.

MRS JONES: When was the last time you met with the Education Directorate and when was the time before that?

Mrs Singer: We met in term one this year with a new gentleman from the Education Directorate. I am sorry, I have forgotten his name. I have since emailed him a couple of times but he is on extended leave. I have emailed a Kate McMahon from the Education Directorate who apparently now sits under that gentleman.

If I want to send the new research out about psychology and testing for gifted students, because it is different—I sent that to the Education Directorate to try to get it to a senior psychologist, and it went through family and community liaison. The person who replied was a teacher. I do not know if it actually got to the psychologists. Prior to that, I do not think we met with them last year.

MRS JONES: You would characterise your ability to get through to government on this stuff as quite poor at the moment and could be improved?

Mrs Singer: Could be improved, yes.

THE CHAIR: A reminder: could you please get answers to any questions taken on notice today to the committee secretary within seven working days, day one being Monday. Thank you very much for your time today.

Mrs Singer: Thank you very much for having me.

CRIMMINS, MS FRANCES, Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Canberra
DWYER, MS LEAH, Policy and Engagement Coordinator, YWCA Canberra

THE CHAIR: Please be aware that the proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice, it would be useful if witnesses could please use the words “I will take that as a question on notice.” This will help the committee and witnesses to confirm the questions taken on notice from the transcript.

Could I ask you to please confirm that you have read the privilege card before you and that you understand the implications of the privilege statement.

Ms Dwyer: Yes, I have, and yes, I do.

Ms Crimmins: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement.

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

Ms Crimmins: Yes, please. I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we gather today, the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people, and pay my respect to elders past, present and future, as well as acknowledging any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people who may be in the room with us today. I also extend my respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, who for thousands of years have preserved the culture and practices of their communities on country. This land was never surrendered, and YWCA Canberra acknowledge that it always was and will continue to always be Aboriginal land.

Thank you for the invitation to address the estimates committee on the 2019-20 ACT budget. YWCA Canberra is a feminist, secular not-for-profit organisation that has been providing community services and representing women’s issues in Canberra for 90 years. In this time we have built a strong reputation for providing high quality and innovative services in children’s services, training, community support, housing support, youth engagement and women’s leadership.

Recommendations made in our pre-budget submission align with longstanding recommendations of YWCA Canberra and our mission in delivering services for vulnerable members of our community, with the focus on girls and women thriving. Our submissions drew attention to the following key policy areas: gender-responsive budgeting in governance; building safe and affordable housing for women; developing intersectional service models of housing; a life free from violence; equality in the workplace; and girls and women thriving. We have welcomed strong progress by the government in some of these areas, which I will discuss in my statement this morning. But I will also take the opportunity to draw attention to policy shortfalls which, if unaddressed, will continue to hinder the Canberra community’s achieving gender equality.

Firstly, I go to the issue of women’s housing and homelessness. As a front-line service provider, YWCA Canberra provides a range of housing services to support

women and families in Canberra. We have seen firsthand how older women, structurally disadvantaged due to decades of time spent out of work raising families and without a job to return to, have become the fastest growing cohort of those experiencing housing stress and homelessness in Canberra.

In this regard we have consistently called upon the government to implement land tax based exemptions as an incentive for property investors to rent property at less than 75 per cent of market rate. We welcomed the release of the ACT housing strategy last October, which prioritised investigating land tax concessions as a means of increasing the supply of affordable rentals managed by the community housing sector. We welcomed the passage of the Treasurer's revenue amendment bill in May this year and the exemption to the agencies act provided to community housing suppliers like YWCA Canberra. These steps were critical and have allowed organisations like ours and values-motivated property investors to play a role in building Canberra's affordable rental housing stock.

We launched our new program Rentwell on 6 May this year, Canberra's first charitable property management service. The reforms have been instrumental to making that happen. Interest in Rentwell by both investors and potential tenants has exceeded our expectations in the first five weeks. We have already had approximately 40 property investors express their interest in renting their property through Rentwell; we have signed up three properties; and we have had over 35 expressions of interest from potential tenants, the overwhelming majority of whom are older women who are struggling to afford rent in the private rental market but who do not qualify for other forms of housing support.

These people are everyday Canberrans who are on modest incomes, struggling to afford the mainstream rental market. They do not need support services or case management. They need rent they can afford in a tenancy that is appropriate and sustainable. Canberrans have been given the opportunity to play a role in helping those who are vulnerable to housing prices or hidden poverty, and they have responded with overwhelming enthusiasm. We congratulate the government on being part of this journey and believe the interest in this initiative to date demonstrates the urgent need to continue to build the supply of affordable rentals in Canberra.

Given this trend, YWCA Canberra believes that this measure has significant capacity to contribute to the ACT housing strategy objective of lifting the supply of affordable rental properties and building capacity in the community housing sector. We therefore urge the government to expand or continue the two-year trial period for this initiative and remove the arbitrary cap of 100 places, which is limiting the success of the measure and the number of potential tenants who could potentially benefit.

We are positive about the budget's ongoing investment to reduce overall homelessness through delivering a new Common Ground site and to grow and renew the stock of public housing in Canberra, making these homes more energy efficient and cheaper for tenants to run.

We have also welcomed the investment towards a justice housing program that will provide accommodation for women and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to support better life outcomes after serving their custodial sentences. Sustainable

housing tenure is fundamental to rehabilitation. The rehabilitation prospects of women, many of whom who have been victims of crimes themselves and whose pathways to incarceration are very often vastly different from those of men, are strong. For this reason, while the justice housing program is supported, we urge the government to ensure that this initiative provides genuine and sustainable opportunities for housing and community inclusion for tenants. A local property made available only for a short-term tenure for use by people released from custodial sentences stymies personal rehabilitation and creates a local community characterised by exclusion and apathy.

Keeping within the theme of housing for a moment, but moving onto our priority, a life without violence, YWCA Canberra continues to support the work of the family safety hub. The family safety hub remains a crucial initiative that will benefit women and improve how government responds to the impact of domestic and family violence on individuals, families and communities.

We have particularly welcomed the announcement that the hub will be looking to explore the nexus between those experiencing domestic and family violence and housing crisis. Between 2017 and 2018, nearly 1,000 women in Canberra sought housing assistance due to experiencing domestic and family violence. The needs of these women and their children are unique and must be considered alongside the matrix of gender inequality, trauma and recovery.

We look forward to being involved in these discussions between the family safety hub, domestic and family violence services and housing and financial support services. There remains a critical need, however, to ensure that we are laying the foundation for children, young adolescents and young adults to build their own respectful relationships, grounded in equality, to challenge destructive behaviours and be part of a future where the scourge of violence against women is eliminated.

The ACT remains one of only two jurisdictions that has not funded and embraced a comprehensive respectful relationships program. These programs have been proven to promote egalitarian relationships in the schoolyard, build shared decision-making among peers, and create awareness of gender imbalances that can emerge as destructive interpersonal behaviours.

We understand that the family safety hub has been looking at how community institutions such as sporting clubs, within their reach into families across the ACT, may play a role in understanding and responding to family violence. However, the institutions with the greatest reach into the behaviours of children and mitigating gender-based violence before it starts are in the educational setting.

This is not a hypothetical discussion. The last national community attitudes towards violence against women survey found that while many young people aged 16 to 24 in Australia have a good understanding of the key aspects of violence against women, they do not have a strong awareness of controlling or coercive behaviours. The survey found that one in three believe it is natural for a man to want to appear in control of his partner in front of peers, and nearly a quarter believe that relentlessly pursuing someone despite objections is flattering.

These behaviours are happening among young people in Canberra and, if left unaddressed, will become embedded and indelible. What is needed is not an ad hoc approach where occasional pastoral care or school mottos are used to deliver guidance and promote respect. The most effective way to address issues of gendered power dynamics and the drivers of interpersonal violence and abuse in a systemic way is to work in concert with schools, the community and relevant community organisations to implement a whole-of-school approach to embed interactive, comprehensive and age-appropriate respectful relationships education.

The last issue YWCA Canberra wishes to highlight is the ongoing need for gender-responsive budgeting in the ACT, principally the delivery of a women's budget statement. YWCA Canberra is broadly enthusiastic about and supportive of the Chief Minister's announcement that future ACT budgets will report progress against a set of wellbeing indicators. We flag with concern, however, that the draft indicators that have been circulated omit any specific indicator relating to women's wellbeing.

The wellbeing of women is inextricably linked to community wellbeing. Realising true gender equality delivers benefits for everyone in our community. Given the omission of women's wellbeing as a potential indicator in future budgets, we remain convinced that there can no longer be any delay in reinstating a women's budget statement.

Women's budget statements are an important means to measure resource allocation against the government's own gender-equality goals, as outlined in the ACT women's plan for 2016-26. They provide a comprehensive gender analysis on budget measures and mean that budget initiatives are considered alongside gender equality goals of government and women's broader inclusion.

In this regard, we do not consider that what was released on Friday, 8 June constitutes a women's budget statement. Rather, this document repackages initiatives announced as part of a broader budget, some of which appear to be otherwise mainstream measures. For example, initiatives such as the bail support program and the justice health service have been included, and while efforts to reduce recidivism are supported, there are no gender analyses of this package. As women represent roughly 7.5 per cent of the population at the Alexander Maconochie Centre, it is difficult to understand the extent to which this measure will be applied to women who come into contact with the justice system and its impact on their future wellbeing.

In closing, YWCA Canberra stresses that there is real opportunity for the ACT to become a national and international leader in achieving gender equality for women. The launch of the ACT women's plan for 2016-26, the valuable work of the family safety hub, the great representation of women among members of the Legislative Assembly and a move toward a wellbeing budget: these steps are meaningful steps that can deliver real outcomes for women and girls in the community. In a similar vein, a robust and genuine women's budget statement would provide the ACT government with a strong policy instrument to measure progress against the priorities of the women's plan: health and wellbeing; housing and homelessness; safety; economic security; and leadership.

Gender equality is achievable if the needs, interests and wellbeing of women and girls are at the centre of policy and program development. We hope to continue to be able to play a constructive role in working with the ACT government to make this a reality and to see us realise our mission of girls and women thriving here in Canberra.

THE CHAIR: Firstly, on the women's budget statement, you said that what was announced you did not think constituted a women's budget statement. What specifically would you like to see in that? How would you like to see that presented?

Ms Crimmins: Previous women's budget statements released by the ACT government, noting that there has not been one for about a decade, outlined the measures which the then-government believed were delivering progress against key themes of the ACT women's plan. So this is not aligned to that. Those key themes, which are not dissimilar to the themes today, formed the framework of how policies and budget measures were developed and coordinated.

The budget statement outlined initiatives, governance-based decisions relating to advisory councils, statutory officers and directorates, and the narrative provided policy justifications and some data on the predicted impact of the noteworthy measurements. We have some further examples of what is a comprehensive women's budget statement that we are happy to provide to the committee.

THE CHAIR: Yes, can you table them?

Ms Crimmins: Yes.

MS CODY: I want to touch on a couple of the things you raised both in your submission and in your opening statement, particularly around support for women and homelessness. Then I want to move on to domestic and family violence. You mentioned that, with rental in particular, it is capped at 100 places. What would be an ideal outcome?

Ms Crimmins: I think the data will show that the people we are housing—it is important that it is targeted at the first and second income percentile. I think it just should be lifted, because if it is not lifted eventually people are going to end up on the public housing waitlist. If we can help people here, where they are in housing stress and before they are homeless, that is literally going to make a huge impact.

Based on the actual cost of the land tax exemption, even at 100 homes, on the assumption that land tax is \$3,000 per dwelling, we are talking about \$300,000. The data we will present with this is probably a bit harder to measure in terms of revenue saving. So we need to not look at this as taking money out of our revenue stream.

For example, for the first tenant who has been housed, a single parent with a child, the child has been able to go to a good local primary school and re-engage with education, and the parent has returned to full-time work. That is what happens when you have affordable rent in a community that you want to live in.

MS CODY: And, therefore, obviously, contributing back into—

Ms Crimmins: Contributing back into the community of Canberra, yes.

MS CODY: Yes.

Ms Crimmins: So we are calling for the pilot not needing to be a pilot and to increase it from that 100 cap.

MS CODY: Do you have a preference for where the increase should end up? At 200? Do you think it should just be a monitored type of scenario?

Ms Crimmins: I think we could just monitor it. I think the reality that the data will show is that it is not actually costing us a lot on the revenue side. When we look at what we are doing in terms of housing people and people's contribution to the community, it is going to outweigh any perceived loss of revenue, particularly if you look at the cost of what it costs to build one new public house. By stopping people getting to that point it is going to save the territory and the community a considerable amount of money.

MS LE COUTEUR: Of course, I absolutely, totally agree. It was something that I was going to ask you a question about. Certainly, the land tax exemption is the most cost-effective way the ACT government has to address housing issues for women, for everybody in Canberra. I think you have made it pretty clear what the recommendations should be on that. So I will go to something that you touched on less: respectful relationship training. I think we can all see the reasons for it, but how do you think the government can best expand it so that it is actually happening for all our young people?

Ms Crimmins: We can look to Victoria, which commenced their work on implementing holistic, respectful relationships in their school from 2015 and the results that they are getting. We see that there are four levels in the school environment that need to be involved in that primary prevention. We need to recognise that it is not just an educational institution; it is a workplace as well.

In terms of what is used to build capacity, it is building the capacity of staff at their workplace, and that of students. There are four key steps. We are modelling this off the research from Victoria. There are school policies and procedures and the work culture, for example, HR, ICT policies, uniform policies. We still have gendered uniforms.

There is the school staff: so leadership and professional development and learning opportunities for all staff in schools. The school students: supportive classrooms and playgrounds to shape positive attitudes. And then stakeholders: parents and events, things that parents and other people in the community are engaged in which model behaviours that are expected elsewhere in the school. That, backed with an age-appropriate curriculum embedded across all the school curriculum, are the key attributes of a holistic, respectful relationships education.

MS LE COUTEUR: Given that we are an estimates committee, which means that we are interested in money in particular, would you think that this would actually cost much for the ACT government to do this, or is it a matter of deciding that this is a

priority?

Ms Crimmins: I think we need to decide that it is a priority. For example, the teaching respect program that we have developed for teachers and people who work with young people can be delivered over a 12-month period in professional development for teachers. Even an investment pool of \$100,000 to have teachers streaming through would be a good way to kick that off. The reason we are supporting teachers is that they know their students best and they work in partnership with community organisations who have expertise on gender-based violence. We can then work together to support the teachers to support their students.

As I say, we have resources starting from primary school all the way up. But sometimes some schools, some students, might need to have curriculum that is about intimate relationships possibly earlier than another cohort of students. That is why I think the teachers, having that experience in education and tailoring that to their students' needs, are the key to support their students and their schools.

MRS JONES: Ms Crimmins, I would like to turn to women prisoners. You mentioned them in your opening remarks. I ask about not just the measures in the budget but about how our system is being run. I have come to the view that there is currently quite a lot of lip-service paid to caring about women in the prison but, in fact, we have women housed in the men's section of the prison where we have been informed that there are risks associated with their mental health from hearing and seeing men. I have had casual reports to me of women getting out of that part of the prison and into the men's section.

You were talking earlier about the women's budget plan idea of actually demonstrating academically how certain things are intended to assist women. The information I have had from the minister so far is just that we care about women but then none of the actions seem to line up with that outcome of actually reducing recidivism for women using a tested, academic or planned approach. What do you think could be done? Are you disappointed with how things stand at the moment for women in our prison system?

Ms Crimmins: I would refer to the work of the Women's Centre for Health Matters because they have been working directly in the AMC. We have not been working directly. They have been doing some extensive research with the women who are incarcerated. In respect of our call for doing a proper gender analysis on policy, if we were doing that across all our policies, we probably would have picked up earlier that the vocational education pathway in that facility that was built, without looking at that up-front from a gender position, is not accessible to women in the prison.

MRS JONES: I do not think many people are doing it, to be honest, in the prison.

Ms Crimmins: Or they cannot access it for safety reasons. If we had started off that great piece of work and actually done a gendered analysis on it and seen how male and female prisoners could use that up-front, we possibly would have ended up with a service that—

MRS JONES: Do you mean like the bakery, the laundry and the kitchen?

Ms Crimmins: Yes, and often—

MRS JONES: For example, we cannot have women in the kitchen because there is a male cohort helping in the kitchen. That was not considered until someone raised it later. That is the type of thing you are talking about, is it?

Ms Crimmins: Yes.

MRS JONES: Yes, there is a fair bit of work to do there.

MR PETTERSSON: I note that you have covered off on three main points in your submission that you raised about the budget. Do you have any commentary on the budget as a whole? Has the budget been a good budget for the women of ACT?

Ms Crimmins: I guess that is where we are saying that if we could have a comprehensive women's assessment of the budget up-front, rather than retrofitting after the budget is announced and seeing how these key policies and noteworthy policies impact women afterwards, then I would feel more comfortable with the ACT budget.

Overall, as we have said, we are very pleased with the investment in housing and the family safety hub. But without an overall gendered analysis of policies while they are being developed, we are not able to see comprehensive data and how it is linked to the priorities of the government in achieving the women's plan.

MRS JONES: Is it almost like a triple bottom line approach—

Ms Crimmins: Yes, that needs to be more—

MRS JONES: where across everything that we do, we ask the question at the beginning, "How will this help women, affect women, reach women and will it be effective?"

Ms Crimmins: Correct.

MRS JONES: Isn't it amazing that we are still having this discussion in 2019?

MS LE COUTEUR: In an Assembly with a majority of women.

MRS JONES: In an Assembly of majority of women.

MS LE COUTEUR: This is not such a big one, but for many years you have been advocating that the Office for Women should be in the Chief Minister's directorate. For many years this has not been the case. Would you like to expand more on why that would make a difference?

Ms Crimmins: I think that if the Office for Women were relocated there, at the time of the budget being prepared it probably would have enabled, and had more resources for, a proper gender analysis of the budget in the first place. I think it does need a

holistic response. When you consider that we are talking about something that has been described to me as a niche group, but it is not: 52 per cent of the population is not niche. We need the strategies to do that. We have to make sure that we do not fall into the trap, when doing a gendered analysis policy, of saying that it is everybody's business but it becomes nobody's. We would then also recommend that there is a gender policy analysis to support each of the directorates that is fed back into the Chief Minister's office.

MS LE COUTEUR: If this happened, would you assume that the Minister for Women should also be the minister in whose directorate the Office for Women is in, because if that were the case—

MRS JONES: The directorates are all over the place.

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes, the directorates are all over the place but also the Chief Minister may or may not be female.

MRS JONES: That is right. The current Chief Minister is not female but—

MS LE COUTEUR: But we have had female chief ministers.

MRS JONES: Yes, that is right.

MS LE COUTEUR: I mean, we do not know the gender—

MRS JONES: This could get quite complex.

MS LE COUTEUR: I think you get my point.

Ms Crimmins: I do. At the federal level, the Office for Women is in Prime Minister and Cabinet. We now have a woman, who is not the Prime Minister—it is the foreign affairs minister—who is the Minister for Women; so it is possible. I think the main thing is having it in the central agency because it is across the whole of government. We need to have insight across the whole of government and for this to be resourced. I think that there is perhaps a good opportunity to look at a whole gender equality team—maybe the LGBTIQ could also be placed there—and have a whole gender equality strategy for the ACT that picks up the diversity of genders across the spectrum as we are seeing them emerge in our community.

THE CHAIR: As we are just about out of time, we will wrap up there. In respect of any questions taken on notice today, can you please get the answers back to the committee secretary within seven days, day one being Monday. The committee will now suspend for a short break. The hearing will resume in 15 minutes at 11.15 am.

Hearing suspended from 10.59 to 11.16 am.

HYDE, MR GLEN, Chair, Belconnen Community Council
VINCENT, MS BRONWYN, Secretary, Belconnen Community Council
PAVLOUDIS, MS MAREE, Membership Coordinator, Belconnen Community Council

THE CHAIR: We will now hear from the Belconnen Community Council, followed by the Kingston and Barton Residents Group and Master Builders Association of the ACT. Please be aware that the proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice it would be useful if witnesses could use the words, "I will take that as a question taken on notice." This will help the committee and witnesses to confirm from the transcript the questions that are taken on notice.

