



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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

(Reference: [Annual and financial reports 2015-2016](#))

Members:

MR C STEEL (Chair)
MRS E KIKKERT (Deputy Chair)
MRS V DUNNE
MS C LE COUTEUR
MR M PETTERSSON

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

WEDNESDAY, 1 MARCH 2017

Secretary to the committee:

Ms K Harkins (Ph: 620 70524)

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

APPEARANCES

Community Services Directorate.....1, 81, 101

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 9.30 am.

Appearances:

Stephen-Smith, Ms Rachel, Minister for Community Services and Social Inclusion, Minister for Disability, Children and Youth, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations

Community Services Directorate

De'Ath, Mr Michael, Director-General

Mitcherson, Mrs Bernadette, Deputy Director-General

Sheehan, Ms Maureen, Executive Director, Strategy, Participation and Early Intervention

Moore, Ms Nicole, Senior Manager, Performance and Accountability

Starick, Ms Kate, Director, Service Design, Policy and Accountability

Forester, Ms Robyn, Director, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

Murray, Ms Christine, Director, People Management

Khan, Ms Azra, Director, Community Participation Group

Jordaan, Ms Elise, Senior Manager, Child Development Service

O'Leary, Ms Catherina, Director, Change Management and Reform

Pappas, Ms Helen, Senior Director, Child and Youth Protection Services

Robinson, Ms Jodie, Director (Operations), Child and Youth Protection Services

THE CHAIR: I would like to welcome everyone to this hearing of the Standing Committee on Health, Ageing and Community Services. This is the first public hearing of the standing committee into the 2015-16 annual reports referred to it by the Legislative Assembly on 16 February this year. The committee is to inquire into the annual reports referred to it and report to the Assembly by the last sitting day in May 2017. Today the committee will examine the Community Services Directorate annual report.

I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the pink privilege statement that is before you on the table. Could you please confirm for the record that you have read and understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Yes.

THE CHAIR: I remind witnesses that the proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes, as well as being webstreamed and broadcast. Before we proceed to questions from the committee, would you like to make an opening statement, minister?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Yes, I would like to make an opening statement. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to make this statement across my portfolios. As I said in my ministerial statement on priorities in December, I feel extremely privileged to have these portfolios, which are really about working with people to support and engage some of our most vulnerable and marginalised residents, as well as about

building an inclusive society that celebrates our diversity.

I am told that in the last Assembly and over the 2015-16 year in particular there was bipartisan support for the major reform in child protection and out-of-home care under the A step up for our kids strategy. I look forward to working in a similarly cooperative way with colleagues in the Assembly in this term, although, of course, I accept that it is the role of the opposition and crossbench members of the Assembly to hold the government to account as well.

I have offered directorate briefings to several shadow ministers as well as Ms Le Couter, and I am pleased that Mrs Kikkert, Ms Lee and Ms Le Couter have taken up that offer. If any committee member is interested in getting a more detailed briefing from the directorate on any particular matter, please let me know.

Chair, this government has made a commitment to our community. We want Canberra to be a fairer and more inclusive community. We want to do better for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, for people with a disability and, importantly, for vulnerable children, young people and their families.

In coming into this role I am keenly aware that 2015-16 was a year of much change, particularly across the portfolio of Disability, Children and Youth. As I mentioned, this was the year in which A step up for our kids was implemented and it was also the year in which the majority of our transition to the NDIS was finalised.

Through the youth affairs portfolio, the youth interact initiatives of 2015-16 engaged young people through scholarships, grants and through the work of the Youth Advisory Council, which I was pleased to meet with late last year.

As you can see from the annual report, 2015-16 also saw the government continue to support multicultural communities in Canberra. This included a strong commitment to supporting refugees and asylum seekers, with Minister Berry successfully seeking to be a part of the commonwealth's safe haven enterprise visa scheme to allow temporary protection visa holders to work and study in Canberra.

We continue to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT in many ways. As members would be aware, the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agreement 2015-18 sets out the commitment of the ACT government and the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body to work together to recognise and respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in the ACT and surrounding areas and their communities.

I have been trying to meet as many people in our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community as possible, including visits to both Winnunga Nimmityjah and Gugan Gulwan, and meetings with representatives of the United Ngunnawal Elders Council and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body. We have obviously got a long way to go in this space, but I am grateful for the support I have received as I have stepped into the role and look forward to continuing to work with the community.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the work of Community

Services Directorate staff. Our front-line staff work with some of Canberra's most vulnerable people in very difficult and complex circumstances, and I thank them for their ongoing dedication and commitment. I also thank the directorate for the support they have given me over the past few months and for their patience in answering my questions and helping me to get across the key issues.

THE CHAIR: We might start with community participation, particularly community sector reform. I have a few questions in that area which I am happy to lead with, and others can follow. My question is in relation to the community services industry strategy, which is referenced on page 54 of the report. I would like an update on the development and implementation of the strategy, and how that is going.

Ms Sheehan: I accept the responsibilities under the privilege statement. Thank you for that question, because the development of a community services industry strategy is unique in Australia. We had a lot of assistance in forming the concept of the community services, not just as community organisations but as a whole industry, from working with our colleagues, particularly in Queensland, who attended the very first workshop that we had between government and the community services in formulating what it would mean for us to see ourselves as an industry and then how we would go forward as an industry to market ourselves, to think differently about how organisations would restructure themselves as businesses and the way in which they would need to work with their own workforces to think of themselves in a different way.

We embarked on the journey of actually developing an industry strategy. We worked really closely with the business development area of Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate. We formed a steering committee jointly with the community, industry and the community organisations. We engaged KPMG as a consultant to work with us on the development of the strategy.

Over a period of time which began in December 2015, when we had that very first workshop that I referred to, we formed the steering committee jointly between government and the community sector, we engaged the consultants and then we had a really long period of consultation with community organisations and with business to look at what were the main features that we would want in a strategy. We settled on a long-term, 10-year strategy. Again, it was really important for us to think about the industry in that broader sense, not just community organisations.

The culmination of all of the consultation was two discussion papers, which were widely circulated. There were a series of workshops held by the consultants with different representatives of major and small organisations, so that we got that mix of input from large organisations, which obviously would face a different challenge in restructuring themselves, to very small organisations, which are largely staffed by volunteers. It culminated in a sector-wide workshop which was hosted by Minister Berry who, at that time, was the Minister for Community Services. Finally, a 10-year strategy was produced with major priorities. The idea was that across the 10 years of the strategy we would have three work plans.

The first priority, which was agreed universally, was workforce. The question then was: having developed the 10-year strategy, how would we go about developing those

implementation plans, those work plans, and who would have responsibility for the implementation of those plans?

The steering committee recommended, and it was accepted by a joint community-government reference group—and the work of that group is referenced in the annual report—that because that group has representatives of all of the peaks and major service organisations in the ACT and all government departments at very senior levels, that body was best placed to take forward the recommendations of the 10-year strategy and to develop those three plans.

The stage that we are at in the development of the plans is that, having focused on workforce as the major priority, we have had a series of sessions of a subcommittee devoted to the workforce issue to look at what the main workforce issues are, because “workforce” is very broad, of course. You have recruitment and retention, you have training, you have the issue of mandatory qualifications or no mandatory qualifications, you have wages issues and so on. So it is about really refining what it is possible for us to influence and where we should invest in that workforce.

We were set to finalise our first plan in December. However—and this was a good thing but it did hold us up—we have the final \$1.2 million of the commonwealth’s investment in the national disability insurance scheme sector development, and that is devoted to workforce. So we went to tender in December for \$1.2 million over two years for investment in workforce in the disability sector. At that point it was decided that there would be a conflict of interest in a number of the organisations who had governance of the workforce development plan in finalising a plan with a view to investment at the same time as many of them were tendering for that \$1.2 million for disability workforce investment.

That tender has just been finalised now and we have recommenced our work on workforce. Also, as the annual report describes, we do have about \$600,000 in the sector development fund for investment in workforce. Of course, we also did not want to be investing that money foolishly, not knowing where the \$1.2 million would be invested as a result of the tender. It will shortly be announced where that \$1.2 million will be invested, and we will then be in a position, with that knowledge, to finalise our first plan and then move on with an evidence base to find where that \$600,000 investment would go.

With respect to the place we are at, we are not quite as progressed as we would have wished. The reason for that, though, is a \$1.2 million investment in workforce, which is quite exciting. We really feel, with working across government and the sector—in fact, I should say the industry, working across the community services industry—that we are very well placed now to be making some serious progress on developing, recruiting and retaining a skilled workforce in the community services industry.

THE CHAIR: Will there be reports against the outcomes of the strategy?

Ms Sheehan: Yes, there will. The expectation is that each of the three plans would themselves contain a reporting regime. That is incredibly important in terms of any future investment. Of course, if you have allocated a priority and you have a series of actions to achieve the priority, you need to take stock of how you are progressing

against that in terms of moving on to your next priority and what the investment needs to be in each of those three priorities and plans across the 10 years.

MS LE COUTEUR: I have some questions on this issue. Part of this plan was a red tape reduction program. What organisations were involved and what bits of red tape did you or they reduce?

Ms Sheehan: Thank you for that question. The red tape reduction program began at the start of the sector reform program in 2012. It is very important to remember that the basis of the reform program was that the ACT government was one of the few state and territory governments that had supported the equal remuneration case through Fair Work Australia and that it had taken a lead in getting the commonwealth, once the decision came down, to jointly fund with the states and territories the implementation of the pay increases across nine years.

It was very important to the ACT government, having agreed to fund wage increases across nine years, to jointly work with that sector that would enjoy the wage increases on what it saw as major impediments to the efficiency of the sector. In having a series of workshops with the sector, the sector itself identified what it saw as impediments to efficiency, and that is how the red tape reduction program was developed.

With respect to the number of reforms that have been worked on, the first one was looking at reporting. We had done some calculations on a time and motion study, almost: what is the time that it takes an organisation to do reporting to government? We found that the reporting regime was the same for an organisation whether it was receiving \$10 million of government funding or \$100,000 of government funding. We implemented two major reforms to improve the reporting required of organisations. The first one was that we changed the reporting requirements from quarterly and six-monthly to annually.

MS LE COUTEUR: That is for all of the organisations reporting to CSD?

Ms Sheehan: Yes, based on a risk analysis. The second thing was that we had worked with our colleagues in what was then Procurement Solutions—it is now Procurement and Capital Works—to look at what the requirements of procurement legislation are that the sector perceived to be putting a burden on them. The advice that we received was that the procurement legislation actually only required the mechanism for funding to be large service funding agreements with very specific reporting requirements if government was procuring services rather than funding what I would call backbone support for organisations such as peaks.

ACTCOSS would be a very good example of that. We are not actually procuring a service from ACTCOSS because ACTCOSS is providing a service to its members. But it was important to government that ACTCOSS received that backbone funding. As service funding agreements have expired over the years, we have converted service funding agreements containing what the sector would have said, and we would agree now, were onerous reporting requirements into recurrent grants with much simpler reporting requirements.

Those two things sound simple, so why didn't we think of it in five minutes? We

actually had to work through the legislation and we had to consult with organisations about what they found to be standing in the way of their own efficiency. Having first of all changed the reporting requirements to being less frequent, we are still progressively now converting service funding agreements into recurrent grants.

MS LE COUTEUR: Are you also consolidating it so that organisations do not have to report to more than one directorate?

Ms Sheehan: There are reporting requirements according to funding mechanisms. For example, in some instances we have been able to consolidate funding from different directorates into a single mechanism. A good example would be that we have done that for Karinya House, which many people here would be aware of. We have consolidated Health and Community Services Directorate funding. Another example that people may not be aware of is that we have worked with our colleagues in Justice and Community Safety to consolidate funding for community legal centres where they were providing, for example, assistance around housing matters as well as the broader community legal function. We have consolidated that funding. Of course, where the funding is consolidated and there is one legal instrument then there is reporting just to that instrument.

Where an organisation is funded by a number of directorates then there are still reporting requirements there. And there could be very good reasons for this. For example, Toora women's services has head leased properties from Housing ACT. It has homelessness funding, and there are requirements to report on what they provide for homelessness services. It also has outstanding alcohol and drug services and, of course, there are requirements to report on that as well.

We have just started some very serious work with our Health colleagues looking at how we can work together in a more unified way to bring together funding agreements and to look at how we procure outcomes for clients rather than just a series of outputs. It may be that in the future we see more consolidation of those sorts of agreements. Of course, that would lead to fewer reporting requirements for organisations.

I will go to a couple of other red tape reductions that the sector had been really keen that we follow up. One of them is having to comply with multiple regulatory systems. In order to assist organisations to meet all of their regulatory and quality requirements, we have invested, on behalf of the sector, in a really tremendous tool that was developed for the community services sector in Victoria. We have been able to modify it for the ACT. It is a regulatory black box. Organisations feed in every quality standard that they meet and it then generates for them, across a matrix, all of the national or local standards, those individual quality measures that organisations have, that helps them to meet every other standard. They are then simply able to provide that information to their funders.

We had originally purchased 30 licences for that tool. There was such a desire for uptake in the sector, and because we had some extra sector funding, we were able to purchase 70 licences. That is quite a good uptake in the community services sector. The red tape reduced is that, rather than having to show for funders for every agreement how, say, 10 different quality standards have been met, the tool itself does

the assessment and that is provided on to funders. That has been very well received by the sector.

MRS KIKKERT: I have a question, is that okay?

MS LE COUTEUR: I will ask more about this later on.

MRS KIKKERT: Thanks. My question is to you, Maureen. Thank you for all the work that you do; I appreciate it. Page 54 of the annual report mentions the government's 0.34 per cent co-contribution levy in relation to the community services industry strategy. This levy was first imposed in 2012 for a period of three years, and it was extended in 2015 for a subsequent two years. As noted by Reverend Gordon Ramsay, then executive minister of UnitingCare Kippax, in an estimates hearing in June 2015, service providers were surprised by the reimposition of this fixed-term levy which required them to draw funds from other parts of the service just to maintain their current levels of staffing.

In addition, the ACT Council of Social Services in 2015 labelled the surprise reimposition of the levy after most organisations had finalised their operating budgets as disrespectful and disruptive. Has the directorate discussed the possible continuation of this levy past its 2017 expiry?

Ms Sheehan: Thank you for that question. The answer to the question is that the government has already decided in the last budget—it was announced in the 2016-17 budget—that the levy would not be reimposed in the future. In terms of development of the industry strategy, as I outlined, the funding of the measures such as that marvellous quality assessment tool and the business development packages to support the community sector to become businesses, in the way I was describing, the way they need to if they are to see themselves as part of an industry, all of that work was funded by the 0.34 per cent levy. The last \$600,000 which I referred to when I was talking about the investment that we will now have in workforce is the last amount that was raised from that levy.

The government has already announced that it will not be collected in the future. We are lucky we still have \$600,000 to invest. We are also lucky that we have the last \$1.2 million from the NDIS sector development fund to invest. The benefits of that levy have been that it has gone back into the sector.

I would also like to clarify the issue about whether funds had to be taken from different areas of service agreements in order to consolidate into the 0.34 per cent. In fact, the funds were never taken off organisations; it was simply that across the totality of ACT government funding agreements where the funding amount was above \$150,000 or where the amount was for a whole service rather than to fund an individual, 0.34 per cent of that money was kept and put into the fund to invest in the sector. That amount was around about \$500,000 a year.

In the last two years of the fund, because we were in transition to the national disability insurance scheme, people would be aware that that involved, instead of the ACT government funding community organisations to provide a service, we were sending that funding progressively to the National Disability Insurance Agency so that

there was cash in the hands of people with a disability to then buy their own services.

The effect of that on organisations in the ACT was, instead of the ACT government giving that money to organisations, the ACT government has sent it to the commonwealth to pay for disability in a different way. That means the 0.34 per cent levy was not applied to the funds being sent to the national disability insurance scheme. The money stayed to provide services, but it meant that, rather than there being \$500,000 in the fund, it reduced over the past two years to be a smaller amount of money.

MRS KIKKERT: So the levy was provided for services?

Ms Sheehan: Yes.

MRS KIKKERT: Could you clarify if it has ever been used to pay or help to pay to employ a member of the ACT public service?

Ms Sheehan: Yes. The levy was used in the first three years to employ one public servant. That public servant was predominantly working on, first of all, the equal remuneration case which provided that substantial benefit to organisations across nine years to increase salaries. After that, the person was working on consulting with the sector on what were their priorities for reform. When we talk about, for example, red tape, it actually takes a person to do the consultation to find out what it is that the sector would like. If the sector is identifying different priorities, again, it takes an investment of resource.

The fortunate position we are in now is that, having identified that the main priority for the community services sector was to develop a 10-year industry strategy to give a 10-year forward view of where the sector would like to go, we do not actually need a public servant to do that consultation anymore. We have had a broad consultation process. We have used a consultancy. We have the 10-year priorities, and the joint community government reference group will settle those three plans. So, yes, initially there was a public servant employed. That was only in the first three years. In the second two years, none of the funds went to public service salaries.

MRS DUNNE: Ms Sheehan, you said that in the first instance the public servant was employed to work on the equal pay case.

Ms Sheehan: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: The equal pay case was handed down in 2009?

Ms Sheehan: No, 2012.

MRS DUNNE: The decision was made in 2012, or the implementation had to be made in 2012?

Ms Sheehan: I believe the decision was in 2012, Mrs Dunne, but with the minister's agreement I can check that.

MRS DUNNE: I thought it was earlier than that, which is why I asked the question why somebody was working on the equal pay case if the decision had already been made. Could you outline that of the between \$500,000 and \$600,000, depending on the year, what the salary level was for the public servant employed out of that? That is stuff to take on notice.

I also go back to the issue of the point that you made where you said people did not have to find the money because essentially we did not give it to them in the first place to give up. The organisations budgeted for a certain amount of grant money which was reduced by 3.5 per cent.

Ms Sheehan: No, 0.34 per cent.

MRS DUNNE: Sorry, 0.35 per cent. So they still had to find that money somewhere. They did not have to pay it back to the government, but it just did not come to them. How did organisations, depending on their size, manage with less money? We have seen that many in the sector at the time were unhappy about it and continued to be unhappy about it.

Ms Sheehan: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: How did the organisations manage or where did they go or what did they do to find the money that did not come to them because of the levy?

Ms Sheehan: Thank you for that question, Mrs Dunne. There were additional amounts that the ACT government paid the sector which, in fact, increased the funding for the sector over the years. The largest amount of funding was, in fact, the payments under the equal remuneration order which enabled organisations over the nine years of phasing in of that order to actually pay increased salaries to staff. At the time that amount of money over the nine years of implementation—I will have to find the part in the annual report—was about \$50 million. I will look at that in a moment.

The second issue—and this is very important, because the ACT is the only place in Australia that does this—is that the ACT government applies a rate of indexation to its funding to the sector every year. It is not just CPI; it is better than CPI. I am going to say it is CPI on steroids. It is the wage cost index approach where the composition of the indexation recognises the fact that in the community sector 80 per cent of costs actually come from wages. In addition to paying the higher wages through the equal remuneration order—and those payments were made six monthly, I believe—the ACT government determines a rate of indexation which is based on 80 per cent wage costs and 20 per cent CPI. That is paid annually as well. The additional money that came into the sector was that higher rate of indexation and the equal remuneration payments, which will go right through for the full nine years.