Before we begin I ask that each of you confirm that you have read the privilege card before you and that you understand the implications of the privileges statement.

Ms Pavloudis: I have read the privilege statement.

Ms Vincent: I have read the statement.

Mr Hyde: I have read the privilege statement and agree with its terms.

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

Mr Hyde: I would. I have supplied our opening statement to the secretariat so I am not going to read it through. It is available and I posted it on our website as well. There are a couple of basic matters I want to cover off on: firstly, the fact that we are the largest district in the ACT and we are the most populous. It is our belief that we have some of the best facilities in Canberra, not least is our wonderful Lake Ginninderra which provides not just our residents and people who work in the district with a wonderful natural facility but people from outside of our district.

A really big attraction for what we do as a community council is to hear people's concerns around those facilities, any maintenance that is required and beautification of those areas. We try to convey those to the government in a way that is not in any way offensive and works from a collaborative view. Those are very important matters for us, and we are very grateful for the opportunity to come along today and talk to you about our submission for the 2019-2020 period.

The thing I am most focused on for the next financial year is some of those commitments that we have been seeking for probably the last five to six years from government. There are a range that have already been delivered on. There is one in particular in our submissions that relates to dog waste bags that the government has delivered on. We are most grateful for the attention we receive through budget every year.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. You mention in your survey response that one of your priorities is public transport and improving accessibility in the Belconnen area. Would

you like to talk a bit more about that and what services you would like to see provided?

Mr Hyde: I think everyone knows that our big ticket item is light rail coming to Belconnen. We have three centres of excellence that people live, work and play around. The recently opened UC hospital is a state-of-the-art facility that draws people not just from across the ACT but from the capital region more generally. Giving people better access, particularly those who are not residential in that facility, is pretty important to us.

We have a bus service that does the job at the moment for most people. There are some glaring holes in that, but I will talk about that a little bit later. But the thing we see that would improve facility and access would be the hastening of light rail to Belconnen. We know that there are a range of levers that the commonwealth government need to pull to make that a reality, not the least for Woden, but certainly we would be completely prepared for that coming forward in the planning process, again, not just for those people accessing those centres of excellence but those people who live, work and play in our district more generally. We have over 100,000 residents.

MS LE COUTEUR: Given that none of the hospitals is currently on the inter-town route, do you have a view as to where the light rail should go?

Mr Hyde: As far as we are concerned the difficulty is that some of the planning documents that have already come out pretty much lock out light rail from those precinct areas and we would need to service those by bus or people having to walk a significant distance. Again, we would need to see some better quality documents to be able to make comment on it.

Our deputy chair will be appearing later this afternoon with his public transport hat on. I am a previous ACTION bus supervisor, so I have got quite a bit of experience. Bron worked in public transport for a period. So it is very near and dear to our hearts.

THE CHAIR: You mentioned there are some glaring gaps in the current bus network for the Belconnen region. Do you want to expand on that?

Mr Hyde: It will come as no surprise that the network closes much earlier than people need it to and certainly does not start early enough. I note that with light rail out of Gungahlin a range of enhancements have happened there and we would like to see similar enhancements made with the bus network for Belconnen.

In west Belconnen in particular we have 50,000 people coming into that corridor over the next 30 years and we are going to have to make sure that good infrastructure exists to be able to move people not just around that area but also into other parts of Canberra where they work and play. Lots of people will have to have childcare arrangements out of area because of employment.

Again, if we can reduce people's reliance on two cars in the household just to be able to meet travel requirements and backfill that with public transport, that is an absolute bonus. Given that we are going to be the greenest jurisdiction in the country very

shortly, that is certainly something we would be very supportive of.

MS CODY: You also mentioned in your community survey that you are concerned with the return of the LNP government at the federal level that there is a risk of the ACT's progressive agenda on the environment and infrastructure being ignored. Can you expand on that?

Mr Hyde: One the issues we have dealt with over the past five years was the fact that the current government tried to move 4,500 people out of the Belconnen town centre through what was the Department of Immigration and Border Protection. I declare that they are my employer so I have a vested interest in that. The BCC went out and lobbied the community, not just employees of the department but business owners who rely on the money generated by those 4,500 workers.

I will not labour the point on the percentage damage that that threatened, but we have seen in the past five years because of the constraints on public servant pay and conditions arrangements most of our business owners have seen a downturn of between five and 15 per cent. That directly correlates to what people in immigration and border protection were not able to spend because their pay rises were deferred and delayed for so long.

We have had a number of coffee shops close, unsurprisingly, as people have been moved around the ACT whilst refurbishments go ahead. We see that those sorts of issues are not something the ACT government has any responsibility for but we think that that is a conversation that could be had through COAG. Where we talk about trying to tie down government agencies to a region or an area, COAG is probably a great place to start that conversation.

MS LE COUTEUR: You talk a lot about consultation, particularly consultation between the government and BCC. I was wondering if you had some consultation with developers who, after all, are the people in general doing it on the ground.

Mr Hyde: That is a great question. I think if we look at the current process being undertaken for Kippax and the group centre masterplan, that is a great example of some of the challenges we have faced. Developers, good and bad, actually drive some good economic outcomes in our communities. We could not survive without them. But we that believe there are some ground rules that should be imposed on them.

One of the suggestions that we have come forward with is a community payment that allows government to offer better services to fulfil some of the obligations on community spaces that government will have to maintain going forward once construction has finished and people move in. We see that as being good corporate citizens, first and foremost, investors in a local community. They do not just walk in, take the money and run, which is the perception in the community at the moment. We would be very supportive of the government coming up with some sort of co-payment or investment levy on those developers that leads to better community facility.

MS LE COUTEUR: I am particularly concerned about equity. Obviously in the richer areas, if it is a percentage levy or something, the developer is in a position to put on a big levy. In the less well-off areas of Canberra those sorts of community

contributions from developers clearly would be a lot less. Could this not lead to a situation that the poorer areas stay poorer areas and the richer areas go ahead?

Mr Hyde: That would depend on how the government wanted to impose those arrangements. We would see that, regardless of what area that money came from, the government would administer it in a way that recognised disadvantage at different levels. One place I can think of, off the top of my head, in the south would be Richardson. There is an area that needs some significant assistance. Crime rates are quite high. By comparison, in Belconnen we do not have a suburb that comes close to what they are experiencing.

There would not need to be as significant an investment, say, in policing or community protection and safety in some areas as there is in others. It would depend greatly on the government. We are not here to tell them how to do business but we would certainly be open to having a conversation on how that might work.

MRS JONES: I have a general, broad question about your submission to the budget process. Is there any built infrastructure that you were calling on that was not commented on in the budget?

Mr Hyde: Not that I can think of, off the top of my head, but I will take that on notice.

MRS JONES: Yes, if there is anything that you think that the area is missing or that government should be providing. I think stage 2 of the arts centre has been delivered or is being delivered.

Mr Hyde: It is being delivered, yes.

MRS JONES: Just where the gaps are in that infrastructure in the area, if you could take that on notice, that would be fantastic.

Mr Hyde: I think, just as a side note, we are very aware of and sensitive to the Ginninderra field station coming on line at some point. That part of north Belconnen will need some significant infrastructure investment, and I think we have made comment on that a few times in our submission.

MRS JONES: The fields becoming suburbs, yes. There are a lot of people with a lot of history to do with that. Just on infrastructure, I know there has been a lot of talk about light rail coming to Woden in stage 2—and there are arguments for and against that—but my understanding is that there has been a fair bit of push over time for our east-west commuter links. Have you put your minds to or lobbied the government at all on the idea of a Belconnen to the city as a stage 2 at all?

Mr Hyde: We did. We have certainly made some public comment through the media and I think on our website as well. Damien Haas, our deputy chair, who also wears his public transport Canberra hat—

MRS JONES: We all know Damien Haas.

MS LE COUTEUR: He will be coming later.

Mr Hyde: I will not overemphasise that point.

MRS JONES: I think it is an interesting question because we have been presented with what or may not happen next. Why? What is the basis of that decision, if it is not political, and what could we achieve by going east-west instead? I am really interested in the views of your council on this.

Mr Hyde: I think—and this is putting my old public transport officer hat on—one of the great problems with east-west corridors in this town is that you have to take the airport into consideration. My department has got a presence out there through the border force office. People who live in Belconnen and now work at Brindabella Park—

MRS JONES: That is right, or indeed in Gungahlin going to Brindabella Park of course, yes.

Mr Hyde: Absolutely. That corridor now makes much more sense. Given that Molonglo is going ahead in leaps and bounds on our southern border, having a facility to be able to link up the east to the greater west—and when I say “the greater west” I am taking us out to Kippax—that corridor now makes much more sense. For us to be able to sit down with government in concert in a proper consultation process—and the one thing that I would lobby government heavily on is having a very full consultation process—

MRS JONES: Since stage 1 was embarked upon has there been a consultation process with the Belconnen Community Council about stage 2 and whether it should come to Belconnen?

Mr Hyde: No, and it did not make sense to do that whilst there ever was a hard and fast plan to take stage 2 to Woden.

MRS JONES: Now I think it is a bit up in the air really.

Mr Hyde: Let us see what the powers that be are able to influence when federal parliament sits during the first week in July.

MRS JONES: You are still hoping that there will be some funding in there for stage 2 to Woden?

Mr Hyde: That makes more sense, in the way that it has been laid out in planning, but, if for some reason that fell over—goodness me, to the camera, I have got my hand up now—bring it to Belconnen.

MRS JONES: I am interested in why you say it makes sense to go to Woden.

Mr Hyde: Given that you have got 100,000 of us in Belconnen and, combined, Tuggeranong, Weston Creek and Woden, I think off the top of my head, the maths take me to about 130,000 to service that group.

MRS JONES: But you would not imagine that Tuggeranong would be strongly serviced by the Woden to Civic—

Mr Hyde: Absolutely. Jump on a bus.

MRS JONES: The idea being that you are servicing those people by getting them on a bus, then they jump on the tram at Woden and then go to the city—a bit like the bus route they take now that goes all the way from Tuggeranong to the city?

Mr Hyde: Yes.

MS LE COUTEUR: The R4s and the R5s turn up at Woden full quite frequently.

Mr Hyde: Yes. And that is the heavy lift that you are seeking to fulfil with light rail, to replace those buses. For us, that makes much more sense. We do not have a fantastically perfect public transport network but it is pretty good. Transport Canberra have worked really hard to try to find a balance.

I note the minister's comments about not reviewing the network for 12 months but there is always tweaking that happens on a monthly basis. And it is very important for us to influence that process as well. We are very clear with our community that they have to participate if they want to see a change. But, again, if stage 2 falls over, we are there. We are more than happy for it.

MR PETERSSON: Do you have any feedback or comment on some of the investments being made in this budget for Belconnen. Belconnen Community Centre upgrades have been flagged; there is the duplication of William Hovell and the duplication of the soon-to-be-renamed road.

Mr Hyde: Yes; don't we love it? The road formerly known as William Slim—maybe we can get a symbol for it.

MS CODY: A bit like Prince!

Mr Hyde: Yes, very much like Prince. We are very grateful for that. We have been advocating for all of the black spot work that has been delivered, particularly Tillyard Drive and Ginninderra Drive, which has been a horror spot for a number of years. We are very grateful that that has been recognised in this budget.

With William Slim, or the road formerly known as, the one criticism I have—and it is not of the ACT government, it is of the federal government—is that we had to wait until the week of the announcement of the federal election to find out that the government was going to cough up their half of the \$40 million to do that duplication work.

It is a key link between our district and Gungahlin. It has been a bit of a black spot for a number of years. If you ask anyone who exits the blue club, the Belconnen Soccer Club at McKellar, using that little roundabout during peak times, they will say that it is a nightmare. You are better off doing a rat-run back through McKellar itself, if you want to get out.

The rest of the investment that is coming through will make access and facility far greater than they have been for a long time. We acknowledge that, as Gungahlin grows, they will need better access ways through our district. The only criticism that we have of this budget is that nothing was allocated for Kuringa Drive. It is a horror story, and it has been for a very long time. We would ask the government to very seriously think about funding for that particular black spot. Anyone who drives on it regularly will tell you that, at a particular time in the afternoon, you cannot see the oncoming traffic, and in the morning it is very difficult. We hope that, as a result of whatever may happen with the Ginninderra field station site—

MRS JONES: There might be some upgrades there.

Mr Hyde: There will be some upgrades, but we really need some realignment of that roadway. We do not want to see any more of our residents, our visitors—

MRS JONES: In car pile-ups.

Mr Hyde: Yes; lives taken because we just did not act.

MRS JONES: You mentioned William Slim Drive. During preparation for estimates, I was contacted by Justin Forrest, whose sister was fatally wounded on William Slim Drive many years ago, when she was a year 11 or 12 student. One of the things that he raised was that, while the idea of renaming the road has popular appeal, it does actually take something away from his family. He says that, whenever they see that sign, it reminds them of their sister, who died at such a terribly young age. Has the community council heard about this or thought about this? I know some people have suggested that the road could be named for her. And there may be others who have died on that road. The process of renaming is not always as simple as erasing the history of the person that the road was named after, and this whole business has been quite re-traumatising for that family. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Mr Hyde: The loss of any life around our district, however recent or far in the past, is absolutely regrettable, and I dare say preventable, regarding a number of factors. Whilst I truly understand and empathise with their grief, there are probably other ways to pay tribute to her memory. Whether that should be done through a formal naming process, I do not know. I know we have had difficulty in getting other eminent Belconnians recognised on other features around our district. That might be something for the names and places committee to consider further. How people choose to celebrate the lives of their loved ones is a matter for them.

MRS JONES: I think the point he is making is that this is a decision that has been made in the public domain that affects him and his family and all those who knew her, and to this point that story has not really been told—that the renaming itself, in his view, takes something away from them, having regard to the memory of their sister. While it might be a fantastic idea to have our roads named after the right people, perhaps we need a process—as you say, by the names and places committee—for those who were attached to names of roads.

Mr Hyde: Maybe that is the appropriate place for that to happen.

MS CODY: That is part of it; there is now a process available for people of the ACT to have their say, which was a little bit more difficult before. The process is now there for everyone to be able to provide comment.

Ms Vincent: We have not heard about that story. I think it is something that our council would take on and do some sort of community—

MRS JONES: Have a conversation.

Ms Vincent: Yes, to bring it up and let people know that this sad story has happened, and what the rest of the community feels about it.

MRS JONES: For the record, if Mr Forrest wants to get in touch with you, what is the best way?

Mr Hyde: He can contact us at chair@belcouncil.org.au; he can visit the website and there are links there to contact us. We would be more than happy to hear from him.

MR PETTERSSON: Have you received much feedback on the announcement of the name change?

Mr Hyde: Not a great amount. I have had a couple of informal conversations with people around it. People are generally respectful of ensuring that people with questionable pasts are held to account for it whilst they are still alive. Once they have passed it makes it a little more difficult and it then becomes a process beyond people's control. I think the message that has come from people that I have spoken to directly is that they are watching what government does on this one. If there is an opportunity for people to comment and to be involved, they want to know about it, and they want to hear about it. We would be happy to be a conduit for that.

MR PETTERSSON: It sounds pretty sensible to me.

THE CHAIR: We will wrap up there. If witnesses have taken any questions on notice today, could you please get those answers to the committee secretary within seven working days, day one being Monday. Thank you very much.

SCOULLER, MS REBECCA, President, Kingston and Barton Residents Group

THE CHAIR: Welcome. Please be aware that the proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice, please use the words, "I will take that as a question on notice." This will help the committee and witnesses to confirm questions taken on notice from the transcript. Could you please confirm that you have read the privilege statement in front of you and that you understand the implications?

Ms Scouller: Yes, I have.

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

Ms Scouller: Yes, please. Thank you for inviting me here today. First I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today, the Ngunnawal people, and pay respect to their elders past, present and emerging. Thank you for the opportunity to speak. It is sad that the timing coincides with Prime Minister Hawke's memorial service, because I was going to be down there watching it at Old Parliament House.

The Kingston and Barton Residents Group is a voluntary non-profit, non-political organisation whose main objective is to enhance the amenity of Kingston and Barton. We also include Griffith and Forrest residents north of Canberra Avenue. We formed in 2011 and incorporated in 2012. The group provides a forum and advocacy for members and other residents, as well as delivering community projects such as artwork in the Telopea Park playground and restoring the heritage pillar signposts. We work closely with the Kingston Traders group and other local community groups, Friends of Manuka Pool, MOCCA and developers and the ACT government.

As you may or may not be aware, Kingston and Barton are rapidly growing. Kingston is one of Canberra's most densely populated suburbs. We have close to 6,000 people, with 89 per cent of those living in apartments, and a median age in the early 30s. The rate increases announced in the budget of 18.1 and 14.8 per cent for unit owners in Barton and Kingston will impact over 5,200 local residents, either directly or via rent increases. These are two of the top four increases in Canberra. It is particularly concerning for our downsizers, those new to the housing market and our renters. The 10 per cent increase in housing also has an impact.

With the existing density and Kingston and Barton, along with Eastlake, identified as a priority site for further infill, the Kingston arts precinct, and the ACT government previously identifying two night-time economies for the area, we want to ensure that there is adequate infrastructure and social and recreational amenity to support the population that is coming. We also want to keep the strong community spirit alive, which is what people love about where we live. We want to see the ACT government demonstrating solid and comprehensive planning, and not operating in silos to address this change. More broadly there is a cumulative impact, with nearly 1,000 apartments coming online between the foreshore and Red Hill in the next couple of years.

We need to make sure that there is good management of green and open space, recreational space, protection of our heritage, and social amenity, that there are enough school places and vibrant shopping spaces, and that there is enough public transport, health and infrastructure for the area. We would like to acknowledge the \$800,000 investment for Manuka Pool, but it is one of the very few investments that we have seen in dedicated funding by the government to the area.

We appreciate that these concerns are not restricted to Kingston and Barton; however, it is frustrating when simple things like requesting a toilet in Norgrove Park or a water refill station in Telopea Park go ignored. As proposed by various submissions, we are putting forward that maybe a simple streamlined grant scheme would allow local groups to be able to address some of these simple municipal issues.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. You mentioned the rate increases for Barton and Kingston, 18 per cent for Barton apartments and 14 per cent for Kingston. These are two of the top four increases across Canberra. What kind of feedback have you received from residents from the community about these increases and the impact that they are likely to have on them?

Ms Scouller: There is a lot of concern from both spectrums. We have a lot of downsizers. One of our residents was featured in the *Canberra Times* article. These are people on set incomes who have downsized and all of a sudden have faced a significant increase in rates coming through, along with costs of living. So that will have an impact on them and their quality of living. Even in my workplace, as soon as the announcements were made lots our younger people started bringing out their budget calculators and adding that into the equation to see if that means they can or cannot buy, and concerns about increase in rent. We also do not know what the impact of that will be on local businesses, which are struggling a bit.

MS LE COUTER: Your area has had a lot of concerns about trees and compliance issues. Both of these have had some addressing in the budget. Do you think that either or both of them have had enough emphasis given to them, or what would you like to see?

Ms Scouller: Regarding the trees, I think it is 17,000 trees a year that have been committed to—

MS LE COUTER: No, not a year—over four years.

Ms Scouller: It would be great if it were a year. I do not know if that is enough. We are a particularly older suburb. The evidence is there that the heat island impact is much lower in areas with established trees. Our concern is that we have a lot of established trees coming to the end of their life. If we do not start a staggered replanting scheme, we are going to end up with a problem of having all new and young saplings coming through at the end.

There is a lot of issue about who is responsible and who is not responsible for maintenance of trees on verges. We have an issue at the moment with a local childcare centre, with parents parking continually under the trees, the childcare centre not doing much to address that and the ACT government identifying that, yes, the

trees are being damaged but basically putting it back onto us, the residents group, to fund, formalise and install bollards. So you have got half-a-dozen established quite old trees that could die because no one can take ownership of the issue. That issue is probably more of concern in some ways for the newer suburbs in getting those trees established to address the heat island impact. I think it is a whole-of-Canberra issue, with different focuses needed to address it.