MRS DUNNE: Could I ask on notice—that would be the easiest way to do this—that you give to the committee an accounting of the amount of money collected per year under the community sector reform levy, how it was spent and whether there will be any residue at the end of this financial year?

THE CHAIR: That is something that you want to put on notice as a question?

MRS DUNNE: I am asking for that information, and I think it might be easier for the officials to take that away rather than scramble around here. I think it is information that is useful for us, and it might be easier for you to take it on notice rather than trying to answer it now.

Ms Sheehan: Thank you, Mrs Dunne. The previous Minister for Community Services tabled in the Assembly an acquittal up to a point in time. We can certainly provide that, and then we can do a reconciliation going forward.

What I would like to say, bearing in mind my earlier answer about some delays in allocating the last amount of workforce funds because we have got \$1.2 million coming into disability workforce support, we anticipate a rollover at this point in time because, of course, we have not had an opportunity to say exactly where that money would go. But the minister has agreed that we will provide a reconciliation across the years for you.

MS LE COUTEUR: Will there be any community involvement in how the outstanding moneys are spent?

Ms Sheehan: Yes, Ms Le Couteur. The allocation of money according to the workforce priority will be determined by the joint community government reference group. It will actually be determined by the minister, but the joint community government reference group will advise the minister based on the agreed—

MS LE COUTEUR: And she may take her advice.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Absolutely.

Ms Sheehan: I would like to emphasise that the 10-year strategy and the plan that sits under it is absolutely a result of consultation with the sector. We have been consulting at every point, which is, of course, what we want to do. The workforce in the community sector belongs to the community sector, and it is appropriate that the community sector has a view on where the workforce should be supported.

MRS KIKKERT: Do you know how much will be collected at the end of the levy when it expires in June?

Ms Sheehan: Thank you for that question. The answer to that goes back to the issue I was referring to where, because we have been transitioning into the national disability insurance scheme and clients have been transitioning across nine quarters, our payments to community organisations have been stepping down as the clients in those organisations transition to the national disability insurance scheme and the payments stop going to ACT organisations and go to the commonwealth. The exact amount we will not know until the end of the financial year because we have to track exactly how that went. Obviously we will be doing that calculation, but it is just not possible to say right now exactly what that amount would be because of the step down of contracts.

MS LE COUTEUR: In the middle of page 54 you have got “Deliver community services industry grants to support the implementation of the community services

industry strategy.” This is the discussion: how that is going to determine what happens to the remainder of the money? We have not got a separate program and I am confused.

Ms Sheehan: No, it is the same program.

MS LE COUTEUR: That is what I thought.

THE CHAIR: Have you done any work around what those efficiencies might look at that result from the red tape reduction scheme and the strategy? What quantity of efficiencies do you think will occur, or is that something you will look at once the grants have been delivered and the strategy has been reported on?

Ms Sheehan: Thank you for that question, Mr Steel. With respect to the early red tape reductions, we had done some estimates based on what community organisations had told us about the amount of time it took them to do the reporting that was required of us or to match standards and so on. We had done some calculations about what we anticipated were savings to community organisations.

They are really opportunity costs for community organisations. So, for example, if the accountant saved four weeks of work because reporting went from quarterly to annually, then that is a saving in the time of the accountant for the community organisation. So we had done those sorts of estimates. We had estimated, based on the feedback from the sector, that that would have been an opportunity cost of around about \$2.6 million to the sector.

In terms of the efficiencies going forward around the support for the workforce, that will be rather harder to estimate in terms of savings. The idea there was not so much to achieve a saving, although we may be able to estimate some savings around workforce retention. I think everyone would be aware of the costs of having to constantly recruit workforce, lose workforce, train workforce. Thank you for that; that would be a very good performance measure for us to have in our implementation plan. They are the sorts of things that organisations are obviously very interested in. In developing up our investment of those moneys in workforce, we are very keen to not be investing money in a workforce that stays in the sector for one year and then goes off and then we have to invest millions more in training that workforce.

MRS DUNNE: You have been able to quantify to some extent the savings brought about by red tape reduction in the community sector. Have you quantified or analysed the savings to government as a result of changes to, say, reporting from quarterly to annually or the like?

Ms Sheehan: We did not do those allocations, Mrs Dunne.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Chair, we have just got some information about the equal remuneration order and case. That case obviously was ongoing for quite some time, but the final equal remuneration order was handed down in June 2012.

MR PETTERSSON: And then the funding was provided in the 2013-14 budget?

Ms Sheehan: From 2013, it was. I said earlier that the ACT had been a leader in this. It was a leader in actually supporting the case because, while the ACT government supports women, as the committee would know, and supporting an increase in wages so that women were not being unfairly paid less was incredibly important to the ACT government, it goes to retention and attraction of workers. But the other really important thing where we were leaders is that to support an analysis of what would be the cost impact on the ACT government if the case was successful, we did a census of all funded community organisations in the ACT to look at their wage levels and, importantly, how many organisations had enterprise bargaining agreements in place where there were already higher wages to be paid. As people would probably be aware, when there is a decision of the commission to increase wages, there is generally a provision of absorption, that is, if you are being paid higher wages already under an enterprise agreement, the increase in the award is absorbed into the higher rate.

We had a census of workers and wage rates in the ACT. We had been able to do a pretty good calculation of what the cost impact would be in the ACT. When the order was handed down, we were able to provide cabinet that information and then go back to every organisation that had a workforce in place when the decision was handed down in June 2012 and were able to calculate on a six-monthly basis the absorption rate for organisations that already had an enterprise bargaining agreement.

We have a unit inside what used to be called our contract and grants unit that undertakes these incredibly complicated and astoundingly good calculations and then provides those payments on a six-monthly basis to organisations to supplement so that they can make those payments on wage increases.

Mr PETTERSSON: Have you had any feedback from stakeholders, employees, as to the implementation of it? How have people responded to the equal remuneration order?

Ms Sheehan: The Australian Services Union is very happy with the decision. In fact, I am very proud to say that the Australian Services Union was a member of the steering committee that developed the community services industry plan. The last thing that workers want is governments and employer organisations developing up strategies for them which do not take into account things that they consider to be important. The community services industry strategy absolutely reflects the views we gained from workers, and not just through the Australian Services Union but through our general consultations with the workforce.

The other thing it would be fair to say is the success of the equal remuneration order we would say can be seen through the compulsory long service leave we have in the ACT for the community services industry. You can see what the retention rates are at the moment for the ACT and how they are moving over time. We have in the past 12 months commissioned a rather large data report from the ACT long service leave scheme on the community services industry. It has been an input into the 10-year strategy, and it will continue to be an input into all of our work on workforce.

THE CHAIR: I have a question in relation to the SmartyGrants program, which is referenced on page 119, and how that is being implemented. Do you have any update

on the online grants portal?

Ms Sheehan: The assessment of grant applications might seem to be very straightforward but it can actually be incredibly time consuming if it is all done by hand. SmartyGrants was first used in ArtsACT, and ArtsACT were very generous in sharing the capability of that system with us in the community services area. We then have been progressively implementing the use of the SmartyGrants program for the assessment of grants. We have found it incredibly useful because it is automated.

The other thing, of course, is that it is online. It means that people do not have to pick up a paper application form. They can do it in their home, they can go down to the library, they can go to the one human services gateway, they can do it anywhere.

THE CHAIR: Is it across the whole of CSD that that has been implemented?

Ms Sheehan: I will need to check that but we are progressively implementing it. Yes it is. It is now.

THE CHAIR: Is that part of the red tape reduction program or is that a separate initiative?

Ms Sheehan: It is certainly a reduction of red tape. I might ask Ms Starick if she has anything more to add. No. It is certainly a reduction of red tape but interestingly—and I think this is important—we think of red tape in terms of organisations. It certainly increases the efficiency for CSD in assessing grant applications. But, of course, it is a great benefit to people in the community, individuals who are applying for grants. Very often those CSD grants are to individuals; they are not just to organisations. Individuals can do it online, and that makes it much easier for individuals.

MS LE COUTEUR: Have you had any feedback from people from the other side about SmartyGrants? It is easier for you but have you had feedback from the people using it? Particularly, does this have any intelligence in it? Is the SmartyGrants program making any decisions and saying 'yes', 'possible' or 'no, doesn't fulfil criteria'?

Ms Sheehan: No. I can absolutely say that the SmartyGrants program does not make any decisions around the allocation of grants. It is simply an automated process that enables individuals to put it into the system and then for us and our assessors to access the information on the system.

We have not undertaken a satisfaction survey around the use of SmartyGrants. We certainly have not received any feedback from community organisations that it is a problem at all. The only time that we had a concern about SmartyGrants was—and this is very, very unusual and I cannot imagine this ever happening again—when we had the enhanced service offer, which was a marvellous \$7 million grants program for people with a disability. In that first year, before we went into the NDIS, we were allocating \$7 million of grants and we did it across two rounds. It is very unusual for people to get two goes within 12 months at \$7 million. People had applied in the first round and had entered their application into SmartyGrants. SmartyGrants did not retain that information for the second round. So people did have to enter their

information again. That is the only negative feedback that I have ever heard about SmartyGrants.

THE CHAIR: Is it possible to download the applications once they are submitted, a text version?

Ms Sheehan: Yes it is.

THE CHAIR: So it is just about highlighting that. Does anyone have any further questions about community sector reform?

MRS KIKKERT: I have a quick one: page 53 of the annual report refers to a program of reforms to enable red tape reduction. But the sole action reported on the following page, red tape reduction program, was the purchase of software licences for standards and performance pathways. Specifically what other reforms were undertaken during the reporting year to reduce the red tape?