In terms of your comments about enforcement, we have had a lot of issues. Across from me on Canberra Avenue there are two apartment blocks at the moment with scaffolding up addressing building quality issues. We have the Bentley apartments with the fire retardation not in place. There have been at least six apartment blocks before ACAT on the Kingston Foreshore. So it is almost too little too late. You have got established apartments with people now having to fork out lots of money into their sinking funds. But we need to see that anything else coming online is not going to have these issues.

I was looking back at previous budget submissions. We were raising concerns about this when we were writing in 2016. It would be good if it were done, and done properly. It would be good if they stopped doing retrospective approvals and started moving beyond the education rather than enforcement model, actually started being serious about the issue.

MS LE COUTER: So enforcement, to your mind, is still a major issue with the building quality issues?

Ms Scouller: Yes. An example is the one in Coombs or Bruce recently with the stop-work order for the 68 buildings on site.

MS LE COUTER: Bruce.

Ms Scouller: The indication by one of the senior ACT officials was that maybe they could still apply for retrospective approval. The 68 buildings were rejected outright but now, because they have started building, they do not really want to make them pull them down. If the ACT government came in hard on a few issues, developers will start to take notice.

MRS JONES: You mentioned a lack of infrastructure funding for the inner south. What specific projects do you believe are most needed?

Ms Scouller: I have not had a chance to catch up to date with the schools, but a couple of years ago we were having issues with schools being at capacity. Certainly Telopea Park is always an issue but that is—

MRS JONES: For other reasons.

Ms Scouller: Yes, combined with a lot of people really wanting to send their children there. But at one stage it was only really Forrest Primary School that had any capacity to take extra children. So if we have a thousand apartments coming online we are going to have a lot of children. With Eastlake coming online with thousands of people coming in there we need to make sure schooling is available.

We have issues with basic infrastructure. I understand that a contract has gone out recently to start to look at things like stormwater drainage. Telopea Park is a big issue. Anyone who has been there in heavy rains will see that it floods every time. We have been very fortunate that either a small child or a dog has not ended up in the stream. It also means that there is no capacity to filter that water before it goes straight into Lake Burley-Griffin. So you have a huge volume of essentially dirty water going straight into the lake. And some of the road capacity issues obviously will come into play as it gets more of an issue.

Some of the issues we are interested in are just basic stuff. We are getting park benches ripped out of Telopea Park and people are writing to us saying, “What’s happening? Are they getting replaced,” because people use them all the time.

MRS JONES: And with rates going up, as you have discussed, you would expect those sorts of things to be maintained. On the schools plan that you mentioned, are you aware of any planning that is going on that you know of for future expected numbers in that region?

Ms Scouller: No. I understand they are looking at something to address when Eastlake comes on board. I remember when the Realm apartments came in the rumour was that all of a sudden there were 200 or 300 extra children wanting to attend Telopea Park School. Now, I cannot say I have seen 200-odd children around the Realm complex.

MS LE COUTER: No. It does not seem very likely.

MRS JONES: No, but there would be some children.

Ms Scouller: There were some.

MRS JONES: In fact, with the push to more apartment living it will become a bigger rather than smaller part of the population.

Ms Scouller: Yes, more families are moving into apartments, and that is the aim. So we need to make sure that is in line with enough childcare centres and all those other facilities.

MRS JONES: Indeed. Finally, you mentioned a community grants scheme for local groups to access funds for local projects. Yarralumla residents have received matching funding for activities like a water fountain at the Yarralumla shops. Have you tried the match-grant approach to the government and how have you gone?

Ms Scouller: Yes. We have had success. So we had an ACT heritage grant for the restoration of the concrete pillar post signs. I think we received \$6,620 to deliver that project and you match that with in-kind support. So 200 hours of community time went into the actual restoration.

We have two heritage grants in at the moment—fingers crossed. One is quite large and one is relatively small. But what we were thinking is that it would be great if there

was one that had less red tape all around. So, working in the grant space you have to be accountable for taxpayers' money but when you are looking at people asking for grants of say \$5,000 you are still looking at 20 to 30 hours to prepare that grant and you are looking at the ACT government officials' time to acquit and double check that grant. Back when I was in a different federal department they were saying it is \$30 to \$40 to process an invoice, whether that is for \$2 or \$10 million.

So if you had a process that was still accountable that could work that all groups—P&Cs, tree groups—could apply for all year round that would be great. And you have to think about things like the heritage grants. We are competing against institutions like the ANU. So you are competing against a billion-dollar industry that has dedicated staff where we have volunteer hours going into it.

MS CODY: What are the heritage grants you currently have in looking to deliver?

Ms Scouller: One is asking a lot—about \$60,000—which if we get any of that we will be grateful. We are looking at a street art project in Highgate Lane at the Kingston shops. Partly one of our frustrations is that there is a lot of activation money going to other suburbs and we have been asking for years to be able to activate Highgate Lane.

MRS JONES: Where is Highgate Lane?

Ms Scouller: Where the Kingston shops are, it kind of scoots down the middle and is like an L-shape.

MRS JONES: The one around the cafe?

Ms Scouller: Yes. So the theory is—

MRS JONES: It is a bit quiet in there.

Ms Scouller: It is, and the original master plan—

MS CODY: That was where my parking was for my hairdressing salon when it was in Kingston.

Ms Scouller: Beside that awful rubbish collection area?

MS CODY: Yes, I know the lane very well.

Ms Scouller: The theory for that one is to get people from the community—we have already got toddlers lined up to some of our oldest members in their late 80s—to work together with artists to talk about heritage and what it means to them. Ideally we want an Indigenous wall, a wall representing Telopea Park, faceless men and spies and all sorts of crazy stuff there, the original evolution of the shops. So to get people's perspective to get the community to own that artwork is the intent. Building owners have come on board and given permission. Places like Winning Appliances have already offered space to host the meetings, so fingers crossed for that one.

And the other is a fashion parade to help the Forrest fire station precinct celebrate their 80th birthday. So they have uniforms from the 30s through to the 80s and then we were going to match them and we were going to donate matching women's clothes, and then we are going to talk about the history of Canberra and firefighting.

MS CODY: The first fire station my father was posted to was Forrest fire station.

Ms Scouller: Cool. I will have to find out some stories. We are trying to get the social history up.

MRS JONES: When do you expect to hear back about those two grants?

Ms Scouller: This is part of the problem; we do not hear until September.

MRS JONES: And when is the 80th birthday of the fire station?

Ms Scouller: That is November, and it will be a fair bit of work. So we have approached Genevieve Jacob to MC it, so we have all these people lined up ready to go but you do not know until September to have something ready by November.

MRS JONES: I wonder also if there are donors out there who would love to be a part of that. And the one about the laneway, when do you expect to hear back on that?

Ms Scouller: Same timing. We are also in discussions with Design Canberra to do some artwork for the Design Canberra Festival. But, again, we have just found out we need to raise \$10,000 to be able to host that. There is one option of an ACT Arts grant we can apply for, but we will not know who the artist is. So you have to apply for two grants out of sync to see if you can try to get the funding. We missed out on having Lakespeare down at Telopea Park and Belmore Gardens because we just could not get access to \$5,000.

I am sure that there are many other community groups and school groups that have fabulous one-off things. It is all community asset. It is not going to anyone else; it is all there for the community to use, but there is only so much time to write grants.

MR PETTERSSON: You mentioned that accessing health care from the inner south can be problematic. What are some changes you would like to see?

Ms Scouller: This is from personal experience. I am primary carer for my mum with dementia, so I am having to access services more frequently than I ever have in the past. The simplest example for me was calling the 13SICK number and being told that there was no doctor in my area and I could go to one of the walk-in clinics at Tuggeranong or Belconnen. If you have someone who is unwell but not unwell enough to go to emergency, someone with dementia, anxiety; if it is 10 o'clock at night, if it is with a small child, you have to put other children in the car to go down to Tuggeranong. It is quite a long way. The services are there, and I know they need to be in all the communities, but it would be nice to see if, at some stage on the plan, there was something in the inner south for a walk-in clinic. Weston Creek is coming online, but when you look at it, it says it is focused on Weston Creek, Molonglo and Woden Valley. Again, with 1,000 units coming online, it would be good to access

something.

MRS JONES: Are there after-hours GPs operating in your area?

Ms Scouller: The 13SICK number, as I understand, is bulk-billing. There is CALMS. For me, in that case, for mum, I took mum to CALMS at 10 o'clock on a school night, essentially. That was a 10.15 appointment, and that was \$120.

MRS JONES: I understand that. I am talking about your standard GPs that are set up in Kingston and so on, those large practices. Do any of them do after-hours service?

Ms Scouller: Not many that I know of. My regular GP is in Narrabundah, because that was where I was when I moved. There might be some that you can contact late at night to do a call-out.

THE CHAIR: Some of them do later, say to 8 o'clock on weeknights.

MRS JONES: Rather than building a full new centre, in the interim there might be ways of lobbying, at least, to have some of those operate after hours, to have something available till 10 pm or something.

Ms Scouller: And ways to know. Because if you do not access it—

MRS JONES: Phillip has the medical centre till 10 pm, but I understand what you are saying about something closer.

MS LE COUTEUR: And also something that bulk-bills.

MS CODY: I was about to ask how many of the GPs in the area bulk-bill.

Ms Scouller: I have not come across one yet.

MRS JONES: Some of them, I think you will find, bulk-bill on a second appointment in the same week and that type of thing, but they are not doing it for everybody all the time.

Ms Scouller: I have an amazing GP who will do things like prescriptions or referrals—

MRS JONES: Yes, for a small fee.

Ms Scouller: and you do not have to go in, acknowledging the fact that a visit is \$80.

MRS JONES: That is right.

Ms Scouller: For me, that is do-able. For someone like my mum, who is a pensioner, it is more of an impact, and for others who are not as well off. It would be good just to see that there is an equal spread of access across Canberra. And if you do not know, that is the hardest thing. I have not had to deal with this. All of a sudden, late at night, whom do you call, what website do you go to, how do you find out?

MRS JONES: Some of us with large families have spent lots of time in medical appointments at 10 pm over the years.

Ms Scouller: I will be spending more, sadly. At least I am starting to navigate the system, but it is hard to navigate. Until you know it, you do not know what it is there.

MRS JONES: A central point of information would be useful, apart from anything else.

Ms Scouller: It would be really handy.

THE CHAIR: You mentioned earlier that you have had consultation with the Kingston traders and other businesses in the area. What kinds of challenges are you hearing from local businesses that they are facing? Also, we talked about Highgate Lane being underutilised, but do you consider that the shopping centres are well maintained? What could be improved there?

Ms Scouller: We had a meeting earlier in the year with Kingston traders and KBRG, just to talk about this very issue. We have sent some of our ideas to Minister Stephen-Smith as our local Labor MLA.

The issues are universal. The main concerns include parking. I know that that is not uncommon across Canberra, but the Kingston shops have been quite impacted, because for a long time people were waiting for the supermarket to come online, waiting to see what was going to happen with the master plan. A lot of parking is impacted at the moment by the building and construction work that is going on. We have worked very closely with that development and that owner to try to address those issues. He has listened and has tried to help where he can, which has been good. Parking is an issue.

There are a lot of empty buildings, which does not make it attractive to come into. There are even simple things. We have those garden beds out the front in Kingston. We said, "Can we go and plant some herbs?" It is not clear who is responsible for maintaining some of those things. We requested the ACT government to have lights in the trees on Kennedy Street, because it is quite dark. That was rejected. We were told we would have to fund that ourselves, that we would have to be careful of tree health because that was really important, and that we would have to pay the ongoing power bills. That would have to be between the traders and ourselves. That is frustrating. When you walk around other suburbs and you see lots of tree lighting, I do not necessarily know how they all fund it, but it was a simple request to try to bring some night-time activity in: to make people feel safer walking down that street at night, make it a bit prettier. We cannot get that. I do not even know if there would be a grant we could apply for to do that. Businesses just are struggling. They do not have the money to put aside for that either.

We are trying to work really closely with the traders. There was Green Square with the re-grassing. There was the parking. We talk regularly. We have a really strong relationship. We probably will not always agree on the same things, but we are pretty sure we are on the same page for what we want.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. I do not think you took any questions on notice, but if any questions on notice were taken, can you please get answers to the committee secretary within seven working days, day one being Monday.

HOPKINS, MR MICHAEL, Chief Executive Officer, Master Builders Association of the ACT

THE CHAIR: Welcome, Mr Hopkins. Please be aware that the proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice, it would be useful if you could use the words, "I will take that as a question on notice." This will help the committee and witnesses to confirm questions taken on notice in the transcript. Could I please ask you to confirm that you have read the privilege card that is in front of you and understand the privilege implications?

Mr Hopkins: Yes.

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

Mr Hopkins: I do not have an opening statement as such, but I want to highlight for the committee that our pre-budget submission and our survey in response to the budget focused on the capital works program, the land release program, the announcements on the building quality and development assessment resources, the removal of stamp duty for first homebuyers, and the future skills for future jobs funding. I am happy to take questions on those points, and on anything else as well.

THE CHAIR: You mention in your submission and survey delays in the approval of development applications. Would you like to talk about what impact that is having on your members?

Mr Hopkins: Yes, certainly. It has been fairly widely reported that there have been some fairly significant delays experienced with the processing of development applications, everything from very large applications to the very smallest house extension or swimming pool application. I note that the budget papers for the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate contain some information about that, including that 39 per cent of application decisions are made within statutory time frames, and their target for the next financial year is 75 per cent.

MRS JONES: Did you say 39 per cent are made within the time frame?

Mr Hopkins: Thirty-nine per cent in the 2018-19 year were decided within the statutory deadlines, according to the budget papers.

MRS JONES: Statutory—

Mr Hopkins: That is either 30 days or 45 days, depending on the complexity of the application.

MRS JONES: Is there any information on how long the rest of them are taking?

Mr Hopkins: They include information about the average processing time in working days being 72 days. The target for the next financial year is 45 working days. Also, on the median processing times, the estimated outcome for this year is 60 working days.

Next year the target is 30 working days.

MRS JONES: So the target is well outside the statutory requirements?

Mr Hopkins: The target is not but the current estimated outcome is for this year. The sorts of outcomes include additional holding costs for larger developers. Probably more particularly, and where we hear most of the feedback, it is about the very small applications—someone building a new house where—

MRS JONES: Or an extension.

Mr Hopkins: Yes, or an extension. But if you are building a new house and you have bought land for your new house, you are probably financing that through a bank. You might be paying an interest-only loan, and delays of up to six months, which is what we are hearing, are not uncommon. If you were to finance that at four per cent, that is roughly \$8,000 in additional cost. That is a very tangible cost that a DA processing delay causes. Of course, not every application for a house needs development approval. In fact most do not, but an increasing number do. Where we are experiencing the biggest issues is with those quite small, minor applications which are getting caught up in the process, being subject to delay and incurring extra costs.

MRS JONES: Is that due to the fact that those in charge of making the application maybe are not people who do 100 of them a week? They may be a smaller builder or someone who is doing something for themselves who does not necessarily understand the way that the particular departmental official wants it to be written up. My understanding is that every time it gets knocked back, that person gets charged an additional fee to resubmit. So it is not just the cost of the lending; isn't there also a cost to the home owner or the—

Mr Hopkins: There are other costs. In fact the owner may engage professional consultants to help them with that application.

MRS JONES: Which is another cost—

Mr Hopkins: Which is another cost, yes. That is right.

MRS JONES: when we are talking about affordability.

Mr Hopkins: We are very pleased to see in the budget funding for six additional development assessment staff. As Canberra is growing—in fact our population is growing faster than the Australian average—it is reasonable to expect that the number of development applications is going to increase, and there should be more assessment staff to process those applications. We are very supportive of that measure. We are concerned that it may take some time for these resources to be identified, recruited, trained and actually be in place. We have already been experiencing these delays for close to 12 months.

The budget measure to fund more staff is a worthy one and we definitely support that. We note that it is being funded through an increase in development assessment fees. For applications that are over \$1 million in value, there is a 20 per cent increase in

fees, which is quite substantial. But the feedback we have from our members is that they would be prepared to pay that increase if it means faster assessment times.

THE CHAIR: You mentioned in your opening the first homebuyers stamp duty rebate. What are the MBA's views on that?

Mr Hopkins: We are very supportive of that measure. That brings the ACT into line with what a number of other states and territories are doing with respect to stamp duty for first homebuyers. The latest ABS figures that I have seen, which compare March 2018 to March 2019 home lending data, show that in the ACT the percentage of loans going to first homebuyers is declining. It has declined from around 27 per cent in March 2018 to around 22 per cent in March this year. We were the only state or territory to see a decline. Twenty-two per cent is not the lowest of every state and territory but it is notable that we were the only one to be declining. We think that measures such as this are really going to kickstart the first homebuyer segment of the market, which is much needed. We are very supportive of that particular budget measure.

MS CODY: Did you say that the ACT is the only jurisdiction in which it had declined?

Mr Hopkins: Yes; according to the March ABS figures that I have reviewed—over that 12-month period.

MS CODY: Over that 12-month period; I did not quite hear what you said.

Mr Hopkins: A number of other states stayed relatively steady. Some increased their first homebuyer loans. We were the only ones where the percentage of owner-occupier loans going to first homebuyers declined over that 12-month period.

MS CODY: I just wanted to double-check that that is what you said and that I had not misheard. You also talked in your submission and in your survey about the future skills, future jobs. If that is the wrong name, you will know what I am talking about.

Mr Hopkins: Yes, I have written it down: future skills for future jobs.

MS CODY: I also believe that having a more highly skilled workforce, and apprenticeships in general, is a great idea for the community. We need more of them. You are obviously quite supportive of this particular measure. Can you expand on those reasons?

Mr Hopkins: Yes. In particular, as I understand it, this funding will help to attract school leavers into apprenticeships, which is where we see a lot of the difficulty at the moment. As you know, we operate a registered training organisation and a group training organisation. We are actively recruiting young people—or any people, actually—into the construction industry, to take on a carpentry apprenticeship. One of the most difficult aspects of that is attracting people to an apprenticeship in the first place.

Programs like this can help a school leaver or someone who is looking for a future

career to have an opportunity to get a taste of the construction industry. I assume that this funding could also go to other industries. Our hope would be that that would lead to more people taking on and completing apprenticeships, which will be needed in our industry as we continue to grow at the pace at which we are growing.

MS CODY: With the increase in the building industry in the ACT, obviously, apprentices are important, as you have just outlined. What age variables do you currently have? I will not ask you about them across the board, unless you know about them across the board. What are the ages of people coming into the industry as an apprentice? Also, what are some of the barriers to—

MRS JONES: To entry.

MS CODY: Yes, stopping people wanting to go into apprenticeships.

Mr Hopkins: Generally speaking, they are young people. They are people who might be leaving school, possibly at year 11 or year 12, or who have already completed year 12. They are less often mature-age people, although we would actually like to encourage more mature-age people. Part of the difficulty is that, as a mature-age apprentice, the pay scales require you to receive an adult wage rather than an apprentice wage, and that can be a discouragement to some employers, who might not want to pay that higher rate.

With the barriers that you asked me about, we still see a strong preference—driven, I think, from parents rather than from students—to encourage people towards university degrees over apprenticeships. That could include a construction degree or a building degree. That would be good, but we need more skilled tradespeople in our industry, including carpenters and a whole range of other trades.

Attracting people to careers is a competitive area. At the moment there are lots of career opportunities for people in Canberra, and we really need to work hard to attract people to trades in particular, and construction trades would be our interest.

MS LE COUTEUR: With regard to lease variation charges—the review is happening and the budget has something about that—the big question is about the different schemes. And that is still being resolved. How do you feel the review is going? What would you like to see happen?

Mr Hopkins: We were pleased to see in the budget papers some confirmation of some of the outcomes of the review because we have been working with other industry groups and with government on a review of the lease variation charge. And I should state that that is not with the goal of abolishing lease variation charges at all. We understand that industry needs to pay a certain contribution and that there needs to be some mechanism that the government uses to calculate what that contribution is.