Ms Sheehan: Thank you for that question. The red tape reduction program began in 2012, as I had outlined in my earlier answers. The annual report reports on what was the next round of red tape that actually happened in the reporting period here, which was 2015-16. All those earlier red tape reductions that I had talked about, such as changing to reporting requirements, the gradual transfer from service funding agreements to recurrent grants, had begun in earlier years. We have just reported on this very substantial measure which we continued with in the 2015-16 year.

MS LE COUTEUR: You may take this question on notice: how many and what types of community sector organisations took advantage of the funded programs to reduce red tape? You said it was a joint community and government organisation reference group which will allocate the money. Is it an equal number of community and government? How is the decision-making actually done, given the clearly competing interests in that sort of decision? Is there a list of the organisations that are on it?

Ms Sheehan: Yes. The members of the joint community government reference group, I believe, would be in the annual report—page 26 of the annual report. I also believe that there will be more community sector members of the joint community government reference group than government members because there is just one representative from each government department and representatives of all the peaks and some of the other key regionals.

MS LE COUTEUR: Can you take the first part of my question on notice about the number and types of organisations that are funded for red tape reduction?

Ms Sheehan: Yes. Is the question: how many organisations have benefited from the red tape reductions?

MS LE COUTEUR: How many and what types? Were they peaks, were they tiny, whatever?

Ms Sheehan: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Are you referring specifically to the licences?

MS LE COUTEUR: No.

MRS DUNNE: More across the board.

MS LE COUTEUR: Part of this program, as I understand it, funded some organisations to reduce red tape. What sorts of organisations? Were there many of them? What sorts of organisations?

THE CHAIR: There are broader initiatives as well that cover the whole sector.

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes. Who got the money for it?

Ms Sheehan: The answer is no organisations were funded for red tape reduction. There was a business development package program where 20 packages were funded in the sector for organisations to look at their business operations. We used that successful model when the \$12 million became available from the commonwealth for sector development of the national disability insurance scheme. We used that very successful model to roll it into the disability sector. I think overall about 60 organisations, possibly more—I can certainly provide that information to you—received business development grants across both the community sector reform program and the NDIS program.

It is very important for us to understand that disability service providers are a crucial part of the community sector and the community services industry. The ACT was very clear with the commonwealth—and the commonwealth were quite happy for this as well—that, as we supported the disability area and mental health providers to become ready to move from block government funding into a full market, fee-for-service environment, with the ACT government's reform agenda particularly around supporting organisations, we did not want to have a separate ACT government reform agenda which was inconsistent with the NDIS agenda. We brought it together and we were able to use that \$12 million to the benefit of all community organisations, not just people who at a point in time were doing disability services.

We can look at—I am going to say—the smallish amount that came in through the levy which was used to support the sector. It was very small compared to the \$12 million investment that the government has also made to support the sector. In fact, the sector reform program is broad and there is a lot of investment into the community sector.

THE CHAIR: We might move on to community recovery issues. I have some questions about the testing that was run, any exercises that were run, in 2015-16, and how many there were in particular but also what sorts of exercises they were as well.

Ms Moore: We run exercises throughout the year in a number of different ways with the community recovery subcommittee. They meet quarterly. Part of the focus in this past 12 months has been to review the community recovery subplan to make sure that it was relevant and up to date. Through that process we ran a desktop exercise with

community recovery partners and we also later in that year ran a community recovery exercise, which was a live site exercise, of setting up an evacuation centre. That was in August. We had all of our community partners participate. We had evaluators come from interstate. It was a very successful event.

THE CHAIR: How would the establishment of a recovery centre differ for different types of emergencies?

Ms Moore: Actually, the recovery exercise that we did was testing out for the first time how we would respond to a terrorist event. That is not something that we have done in the ACT before. What we were really testing there was what would differ, exactly that question. We do find most things do not differ in terms of the support that we provide; it is the same. But what we do need to take into consideration is some more issues around security environments.

THE CHAIR: How many agencies were involved in those exercises across the ACT government?

Ms Moore: I would have to check the exact figure but it is around 12. We have a number of ACT government directorates but we also have community partners—Red Cross, Anglicare, the Salvation Army, for example—and pastoral care providers as well.

THE CHAIR: Does that involve volunteers from the community as well?

Ms Moore: Many of those agencies do rely on volunteers. They are a crucial part of the evacuation centre establishment and running. We did have volunteers attend that exercise, which was important training for them. We work obviously with the agencies but they then have responsibility for their volunteers.

THE CHAIR: What locations across the ACT would be used as recovery stations in the event of a disaster or emergency?

Ms Moore: We have agreements with every ACT government college that they can be set up in the case of an evacuation. We can also use child and family centres for smaller evacuations, but the colleges are larger. I should mention also the exercise that we held in August was at Dickson College, and Minister Stephen-Smith attended that exercise. That was a great opportunity to get on the ground and talk to agencies about their experiences of setting up an evacuation centre. We had people role-playing, volunteers on the day, role-playing evacuees. It was good for us to learn what that would feel like from their perspective and how we could make sure that they were adequately supported.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Can I just say that was not in August; it was later in the year, the one that I participated in.

Ms Moore: Sorry.

Ms Stephen-Smith: It was in November, from recollection.

Ms Moore: That is right. That was the live exercise. We did a desktop exercise in August.

THE CHAIR: My question is: what is involved in a desktop exercise?

Ms Moore: A desktop exercise is, I guess, similar to a live exercise except we are not actually running through the process. We have a scenario similar to a live exercise. We have all of the community partners around the table, and we walk through the steps, who would be doing what at each stage. With both the live exercise and the desktop exercise, what we are testing—and most agencies know their role in an evacuation or an emergency—and what we need to continuously test is: do we know how to do it together? Do we know how our role within the Community Services Directorate works with Red Cross, for example, in registering people as they arrive at an evacuation centre? Those exercises are really about agencies making sure that we know how all the pieces work together so that in a real emergency we are as seamless as possible and able to respond as a team, essentially.

MRS DUNNE: Can I just follow up briefly, Mr Chair.

THE CHAIR: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, is CSD the centre point for these emergency recovery exercises? And what is the relationship between your directorate and the Emergency Services Agency, which seems to be the place where all the hard work of dealing with the actual scenario is, whatever it may be—fire, terrorist, whatever? What is the relationship and who is actually the lead agency?

Ms Stephen-Smith: My understanding, and Ms Moore can correct me if I am wrong, is that CSD is the lead agency in terms of community recovery, so it is things like evacuation plans and supporting the community after an event to recover. The emergency services agencies are the first responders to the actual event, whether it is a fire or a flood, and rescuing people and that kind of activity. Then Community Services comes in and does the recovery after.

MRS DUNNE: What is the thing that would activate CSD to go into recovery mode? The answer might be that it depends on the scenario.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I will hand over to Ms Moore for the mechanics of it.

Ms Moore: In an emergency, the ACT government has an emergency coordination centre that is stood up. That involves people from all ACT government directorates that will come into the emergency coordination centre at the time of an emergency. There will be a lead agency assigned to the emergency depending on the type of emergency, whether it is a fire or flood, for example. That agency will take control of the incident, but all of the directorates will work together around how we collectively respond.

At a point in time, they will look at recovery. We try to do that as early as possible, particularly if we are requiring evacuation centres and people are having to leave their homes. The command centre might say, “We’re activating the community recovery

subplan,” which is what Community Services Directorate has responsibility for. From that point, we will take over responsibility for setting up the evacuation centres and for providing all of the supports that people receive in the evacuation centres. At the same time, the emergency will still be ongoing and the controller for the emergency will still be in charge.

MRS DUNNE: I think you have answered it. It is a subplan of the larger emergency plan, the ACT emergency plan?

Ms Moore: That is correct.

MS LE COUTEUR: Continuing on from that, I am wondering what, if any, role you have in different potential crises? A few weekends ago there was a real possibility that a lot of south-east Australia, including Canberra, might have had blackouts. Clearly, we managed to avoid the worst of that, but had things not gone as well as they did, would you have been involved? If so, how would you have been involved?

Ms Moore: Yes. In fact, we were involved in that the emergency coordination centre was stood up. We had our people in the emergency coordination centre to be ready to respond if a community recovery activation was required. In that case, again, we might be looking at an evacuation centre, but another option that we have is to establish a recovery centre. People might not necessarily be evacuated from their homes, but they might need somewhere they can go. In that example of having no electricity, for example, they might need to go somewhere that is air-conditioned and has access to basic amenities that they might not be able to use in their homes if they had no electricity. We could be activated to provide support to the community outside of just setting up an evacuation centre.

MS LE COUTEUR: This is possibly getting too detailed, but one of the things that has really exercised my mind a bit is that a number of disabled people live in multi-unit apartments which have lifts. I have looked at a few and asked them if they have any backup power. They all look at me; they clearly do not have any backup power. Do you have any procedures for people who will become isolated, stuck in their unit and not able to leave?

Ms Moore: Not in terms of community recovery. Our response is not to go in and get people out, though emergency services will help with evacuating people who need to be supported to leave their homes. In terms of providing power in our sites, our evacuation centres, we did tests back in November testing what we would do in an evacuation centre if we lost power and how we would be able to get generators on site; how quickly we could do that and how we would do that. We do, in terms of our response to community recovery, look at how we would respond to those issues. But in terms of individuals within homes, community recovery is not the agency that would be going into the homes and supporting, although one of the things that Community Services Directorate does is, if an emergency is activated, we certainly contact our business areas, like public housing, for example, so that they could be contacting their tenants to make sure that they are okay, that they know what their options are and that they know who they can call if they need additional assistance.

MR PETTERSSON: In a similar vein to Caroline’s question, you said in the report

in terms of the outlook that you want to review policies and processes for supporting vulnerable Canberrans in emergencies. In what way is supporting these Canberrans different from, I guess, more secure Canberrans?

Ms Moore: It is more about preparedness, how we are making sure that ahead of an emergency they know what their options are and they know how to respond. That is one thing. We have done a fair bit of work with trying to get information out particularly to vulnerable groups. We have been working, for example, with multicultural groups around how we make sure new arrivals—refugees, for example—know how an emergency works in the ACT. Some of the feedback that we have had is that it is really important, because when people come from particularly countries where perhaps they have not had a very good experience of officials or emergency services—police services, for example—if there are suddenly emergency services in their street, they need to know to be calm, that that is okay and how to get the support they need. We have also been looking at it in terms of our exercises, making sure that within our centres we are able to respond to diverse needs. In relation to people with hearing impairments, how would we respond to that to make sure that they have their needs met? There are people with language barriers, for example. It is about preparedness, but it is also about how we respond in a community recovery sense as well.

MR PETTERSSON: Following on from Caroline’s question again, you said that you want to reach out and inform as many people as you can about being prepared. Is the situation that Caroline has put forward in terms of power outages and disabled people something that is actively considered?

Ms Moore: In terms of how we would inform people about power outages? Is that the question?

MR PETTERSSON: Not so much—

MS LE COUTEUR: I had a situation in mind. My husband, a few years ago, was in a wheelchair. Fortunately, he is not any longer. A week after we moved into the multi-unit residence that we are currently living in, the lift was out for about 36 hours. It is okay; he can walk now and I can walk now. But I was really thinking, “Had it been a few years ago, what were we going to do?” And there are many other people in that situation.

MR PETTERSSON: So just to go back to what I am talking about, you are reaching out to the community, trying to inform and help these individuals. Are you proactively trying to help disabled people as well?

Ms Moore: In terms of making the information available, yes. In terms of identifying those individuals and specifically going and speaking to those, that is not something that we do currently. We do know, though, that other directorates have different roles to play in this space as well. For example, ACT Health do a lot of community messaging and specifically targeted messaging around emergencies. With heatwaves, for example, all of the messaging comes from them. Also, in terms of the electricity outages, they were putting out messages around the health impacts and who are particularly vulnerable. It is really important that what we do in community services

and in community recovery is not mixing the messages up for people, which makes it more confusing. We do try to work with asking what the rest of government is doing and then asking what part we can play that would be of value and of use, making sure that we are all going to give the same people the same message, not a different message so that it becomes confusing.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I just want to add—I do not know if others have had the same feedback—that I have seen public feedback and also had ministerial correspondence commending the Housing ACT staff in particular for the outreach that they did when the weather was very hot to ensure that their tenants, particularly vulnerable tenants, older tenants, were managing to cope with the heat. I want to put that on record. There is some sort of proactive outreach in those situations as well.

Ms Moore: That is right. Definitely within our client groups we have people contacting clients. There has been work nationally and talk about looking at databases of vulnerable people so that in an emergency we would know who to particularly check in on. There is a whole range of challenges with that, not to mention privacy issues, for one. At this stage, the best approach is to go through the service delivery areas, for people to be contacting their own clients, to check in and make sure they are okay. Notwithstanding the work happening nationally to think about that issue, they have not been able to crack that.

MR PETTERSSON: You mentioned a couple of times the activation of community recovery. Historically, how often does that occur? I know it is a difficult one to answer because there are different scales to it, but is this happening where every few months you are calling in different directorates and there would be secret meetings going on that no-one hears about?

Ms Moore: No, it is not very often.

Ms Stephen-Smith: And not very secret.

Ms Moore: It is definitely not very secret. As soon as the emergency coordination centre is activated, there is public messaging that comes out from the centre. You would definitely know about that. Over the past 12 months, aside from the electricity incident where we became involved just as a sort of watching brief, there was one incident that we responded to, which was not an activation of the community recovery subplan but a supporting role that we provided under ACT Health's emergency planning around communicable diseases. They had a group of school students from Brisbane who had come to the ACT for a school camp, and they became unwell with a gastro outbreak. We provided a supporting role in looking after the students so that the teachers who were also sick and exhausted could get some rest. There are times like that when we will get involved and support other directorates in responding to their responsibilities. But in terms of the community recovery subplan being activated, it has not been activated in the last 12 months.

MR PETTERSSON: Thank you.

MRS KIKKERT: I just have a quick one, thank you. I realise that the work that you do is important in recovering people's lives after tragedy. In your area of work, is

there an area that you see needs to be improved, and if so what is it?

Ms Moore: In community recovery?

MRS KIKKERT: Yes.

Ms Moore: I think we can always improve. With the evacuation centre exercise, we did have evaluators come from interstate to provide their expertise. They watched and they provided us with recommendations. Largely they said that the support to evacuees was of a really high quality. But there are always things that we can improve. They were very tangible, detailed things about signage or making sure that we considered an area for animals, because people quite often can turn up at evacuation centres with pets. It was really about quite, I guess, logistical improvements that we can make. But we are always looking for opportunities. That is why our community recovery subcommittee meetings are so important, because we are hearing from the agencies about different work they are doing.

One of the really important things is that a number of those agencies are not only ACT but also New South Wales. I am thinking about Red Cross, for example. They respond far more often than we do to emergencies. They are far more experienced in terms of keeping their skills and their volunteers really able to respond, because they are responding to all of the events that happen in New South Wales as well. We are able to learn from them quite a lot about what has worked after each incident. In the ACT, every time we are activated, we will do a debrief and we will look at what we can learn from that incident and how we can improve. Because we do not have too many, thankfully, we can also do that with other agencies like the Red Cross, after they have had an event, and we can look at what worked really well and what areas they found that were challenging that we can think about for our own work.

MRS KIKKERT: That is great. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I am cognisant of the time. We need to move on. Do you have any questions, James?

MR MILLIGAN: No, not on this subject.

THE CHAIR: We will move to service strategy and community participation. Does anyone have any questions in that area that they want to pursue? I also want to note that we will try to break at 11 very briefly for morning tea.

MRS KIKKERT: I have a question.

THE CHAIR: Yes.

MRS KIKKERT: On page 51, the annual report notes that because transport was found to be a particular concern for older community members in the west Belconnen area, a seniors transport expo was held at the Kippax library to inform local seniors of transport options. In addition to telling these older community members what their current options are, was input sought from these participants regarding what their issues and unmet needs are?

Ms Moore: Yes. The transport expo was a great example of responding to what people had already told us the issues were. People had told us that transport was an issue for seniors in that area, knowing what was available. The transport expo brought together a range of services that could be provided to support seniors in the transport space, but we also had volunteers meeting with individuals and talking to them about their issues more broadly. That information was fed through the working group that had established the transport expo and used to inform their planning around what future events they would like to hold.

For example, I am aware that following that event they had another event focused on seniors health. It was particularly around the use of electronic devices to support people in health. That came from feedback through the transport expo, that people wanted to know more about that. They were interested. So yes, it was asked.

We did ask people how they found the transport expo itself, but we also had volunteers having informal conversations with people about broader issues that they were interested in.

MRS DUNNE: Was there organised transport to the transport expo? It may sound flippant, but it was a question.

Ms Moore: It is a really good question. I am not aware that there was transport to the transport expo. It was held at the Kippax library, which is a very central point and does have transport available to that site. There was not additional transport arranged, but certainly there was transport available.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Can I just butt in there and add that there is a flexible bus service available for people to get to community events—older people and people with disability. But also, since the seniors transport forum, the government has moved to make off-peak travel free for seniors. I do not know if that was specifically in response to some of the feedback, but that has been an ongoing issue that we have responded to.

MRS KIKKERT: Based on the feedback that you received, what actions will you be taking to provide that?

Ms Moore: The transport?

MRS KIKKERT: From the feedback that you received, are you doing any actions to meet those people's needs?

Ms Moore: The local services network itself was something that we established, but we really set it up so that it would be sustainable for the community to own and deliver into the future. They are certainly taking forward actions. And I should say that in terms of transport, the issue was not so much that there were not transport options; it was that people did not know what those transport options were. That working group was taking forward some ideas coming from the transport expo and also coming from other events that they had held around how we get information to people in the community about what is available. The local services network itself is

really now at a point where the community is driving that work and taking it forward.

MRS DUNNE: Did you highlight any unmet needs in west Belconnen as a result of the transport expo?

Ms Moore: Not so much, no. I think that generally it was more about people not being aware of what was available. It was not always about public transport either; it was about active transport. People did want to talk about footpaths and how they can inform government around any issues that they have. It was about providing advice on how you can have a say about things in your local community and how you can access services around transport. Things like mobility scooters, for example, were discussed at the transport expo. It was quite a broad expo; it was not just about how we can improve public transport or anything like that.

MS LE COUTEUR: Did you talk about the issues for people who find it difficult to walk to a bus stop, whether it is because their footpath needs repair or because 400 metres is beyond them now? What can they do? There is the flexible bus, but there is not an awful lot of availability of the flexible bus, as far as I know, from a social point of view. They are not going to be able to just go out.

Ms Moore: The format of the expo was information stalls that people could self-navigate to find information that was relevant to them. It was not about talking to people about issues, but people were able to access information, as I said, about mobility scooters, for example. If you need support just to get from your house to a short distance, people were able to talk to somebody about footpaths and the issues that they might have and get advice on how they can feed that back to the ACT-government for improvements. They were able to talk to people about all sorts of public transport options as well.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Transport is one of the key themes in the active ageing strategy. It might be better to direct those questions to Minister Ramsay when he is here as the minister for seniors.