The problem at the moment is that the system is extremely complex. There is not a lot of transparency and there is not a lot of certainty that a developer or an investor would have at the start of a project about what their ultimate lease variation charge would be. A move towards greater codification, which would mean that there would be a schedule in a regulation setting out a charge, would help people understand with much

more certainty what their charge would be. We would support a move in that direction.

There is some codification already but if there were a greater codification of the lease variation charges I think that would assist industry in understanding with greater certainty what the lease variation charge actually will be for a project.

MS LE COUTEUR: From that point of view you would not support things like reducing them for affordable housing or community housing providers or any of the various exemptions which have been proposed over the years to encourage specific developments that you think—

Mr Hopkins: No, I would not say that. I think there are some concessions in place. We would support a continuation of concessions to achieve particular policy outcomes, and they could include the ones that you have mentioned: affordable housing or particular environmental goals.

The point is that at the start of a project when a developer or an investor is developing their feasibility assessment they should be able to relatively simply work out what the lease variation charge would be, including any concessions, and at the moment that is not always the case. In fact, it is quite often not the case.

MRS JONES: My question is: in the fourth year of the budget the infrastructure spend on capital works is reduced to \$580 million. What impact will that have on your members and on the city itself?

Mr Hopkins: That particular measure was something that was surprising to us because we noticed that in the messaging around the budget there was a lot of focus put on the infrastructure investment, and in the next year there will be \$770 million, I think, of investment. But when you look at the longer term trend of our infrastructure spending—and there is a particular figure in 5.2.1 in budget paper 3 that shows the capital works program with infrastructure investment from the 2013-14 year all the way out to the 2022-23 year—it shows that in 2016-17 we spent close to a billion dollars on infrastructure, and in the years 2022-23 it is \$581 million. That is the figure in there. It would be unusual to us, in a city growing as fast as Canberra, that our infrastructure investment would decline. That just does not seem reasonable or realistic to us.

MRS JONES: It seems from my reading of the budget that the spend on the building of the SPIRE centre has not been included yet. I presume that that will be a chunk of spending at around that time but obviously if it has not been put into the budget then we cannot analyse that.

Mr Hopkins: It may be that there are other projects that have not yet been announced that would be set up in the future years but, as you may have read, the Master Builders Association has been calling for a long-term infrastructure plan. We have been calling for this since about 2013 when we released our procurement policy. We have called for a 30-year plan, and we are not expecting that in 25 or 30 years government would be able to plan infrastructure to the nearest month or probably even the nearest year.

MRS JONES: Some governments have a longer term approach and I think countries

other than Australia sometimes do this better.

Mr Hopkins: Yes, certainly other faster growing areas or regions of Australia, which are Sydney, Melbourne or south-east Queensland, have longer term infrastructure plans. For our members what that would mean is that they would have some confidence on the future pipeline of work. They would be able to gear up their businesses in anticipation of delivering that work. They would be able to start training people. An apprenticeship takes four years. A university degree takes at least four years. And it will give businesses confidence to be able to plan for the future so that more of that local infrastructure can be delivered by local businesses and locally trained people.

MRS JONES: I wonder if in the long term we need to really have a big public discussion about long-term infrastructure for Australia and for Canberra as well simply because I think it is always tempting for governments to live in one cycle and to use today as the opportunity to get some popularity. The government is ramping up its spend on building quality reform. What does your organisation think about current changes that are afoot?

Mr Hopkins: There may be two questions there. There was a particular announcement in the budget to fund 16 additional resources to deliver the building quality reforms or to work in the building area more generally, including a greater focus on enforcement and compliance, which we are very supportive of. I think four of those 16 positions were to be consumer or community-focused positions to help owners navigate the building process, to answer inquiries or to help resolve disputes. We are very supportive of that. And if both industry and community and consumers have a greater understanding of their rights and responsibilities, that will lead to better outcomes.

We note that those positions were funded through extra fees on the building sector, extra licensing fees and increasing the building levy but, again, I think, with that relatively small extra cost, if that is going to lead to better building quality outcomes then we are very supportive of that.

MRS JONES: Is that something that has been done in the past? Is that a normal way of government funding improvements and changes or is that an unusual occurrence?

Mr Hopkins: No, it has occurred before. There was an increase to the building levy either last year or the year before to fund additional positions—another small increase.

MRS JONES: Do we know over the longer term in the ACT whether that has been normal or whether that is more this current government?

Mr Hyde: I could not give you figures that go back.

MRS JONES: Do you want to take that on notice, if you can?

Mr Hyde: If I can, yes. I am certainly happy to look into that.

MRS JONES: That is, on notice, whether government has increased levies to

improve quality and standards in the past?

Mr Hopkins: Just to give you an idea of what that increase in levy actually means in dollar terms, a 0.1 per cent increase would mean that on a \$400,000 house it is an extra \$400.

MRS JONES: Which there are not very many of any more.

Mr Hopkins: Yes. Let us say there was one. Sorry, this is not including the land value. This is just the building value. On \$400,000 it would be a \$400 increase in the fee, yes.

MR PETTERSSON: I have a supplementary on Ms Jones's questions about the long-term works program. What are other jurisdictions in Australia doing in terms of long-term planning for infrastructure?

Mr Hopkins: Many of them have a 20-plus year infrastructure plan in place. Some of them have formalised that through city deals with the federal government and with other layers of government. One important thing that this could do for the ACT is help us attract more federal funding, which I notice there has been some public commentary around. If the ACT was able to develop a long-term plan within its own borders initially, and then for the surrounding regions, it would give us a much stronger argument to go to the federal government and seek support funding for some of those projects, particularly the major projects.

MRS JONES: Perhaps you could demonstrate the long-term economic benefit as well?

Mr Hopkins: Yes. To answer your question directly, that is what other parts of Australia are doing, not necessarily on a whole-state basis but around the high growth areas like south-east Queensland, the Sydney metro area and the Melbourne metro area.

MRS JONES: Do you have access to those documents?

Mr Hopkins: They are all public documents.

MRS JONES: Are you able to send us some links?

Mr Hopkins: I can go and look for them, yes.

MRS JONES: It would be really interesting to see.

MR PETTERSSON: Are they normally 10, 20 or 30-year plans?

Mr Hopkins: It all varies but some of them are certainly 20-plus, yes. I think a 10-year plan for the ACT would be better than no plan at all, and I think once we had a 10-year plan we could then work towards longer term plans and we could work towards more regional plans. Our view would be the longer the term, the better but a 10-year plan would be a good start.

MR PETTERSSON: In your submission you said that you have some concerns that increasing taxes may ultimately make Canberra an unattractive area for private investment. Are we near that tipping point, in your opinion?

Mr Hopkins: If you combine what we have labelled the real estate taxes—commercial rates, residential rates, stamp duty and land tax—and look at that as a percentage of the total tax take in the ACT, based on this budget, that is 49.5 per cent. There were some ABS figures released a few months ago that compared other states and territories, and the ACT was the second highest. Some areas, like the Northern Territory, were much lower.

This partly goes to the first question that I was asked by Miss Burch about the stamp duty reforms. In some cases we are seeing some of the benefits of some of the stamp duty reductions being offset by other charges or other issues in the budget. The increase in development assessment costs and the extra holding costs will offset some of that benefit of the stamp duty relief.

I think we can at least say that, compared to other states and territories, the residential real estate tax as a percentage of total tax take is much higher than in most other places.

MR PETTERSSON: Has that stunted private investment, though?

Mr Hopkins: In our recent history of building approvals, the trend has been that they have been increasing, so on the evidence you would probably say no, it has not. It has not necessarily slowed down our pace of growth but I think it has affected things like the cost of our land, the cost of our units and the cost of our houses. I think it is having affordability impacts; I think it is having impacts on businesses; but based on the evidence of our building approvals, it is not necessarily slowing down growth.

THE CHAIR: Do you think it has resulted in more development taking place over the border?

Mr Hopkins: We have seen an increase in particularly residential development across the border; that is right. For many of our residential house building members, a large part of their business is now conducted over the border. Land generally in the housing estates in New South Wales but close to Canberra on average is lower than the cost of land in the ACT.

MRS JONES: Do you have any statistics about how much lower?

Mr Hopkins: Not at hand.

MRS JONES: Are you able to take that question on notice.

Mr Hopkins: Certainly, yes. You have given me lots of work to do today.

MRS JONES: Also, you mentioned the comparison that you have done between those residential real estate taxes here and elsewhere.

Mr Hopkins: Yes; I can certainly send you that.

THE CHAIR: I want to go to the somewhat related topic of land release. In your submission you talked about the decline in land release by the ACT government. How would additional land release benefit the property and construction sector, and Canberra more broadly?

Mr Hopkins: Land release is interesting to talk about right now. For a long time, our land release program had not kept up with demand. There was, in some cases, a long wait to access land, and ballots where there were many more purchasers than blocks available. There was a noticeable change in the market late last year. That was not the case, because of a number of different factors.

First, demand dropped. That has meant that we now have an inventory of build-ready land available in the ACT for purchase. According to the latest figures I saw from the Suburban Land Agency, in their developments alone, around 400 blocks are available. That is a fairly healthy position to be in. We would not object if that increased slightly, for two reasons. First, it means that if you are a purchaser looking for a block of land, you are not having to wait a long period of time until your land is ready and you can start building; it means you can move into your house much sooner. But also it prepares us for what I think will come in the future: a future upswing in the market. It would be good if we had an inventory of land ready to build on.

It was a bit surprising to see in the land release program that the four-year program is to decrease land release from around 17,000 in the four-year program released last year to 15,600 over four years in the program released this year. That reflects the state of the market, as I just described, and also the fact that more of our land is now being developed by the private sector, both within the ACT and also, as we just discussed, over the border.

MS LE COUTEUR: You mentioned housing choices in your submission. You said you would like to see the territory plan variation sooner rather than later. Can you go through some of the reasons for this and what problems it could solve?

Mr Hopkins: We are very supportive of the policy work the government is doing on housing choices, because our demographic is changing. We no longer have a predominance of nuclear families and families of three, four or five people. We need to adjust our housing types to our household types. Single-person households will soon be the most common form of housing, and we need to adapt our housing types to suit.

Our housing types at the moment are generally smaller apartments or larger houses, with not much in the middle. That missing middle, as it has been coined, needs to be addressed through changes in planning policy, and then also by different forms of housing. We would like to see government be more ambitious in its housing choices reforms. We note that there are soon to be some Territory Plan amendments proposed. Our view would be that they could go much further and be more ambitious. I would be a bit concerned that our reform process is going a bit too slowly to keep up with the actual demand for different forms of housing that our community has—today, let alone in the future.

MS LE COUTEUR: You said they could be more ambitious. Housing choices had quite a few recommendations. Is there any one in particular that you would like to see the government prioritise?

Mr Hopkins: Yes. There is a really easy and a really specific reform that could be introduced easily. The dual occupancy RZ1 provisions that were introduced in the Mr Fluffy blocks in our view have been quite successful and have resulted in some high quality, well-designed dual occupancies in established areas. Those types of reforms could be extended to other RZ1 zones, non-Mr Fluffy blocks. That would be quite a specific change the government could introduce ahead of the Territory Plan review that would be one example of being more ambitious as I described before.

MRS JONES: People can age in place and that type of thing.

MS LE COUTEUR: The obvious thing that people will say in response to that is: “What about keeping some green space?” “And if we do have more infill development, which housing choices is about to a large extent, what is the best way of ensuring that we do not turn into a concrete jungle?” I am not necessarily saying these are my views.

Mr Hopkins: If we are talking specifically about dual occupancies, the Mr Fluffy Territory Plan amendments dealt with that quite well. They contained provisions that dealt with site cover, plot ratio, size of buildings, frontage of blocks and all of that sort of thing.

MRS JONES: But they do not allow for the combining of blocks, do they, to make a bigger development? They are just one site, one development?

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes; they were just one. Combining blocks is still quite problematic.

MRS JONES: Yes, that is right. I know that is probably a good thing, but the point I am making is that these changes do not allow for the combining of blocks.

MS LE COUTEUR: No, they do not. Mr Fluffy did not combine.

MRS JONES: That is the one that really upsets.

Mr Hopkins: We have a real-life example with those Mr Fluffy developments. We could go and look at the dual occupancies built on those blocks and assess whether we are happy with the built-form outcomes, the building quality and the green space.

MRS JONES: Is it right that they are often just taking the same sort of footprint as the original homes, that they are not massively bigger or higher.

Mr Hopkins: There are much more restrictive controls around heights and building size, that is right.

MRS JONES: Certainly with the ones I have seen, the same trees, for example, have

stayed on the block.

Mr Hopkins: Yes. Even if the new dual occupancy might be slightly bigger than the original home, it is still in line with the character of the area that they are built in.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for your time. You took a number of questions on notice today. Could you please get those answers to the committee secretary within seven working days, with day one being Monday.

Hearing suspended from 12.40 pm. to 1.50 pm.

HEYLAR, MS SUSAN, Executive Director, ACT Council of Social Service Inc
WALLACE, MR CRAIG, Policy Manager, ACT Council of Social Service Inc

THE CHAIR: This afternoon we will be hearing from the ACT Council of Social Service, the Youth Coalition of the ACT and People with Disabilities ACT. Please be aware that the proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice, it would be useful if witnesses could use the words, “I will take that as a question taken on notice.” This will help the committee and witnesses to confirm from the transcript the questions that are taken on notice. Can you also confirm that you have read the privilege card in front of you and that you understand the implications of the privilege statement?

Ms Helyar: I am familiar with the privilege statement.

Mr Wallace: I have also read the privilege statement.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Would you like to make a brief opening statement before we begin?

Ms Helyar: Yes, very briefly, thank you, chair. As you would note, we have provided you with a copy of our snapshot and also a series of questions that we were hoping the estimates committee would consider when asking questions of government officials. We are really pleased to talk through any of the questions you might have from our snapshot. Just briefly, we would say that we welcome a number of measures in the budget, particularly the investments in the criminal justice system and in diverting people from the criminal justice system, from out of home care and from the care and protection system, and responding better to those high-risk groups for poor social outcomes.

However, we would note that a lot of the investments in those areas and in health and in education are around investing in government-run services rather than in the NGO-run programs that can contribute substantially to addressing the risk factors for people and addressing the needs of some of the more marginalised.

We have some key concerns that have been outlined in our paper. I do not know whether you want me to talk through those or whether it is useful just to take questions. The investment in prevention and early intervention is not there. There is an investment in high risk groups, which of course is welcome, but not in that kind of stopping the pathway into risk. It is often referred to as—we have seen a response to “in risk” but not a response to “at risk”.

We would like to see more investment in community development that is municipal level, neighbourhood development and social cohesion work. We also would like to see the speed of the housing strategy and the new builds increased. As I said before, we noted a lack of growth funding for NGO-provided programs, which is caused by a couple of issues. First of all, there is an increasing gap between the costs of delivering programs and the funding that is provided. We also, as seen in the budget, have substantial population growth that, in some ways, is faster than previously had been

expected. So both of those mean that we have significant unmet demand and some significant catch-up needed.

There is a lack of investment in the industry strategy. We saw the really good analysis of employment growth and employment opportunities in the city, but we do not see an investment in the industry strategy measures that the ACT government and the community jointly agreed were important. They particularly relate to workforce development. They relate to ICT, fleet and facilities development and also to developing that capacity around data evaluation and outcomes.

The last thing we would say is that there is a number of cost of living measures which will support households. But I suppose our analysis is that they allow catch-up rather than genuinely enabling people in those bottom 40 per cent income groups to really have a substantially different opportunity for financial confidence into the future. So we continue to push for an extension of concessions beyond people with healthcare cards and we are keen to see some work done on income-based fees and fines that could reduce some of the risks of financial hardship for people across the community.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. You mentioned the lack of investment in social infrastructure across a number of different areas. What specifically would you like to see a greater level of investment in?

Ms Helyar: I suppose there are a few things. First of all, there has been an increasing investment in municipal infrastructure: footpaths and community facilities. For example, the Woden facility is very welcome, but we are not seeing that investment across the whole city. We do not even have a mechanism for doing a precinct-based plan or a suburb-wide assessment of gaps or needs. We certainly do not have a sufficient investment in the community development workers that are core in municipal governments around Australia.

Their job is to build the capacity of communities to identify their own needs, meet their own needs from within informal networks, but also to build social capital in the places where they live. We see that the ACT does not have the same level of investment that we think is needed, particularly in a growing city that is transforming in its physical form. That has implications for its social capital.

MRS JONES: I have a supplementary question. On that, one of the things that occurs to me about the way the city is developing from the perspective of the electorate that I represent is that the new Molonglo suburbs of Wright, Coombs, Denman Prospect, and the others that are coming on board, not only do not have the investment in that growth of social capital and connectedness necessarily, but also there is a complete lack of the actual physical community facilities. We have not seen many halls; we have not seen community centres; we have not seen churches. No doubt, you are very practised at quantifying and understanding how that impacts on a community. My concerns are significant. We are basically building a big place full of people very close to each other but who may be completely isolated.

Mr Wallace: I might answer this one. I think we would definitely like to see more investment in actual place making. That includes local commerce. In places like Coombs and Wright, we just essentially have housing without even local commerce

adjacent to it. There is also an agenda around ensuring that the community facilities that we do have, like local schools, are actually available to and usable by community groups after hours during that transition period. That is one of the issues.

We should do that precinct-level planning based on a pretty thorough needs analysis. That should include lived experience feedback from people who are most at risk of exclusion from community activities and social isolation on the way through. We have an opportunity now with the Territory Plan review and a number of review processes that are happening across Canberra to build that in at the front.

MS CODY: In your budget snapshot, you talk about two points under the CMTED directorate on page 8: increase access to secure jobs and develop a fit-for-purpose service procurement framework. I want to talk to you about both of those things. Let us start with the procurement framework. Can you expand on what you are talking about in that sense?

Ms Helyar: We did some work back in 2015 that we called “Lost in Transition” where we spoke to organisations about what they were worried was being eroded through substantial changes in the way that programs were funded and in a shift in jurisdictional responsibilities. What came out of that was a sense that procurement processes do not necessarily put at their centre thinking about the continuity of the workforce. Procurement currently is for two to three years usually. Often you do not know in very much time before the end of that period whether the funding will continue, so workforce leaves. People who are able to move on to more secure work do, so you have a loss of capacity, a loss of corporate knowledge and a loss of continuity in terms of service delivery relationships through those processes. So we would like to see a procurement process that really puts continuity and development of a skilled workforce at its base.

MS CODY: Have you had a chance to look at the secure local jobs code since that came out?

Ms Helyar: Yes.

MS CODY: Part of what that is trying to do is support secure employment. Obviously it has not rolled out across all sectors yet.

Ms Helyar: No. We did give some advice when it was first exposed. We said that there were substantial problems with secure work in community services and gave some advice on what, if that code was going to apply to community services, it would mean. There is an issue that primarily the purchaser of services is government. So government, as the purchaser, would need to think differently about how it purchased to create the right environment in which to build that secure work. Work is insecure because the funding stops; that is primarily the issue. Certainly with the NDIS transition insecure work has arisen through organisations having uncertainty about the flow of funds.

We have done quite a lot of work with Jobs Australia, which is an IR advisory service, in working with organisations around how to build permanent part-time work rather than casualised work. Some organisations have deliberately done that and have found

they have had a more continuous workforce. That has made a difference to their credibility in the marketplace. So there is real evidence that supports that. We are right behind secure work. But one of the issues is whether the procurement process considers that.

MS CODY: The whole idea of the secure local jobs code is to help stamp out insecure work. I am not a fan of insecure work in any way, shape or form, or labour hire firms at all. I guess the increased access to secure jobs spins off that. You were talking a moment ago about the transition to the NDIS and the workforce. You see everywhere that if your employment is secure you are going to get more satisfaction from your workers, which means they are going to deliver quality service, whatever service that may be. Is that the sort of thing you were thinking of when you made that—

Ms Helyar: Fit-for-purpose procurement? Absolutely. We think about security of the workforce as being one of the values to be considered in the procurement process. Often value for money is the core criterion, and that does not necessarily consider continuity of the workforce.

MS CODY: That is correct.

MS LE COUTEUR: Do you believe that there is still a gap in funding for community organisations between the real costs of providing the adequate service and the broader workforce obligations? Was \$1 million a sufficient increase in funding when the equal remuneration order came out?

Ms Helyar: When the equal remuneration order supplementation was calculated, it was based on the current workforce in place in 2011-12. It was calculated correctly for then, but we are now eight years on. The workforce configuration has changed. Often there has been an expectation of a higher qualification level and skill set than might have been in place back then. That has meant that the configuration of the workforce is different. Also the supplementation was given for the existing workforce and for existing programs. The assumption was that new programs would be able to renegotiate the base. But actually for most programs there has not been a process to renegotiate the base, because there have been rollovers of funding arrangements, which has allowed for people to have continuity of funding but not to negotiate a different base.

Frankly, services do not want to cut service delivery, so what has been cut is access to workforce development; what has been cut is improvement in ICT infrastructure; and people have often tried to cut back on the other major expense, which is their facilities, so they have squished more people into smaller spaces or given people not as much shared space in the office. We have heard of organisations where people are mostly out on the road working and it is really hard to connect with their teams because there is not necessarily the room and the space for that, either in their work program or in their actual facility.

The gap has been cumulative over that time. We have done some calculations and have commenced conversations with officials about it. Every year when indexation is less than the national wage case is another year when there is an addition to the

cumulative gap. For example, ERO increases have come through, but also the national wage case increases the award. The national wage case that was announced at the beginning of June was three per cent. Our facilities costs are going up three per cent. Electricity and everything else is going up. But the indexation was 2.45 per cent. While that is relatively small, only a 0.5 per cent gap, over time it accumulates.

MS LE COUTEUR: In your opening remarks, you talked about extension of concessions. That seems like a very good idea. But how would you propose to actually do this? Are you talking about people who are already getting concessions getting a higher amount, or you are talking about extending it to more people?

Ms Helyar: I think we need both. Certainly the extension of the utilities concession has been valued by people. For people who have already got concessions, getting a bigger concession continues to be valuable for those household budgets. But also there are households that are not eligible for concessions but are on relatively low incomes. In fact they can be on lower incomes than people who are eligible for concessions because they are in insecure work or because they have not enough hours of work in any given period.

The logistics of that are tricky. We understand that the reason why concessions are offered as they are is that there is a commonwealth government mechanism for assessing eligibility. But long term that is not sustainable, because we have the growth of people who are not eligible for those cards but are living in quite difficult financial circumstances. I guess it is about having a mechanism for assessing hardship. There is some quite good practice in the utilities sectors, in the telecommunications sector and in the financial sector around assessing hardship and then providing different arrangements for people in those circumstances.

MS LE COUTEUR: Would you have some references to your quite good examples? This is obviously an issue. Would you be able to, say, send us links to where they can be found?

Ms Helyar: Yes. Yarra Valley Water is an organisation that has been seen to have some of the best hardship recognition and response practices. They have been working for 20 years with a financial counselling service to continually evolve their program and they have been seen as an industry leader.

MRS JONES: On page 59 of your submission you talk about the Justice and Community Safety Directorate and the Legal Aid Commission. In the bottom list you talk about fully funding the implementation of the recommendations from the Moss review. I want to go to a couple of those recommendations. Recommendation 5 of the Moss review is that Aboriginal health services be implemented in the prison. While we have had the allocation of a small cell to Winnunga Nimmityjah health services and they have been in the prison now for six months, despite the fact that 90 or so people want to transfer to that health service only 16 people have. It seems like a go-slow.

There is a recommendation that we have a separate remand facility out of recognition of the human rights of those who have not been convicted and there is also a recommendation that the Health Services Commission conduct an own-initiative

investigation into the prescription of methadone, which sits between 20 and 30 per cent of the prison population whereas in other facilities it is around 10 to 12 per cent.

Do you have any thoughts about whether this is good enough for the people you are speaking on behalf of who have a number of determinants working against them?

Ms Helyar: We continue to argue for increased resourcing to address those social determinants of offending and social determinants of poor outcomes from being in the criminal justice system. As I said in our opening remarks, we have welcomed the investment so far, but there is always room for more. We know that investing in improving health status, improving access to programs and reducing contact with the criminal justice system can all be valued.

MRS JONES: But once someone is actually in the facility. I am presuming that responding to the Moss review is quite important.

Ms Helyar: Yes.

MRS JONES: It is not a lack of funding that Winnunga Nimmityjah has; it is a lack of people being transferred to their program. Of 90 people self-identifying as wanting to go across to that program in six months only 16 people have been transferred. That is not about funding; that is about willingness or something.

Ms Helyar: I am not familiar with the reasons for that, but certainly we would argue that people getting access to the services they prefer is vital.

MRS JONES: The Moss review was looking into a death. The death of that man may not have occurred if his health situation was better understood. Given that his sister had died of a heroin overdose and he had promised to never touch heroin it would have been better if this kind of a service had been available to him. It seems to me a great shame that we are not implementing fully these recommendations when there could be other people in the same boat.

Ms Helyar: That is why we continue to call for them to be implemented fully.

MR PETTERSSON: You note in your submission that funding for the flexible bus service has only been funded for the single year. What are the shortcomings in that service as it stands now?

Ms Helyar: What we have been arguing in our conversation with TCCS around transport is that we need to properly integrate the flexible bus service, community transport delivery, and other on-demand services into the broader public transport planning and funding arrangements. Community transport is funded and administered and organised and designed separately from the bus system and the light rail system, and the flexi-bus is not funded on a long-term basis; it is funded on a short-term basis.

The issue is that because we are not coordinating and planning all that together, it is not entirely clear which gaps in service provision would be best met by which component. That needs fixing.

MR PETTERSSON: You call for the ACT government to consider making public transport free. What would be some of the benefits of making public transport free?

Mr Wallace: ACTCOSS's position is that transport is a public good that enables those with the greatest barriers to travel to get where they need to go. We think the ACT government should consider a triple bottom line business case to making transport free. That might look at what economic, social and environmental factors and costs and benefits there might be from doing that.

It might look at the costs of administering the concession system, administering collection versus the uptick you might get in economic and social participation, in volunteering, people who are using transport to access services that avoid crisis in their lives as well as mode shifting that has a positive environmental impact. Our ask at this stage is to take a look at what the business case is.

MR PETTERSSON: If that business case stacked up, should that be a priority for the ACT government?

Mr Wallace: Yes, we think it could unlock significant potential. We have already tried this for a period after the introduction of light rail. We do it for specific groups. During Seniors Week we have an offer here. We think it is worth looking at the liberating economic potential for individuals, with the most disadvantaged being able to seamlessly access public transport across their lives to do the things they need to do.

Thinking about people like Centrelink customers who have complex participation requirements and need to get across the city outside of the 9 to 5 commuter run, this might be quite liberating for the groups of people who have most to lose from not being able to move around. That also includes older people and people with disabilities.

MS LE COUTEUR: I assume you are aware of the current system for seniors and concession holders out of peak hour times. Do you think your proposal would be accepted if it excluded the morning and evening peak given that our buses currently at peak hour are full and standing room only in many instances?

Ms Helyar: The business case around free access to public transport needs to think about public transport beyond the mass transit bus and light rail networks. Public transport, community transport, needs to include the flexi-bus service and on-demand services so you can genuinely think about what is a modern mobility-as-a-service concept for the public transport system. It is not necessarily accurate to assume that people who are travelling for non-work reasons do not need access to travel during peak times.

MS LE COUTEUR: That was not my assumption.

Ms Helyar: No, but I think there is—

MS LE COUTEUR: I was more trying to think how you could do it reasonably easily in the current environment. The peak hour is clearly a huge pinch point at

present.

Ms Helyar: Well, I presume that will be part of the business case analysis. If you needed to purchase more stock or have more facilities available that will be part of costing the business case for that.

Mr Wallace: But it might also remove other distortions from the marketplace as you do it. Some people might actually weigh up the benefits of undertaking some casualised employment and say, “Well, I’m going to work outside of peak hours,” so it might level out across the whole thing. It would be worthwhile doing some econometric modelling across the whole system.

THE CHAIR: We are out of time.

Ms Helyar: We would welcome follow-up conversations directly. MLAs are most welcome to call us in at any time.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for your time. If witnesses have taken any questions on notice today please get those answers to the committee secretary within seven working days, with day one being Monday.

BARKER, DR JUSTIN, Executive Director, Youth Coalition of the ACT.

THE CHAIR: Can you confirm that you have read the privilege card in front of you and that you understand the implications of the privilege statement?

Dr Barker: I have read the statement and understand it.

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

Dr Barker: I would. Thank you very much for the opportunity to appear today to provide our reflections on the ACT budget. The Youth Coalition of the ACT is the peak body representing young people aged 12 to 25 and those who work with and support them.

In our written response provided to the estimates committee we identified that the ACT budget includes a very limited number of youth-focused initiatives. Some of the initiatives that are included are the funding towards increasing young people's access to health and mental health services, particularly within schools, and investing in education and school infrastructure. However, young people are also part of families, and the budget delivers significant funding boosts towards child protection, justice reinvestment and supporting safer families.

In the lead-up to this budget we advocated quite strongly for funding to prevent child homelessness for children and young people under the age of 16. While the budget did not include specific funding to address this issue we have established a dialogue to progress this with the government, and we understand that the Minister for Children, Youth and Families has identified that policy work on a new model for these children will be developed in partnership with the community sector. We commend the minister and the ACT government for recognising and prioritising this need and helping us find the solution as we move forward.

With that in mind, there are three key areas we want to comment on in regard to the 2019-2020 budget: child protection and out of home care, education, and mental health. We welcome the significant investment provided to child protection and out of home care which recognises the need for both systemic change and increased capacity within the existing system to respond more appropriately to need.

Establishing the therapeutic care court within the ACT Children's Court for care and protection matters is a very promising initiative, and we understand that it aims to divert into a non-adversarial process families whose children have been removed or are at risk of being removed. We think it is crucial to evaluate this as it is set up to see how successful it is and what needs to be changed to improve it.

We are disappointed that the budget did not deliver the \$30,000 we asked in our submission for CREATE to provide opportunities and support to young people with a care experience, including to engage with children and early child protection services to share their views. CREATE currently operates with two part-time staff, and a small investment of about \$30,000 would allow CREATE to increase its core capacity. Between 2016 and 2018 the number of children and young people in Canberra

supported by CREATE increased by 55 per cent. In light of this significant investment in child protection in this budget and the commitment by the ACT government to continue hearing the voices of young people in care, this small investment would have a significant increase in CREATE's capacity to support young people to engage with the child protection system.

We welcome the provision of funding to implement the recommendations from the Our Booris Our Way review and recognise the ACT government's commitment to continue hearing the voices of children and young people in care. Supporting families and protecting children and young people is a whole-of-community issue and a shared responsibility, and we would like to support, moving into the future, the ACT government to improve communication within child and youth protection services and community-based services to strengthen confidence in the child protection system and to build stronger collaborations.

In regard to education, we note that there was a strong investment in school infrastructure and implementing the future of education 10-year strategy. We strongly support the focus of the future of education on early intervention and on recognising the opportunity for schools to act together, act as community hubs with the community sector, and we would like to see the future of education succeed in the long run.

In our submission to the 2018 budget we asked that funding be allocated within the future of education to support evaluation activities. The implications and outcomes of the changes that have been made need to be monitored for young people, for schools and for community-based education support services so that we know if these changes have led to positive outcomes, which is what their intention is, of course.

The Youth Coalition is currently providing our support to the communities and schools together project, which is referred to as CAST, which is a community development and play-space initiative in the ACT that brings together schools and community services to provide early support to young people and families within their communities. This recognises that schools are uniquely situated to be pathways for students and families to access supports within their local communities. CAST is trialling a new model of coordinated assessment and support that has not previously been used in the ACT and provides a valuable opportunity for the future of education to strengthen the partnerships between schools and community organisations.

In relation to mental health, we welcome the announcement of funding to establish an eating disorder specialist clinical hub and community-based intervention support service. We note that the Education Directorate will fund an additional four full-time psychologists. While we welcome initiatives that support youth mental health and wellbeing we also know that barriers exist to accessing school-based psychology services. It will be valuable for the Education Directorate to allocate resources to hear directly from young people about their perceptions of and experiences accessing school-based psychology supports and to identify the systemic barriers and constraints in that area.

The office for mental health and wellbeing is about to commence a child and young people review to develop recommendations later this year to guide future planning

and investment through the ACT budget for children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. This is a really important opportunity for the office to examine the existing constraints across the system and to identify the gaps in data relating to young people's experiences of mental health problems and the system.

On a final note, we welcome and support the significant funding directed to justice reinvestment initiatives which will affect the lives of children, young people and families. However, the broader building communities not prisons efforts do not currently provide a dedicated investment directed to preventing children and young people becoming involved in the youth justice system. Taking a successful long-term approach to justice reinvestment requires the provision of support to children and young people to divert them away from the justice system.

THE CHAIR: One of the things that you mentioned in your submission was that you asked the government to allocate funding to prevent child homelessness and they failed to deliver on that. What services or what initiatives would you like to see from government to help combat that issue?

MS LE COUTEUR: What sort of money would it cost?

Dr Barker: We have actually put together an action plan to a lot of members of the Legislative Assembly, outlining the suite of services, the spectrum of services that needs to be put in place to effectively address and prevent young people becoming homeless so that we stop the tide of people entering the homelessness system.

What we are hoping to do in collaboration, in partnership, with the government leading up to the next budget is go through a kind of development and design phase to really articulate exactly what these services will need to look like in the ACT context, to scale. We have now collated the evidence of what works and we need to move from that evidence to a very practice-based approach of what that will look like and how much that will cost in a very concise way. And that is what we are leading up to for the next budget. We were seeking funding from this budget to do that scoping.

THE CHAIR: When you say you have now collected the evidence of what works, is that looking at other jurisdictions or—

Dr Barker: What we have done is look at the evidence across Australia and internationally of the models and practice principles that we know work most effectively with this population group. We have looked at the models that have been used in other states and territories to address this. And we have pulled them together to identify what we now know to be our best guess as to what will work in this population group, and with the strongest evidence.

There is a service in South Australia that we think is worth replicating. There is a similar service in New South Wales that does something slightly different in an outreach capacity that we also know needs to be replicated. Again, this suite of services—which makes it sound like a lot but it is not—is what is needed to keep young people in families where safe and appropriate, provide respite when they need that, instead of having them sleep on the street or couch surf or do something else unsafe that helps them trickle into long-term adverse outcomes and, for that limited

few for whom it is unsafe, to think about what the other alternatives are long term.

MS CODY: You were talking about some development of the future of education program, the 10-year strategy. You were talking about evaluation of phase 1. Can you expand on what you would see that looking like?

Dr Barker: Yes. It is great to have a strategy and it is great to have a plan. A strategy and a plan are only ever as good as their implementation. Even then, if it is implemented as intended, we need to ensure that it is achieving the ultimate outcomes that it was hoping to achieve. The only way to do that is to evaluate it. Increasingly, we are expecting community organisations to evaluate, to prove that they are achieving outcomes and doing what they said they would do with their money. I think it is really important that government strategies and plans have similar funding allocated to evaluation.

With their evaluation of the future of education, there needs to be a process evaluation: have you done what you said you would do? And there needs to be an outcome evaluation: did this make changes in the lives of children and families, and in schools? It is imperative that this not be an overly academic piece of work. It really needs to speak to the children and young people whom we want to have experienced change in the education system.

MRS JONES: To get their feedback.

Dr Barker: To get their feedback. That is a really important part of that. We have spoken to Minister Berry about this as well. This is something that we really need to move forward on. It is great for us to do justice reinvestment and to think about early support, but there is a primary social determinant for wellbeing for all of us: schools and education. It is imperative that we make sure that we are providing the best supports possible in that environment, and that we are showing what that support looks like.

An evaluation framework also allows us to do ongoing improvement. It is not about saying, “Did we do it right or did we do it wrong?” It is about saying, “What is the value of this and how can we make it more valuable?” Without having a framework to collect data on that, and to feed that back into the system, we have no way of knowing. We cannot make a best guess; we need to get some evaluation.

MS CODY: That leads in to my next question, about the education and training initiatives that the budget announced with future skills for future jobs. We heard this morning that apprenticeships have been declining a little bit or that young people are not encouraged to go into an apprenticeship as often as they were. Would you tend to agree with that scenario? Do you find that there are fewer young people looking at apprenticeships rather than furthering education through universities and things like that?

Dr Barker: I happened to look at the research on this before I came here, coincidentally. It is interesting; there does seem to be a decline in some apprenticeships—there is that confusing barrier between apprenticeships and traineeships, and we often confuse the two—and what that means for different sectors.

Not all sectors are seeing declines, apparently, in the same way.

It is interesting that the evidence about how we boost the number of people who participate in apprenticeships and in how effectively it leads on to ongoing employment is lacklustre. Most initiatives that have been used have not done that successfully. However, one of the interesting things that I looked at was the gender disparity regarding encouraging both males and females to access all trades and professions through apprenticeships and traineeships, and how that is potentially a way forward to increasing the number of people entering into the job market.

As far as I can see, there does seem to be a decline. That might be due to, in the ACT context, remuneration, cost of living, and being able to effectively live as a young person who is transitioning to independence on a wage and lifestyle linked to apprenticeships. All of these things are affected by the price of housing, the cost of living and how attractive and feasible it is to do an apprenticeship for up to four years, and whether that is feasible.

MS CODY: I know all about apprenticeships; I did mine many years ago. I loved it; it was fantastic. I think everyone should do one.

MS LE COUTEUR: There are lots of different things I would like to ask you about. There is a summary at the back of your submission of things that impact on young people. One thing in particular was supporting sustainable out of home care placements. Periodically, we hear some fairly negative stories. Is this sufficient and is it well targeted?

Dr Barker: I need to have more information on exactly what that money is going to do. At present we do not know what it will do and where it is going. There definitely needs to be both an improvement in the systems in child protection and an increase in the capacity of the workforce within both government and NGOs to more adequately deal with the issues that care and protection face. I do not know if that funding is adequate, and I do not know if it will achieve what it intends to achieve, without knowing what is going to be done with it. At this point in time we need to have more information.

It does look like a promising start. Although it is not explicitly linked to that, the therapeutic care court, which was in the justice section rather than the CSD section of the budget, was in danger of slipping under the radar. It was potentially a very good initiative to help us to deal with at least one of those systemic issues that we had, which was an adversarial approach to removing children from families.

MS LE COUTEUR: On that same note, there is a review of the therapeutic protections for children and young people in the Children and Young People Act. Do you have any views about what should be in that? Have you been consulted about that?

Dr Barker: No, we have not been consulted, not in the time that I have been with the Youth Coalition. It would be good to be consulted. One of the key problems we have in this space is a lack of adequate therapeutic responses to children with complex and high needs. We know that in terms of both early intervention and diverting people, we

need to invest more, and in a more ongoing way, in therapeutic approaches. It is needed, yes.

MRS JONES: I have a quick question about child homelessness. One of the issues that we have been delving into on another committee, associated with domestic violence stuff, is that often boys over the age of 11 or 12 are not able to go with their mothers if they leave a violent situation. It depends, obviously, on what form of housing or shelter they go into. Is that something that you have had an eye on or have looked at as part of preventing homelessness?

Dr Barker: That is not something that we have explicitly focused on as part of this. I would have to take it on notice and think about what the implications are. This is not a new problem families having to be separated when they become homeless. It really comes down to the available suite of accommodation types that someone—

MRS JONES: I realise that the shelter is not the way of the future as far as government policy is concerned, but we do have some of those facilities that operate now.

Dr Barker: There are some safe-at-home or sanctuary-style models where the mother and the children can stay in the family home and be supported to be safe, while someone who is a perpetrator of violence leaves. Obviously, that is one way that we can move. They have been introduced in most states and territories. That is not always feasible or safe. We know from international evidence that rapid rehousing of women and children escaping domestic violence has an ongoing effect of reducing a whole range of issues for those children and the impact of homelessness. Prioritising rapid rehousing for women and children escaping domestic violence should be a priority in terms of triaging housing.