MR PETTERSSON: How many people attended the expo?

Ms Moore: I do not have that information on me now. I could find out for you. I should say that it would be an estimate because we did not count people at the door. It was an open event that people could attend as they wished. They came in and left throughout the morning.

MR PETTERSSON: That is quite okay.

MRS KIKKERT: The outlook section on page 53 of the annual report mentions the need to implement improvements to human services reform based on the findings of the evaluation of the human services blueprint and better services. But the report of this evaluation on the previous page does not list any recommended improvements. What specifically are the improvements that the consulting group, Nous, suggested needed to be made to human services?

Ms Sheehan: Thank you for that question, Mrs Kikkert. The recommendations were

around particularly the three flagship initiatives of the better services reforms. One of the three flagship initiatives was the west Belconnen local network, which is something that we have just been talking about. The network has taken two years to establish, but you can really see how the community development aspect of it is working well. In terms of the activity of that group, we have just spoken about the expo, but many other things are mentioned in the annual report too, such as the grants program and so on and the collective impact approach, which is the idea that services should not work separately from each other. If you work together for a particular shared agenda and a shared goal then you will achieve a better impact because the whole collective is working towards it rather than individuals. It has taken a while, two years, to get going, but now it is really finding itself and, in the way that Ms Moore was describing, making sure that it is sustainable, because if the community owns it rather than it being something that government has done, that is the key to the local community development work going forward. That is the approach that we have been taking.

The second flagship, which has been incredibly successful, was called the One Human Services Gateway. Because we have got a new service model we now refer to it as OneLink. That has brought together what were a number of gateways into services. There was a gateway for disability services, a gateway for children, youth and family services and a gateway for homelessness services. It has brought those gateways together, and we have co-designed with the community sector and with people who use the services a model of the way in which they can come now to a single point. They do not have to go physically to the gateway in Belconnen. They can access it electronically as well and through other services such as at child and family centres and so on.

The recommendation was: establish a gateway that brings all of these things together. We have done that. We have gone to tender for it and it has been in operation since September last year. It has operated in a partnership between Belconnen community services and Woden community services. We had been trialling that for two years. The recommendation was: it looks good; do it. We have done it—fantastic—and we are all really excited about the way that is developing, including having collocation with the National Disability Insurance Agency. It is the only place in Australia where we have the agency located with a point of access for all of our other services. We have been really glad to be moving on that recommendation.

The final flagship was strengthening families. The strengthening families approach is absolutely best practice. The idea was that it was focusing on very high needs families. The goal was to work up to 50 families who were high needs families. Very often we would say that they had been accessing multiple service systems but it still just was not meeting their needs. You ask yourself: how is it possible that people are accessing lots of services, but they are still not getting what it is that they need? The answer is: no-one asks you what you need. The model for strengthening families is that the family establishes its own plan and sets its own goals and then services come in to support the family. It is supported by a lead worker who helps families navigate the system so they get what they need.

The recommendation was that this is a good approach; families setting their own goals is a terrific approach to access the services they need. Part of the evaluation was

healthcare consumers doing one-on-one interviews with families that had been part of the services to get the families' experience. Part of the evaluation was: what do the families say about it? The families said, "Thank goodness someone asked us what we wanted. We found the lead worker helping us to navigate the system incredibly useful."

Nous Group did the overall evaluation but, because strengthening families was so much focused on making sure that families get what they want, because you have asked them, it was very important to us to get the healthcare consumers to do those one-on-one interviews. The recommendations were that families setting their own goals really works and that lead workers helping them to navigate the system really works.

The third aspect was what we called an escalation process. That is, if you go back to the idea that families can have lots of services but they still do not get what they need, sometimes they do not get what they need because people inside the system will say no when, in fact, they could say yes if they understood better what was going on. The escalation process was senior people in directorates, in government, right across the ACT whom you could escalate a system barrier to and then, working with the lead worker, they could overcome the system barrier and the family would get what they want.

The recommendation was: take those three things together, and the strengthening families model is a good model for high needs families. I am very pleased to say that we have now been able to move that model into OneLink, our One Human Services Gateway. If you think about the benefits of people having a single point of access and having the high needs families being supported by that type of approach, it is really going to work for those families.

The other thing is that CSD is funding a lead practice worker in that gateway to support those high needs families. In fact, because of the funding under the children, youth and family support program, which is one of the programs that you can access through OneLink, that provides for case management support for 200 families. This best-practice model of asking the family what they want, having a lead worker help them navigate the system and, if they experience system barriers, escalating it, is a model that, over time, can be extended beyond the 50 families to possibly 200 families.

So, all in all, trialling those models, having them evaluated, getting the recommendations and then actually being able to act on them shows that that is the way that you need to go. Try something out, find out what works, and then have an evidence base to move forward. That is what we have done. We have got an evidence base to move forward.

MRS KIKKERT: That is great. Will the minister support you if you want to have 200 families, because that requires extra funding?

Ms Sheehan: No, it does not.

Ms Stephen-Smith: That is what we are currently doing.

Ms Sheehan: All of those 200 case management places already exist in the children, youth and family support program. That is actually funded under output class 2.1, early intervention, and we will have an opportunity to answer questions about that later. But I would like to reassure everyone that those places are funded and do exist. What we are bringing as the best practice is that model which is: what does the family want? “Tell us what you want and that is what we will go for.” “I want my children to go to school.” “Okay. What support do you need for that to happen?”

MRS KIKKERT: Perfect.

THE CHAIR: I have some questions on OneLink and the strengthening families program. In relation to the strengthening families pilot scheme, how are those families identified? Do they self-identify to the service as needing support or are they families that are known by CSD?

Ms Sheehan: In relation to the first 50 families who were in the trial, it was a combination. We had practice leaders and lead workers identified in different services, so it was a question of people in funded services saying, “Here’s a high needs family. We really think that strengthening families might help them.” One of the things that were essential about strengthening families was that the families said what they wanted but, as far as possible, they could identify the worker that they wanted to work with. It was a combination. Some families might have heard about strengthening families. I think most had not. But the other workers inside the service system found high needs families that they thought would benefit. Ms Moore, the Jill of all trades, was actually the lead on strengthening families. I think it would be respectful of me to hand over to her.

Ms Moore: Thank you. We did have a referral process for those families to come through. We did a lot of engagement with services. As Ms Sheehan has mentioned, many of the referrals came from services that were already working with families. We said to them, “Who are the families that you’re working with that, despite your very best efforts, you’re just not able to make positive progress with? Talk to them about this model and see whether that is something that they would be interested in.” Many of the families came in already having a lead worker that they thought they could trust. What they were looking for was how we could support that lead worker to provide a new model that would better meet their needs.

Some families were identified from services that were working with them that knew they had complex needs but were not able to take on that lead worker role. So they might have been referred without a lead worker. We would work with the family directly around who was in their support network that they already had a trusted relationship with that could take on a lead worker role. That was a really important element that came through.

Our early consultation with families was that choice was important and having a trusting relationship was important. As much as possible, we tried to work with the worker that that family had identified. Sometimes that meant we needed to go to their agency and negotiate with their agency around what that would look like, what support we could provide and what that would mean for their worker. In some cases they were working quite outside of their role. They were not necessarily case

managers in that context. They might have been a social worker in a school context, for example, so we were asking them to work outside the school gates. But that was part of the model: how can we make the system more flexible to meet the needs of families?

On the rare occasion where they did not have any support person that they felt they could directly trust as their lead worker, we would refer through to the children, youth and family support program to look for a case manager within the system. The referrals usually came from agencies where they were aware of families, whether they were government agencies or community sector agencies. In terms of getting them started and linking them up with a lead worker, it was a number of different ways, depending on the needs of the family.

MRS DUNNE: Can I follow up, Mr Chair?

THE CHAIR: I have some further questions, but I will reserve those until we discuss early intervention services and the relationship with child protection and early intervention.

MRS DUNNE: This question may better slot there, so if that is the case, feel free to say so. How do you manage the diversity of key workers, the key person? They are not all people from CSD, so how do you herd all the cats? What are your criteria for evaluating the success of the program? For each individual family, how do you measure the success of the program?

Ms Moore: The first part of the question was: how do we herd the cats? The model was set up around: how do we support these workers that might come from any part of the service system? They would be allocated a practice leader who was their key contact for strengthening families. That practice leader would meet with that worker as regularly as required. We actually start the process by setting up a lead worker agreement, which is the lead worker's opportunity to say, "These are the supports that I would need to do this role and these are the supports that my organisation can provide. These are the supports I need from strengthening families." So it was very much individual to each worker as well.

We then had monthly small group reflection sessions for lead workers, so each practice leader had their small group come together. The real benefit from that was that you had workers from across the service system going into a room to talk about their experiences within the strengthening families model and the challenges that they faced and troubleshooting together over how they would tackle the potential issues. For example, I know many times people would be talking about particular barriers that they might have been facing to do with, say, education, and then there was a lead worker from the education system that could say, "Well, actually, this is what you could do about that, because this is something I know about." Or we might have had a lead worker from Housing and the issue was around: how do you work with the housing system?

One of the really great benefits from the model was actually that cross-systems learning and sharing expertise from workers. It was not always about the practice leader providing the support. It was equally about the other lead workers supporting

each other. It was a combination of the one-on-one time supports, but then bringing small groups together.

The last thing I will mention is that we had community practice forums biannually, so twice a year, that brought together all of the people who had gone through the strengthening families training, which I have not mentioned. There is a training package that goes with the model. Twice a year we provide an opportunity for them to come together. We had guest speakers from different parts of the service system. They were identified, actually, by lead workers. We would survey lead workers before every forum to ask what areas they would like to hear about or know more about. We always designed the forums around that. We would have a combination of speakers and breakout times on key topics so people could choose which ones they wanted to go to. It was quite a supportive model based on the idea that these are workers from very diverse backgrounds and with very diverse levels of experience in this space.