MRS JONES: One of the other things that we briefly touched on in those investigations was that either party can be a perpetrator; and same-sex relationships can be violent. Obviously, it is a complex area, but the fact is that there is not necessarily so much of a major focus on children as there is on adults. As that discussion goes on, I would be interested to hear anything from the Youth Coalition about the focus on children in those circumstances.

Dr Barker: We know that the Domestic Violence Prevention Council has highlighted that as a gap, and where we need to move forward with that. Hopefully, the training that has been implemented within government as part of this family safety hub includes a real focus on the impact on children and young people. I agree that, in moving forward, we need to make sure that there are better supports for children and young people. This is early intervention, after all. It is both crisis and early intervention at the same time. That is why it is a very effective use of resources.

MRS JONES: Otherwise you go on repeating history all the time.

Dr Barker: Absolutely.

MR PETTERSSON: The ACT budget includes \$2.2 million over four years for an eating disorders specialist clinical hub. What shortcomings exist in the current

treatment of eating disorders that you would like to see addressed with that money?

Dr Barker: In terms of responses to eating disorders, even now, for certain types of therapeutic supports, you need to go to Sydney. Even accessing private psychiatry and psychological support often means there is a waiting list. Currently, the psychiatric units do not quite understand how to deal with people with an eating disorder; they treat them like someone with any other medicated mental health issue, whereas there are different kinds of supports that need to be in place.

We need to make sure that the skills of people working in the mental health space are such that they understand the different nature of this range of issues, how to treat them and how to respond more appropriately. The idea of having a therapeutic, residential kind of facility would also be ideal, so that they would have a place to stay.

One of the things that we often miss in our understanding of eating disorders, and mental health issues more broadly, is the impact it has on the entire family. We often look at the harms linked to the person who has the mental health issue without thinking of their caring duties, their absences from work, from being the carers and from the family. To provide that support to family through the existing mental health systems and to provide a specialist response will definitely have a meaningful impact on the ACT landscape. At the moment we do not have a good handle on the sheer scale of this issue. When you create better supports for these issues, you start to get a better idea.

As with child homelessness, there is a suite of interventions that need to be improved, not all of which are expensive: upskilling psych staff and nursing staff to make sure they know how different this is; specialist responses in the community, with parents and families; and having a specialist unit. To me they seem to be the three responses that would most adequately address this issue.

THE CHAIR: We will wrap up there. I think you took a question or two on notice. I remind you to please provide answers to the committee secretary within seven working days, with day one being Monday. Thank you very much.

Dr Barker: Okay, thank you.

SIRR, MS RACHEL, Chief Executive Officer, People with Disabilities ACT

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon, Ms Sirr. I remind you that today's proceedings are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard, and they will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice, it would be useful if you could please use the words, "I will take that as a question on notice." That will help the committee and witnesses to confirm from the transcript questions taken on notice. I ask you to confirm that you have read the privilege card in front of you and that you understand the implications of the privilege statement.

Ms Sirr: Yes.

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

Ms Sirr: Not really.

CHAIR: Straight into questions then. What is the current status of funding that you receiving from the ACT government?

Ms Sirr: We received an offer of a grant. We accepted it last week. We are really grateful for that funding. It was a total of \$173,000 over two financial years, plus an additional \$35,000 for this coming financial year. That is what we receive from the ACT government currently.

THE CHAIR: Do you have any comments about funding for people with disabilities in this year's budget?

Ms Sirr: I do. I have some points if I may just go over them?

MRS JONES: Yes, do.

Ms Sirr: I note that the current government had promised a 9.3 per cent increase in disability funding in their last published budget. There is little detail around where that will be. There is little detail about the places it is going to spent, where it is going to be spent, or whether this is just going to be funding for existing local services. That was the number one thing for us that we would like some more detail on.

In terms of the focus on housing design, as mentioned in the parliamentary agreement we would like that all new ACT housing builds be mandated to adopt either the gold or the platinum standards, ideally the platinum standard. So that means that any new houses moving forward that are built in the ACT can be lived in by any person, including those with a disability.

There is an access reference group. We are pleased about that. This means that people with disabilities are able to be consulted properly by government. But at the moment—this is also mentioned in the parliamentary agreement—this access reference group does not belong anywhere; nobody owns it. What we would like to see is that it sits in, perhaps, the Chief Minister's directorate, and that it has

appropriate funding for people in this group to spend time consulting. We do a lot of consulting to government at the moment and a lot of it we do not get funding for.

But we are very pleased to be approached. We want to be approached. We want to be involved. Again, one of my points is that there is no point spending millions of dollars on infrastructure, as the current government budget says it is going to do—at a slight deficit, mind you—if it excludes 20 per cent of the population, who are people with disabilities; so some 65,000 people in Canberra.

We note that the physical environment will be addressed as part of this budget but we think that more attention needs to be paid to accessible and safe footpaths, for example. We know that there is a report-your-street mechanism. We would like a report-your-footpath mechanism. It is just impossible if a) there is no footpath or b) it is awful. How can people possibly use it? That is why we believe that taxes are paid.

We want fully accessible public transport in Canberra by the promised 2020 date. At the moment we think it is about 80 per cent, but we are not quite sure because it is not really reported on regularly. I note that ACTCOSS have been talking about the integrated public bus system and public transport system with the on-demand transport.

THE CHAIR: The flexibus and community services, yes.

Ms Sirr: Yes, we fully support that as well around transport. It just makes sense and it would be great to connect the dots and say, “Come on, can you guys work together and just make it happen?” That would be good. We note that there was an inquiry into employment of people with disabilities in the ACT. It was part of the ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Health, Ageing and Community Services. This was a couple of years ago now. I believe it was three years ago. What happened to those recommendations? Where were they published? What has happened to that? We would like to know because that is important with employment.

I note as well that ACTCOSS have been talking about energy costs for people and being able to subsidise energy costs. We fully support that. We know that it is all mainly a federal managed rebate but we would like to see the government update the way that they approach COAG rather than just say, “Oh, well, COAG has not given us enough money.” We want government to say, “No, excuse me, it is not sustainable for Canberra to be having to fund itself. We do not have the population density to do that.” So go back to COAG and say, “The way that you are disbursing the funds federally has to take into account that Canberra has a small population and we must be treated as such.” That makes sense. In terms of energy, it makes sense that COAG should be able to provide further funds for people on lower incomes. That often includes people with disabilities.

That leads me to the gaps. As we know, there are social inclusion gaps. We do appreciate the ACT government’s active support in terms of giving out grants to community organisations to include more people to close the gap, but what we would like to see is that process made easier. To apply for a grant is not an easy, quick process. Often it is almost not even worth applying because you spend so much time on the administration of it that you have only got so much time to do it. I have been

told by ministers in the ACT that you should just apply, that it is quick and easy. Well, it is not.

What I would like to see is that they streamline that process for all community organisations. It will be worth while. You can trust those organisations to make that dollar go really far, put their hearts on the line and work really hard to include people to close those gaps, to care for those people in the community that most need it.

Finally, on the action on disability justice, I note that ACTCOSS have also raised some of the issues around that, but what we would like to see as part of that strategy is more specific support for children between 11 and 14. A lot of them have special needs that do not quite fit the justice system but they are at risk of entering the justice system at such a young age.

I will provide an example. There was a report of a girl in the *Canberra Times*. She was 11. She had been put in Quamby three times. She was 11. She is just one small case study of what is happening in wider Canberra. These kids often do have disabilities. They might have cognitive impairments; they might have autism. We want to see that looked at and properly funded, integrated into the mental health side of things also. They are my points.

MS CODY: I come back to one of the points you made. It relates to accessible footpaths. As you have quite clearly stated, when they are accessible for people with a disability, they are accessible for everyone. I was wondering what the main issues are. Is it just the state of repair of some of the footpaths? Is it that with construction work going on, there is not enough attention made to keep footpaths accessible? I know from walking around Braddon, that that is becoming a bit of a thing for general pedestrians, not to mention people with a disability. Are they the sorts of things? Are there other things?

Ms Sirr: Yes, they are the main things, and having the lips on the kerbs not too high. They need to be smooth. If you have ever pushed a trolley or a pram, you would kind of get the sense of what you want. You do not want cracks in the footpath. You want there to be a footpath but it is where the kerb dips down. That is really important.

Then for blind people, I suppose that it is those accessibility markings. They are really important. I recently had to lead two blind people to and from an event in Gungahlin, while pushing a pram. I must say that I appreciated the roads, I appreciated the footpaths there and my two blind colleagues appreciated those accessibility dots. That was a good case study. If all of Canberra were like that, it would be nice. I am not saying that was an easy thing but the infrastructure made it easier.

MRS JONES: It was doable. As a supplementary, do you in your organisation take that information, do you ask your members or those you represent to feed that information back to you? I know, for example, that as a local member I spend a large part of my time writing to the Minister for Transport about exactly those issues.

We had one bus stop fixed where there was nowhere to put a wheelchair or a pram. Even if the bus was accessible, it was not anyway. I am thinking that there have to be a lot of little places that are giving people the irrits. Is there a way of collating that?

Do you have any capacity to feed that information back into government at all?

Ms Sirr: We feed things back to government all the time from our members, but it might be more from a systemic level. We would not say that somebody has complained about this particular street. But we might help them if they need to raise it. What we are calling on government to do is something wider. We are happy to help if we are resourced to do so. We would love to but it is quite a big task, and it is an important one.

MRS JONES: That is right. I remember when I represented the Gungahlin area, even there where things are fairly new, there were bikepaths that did not meet up, or on-road bikepaths that would disappear suddenly. There was not a lip so you could not ride up on to the other version of the bikepath. There was stuff like this all the time. I imagine that all over the ACT there are issues like this but in order to actually address them, someone, either in government or outside of government, has to actually propose that we all feed that information in at some point. I am wondering about it. We might be able to recommend something from here, but would you be willing to be a part of that, I guess?

Ms Sirr: Absolutely, yes.

MRS JONES: Do you have a membership base, a certain number of people?

Ms Sirr: We have organisational members, about 30 peaks in Canberra that represent many others that have all sorts of disabilities. We have individuals as well. But when we look at issues, we think of everybody in Canberra with disabilities. As I said, it is 65,000 people. I think that only 7,000-ish are on an NDIS package. There are this many people who really need to be heard and considered, yes.

MRS JONES: Yes, that is definitely something we can have a chat about here.

MS LE COUTEUR: You mentioned the access reference group. I remember last year asking about that in the context of Transport Canberra, who all claimed they had never heard of such a thing, and I am sure they meant it when they did. How do you think the access reference group can be placed in government so that it actually has an impact on the access issues which you have just been talking about and all the other access issues?

Ms Sirr: They would have to be independent, I suppose. I suggested chief minister's because presumably they have oversight of and input to all of the directorates in some ways, so they could perhaps feed into some of their processes. That would be something that would have to be explored further; it is up to government if they want to do that. At the moment, I do not think anybody knows about that group.

MS LE COUTEUR: That statement is clearly true: nobody knows about it. Moving to transport, you talked about fully accessible public transport. I assume by that you mean wheelchair compliant. Is that what you mean by that? What do you mean by fully accessible?

Ms Sirr: Yes, that wheelchairs can get on and off, and there is a place to store them.

MS LE COUTEUR: Do you think that that is where we should be aiming only? I would have thought that there was a considerable issue with actually getting to the bus stop. And then when you get there, some disabled people are in a wheelchair but an awful lot are not. As we are getting fuller and fuller public transport, those people are finding it harder and harder. In the last couple of weeks, I have seen a couple of people fall over on buses because they are so full. I do not think any of them were disabled, but it would be even worse if you were.

Ms Sirr: I suppose, if you think about it, there are different people who use public transport for different purposes. Some people just cannot be bothered driving. Some people want to be friendly to the environment. Some people cannot drive. They are the people that I am advocating for: people who maybe would love to drive but cannot. Some of them might be able to, but they might not be able to afford to modify a vehicle. Some people are blind, as we know; they cannot drive. And there would be people with other disabilities. Some people have no arms; they could not drive. Therefore, they need to be given priority for the public transport system as far as I am concerned. There used to be a seat where it would say, "Give up this seat."

MS LE COUTEUR: There still is. But as the buses are seriously standing room only, that seat is always going to be occupied.

THE CHAIR: As we were talking about earlier, there is a difference between peak time and non-peak time as well.

Ms Sirr: Maybe they just need more buses.

MS LE COUTEUR: That is a quite possible conclusion. I was just interested that you were saying that we were nearly fully accessible in public transport.

MRS JONES: As in the number of buses.

Ms Sirr: Yes.

MS LE COUTEUR: Whereas that would not occur to me; I would never have said that. I am much more scathing in my views about public transport.

MRS JONES: If I am correct, Rachel, the point that you are trying to make is that at the very basic level all buses should be able to be accessed by a wheelchair.

Ms Sirr: Yes, because if you have made the effort to get there—

MS LE COUTEUR: We have nearly got there, but compared to the other issues—

Ms Sirr: Perhaps I should get my colleague up to talk.

MRS JONES: We do not know the exact number; it could be 80 per cent.

Ms Sirr: It is just so that everybody has the same choice. That is what it is about; it is that everybody has the same choice. Regardless of whether or not you can walk, you

can still catch the bus. If you have made the effort to get to that bus stop on time, when the bus arrives, you should be able to get on. That is the point.

THE CHAIR: You know that they will be wheelchair accessible.

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes, absolutely. I am just arguing for more than that. It has been ongoing.

MRS JONES: Another point is this: with a bus network that is not entirely wheelchair accessible, do we have real-time information about the particular bus on its way to your bus stop? I do not think we do. You cannot even plan a trip on the bus if you do not know whether it is accessible or not. It is the same problem that mums with prams have. And prams are bigger, not smaller, than they used to be. How do you get them on and off whilst carrying a baby that may or may not even be able to hold its head up? You cannot plan it unless you know what kind of bus is on its way.

Ms Sirr: We are just seeking that government infrastructure supports all of the community, including the most vulnerable. It should be a no-brainer: it is just a given; that is the job of government. That is what I am asking for.

MRS JONES: We will certainly be asking the department, when they appear before us, when we might get to 100 per cent wheelchair accessible.

Ms Sirr: Thank you.

MRS JONES: Earlier you mentioned the universal housing design. Obviously there is a certain element of choice about what people build for themselves, but where are you up to with that given that it is mentioned in the Labor-Greens parliamentary agreement, I believe?

Ms Sirr: I know that we have provided some input to it and we have responded to the consultation.

MS LE COUTEUR: Your submission has a bit about it.

MRS JONES: I might be able to look that up later. PWD ACT is active in writing submissions on lots of issues: libraries, employment opportunities and transport, just to name a few. What progress has been made in respect of opportunities for employment for people with disabilities, especially in the ACT public service and the disability office area? I know that that was one of your requests in an earlier budget submission. What progress has been made in the employment for people with disabilities space?

Ms Sirr: We do not have specific statistics at present. I can take that on notice and see if I can find out. As part of our planning, we are allocating some funding towards some research. We want to have those specific datasets, but it is specific for Canberra. I will see if I can find out.

MRS JONES: Thank you.

Ms Sirr: Is it specifically for the ACT public service?

MRS JONES: As the estimates committee, our power is to recommend or ask government about what they are doing through the ACT budget. So it is about, in particular, how we are tracking on disability employment, because it is the workforce that we have the greatest influence over.

Ms Sirr: Okay.

MRS JONES: And in government policy terms, it is often used as a bit of leader of what can be done. I am just wondering if you are satisfied with where we are at.

Ms Sirr: I would like to say that we are satisfied, but without seeing the figures I would not know. I will find out.

MRS JONES: I am fine for that to be taken on notice.

THE CHAIR: You have taken a couple of questions on notice today. Could you please get those answers to the committee secretary within seven working days, with day one being Monday. Thank you for your time.

Hearing suspended from 3.06 to 3.28 pm.

HAAS, MR DAMIEN, Chair, Public Transport Association of Canberra
HEMSLEY, MR RYAN, Deputy Chair, Public Transport Association of Canberra

THE CHAIR: Welcome to the hearing. Please be aware the proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice it would be useful if witnesses used the words, “I will take that as a question on notice.” This will help the committee and witnesses confirm questions taken on notice from the transcript.

Can you confirm that you have read the privileges card in front of you and that you understand the implications of the privileges statement?

Mr Haas: I have read it and I understand it.

Mr Hemsley: I have read them and I understand them.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Would you like to make a brief opening statement before we begin?

Mr Haas: I thank the select committee for the privilege being able to appear for it and answer questions related to our budget submission. The Public Transport Association of Canberra is very pleased with the ACT government’s continuing investment in public transport and expansion of public transport services. I do not have a prepared statement but Ryan has some comments he would like to make.

Mr Hemsley: Like Damien, I thank the committee for providing us with the opportunity to comment on this year’s budget outcomes. These past few years have seen a bit of a shift in terms of how public transport is viewed by the ACT government both at a funding level and more subtly in other areas of government policy. Where once we would have been faced with nebulous planning terms and vague promises of better public transport at some indeterminate point in the future now we have actual funding commitments and the delivery of real, concrete infrastructure in the form of light rail that people can use right here, right now.

The bus network, which was once seen by those in positions of power as a drain on public funds that could have been better spent on building more freeways through our nature reserves, is finally receiving the attention it richly deserves. PTCBR welcomes the funding commitment of 84 new buses to the Transport Canberra fleet and looks forward to additional fleet acquisitions in the years ahead in order to provide for increased frequencies along our rapid routes which form the backbone of Canberra’s new and improved integrated public transport network.

However, while we are grateful that Canberra’s transport focus is finally moving in the right direction, there is still a great deal more work to be done. The Woden and city bus interchanges are in desperate need of renewal and it will not be long before Tuggeranong needs similar levels of attention.

This year houses will be released and built in the Molonglo suburb of Whitlam that

may be denied public transport access to community, recreation and retail facilities south of the Molonglo River for up to a decade. Light rail to Woden might also be in the early stages of development but we could start some of those early works right now in order to minimise disruptions further down the track.

Our submission to the 2019-2020 ACT budget highlighted a number of areas where investments, both large and small, could significantly improve the public transport experience of the tens of thousands of Canberrans who use public transport every day. We make no apology for our focus on getting good outcomes for people who catch public transport, whether it be by choice or because they have no other transport option available.

As a former Prime Minister once said, you can never spend too much on the public. Nowhere does that statement hold more true than investing in and providing fast, frequent and reliable public transport options for all those who visit, live and work in this wonderful city of ours.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. In your survey response you mentioned that you would like to see more cross-border transport. What infrastructure projects or initiatives specifically would you like to see the ACT government invest in to achieve that?

Mr Haas: I think there are probably several quick things the ACT government could do. One would be to build an extension of the existing rapid bus to Fyshwick out to near Harman where the ACT and New South Wales border meets. That could be done fairly easily by putting a park and ride out there and a regular bus service with a nice shelter.

In the longer term we would like to see much more cooperation between the ACT government, Queanbeyan-Palerang and the New South Wales government to extend, first of all, rapid bus right out to the Queanbeyan town centre. At some point we would like to see them integrated into the light rail network. We think that is really important and something the ACT government could start work on with the New South Wales government fairly quickly.

Mr Hemsley: An integrated ticketing system between the two jurisdictions is also high on our priority list.

Mr Haas: At present you have got Yass, Murrumbateman, Goulburn, Queanbeyan and the ACT. The ACT has its own ticketing system and the others have a variant of the New South Wales government's Opal card. We would like to see total integration between the ticketing systems in the ACT and New South Wales so you could just tap on and the cloud-based software could figure out who is paying for which public transport trip. We are cognisant that both the New South Wales and ACT governments subsidise public transport fares and who pays for that needs to be worked out. We will leave it up to the politicians and the bureaucrats to figure that out.

MS CODY: In your submission to the budget consultation process you talk about an upgrade to the ticketing system in Canberra: new ticketing technology, I think you called it. Can you expand on what you are referring to?