MRS DUNNE: And evaluation?

Ms Moore: There were a number of things that we wanted to find out. We wanted to know whether it was a better experience for families. The healthcare consumer interviews with families were really critical there in terms of understanding what that experience was like and where they felt there were improvements for their situation. But we also wanted to evaluate the impact that it had on improvements to the service system. We wanted to understand, for lead workers, how effective that support was. One of the things that the practice leaders were doing was recording issues as they came through. Every escalation that comes through is recorded and logged so that we can understand what are the common issues that families are facing and then, as a system, how we can respond to that.

MRS DUNNE: Are there objectives for the program such as setting these families up so that they can go about their own merry way without the need for recourse to community service organisations?

Ms Moore: Yes. The model is built around building family resilience, so it is very much around: how can we make sure that families are given choice, first of all, in what matters but then are also given the skills and the supports to achieve those things? With families, we go through a co-design process in developing their family plan that looks at what it is that they want to achieve but also what are the barriers and what are the opportunities. We always encourage families not to look for service solutions as a first resort, because most families do not want services in their lives. The model is working with families around: who are your natural supports, what are the things that you can do and what are the gaps? The model is definitely about how do you build resilience in families and how do you help them work towards no longer needing diversity of services? It is important to note that some of these families will always need services. It is more about, for those families, how do we move them from the pointy end services to more ongoing, sustainable supportive services that they may always require in their life as a result of the different challenges they face, but they are not at that high level of intensity that they are otherwise required? That comes from building resilience.

MRS DUNNE: Have you measured the number of families who have gone about

their merry way because they have reached an appropriate level of resilience or those who have decreased their reliance on services? Do you measure that?

Ms Moore: There are exit surveys undertaken, but I would have to go back to the actual evaluation report to see whether that was the measure that they considered in the evaluation.

MRS DUNNE: Have people exited the program, I suppose, is the question.

Ms Moore: Yes.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Yes, they have exited the program.

MRS DUNNE: So that means that everyone—the families themselves and the service providers—are satisfied that they no longer need support? Or is it envisaged that the program is time limited anyhow?

Ms Moore: The program is not time limited in that you have a set amount of time with strengthening families and then you need to move on. But we do look at the right service for the right amount of time. Requiring a strengthening families response should not be ongoing because it is about making sense of what is going on in that family's life and making sure that the supports in place are sustainable services.

The point where we would comfortably move out—and it would be in consultation with the family, that they are feeling ready for that as well—would be when they are confident that they have the right services in place to take them forward and that those services would be able to provide the support for the length of time that they need it. It is very much about making sense of the situation, resolving the barriers that the family are facing and putting the rights services in place.

At that point they do not necessarily need the strengthening families initiative to be involved in their case. We have had one occasion, for example, where a family faced a very new and very different crisis down the track that was not dealt with when working out the family's plan, so that family were able to come straight back into strengthening families; they did not have to start from the beginning. But we did need to look at: "The situation has changed dramatically. What supports do you need now and how can we make that sustainable?"

Hearing suspended from 11.07 to 11.26 am.

THE CHAIR: We will get underway again. I realise we have just over an hour before lunch to deal with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs and multicultural affairs, as well as finishing off any further questions around the community participation service strategy. Does anyone want to ask any further questions about the service strategy?

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes, please. I particularly want to ask about the human services outcomes framework. How has it been developed? What are the outcomes? I must admit to being somewhat confused as to how that differs from the human services blueprint. I did work that out because it had three bits under it. With the human

services outcomes framework, I understand this has been a long time coming. Tell me more, basically.

Ms Sheehan: Thank you for that question, Ms Le Couteur. The human services blueprint and better services approach was not just about our three flagships, it was also looking at what system-wide changes will actually improve services for people and that will make the system itself better and more efficient. One of the things you need to do before you can say that things are better for individuals and the system is more efficient is to ask the question: to what end? Efficient to achieve what? Better for people in what sense?

All roads lead to the question: what outcomes do people want? What outcomes should systems be achieving? That is really the jumping-off point for knowing how you are progressing towards a system that is better and services that are better. That was why we started down the path of developing outcomes for the whole of the human services system. On page 9 of the annual report there is a marvellous picture which sets out for the committee the foundational outcomes across the domains of an individual's experience of the world. In researching what work has been done on outcomes that individuals want, outcomes that systems would want and outcomes that you would want to achieve at a population level, what are the different domains that would be really important?

The foundational outcomes are those domains: health, relationships, home, safety from harm, what is happening in my everyday life, I want control and choice, I want services to be culturally proficient, the system itself has to be sustainable, there should be participation, I want to learn, and I want to work. So that is the work that we have progressed to in terms of the foundational outcomes.

MS LE COUTEUR: This picture on page 9 is in fact the human services outcomes framework?

Ms Sheehan: It is the foundational outcomes work that has been progressed through the whole-of-government and community task force. They have been endorsed in principle by the task force, but the question is: how do you give life to them? What are the next steps?

MS LE COUTEUR: Was the community involved in input into this policy?

Ms Sheehan: Absolutely. The better services task force has both government and community members. Also the human services blueprint was developed by government and community joint work. The current Chief Minister, Andrew Barr, was community services minister at the time that the whole blueprint was developed. He publicly announced a task force that was appointed to develop the key initial work, and, after the initial work was done, the blueprint documentation was publicly released. It is available on the website, as outlined in the annual report. The next stage of the task force, which is the current members, was established to take the work forward. These foundational outcomes are part of the work that has been taken forward by that task force, which is currently chaired by our director-general.

MS LE COUTEUR: Thank you. In the interests of time I will put a couple of others

on notice. I could keep going, but I appreciate that we need to go to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs.

THE CHAIR: An hour is going to be stretching it across both of the further two sections. We might move on to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs. I have some questions to start with. Could you update the committee on the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body work plan at the moment?

Ms Stephen-Smith: The current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body is coming to the end of its term. There will be an election this year. As you are probably aware, the body will go into caretaker in mid-May, when nominations are called for people to stand for election to the new elected body. Those elections will take place in NAIDOC Week in July. We are actively getting out and encouraging people to both stand for and vote in those elections. I will hand over to Ms Forester to talk about the current elected body's work plan and how it is progressing that.

Ms Forester: I acknowledge the privilege aspects of this committee. The elected body is working hard to achieve good success for themselves within the community and it is working closely with government. We are in the process, as the minister has said, of preparing for the next elections, which will happen in NAIDOC Week, which is in July, kicking off on 1 July, through to 7 July. We are also in the process of reviewing the act. That was some work that was undertaken through consultation with community, government and other various stakeholders last year that Terri Janke conducted. From that review a number of recommendations were brought forward. We are in the process of looking closely at revamping and reviewing the act, which will be coming forward in May for sign-off. We will be starting a new period with a new elected body and a new act; fingers crossed.

THE CHAIR: In relation to the elections, what is being done to increase participation in the election?

Ms Forester: This will be the fourth election process that the elected body has undergone. Each year the numbers have gradually increased. Through my office we have gone out and consulted with community, to let people know. At the last election we did have a marked increase in the number of voters, not a huge increase, but we did have a marked increase in that. One of the things that we did through that period, which we will be doing again this time, is to have lots of information going out through the networks, running a number of community forums and consultations beforehand, getting out to all of the relevant community organisations, both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

We are advertising the fact that the elections are coming up and eventually we will be putting out what the roles and responsibilities of the elected body are and what candidates, if they are successful, will be responsible for. That will also go out by way of information through our housing newsletters, and through the education system and all the education newsletters. So we are doing quite a bit of a campaign. That is slowly starting to ramp up. We started off with the Multicultural Festival, where we were letting people know that this was an election year and to keep it on their radar.

MR MILLIGAN: In 2014, according to the report, 374 people participated in the

voting. What percentage does that represent in relation to the total number of adults who are able to participate in the vote?

Ms Forester: I would have to take that on notice and get the exact numbers, but we do know at the time of the vote the census indicated there were just over 6,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people identified in the ACT. Of course, a lower percentage of those were of voting age, 18-plus, but we can get the exact number for you, Mr Milligan.

MRS DUNNE: There is a target for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment in the workforce of two per cent by the end of 2015. Does this directorate monitor other agencies, to ensure that the target is met within this agency? Is there a lead agency for monitoring and addressing these issues of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment across the public service?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Ms Forester can take the whole-of-government stuff and Ms Murray can talk specifically from an organisational point of view.

Ms Forester: From the whole-of-government perspective, the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs has responsibility for consulting, advising and supporting directorates in the work they are doing. Directorate responsibility is down to what they do. However, we do have the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander subcommittee of the strategic board, which the D-G chairs. It is often a point of discussion on our agendas. We do assist Chief Minister's, which have the responsibility for overall employment across the ACT. We work with them very closely. Through our whole-of-government agreement, employment is a major initiative. It is also one of the major initiatives for the elected body. They are very keen to ensure that employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are available within ACT government.

MRS DUNNE: Are we meeting the target—whole of government and then Ms Murray can answer in relation to the directorate. I am assuming that is how it works.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I think she can answer across government; I am not sure.

MRS DUNNE: Are we meeting our targets? If not, where are the gaps?

Ms Murray: I acknowledge the privilege statement. Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee. Chief Minister's and the Commissioner for Public Administration in her responsibility as commissioner oversee the whole-of-government employment strategies relating to people with a disability and people who are from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. They monitor, through the subcommittee and through the commissioner's survey, how they are meeting their targets and whether they are meeting their targets.