Mr Hemsley: New South Wales is trialling a technology that allows you to simply

use your credit card, which is a fantastic start. That opens up all sorts of options when it comes to visitors and infrequent users of transport. It can be quite difficult if you do not use auto load to know how much money is on your MyWay card. To simply be able to use your everyday credit card to access public transport would be an incredible step forward.

Mr Haas: Especially for people who are infrequent users of public transport. One of the advantages of the ACT system we would like to see retained is the ability for a person just to get on a bus and buy a ticket. You can walk onto a light rail platform now and buy a ticket from a machine on the platform. We need to see that retained.

Victoria made an enormous error when they removed the ability for a single trip; you have to find somewhere you can buy a plastic card and then navigate this system. We have avoided that. Some of these new technologies that Ryan talked about are something we would like to see adopted. We understand that is in train now and we would like to see it rolled out sooner rather than later.

MS CODY: You have a couple of interesting concepts to help encourage people out of their private vehicles and onto public transport. You have a congestion-based charging system and replacing registration fares with distance-based charges. Can you expand on how you think that will help?

Mr Haas: Obviously we are aware the ACT government is working on its integrated transport strategy, the moving Canberra thing out to 2045. So a lot of the concepts we have put in in regard to congestion charging are probably things that are not applicable now but you probably need to start thinking about how you would do that in the future, especially if Civic and Barton and places like that become the main areas where people continue to work instead of people moving out to the town centres and working there.

In terms of tolls on roads, we do not see that as something that is super urgent right now. But if you are going to build a new parkway, why not look at a mechanism to make the people who want to use that parkway pay for it? When Ryan and I boarded the bus to come here today we had to pay to ride the bus. Similarly, when a person chooses to drive their car it should not just be something the government provides them. There should be some parity in the pricing mechanism for all transport choices people make.

As to distance-based charging, if you want to look at electric cars, autonomous vehicles, all these possible modes of future private vehicle transport raise some interesting questions. At the moment whenever a person buys a litre of fuel a large element of taxation in that goes to the federal government and a portion comes to the ACT government in commonwealth grants. As the adoption of electric cars increases, that tax take will decrease so the government will naturally look at other areas to recoup that and I think one of the logical areas is a distance-based charge.

In effect fuel taxation is a distance-based charge, but it could be easily recouped through a mechanism such as distance-based charging on registration so that a person who chooses to drive frequently pays their fair share and a person who does not drive frequently pays a reduced rate. For example, if you are retired and only drive two or

three times a week obviously you pay far less than if you drove every day. If you were a tradesperson you could incorporate the component that you would use for work into whatever invoice you are providing to a client.

MRS JONES: Does your organisation have any view on how that might affect lower socio-economic groups, given that the less costly housing tends to be further away from the city centre?

Mr Haas: We would encourage people to use public transport as their first choice. If they are unable to do that—

MRS JONES: That is not what I asked. The question I asked is whether your organisation has taken into account how a policy like that would affect those in lower socio-economic groups?

Mr Hemsley: The fact is, it already does in terms of the fuel excise. So they are already paying for distance-based charging. What we are suggesting is that in the future, when there is not a fuel-associated price that is distance based, that be reintroduced in a different format. So it is not changing it any more than it currently is.

MRS JONES: No, but if petrol or diesel or other fuel type cars are not eliminated and a system like that is introduced, then those people would be paying twice.

Mr Hemsley: Of course, and there would have to be some sort of balance taken into account. Perhaps you would not pay that distance-based charge if you continued to use, say, a petrol-powered car.

Mr Hass: We have made the recommendation that the government explore it. We have put in our submission to the moving Canberra group. We do not have all the answers but we think that it is something the government has to look at. You have got people who are paid to investigate and explore these things, and we are happy for them to go and explore that. But transport-induced poverty is a real thing, especially in the ACT, and it is something we think public transport can help alleviate. Fortunately in the ACT there is only one zone, so if you buy a daily ticket, whether you live in Dickson and work in Civic or live in Tuggeranong and work in Civic, it is the same cost. So we obviously encourage more people to use public transport.

MS LE COUTEUR: What are your views on park and ride? Some people are very anti it.

Mr Hemsley: Park and ride is quite interesting. I think it depends on where you put it. I think it was the late, great Paul Mees who was a very vocal critic of park and rides because essentially it meant that you had a limited capacity at each stop. That capacity was the number of parking spaces provided at each stop. That is a criticism that is ongoing. There were a lot of announcements of additional parking spaces in railway stations in Victoria at the most recent federal election, and there was a lot of commentary around the long-term viability of those expansions in terms of attracting new customers to those railway stations.

When it comes to providing park-and-ride facilities, there is also the added cost of the

land that they are used on. So we would not necessarily encourage the construction of park and rides at the town centres, for instance. That land is very valuable. That land could be used for a much higher purpose. It could be used for office, retail or residential accommodation. But there are instances of park and rides that you could put along your transport corridors. The Wanniassa park and ride is very popular, and that land is also a very good place to do it, because it is not likely to be utilised for a higher purpose any time soon. Likewise the park and ride at the top of the hill on Cotter Road is a very good example of where you can place a park and ride where you are essentially saying we are not going to use this land for anything else and it has not, at the moment at least, reached its capacity.

So park and rides are, I think, appropriate but it depends where you put them. Do not sterilise large sections of your town centres by putting in surface car parks. Canberra has had enough of that. It is time for that to end. If you must, make sure that you put them underground when you put a new development on there, but we should not be encouraging further park and rides in our town or group centres.

Mr Haas: Every tool has its purpose. Park and ride is a tool that can be used well and that it does not work as people imagine it does in some instances. As I think we mentioned earlier, you could put a park and ride out near Harman and Queanbeyan people, New South Wales people, could take advantage of that. They could then free themselves from having to pay \$10 to \$14 a day parking in the ACT. So I think there are instances where park and ride can work and also instances where it is probably not the best use of that space.

MS LE COUTEUR: The use I am particularly interested in is by those people who no longer feel that they are capable, or probably in fact are not capable, of walking half a km or a km to a bus stop—generally older people—but are still capable of driving within their suburb and, if they can get themselves close enough to a bus, would happily catch the bush. It is the last mile problem. What are the best solutions?

Mr Haas: Anecdotally I have heard of many instances where people drive to local shopping centres or local football ovals, park there and then catch the bus. People are clever. They will figure out a way that they can take advantage of parking and public transport. That does happen now. One of the advantages of using the local centres for park-and-ride spaces is passive surveillance. You have got lots of movement, lots of activity, and people can see it, whereas if you have got a nice park and ride that is solely for the purpose of a person catching light rail or a bus then, once it is filled at peak hour and everybody goes off, it is a picking field all day for a person of malevolent intent. Passive surveillance, something at a local centre with a bit of commercial activity and movement, is better than an isolated dedicated park and ride.

Mr Hemsley: The proposed one on Well Station Drive and Flemington Road for the light rail is a good example, because there is plenty of passive surveillance from the residential development.

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes, although in more and more local centres, with the Rapid routes it becomes not that convenient. You get to a local centre and you are then waiting an hour to get a bus in.

Mr Haas: You should have more frequent local buses, I agree.

MS LE COUTEUR: I was going to ask that. But this is the whole last mile problem in general. If you have any other good suggestions for that problem—it is not going away any time soon. The other perennial one is free buses. We heard evidence earlier today that we should have more free buses. What are your views on that?

THE CHAIR: That was going to be my next question as well. You mentioned only having one zone in Canberra. Do you think we have the right pricing structure at the moment?

Mr Haas: I do not believe that we should have free public transport all the time. It was a really great idea to have a month of free public transport to encourage people to come and try this magnificent new investment in public transport infrastructure with light rail, and light rail tourism was an obvious thing. You could hear people on light rail who had come from other parts of Canberra just to ride it. But in general, free public transport is probably not a good idea. I think that people need to value the public transport they are using, and they can show that value by investing, as a full fare paying adult, \$9.60 for a day fare. I am happy to pay that. The single zone and the fare structure that we have now is fair. We are a pretty large geographic territory. I do not know what the distance is exactly from, say, Theodore to—

Mr Hemsley: It does not bear thinking about.

Mr Haas: Forde, but it is a fair way. I do not think that there are many people who live at Theodore and travel to Forde for work, but one of the perennial problems of public transport in the ACT is people in Tuggeranong complaining about the length of time it takes them to get to work in Civic. That is never going to change until we develop teleportation technology. Having a single zone is fair because it removes the disadvantage of a person living in Tuggeranong and having a 90 minute ticket that expires. So a single zone is a good idea. The current fare structure is fair. CPI-based increments is a good idea, because I think we should pay for things properly and fund them properly.

MRS JONES: I want to ask you about the east-west link for light rail and what your views as an organisation are on that. We often hear in the community about it going to the airport or going to Russell. My understanding is that there is a fair bit of thought that Canberra's east-west links are less well served at this point in time. Is there any opinion on going from Belconnen to the airport or something with light rail at some stage in the future?

Mr Haas: Yes. The ACT government has announced that stage 3 of light rail will be Belconnen and Civic to the airport.

MRS JONES: Is there a reason why that should be stage 3 and not stage 2?

Mr Haas: Yes. As you are aware, there was an Assembly election in 2016 where the ACT government, through the year before, had held a long consultation process about the light rail network. They asked people what they thought. A draft master plan or draft light rail network plan came out. It had six or seven different routes on it. They

went to the community. They had a lot of community consultation. They said, “Where do you want us to go? What do you want the next priority to be?” People overwhelmingly said, “Woden.” Woden going south of the lake was the one they supported.

MRS JONES: The majority of respondents said they wanted it to go south of the lake or the majority of the whole of Canberra?

Mr Haas: The people who took part in the community consultation overwhelmingly supported going to Woden as the second stage of light rail. I believe the ALP and the Greens went to the 2016 election with that as their policy, and it was supported. I think that they have a mandate to do that.

MRS JONES: So more of a political consideration.

Mr Haas: No. Not unless you regard engaging in community consultation and taking the support from that as political. I do not. If you want to ask the community what they think and then act upon what they think, I think that is probably a good thing. The community supported it. The electorate supported it.

MRS JONES: And the people of Belconnen? What is the view out there? I believe you have a fair bit of understanding of that area, too.

Mr Haas: I am also the deputy chair of the Belconnen Community Council. We support building light rail from Belconnen and Civic to the airport. I think that if we want to be a mature electorate we need to step away from the north-south division. We need to view Canberra as one huge city, not seven town centres, and I think that—

MRS JONES: I do not think anyone has raised anything here about a north-south division.

Mr Haas: Can I please finish? I think that if you want to look at going from Belconnen to the airport, that is a great idea, but that has already been announced as stage 3. I do not think it would be logical to abandon the work that has been done on stage 2 to start on stage 3. We support stage 3, but—

Mr Hemsley: We very strongly support stage 3.

Mr Haas: Yes. But right now, continuing with stage 2, a considerable amount of work has already been done and it would be foolish to abandon it now.

Mr Hemsley: It is also worth bearing in mind where we want the next weight of development, essentially, to be in the ACT.

MRS JONES: Say that again, sorry. I missed what you were saying.

Mr Hemsley: In terms of where we want to think about the next growth area in the ACT, that is the other key consideration to take into account. Obviously, with Gungahlin, I guess since the very late 1980s and 1990s through to today, a lot of development has occurred in the northern parts of the city. You think up in

Gungahlin; you think the inner north, Dickson and what not; you can see all the development happening on Northbourne.

We have to consider where exactly the infrastructure can take additional development, at least in the short term. If we look at the additional road capacity that we have at the moment, Adelaide Avenue is a massively over-engineered road. It was designed back in the day for a much more intricate network of central expressways. That project was abandoned very shortly afterwards, but it has meant that we have a road with a great deal of capacity to take additional development on it.

We are looking at where the existing places in Canberra right now can afford to take some of that growth. We are going to be a city of 500,000 people by around 2030. We need to look at where those places are acceptable for development at this stage. As a mechanism to encourage development, light rail is probably one of the best in the world. So we encourage light rail stage 2 not just in terms of providing good public transport access for people in the south—as a lifelong south-sider, I am very supportive of that—but also in terms of looking at where the people in the future of the ACT are going to live in the medium term.

MRS JONES: So you are saying that the corridor from Parliament House down to Woden is where infill should go? That is the point you are making?

Mr Hemsley: Yes.

MRS JONES: Because it has the breadth to take that traffic?

Mr Hemsley: It is. If you think about it, obviously when Walter Burley Griffin designed Canberra, Northbourne Avenue and Adelaide Avenue were treated very similarly. They had intersections every 500 feet. Northbourne, due to historical reasons, never received the expressway treatment that Adelaide Avenue did, but the fact is that, because Adelaide Avenue is as wide and unnecessarily over-engineered as it is, it does have capacity for development, potentially even greater than Northbourne Avenue, if done sensibly and with a great deal of community consultation.

Nobody wants to have skyscrapers show up on their door when they were not announced. Believe me; I know that all too well. But with community input and with a long ongoing conversation as part of a gateway strategy between Woden and the city, light rail stage 2 has the capacity to be Canberra's next great gateway.

Mr Haas: One of the reasons I think the community supported light rail stage 2 to Woden in the manner that they did is that they understand that the parliamentary zone has national attractions and 14,000 people working in it. At the time of the 2016 election, the public transport connections were not as good as they are now, and parking is always going to be a perennial issue in there. As the national capital—

MRS JONES: In where, sorry?

Mr Haas: In the parliamentary zone, in Barton and Parkes. As the national capital, we have to be able to service not just our residents but Australians who visit the national capital. Putting light rail through the parliamentary zone and Woden really does make

us a mature city that is able to present its capital well to all visitors.

MRS JONES: Because people can come across to Civic on the light rail? Is that what you mean?

Mr Haas: If you are a visitor to the ACT and you get accommodation in Civic, you can then catch light rail out to the parliamentary zone, or Woden, if you care to go to Woden for a visit.

Mr Hemsley: It is a lovely town centre.

Mr Haas: A lovely town centre. This is a form of transport that people are comfortable with. I do not know too many cities in the world where people are comfortable with walking to a bus interchange and catching a bus when they are not quite sure where it goes. Light rail is a quite certain route and way for people, and it is an internationally recognised way for people to travel now.

MRS JONES: So coming across the lake would be about that. And the infill down Adelaide Avenue is the reason why you would do it there rather than out to Belconnen first? Is that what you are saying?

MS CODY: And also rejuvenation of the Woden town centre.

MRS JONES: Yes.

MS CODY: Is that another consideration, and access for Molonglo residents?

Mr Hemsley: Yes, absolutely. Guilia, you live in Weston Creek and—

MRS JONES: I have also lived in Gungahlin and all over the place.

Mr Hemsley: Yes, but you know what I mean. At the moment, at least, the situation between the Cotter Road and Yarra Glen intersection is a slow-moving disaster. There are now 20—

MRS JONES: It depends what time of the day, but yes.

Mr Hemsley: It is always in the morning, but the fact is that there are now 20 applications for multi-unit developments in Molonglo that either have been approved or are currently undergoing assessment. That population over the next two or three years is about to explode, and so there is a great deal—

MS LE COUTEUR: And they think they are going to build some more.

Mr Hemsley: PTCBR did not mention it in our budget submission, but it is also important to recognise that there are a lot of complementarities with projects such as the Mint interchange, which I understand has been put on the backburner. We would argue that that sort of large-scale project ought to be integrated with projects such as light rail stage 2.

MRS JONES: What do you mean by “Mint interchange”?

Mr Hemsley: Where the Cotter Road meets Yarra Glen. When the Yarralumla brickworks development was in full swing, there were all sorts of discussions about what was going to occur at that intersection—

MRS JONES: Putting lights there.

Mr Hemsley: Yes. There was a very large—

MS LE COUTEUR: More than lights.

MRS JONES: You mean a flyover?

Mr Hemsley: Essentially what was planned at one point, which is fascinating and I am almost sad it did not go ahead, was this idea of an enormous floating roundabout over Yarra Glen that would have connected the Cotter Road to Deakin, essentially. Apparently the traffic analysis indicated that was the best way to minimise traffic interruptions. Obviously, with the Yarralumla brickworks yield being significantly reduced, that sort of capital—

MRS JONES: Less affordable, yes.

Mr Hemsley: That sort of capital works investment is no longer as relevant today as it was back then. But a similar sort of just an overpass with on-off ramps and an integrated bus and light rail interchange there has the potential to be something that can improve both public transport connections—

MRS JONES: And possibly a bridge.

Mr Hemsley: There is a lot of stuff that potentially has a lot of value down that way. We think light rail stage 2 is a great way to capitalise on some of those infrastructure projects that need to be done at some point in the future.

THE CHAIR: In your opening remarks you mentioned interchanges, including Woden, needing some work. What specifically would you like to see in terms of facilities and services around interchanges to try to increase the number of people using public transport?

Mr Haas: I will let Ryan take carriage of the Woden interchange but I think, generally, we want to see walkable, active street frontages at interchanges that have good security, good surveillance, are friendly and welcoming, have good surface textures, are well maintained and have good integration with other transport. I think Gungahlin interchange is a good example where you have got shopping services, you have got a road, you have got parking, you have got bus, you have got light rail, you have got entertainment, you have got dining right there. We would like to see that at other major interchanges.

I think that the introduction of the new network and light rail gives a great opportunity to redevelop the city interchange. We would like to see some of that work done ahead

of the introduction of network 19, but generally we would like to see much better services at interchanges than exist now. We would like interchanges that actually cover people from the elements. The Westfield Belconnen interchange is not optimal for that. We think that some interchanges work better than others. Certainly Woden has great potential to be redeveloped as a much better interchange.

Mr Hemsley: And there is a balance to strike between what is essentially providing good services for passengers and also not burdening ratepayers with enormous maintenance costs. I think it is fair to say that the Woden bus interchange and the Belconnen bus interchange, though on a grand scale, were unnecessarily complex and essentially their complexity led to their inevitable demise. The former Belconnen one got replaced but at Woden we are still feeling the consequences of that enormous overinvestment in that unnecessarily complex way in which the buses come around and meet on an island platform. Essentially, we need something that strikes a good balance between being able to provide what Damien said in terms of passenger surveillance and good facilities for passengers and essentially is as simple as possible to ensure that 10, 20 years in the future it is as good as when it is built.

Mr Haas: We also want much better signage at interchanges. We want people to be able to step off their bus—

MRS JONES: And work out where to go.

Mr Haas: and have a nice, visible sign saying this is where you need to go; something is this way. Certainly, you can take that right out to local bus services. For example, with the introduction of the new network there are more frequent local services that loop to town centres and do not crisscross rapids. We think that there are many instances—and we have had a look at some of the maps—where there is a local service bus stop a hundred metres away from a rapid service and, if you knew, you could get off the bus, walk a hundred metres and be at your destination 20 to 30 minutes earlier. A lot of people are not aware of this, and some simple signage at various bus stops could help people move around the network a lot more quickly.

MRS JONES: In the Woden situation, where the bus interchange is beneath the level of some of the shopping there, there are dark corners behind buildings and stuff. Do you have a position on the best way of constructing modern interchanges? I imagine it would not be like that.

Mr Hemsley: No. Essentially with the Woden bus interchange, there were plans back in 2012, the development application went in, consultation was undertaken, and they did not go anywhere. That was because a lot of it depended on the Myer expansion at Westfield, and that did not go ahead. The whole thing fell over. Those plans have a lot of merit. They essentially said, “We are going to get rid of the horrible concrete mess that we made and we are going to make it nice. We are going to open it up.”

Mr Haas: I like to look at Dickson interchange as a good example of a well-designed bus interchange. The Westfield Belconnen, the way it works, not necessarily the cover that is there but the way that it operates services, is good. I think that when you look at an upgrade to Woden you have got to remember that it is going to be an integrated light rail and bus interchange. I guess there will be a combination of the way Dickson

works and Gungahlin works.

There are no concepts or designs out yet. The 2012 work has probably been overtaken by events. We do not like these older types of interchanges where you have got 40 different platforms for disparate services; you have got to get off at one end and walk 250 metres. We do not want to see that. We would like to see much more thought put into the way that people access interchanges and change services. Certainly we think that, with the expansion of services, it is inevitable that people need to make more transfers. Let us make those transfers easier rather than harder.

THE CHAIR: On that note, we are out of time. We will finish there. Thank you for your time today. If you have taken any questions on notice would you please get those answers to the committee secretary within seven working days, day one being Monday.

CIRSON, MS ADINA, ACT Executive Director, Property Council of Australia
DOHERTY, MR TRAVIS, ACT President, Property Council of Australia

THE CHAIR: Welcome. Could I ask you to confirm that you have read the privilege card that is in front of you, and that you understand the implications of the privilege statement?

Ms Cirson: Yes, I have read the privilege statement.

Mr Doherty: Yes, I have read it.

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

Ms Cirson: Yes. I thank the committee for squeezing us in late on a Friday afternoon. The Property Council was very pleased to see some positive economic indicators in the budget last week. In particular, we have maintained the lowest unemployment in the country, at 3.9 per cent; we still have the highest median wages; and population growth and the growth of the economy are going gangbusters. They are all good signs. They are all good things that the property sector is very pleased to see with respect to our economy. The housing market is holding pretty steady against jurisdictions, particularly the Sydney and Melbourne markets. The median price of houses is hanging in there. In fact the population growth really is driving that. The budget papers refer to population growth providing a solid floor to the housing market. We would certainly hope that that trend continues.

We were very pleased to see around \$3 billion worth of infrastructure committed to in health, education and community facilities. In particular, we would note, as the MBA probably did earlier today, that we are very keen to see the government's 10-year forward plan for infrastructure. We need a pipeline of work in the market, and we will be keenly engaging with the government over coming months before the release of that 10-year plan.

We welcomed commitments in the budget to drop the threshold for access to the deferred payment scheme on lease variation charge, something that our members championed over the past two to three years and were successful in getting up last year. We were pleased to see that, despite the warnings from many banks that they would not lend to those of our members who were using the deferred payment scheme for finance, many of our members have been successful in that. That has been really pleasing to see, and the dropping of that threshold will also help.

Also, since we participated in the review around LVC last year, we have been keen to see the government's response. We did have an initial consultation report in February, and we were perhaps a little disappointed that some of the recommendations we made were not taken up. We were pleased to see in the budget papers last week at least a commitment to simplification and codification, and further engagement with the industry around lease variation charges going forward.

With commercial rates, we participated in the commercial rates inquiry earlier this year. We are very keen to see the government's full response to that, but we were

pleased that at least there has been an acknowledgement that there has been bill shock felt by the commercial sector in particular around the three-year rolling average unimproved value calculations, and that there might be a willingness to extend that period. We will be engaging with government around that issue in particular. As I said we await a further response from the government. We had called for a task force to be established to understand the methodology around rates calculations, for greater dispute resolution mechanisms, recognition of mixed-use developments and the rates that were being attracted through that, and being able to encourage that, and greater transparency about the rate of increases.

We did not expect to see a six per cent rates rise this year in the commercial sector, but we are very acutely aware that other jurisdictions are watching tax reform as we go forward, and we take note of the Chief Minister's comments yesterday at our lunch, that the heavy lifting had been done in terms of tax reform. Certainly, we hope so, but we are very keen to engage with the government around further lifting of the \$1.5 million threshold on stamp duty abolition on the commercial sector in particular.

There are a couple of other things that I will mention. We need to keep a keen eye on the land release program, as we see reductions—around 2,000 fewer available blocks for sale from the Suburban Land Agency. We will be talking to them more about that. We are also very keen to continue to have a conversation with the Suburban Land Agency about how our members can deliver more affordable housing, in partnership with government and the community sector. On that note we were pleased to see a remission of the lease variation charge for community housing providers of 25 per cent.

Going back to population growth, we also have an ageing population. We are very keen to talk to the Suburban Land Agency and continue our discussions with planning around how we deliver a greater diversity of housing choice in the market, and what incentives can be given. Government has available to it many levers, lease variation charge remissions being one of them, which can enable or incentivise developers to do more on that front. I am happy to take questions. Do you have anything to add, Travis?

Mr Doherty: The point around transparency of rates is that it is about having the ability to be more predictable. Uncertainty in anyone's industry is challenging. You want to know where it is going. We have made it very clear as an industry that we certainly pay our fair share of taxes; we contribute nearly 60 per cent of revenue for the ACT government. We are not saying that it is unjust to pay it; we just want to have a bit more predictability and certainty.

THE CHAIR: On that point, on commercial rates, you mentioned increases of six per cent, and that you finally got acknowledgement from the government of bill shock. What kind of an impact are those rates increases having on your members?

Ms Cirson: There are two things that happen. There are two different leases in Canberra. There are gross leases and net leases. Under a gross lease situation, building owners are not able to pass on those statutory outgoings to their tenants. Under net leases, they are. There are two things happening. The burden is felt by the building owners. We are hearing from the market that it is preventing them from reinvesting in

their buildings, from upgrading to creating greater energy efficiency in those buildings. On the other side, those who can pass on the cost are doing so, to those tenants who they think can afford to bear the costs.

Probably the best example is on Northbourne Avenue, an ACT government tenant, in fact. Those rates have gone from around \$100,000 to \$1.4 million. That building owner has decided to pass on the costs where they can to those who are most able to pay, because they know that if they pass those costs on to the small business owners, they will move out.

There are some strategic decisions being made about that. Also, it is about local businesses. It is not just about big building owners or big developers bearing the brunt of commercial rates increases; it is actually about small business owners as well. In fact, in Fyshwick, we have heard of businesses making deliberate decisions to move across the border to Queanbeyan. I raised these issues in the commercial rates inquiry. Those are some of the impacts that we are hearing about.

MRS JONES: You mentioned that predominantly what you want is transparency, and you spoke about paying a fair share. But is there a point at which it becomes unfair or unjust, the amount that your sector is being asked to contribute? Using the same logic, if they went up by six or 10 per cent a year forever, it would not matter. Where is the point at which it becomes crippling, unjust or not right to continue to increase rates on commercial properties?

Ms Cirson: I think our members are saying that that is now. Certainly, the Property Council, since the get-go, has been supportive of tax reform. Stamp duty is an inefficient tax; it needs to be abolished. Our national colleagues will say the same thing. But the rate of progression of tax reform is actually what is key here. Our members say to us that it has happened too quickly, that we have moved through the tax reform process much too quickly, and the pain is being felt right now.

MRS JONES: I guess that is where this bill shock idea comes from. Not only was it a bit unexpected but people cannot just pull money out of budgets that they have not prepared for, as you say, by knowing what is coming up.

Ms Cirson: On that transparency point, we have a member who is located on Northbourne Avenue. They signed a lease with a hotel tenant. This is the other thing: commercial leases are quite long. They are 10-year leases, so you have to do quite a bit of guesswork in terms of what the rates increases long term might be. They are already \$100,000 behind on where they thought they would be two years ago.

MRS JONES: Because of these changes.

Ms Cirson: Yes, because of the changes, and they were not anticipating the rate of increase at this point. Calling for greater transparency, having a clear path about where tax reform is going and the rate of increases year on year, is actually critical to the commercial sector because they are signing long-term leases with their tenants.

Mr Doherty: And there is a lag. What we are seeing at the moment is that property owners are looking to invest elsewhere. It is not just larger businesses; it is widowed

retirees whose retirement asset is a commercial property in Fyshwick or Mitchell. As rates continue to go up, it means that their margin goes down, their income goes down, and ultimately the value of that asset goes down. We will continue to see the implications flow out over the next six, 12 or 18 months.

Ms Cirson: We would argue that the commercial sector has disproportionately felt the rate of change. Commercial rates are nine times higher than residential rates. Commercial rates have doubled since 2011-12, and stamp duty receipts have not changed that much.

MRS JONES: Yes, that is right.

MS CODY: Ms Cirson, you put a media release out on 4 June talking about the abolition of stamp duty for first homebuyers as a positive step and the abolition of stamp duty for commercial properties under \$1.5 million. What impact does that have on your members?

Ms Cirson: Certainly the abolition of that stamp duty for incomes below \$160,000 is very welcome. That combined with negative gearing changes federally not coming to fruition, APRA's lending relaxation and the first homebuyer deposit scheme the federal government has committed to is really good news for first homebuyers. In fact, one of our biggest members, Geocon, has sold 100 units since the federal election and it predominantly deals with first homebuyers.

We are certainly seeing positive signs in the market that the housing sales are holding pretty steady. Yes, we welcome the abolition of stamp duty and, as I said, we nationally support a position that it is an inefficient tax.

Mr Doherty: Certainly from the level of inquiry across all our members of first homebuyers it has been a very challenging environment for them for many years. We have not necessarily seen a flow through the entire market yet, but I certainly see it as a real positive step forward. We really welcome that move.

Ms Cirson: On commercial stamp duty, the Chief Minister yesterday invited industry to have a conversation about the lifting of that threshold as we hit the halfway mark in the tax reform process. We really welcome that discussion. We would have liked to have seen a lifting in that threshold in these budget papers, but that was not to be. The government will argue that 70 per cent of transactions fall underneath \$1.5 million, but it is the value of those over the \$1.5 million obviously that is where the big end of the market is. We are keen to have that discussion and see a reduction in stamp duty.

MS LE COUTEUR: The impression I got from your opening remarks was that you thought the government was basically going in the right direction with the lease variation charge. I may be verballing you; sorry if I am.

Ms Cirson: Those words would probably never come out of my mouth. I might not have a job.

MS LE COUTEUR: More generally where do you think the government is and where should it be going? It is doing a review. What are your reactions to that?

Ms Cirson: I think there are two parts. There has been some listening from government around a deferred payment scheme. That legislation was passed by the Assembly last year and we were very pleased to see that. There was also the first real engagement we have had by the ACT government thanks to the Assembly motion that was successful to see the first review of the lease variation charge for a few years.

What we saw in February in the stakeholder report, my members explained that as they felt a bit dismissed by that. So we were pleased to see a commitment in the budget papers to simplification and codification. And I will say this time and time again: my members do not come to me and say, “Adina, we should not be paying any taxes and charges.” As Travis alluded to we pay almost 60 per cent of all taxes and charges that go into the budget. So no-one is coming and saying that. But they need to know what those charges are before they buy the land.

Mr Doherty: Lease variation can fluctuate by millions of dollars on a \$10 million dollar purchase. It makes it extremely hard to make investment decisions when you do not know. I can categorically tell you that the business I lead walked away from transactions because we could not get that within a certain threshold of confidence. That is not good.

Ms Cirson: That is evidenced in the budget papers themselves with \$43 million dollars collected this year. The ACT government had budgeted for around \$21 million to \$22 million. Last year they collected \$8 million. There are a couple of really high value transactions in that, and that is noted in the budget papers, but the point is that it is very unpredictable. We would argue that it is just as good for ACT government and the community to know what those charges will be ahead of time as it is for anybody who owns land in this town and is trying to do development.

MS LE COUTEUR: So basically you support a codification.

Mr Doherty: Absolutely.

MS LE COUTEUR: No variation of B1, B2?

Ms Cirson: In our submission we asked the government to consider alternative paths so that if you wanted to choose a codified path you could and if you wanted to have the discussion with government and have those valuations compared then you should be allowed to do that. Some developers want to do quite different things and the codified path will not suit those developments. So giving options to people is really what we would like to see.

MRS JONES: Can you tell me a bit more about the housing affordability targets? Do you think that the ambitious targets outlined in the housing strategy are achievable, and are they supported by the governments land release policies?

Ms Cirson: I sat on the consultative group, the housing affordability consultative group that Minister Berry convened. We sit on that with community housing providers. We had some input into the development of the housing strategy which was released last year. I will say that we have been long calling for a formal ministerial

council to be established to oversee the implementation of that housing strategy.

We believe the bones are there but how you then implement that and what recommendations come from that group to government when they are determining their budget year on year on how to get that affordability mix right is something that we are very keen to see.

MRS JONES: From your work on that committee what has to happen?

Ms Cirson: There needs to be some greater skin in the game by the government in terms of what price it is prepared to take for its land. It arguably has the greatest ability of any jurisdiction to make some difference on housing affordability because of the way our leasehold system is structured.

There is a statutory requirement on the SLA to sell land at market rate, and forever that will stay true until the government decides to amend that act. We are certainly saying let us do it together. The government could take a lower price and developers will deliver the product. In fact, we spend a lot of time at the Property Council through our committees discussing housing affordability.

Travis is probably in a better position with his Village hat on to talk about this. But it is very difficult to make the affordability targets on the current land release program financially stack up.

Mr Doherty: Absolutely. The price of land is extremely prohibitive, and there is a lack of flexibility around being able to structure transactions in a way that incentivise a developer along with government and community to deliver solid outcomes.

MRS JONES: It was put to me many years ago by someone who built houses in this town that one of the important factors in housing affordability is to have enough of the one-bathroom, three-bedroom stock built. I believe under Jon Stanhope that was pushed fairly heavily but has not been since. What are your views on whether that can be better delivered as well as some lesser costing blocks?

Ms Cirson: Funnily enough, I worked in Chief Minister Stanhope's office on the housing affordability strategy and Travis's predecessor actually delivered the product. It is quite interesting. We would always argue there needs to be a diversity in the housing stock. Is there a market for three bedrooms?

Mr Doherty: There is a market for three-bedroom, one-bathroom, single-garage homes if we could get the cost right. But at the moment it is extremely prohibitive because of the cost of the land. You look at the release at the moment, 70 per cent—

MRS JONES: A current block goes to market. The average is obviously very high compared to the Australian averages. Would government need to forfeit 20 per cent of the current cost of land to make that sort of house stack up?

Mr Doherty: I think it depends on your definition of affordability, but it could be 20 per cent. It could be more in some situations. It could be less.

MRS JONES: My understanding is that in the current market you cannot find those smaller dwellings to get started. Most people are not so stressed about meeting their long-term housing perfect needs; they want to get in.

Mr Doherty: It is well-documented that there is the missing middle and it makes it extremely hard. This is where the linkage back to some of the policy levers like lease variation charge and others come into it.

Ms Cirson: But planning constraints as well.

Mr Doherty: Yes, planning constraints. There are planning delays we have experienced as well. But it makes it extremely hard to justify the acquisition of a site that means there is a commercial benefit for a developer to do it and to be able to deliver a single-storey three-bedroom, one-bathroom home. It is nigh impossible at the moment. We have been having ongoing dialogue with the SLA and government around opportunities.

Ms Cirson: We have had a very positive engagement with them and there is a real willingness to do it, but there is a policy conflict here: how much money needs to be earned because of a statutory requirement compared to what the government from a policy objective is trying to achieve through their housing strategy?

MRS JONES: What change needs to occur? Is it an ACT law that has to change?

Ms Cirson: I am not sure which act it is, but there is a statutory requirement to get the market rate.

Mr Doherty: And ultimately there is a willingness to want to partner with the industry. As soon as someone from the industry is given that opportunity there are concerns that that can be seen as favouritism. We do not want that. We want a good outcome for community and Canberra and the entire region. We need leadership on this issue.

Ms Cirson: We asked this of the Chief Minister yesterday, and he said he believed the government should have skin in the game and would be willing to consider new ideas and options around joint ventures and things like that. I do not want to put words in his mouth; those were not his exact words. But there was certainly a willingness to have a further discussion about how we can do it together. We are working very hard with our community providers—Community Housing Canberra is one of our members—but we need a bit of policy connection on this issue.

MS LE COUTEUR: Affordable housing certainly has in the past been seen as something which was built and then sold a few years later at a considerable gain to someone. I understand there have been some changes made to how this is administered. Do you think this is going to be enough to solve that certainly widespread perception of roting?

Ms Cirson: Certainly. The Property Council made it very clear to government 18 months ago that we were aware that, with affordable housing, the policy settings needed to be changed, that affordable dwellings were not getting to the people who

needed it. In fact we reported directly to government a couple of concerning stories that we had heard so that they could be addressed and picked up. We certainly are very supportive of change, which is why we engaged in the consultative forum.

The bones are in the housing strategy. It is about how we now roll that out, and we acknowledge that we have to make sure that the dwellings are getting to the people who need them. The Suburban Land Agency is currently talking to us about an expression of interest around seeking people who can deliver affordable housing against those greenfield areas. We want to actually see more of that done in the urban infill space which is actually where those key workers, the most vulnerable in our community, actually need to be located: close to transport and health facilities and work.

MS LE COUTEUR: From what you are saying, this sounds like the government simply deciding a 15 per cent target is not all they have to do. There is a lot more.

Mr Doherty: It is a step in the right direction but it is a lot more than that. I reiterate the point that Adina made that we are looking at opportunities for expressions of interest for affordable housing providers but unless we have their willingness and the desire to be able to use the land price as a lever we will be spinning our wheels.

MS LE COUTEUR: That should happen automatically insofar as if it is sold with “you have to have X proportion of affordable housing” then the market price is the market price with that amount of affordable housing. That bit should regulate itself in terms of what you are going to pay for the blocks?

Mr Doherty: I think you would have the ongoing management of it, though, because the issue you have is that you will have caps on your number of two, three and four bedrooms for your price. You will release that to the market and, unless you have the assessment criteria for those who are buying it and that there are restrictions on reselling those, you will find that something you may buy for \$384,000 which is, from memory, the three-bedroom or four-bedroom price gap for affordable housing, may be sold in the market two years later when it is an open market for \$500,000.

MS LE COUTEUR: That was one of the points I was making. Something has to be done so that you do not buy at \$380,000 and sell at \$500,000.

Mr Doherty: I agree.

MS LE COUTEUR: Should that be able to be solved or not solved or you do not think it is possible to solve that problem?

Mr Doherty: I think it can be solved, absolutely. This is where for me it is more of a partnership and it is not just a transaction for a developer to build something, sell it and then move on to the next one. It is actually a long-term partnership with government, a long-term commitment, and not just the basis of that transaction starting out at maximising the value of the land. With a reduction in land price there could be ongoing commitments on the developer for anywhere from two to 10 years.

Ms Cirson: The best example of this is the partnership between the then LDA, now

SLA, and the Riverview Group to deliver west Belconnen, Ginninderry, those suburbs out there. They are delivering affordable dwellings out there because they are in partnership. There is a commitment from both the government and the developer to meet the demands of a particular part of the market. It can be done. I guess what we are saying is that the strength is not actually the partnership. Let us get around the table and try to work out how to get this product delivered in the quickest way possible. I think what we have sensed is that there is a disconnect going on at the moment and there is willingness but it is a work in progress.

MRS JONES: Can I get a clarification on what you were talking about in regard to the long-term relationship. I cannot say I fully understood what you were referring to.

Mr Doherty: I was saying that there can be obligations put on a developer and government, for that matter, as a part of a specific project.

MRS JONES: They will do this and you will do that?

Mr Doherty: Yes. Government is obligated to do this, the developer is obligated to do this, and there are measurable milestones and performance indicators.

MRS JONES: Over the life of the development?

Mr Doherty: Over the life of that project or for a set period. It is not just build it, sell it, next project for a developer.

MRS JONES: Certainly developers are people too and they have—

Mr Doherty: Yes. We live, we invest, we work in the city because we love it.

MRS JONES: You would probably be happy to see the place function better.

Mr Doherty: Yes, absolutely.

Ms Cirson: I often say about our members, which is unique to Canberra, that our members here are part of the community. It is not them and us. We choose to build—

MRS JONES: And they are not coming in from somewhere else?

Ms Cirson: They want to leave a legacy and I think that sets us apart and also provides the greatest opportunity for us to work really closely together.

THE CHAIR: On that note, we are out of time. We will wrap up there. The committee's hearing for today is now adjourned. On behalf of the committee, I thank all witnesses who have appeared today and for their contribution to this inquiry. The secretary will provide all witnesses with a copy of the proof transcript of today's hearing when it is available. I remind witnesses again: if you have taken any questions on notice today could you please get those answers to the committee secretary within seven working days, day one being Monday.

The committee adjourned at 4.31 pm.