In relation to the Community Services Directorate, we have consistently met our targets. We currently have 3.8 per cent of our staff identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. A particular focus for us, as we transitioned out of Disability and Therapy ACT services, was how we retained those staff who identified as

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander within the workforce. So we had specific plans in place to support those staff members and retain them within the service.

We have also had a lot of discussions with our staff who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander around the things that are potentially holding them back in their careers. I think the consistent message that we have received is, “I want to do my work as a human resources practitioner,” or “I want to do my work as a finance officer,” rather than, “I don’t want to work specifically with my community.” So we have two different schools of thought. We have invested quite a lot in identifying positions within CSD that are not specifically related to servicing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community; identifying positions in the finance stream or the HR stream. We have found that listening to our staff about what they want to do in their careers has been a really valuable way of retaining good staff.

MRS DUNNE: You said identifying positions. In the good old days when I worked in the public service there were identified positions that were often program-specific. You might have had Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders working in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs. Are you saying you now have a wider, more diverse approach to identified positions in that there are identified positions in non-program areas, what might be called mainstream areas?

Ms Murray: That is correct. For example, in my own team, in the people management team, we have an identified role. We also identify components of the graduate program and we have utilised those that suggested they would take specifically Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates. Within our housing space we have run a specific program as part of our housing traineeships, which have been identified positions. It is about trying to, as I said, listen to what our staff have said in relation to their careers and choices, and where they see their passions lying. They do not necessarily lie wholly within a program support area. We have found that that has been really good in terms of nurturing and building, as part of a larger program and as part of working collaboratively with our other colleagues across government.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, should I direct the more general whole-of-government questions to Chief Minister’s through the public service commissioner?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Yes.

MR MILLIGAN: I have a supplementary. Typically, what levels are our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees employed at? What support, promotion and development is being provided to them to move up in the public service?

Ms Murray: Thank you for that question. We do work individually with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members. They are employed at a wide variety—from an ASO2, to a housing traineeship which is, I believe, an ASO4 equivalent, to a number employed in the health professional stream, 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. Equally, more specifically, I would say that as part of the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs they are employed in more senior roles. But we do have a variety of individuals who identify in the more senior roles. I would say that it is a spread and it is a relatively even spread across the board in terms of the levels that they occupy.

We have done some fantastic work with some of the university support staff and also with some particular employment agencies in relation to mentoring. Mentoring looks a little different for different people. It has been really important for us to work with people where they meet, where they are at.

What we found with the traineeships and the graduate programs is that often we were bringing in young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from outside the ACT. So we were working with a number of employment firms—I am sure this will be echoed by the Commissioner for Public Administration in her conversation—around the different skills that are required. That might include helping people find a home, helping them connect back to their families as they have moved away from those particular networks, helping them with budgeting. That is a different subset of mentoring and support that is required at that early stage.

In relation to the mentoring program, I think that is probably an area we could work more at at the more senior levels. But we do work one on one with staff and help them partner up with an appropriate coach or a mentor. Often that is best if it is self-selected by the individual. There is nothing worse than being allocated a mentor that you actually really do not like.

MRS DUNNE: Character building.

Ms Murray: The reality is that we need to work one on one with people. I think you will find that in a lot of the work we do in people management it echoes that person-centred approach that the CSD has, as a whole, taken to operating. I hope that answers the question.

Ms Forester: Could I add to that? It is important to note that identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander is not compulsory. As an Aboriginal woman myself working in the public service, I know that a lot of my colleagues who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander choose not to identify because they do not want to be singled out for different things or they do not want people thinking that that is all they can be.

I think that, in respect of our numbers—this is not just here in our ACT jurisdiction; this is right across the board in all jurisdictions as well as the commonwealth—the choice to identify as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person to your employer is self-identification, and a number of people choose not to. I think it is really important to note that as well.

MR PETTERSSON: I have a quick follow-up on that. I know it is hard to gauge this, but how prevalent is that? Is that in any way going to impact the goal of two per cent?

Ms Forester: It possibly can. I would say that there are a number of people—I will use myself as an example. Until recently I thought that I was the only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person in the ACT public service who was at the SES level. Then, when sitting in a meeting, I discovered that there were two others. One of them had been around in the ACT public service much longer than me.

You find out those stories or hear those stories. For some of those people it was really around, “I don’t need to let people know that I’m Aboriginal. What’s in it for me to tell you that I’m Aboriginal?” That does affect it right across the board, particularly with people originally coming from the commonwealth. At different points of time, depending on government policy, people would identify and unidentify.

A classic example is when I worked in the commonwealth many years ago when changes were made to the CDEP program. At that point I was working for the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations. Our statistics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people overnight went down less a hundred people, because people used that as their protest. They went and unidentifying because they were not happy with what the organisation was doing to service the community.

It is something that is still out there and will continue until all governments, and our government in particular, can show that we are a good employer and an employer of choice. People will make their choice as to whether they identify, not identify or de-identify.

MRS KIKKERT: In 2013-14 the government put aside \$1.5 million for the construction of culturally specific accommodation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander older people. Did construction begin last year as stated? What is the final budget for the completion of the buildings?

Ms Stephen-Smith: We can probably provide some advice on that, but the primary responsibility lies with the housing area under Minister Berry. I do not know if anyone wants to give a quick answer.

Mr De’Ath: Thank you, and I acknowledge the privilege statement. We will provide some response, but the minister is absolutely correct about that being redirected to Minister Berry at the appropriate time.

Ms Forester: The response is that the first older persons accommodation has opened and is occupied in Kambah: five two-bedroom units. As the minister has said, additional information can be provided by Minister Berry.

Ms Stephen-Smith: And the government committed in the last election to build another one of those older persons Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing units, and that is progressing.

MRS KIKKERT: That is great. Were the dwellings designed with Indigenous representation?

THE CHAIR: You could reserve that for later in the program?

MRS KIKKERT: That would be nice. However, this falls under Indigenous influence so—

THE CHAIR: Yes, but not the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs.

MRS KIKKERT: You might have an input on it.

Ms Forester: The elected body was involved in the discussion.

MRS KIKKERT: It was represented?

Ms Stephen-Smith: The short answer is yes, but Minister Berry will be able to give you more detail.

MRS KIKKERT: Fantastic. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: She will be here at 3.30. I have a question in relation to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Centre. Specifically, it is about the achievements of the centre over that financial year. What sorts of activities has it been up to?

Ms Forester: In respect of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Centre, at the moment there are two tenants in that building. Property Group within CMTEDD has responsibility for the maintenance and management of the centre. Through my office we are responsible for the casual hire of the conference centre. The centre from time to time gets hired by a range of different organisations and groups, including non-government organisations, government organisations and individuals who wish to hire it for events or functions.

We do, as a directorate, from time to time run events out there as well, but there is a lot more work that we would like to do with the cultural centre. Some of that will be done through what we are doing with the whole-of-government agreement and the development of our cultural strategy.

MS LE COUTEUR: I have a question about the traditional owners project, which I am aware has been going on for a very long time. This is at page 57. Where is it up to? It says it is going to lead to a review of ACT government policy relating to recognition of traditional ownership within the ACT. Can you give us some more information about where it is up to and specifically recognition of traditional ownership?

Ms Forester: The Ngunnawal people were recognised by the ACT government as the traditional custodians. That recognition was done in 2002. The work that the office has been doing is around a genealogy project, supporting a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families with connection to family and country. That project is drawing to a close. Initially, it was around a number of pedigree charts being put together for each of the families which then grew into family history books. We are just in the process of trying to wrap that process up.

As far as the traditional owners project goes, we did have a round of consultation with a number of families to actually get a look at what we thought that would be and could be. We have not progressed that work any further as yet, but it is on our work program for the next 12 months to actually look at how we can further progress the work within the traditional owners space.

This is something that is going to take a bit of time. It is something that is going to require a deep democracy process. It is also a process where we need to have all of the

parties that are claiming some traditional ownership to this particular region. We need to consult with them. We need to look at many branches of many trees. It is something that we will be progressing work on. It is not going to be easy and it is not going to be straightforward.

One of the things that is interesting is that there are a number of groups that do claim traditional ownership to this particular region. However, none of them actually claims the same footprint. There is an overlapping of footprint, but they do not all claim the exact same footprint. That is something that we will need to consider when we have the broader conversations.

MS LE COUTEUR: But you are envisaging from this that there might be a change in how the ACT government formally recognises traditional ownership? It says that you are going to review the policy; so is there some expectation of change?

Ms Forester: I do not know whether we would say that there is an expectation of change. I think it would be a better understanding about what it is that we have here within what is known as the boundaries of the ACT, bearing in mind that prior to non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people coming to this space the ACT border was not here.

MS LE COUTEUR: Clearly the ACT border was not here.

THE CHAIR: Do you have any further questions, Caroline?

MS LE COUTEUR: No, not on this issue.

MR MILLIGAN: I have another question in relation to the elected body. Can you identify what resources they currently have available at their disposal? Also, were the six meetings held during the last year? What were the stated outcomes of those meetings?

Ms Forester: The elected body has 2.5 FTE within my office that provide support to them. The office also provides additional or supplementary support to them when required. My understanding is—we just have to get confirmation on whether the full six meetings were held in that period of time. They did have a full membership base in this particular reporting period. So I would say that they will have held their six meetings, but I can confirm that for you.

MR MILLIGAN: That would be good.

Ms Forester: A lot of the work that they did through this period was around their community priorities. They were working with government on the development and support for the ACT whole-of-government agreement. Also, they were working very closely with other directorates, particularly JACS on the justice partnership and with Health on their health plan.

MR MILLIGAN: Are you able to confirm whether they held the two community forums as well during last year?

Ms Forester: Yes, they did. That is their minimum: six meetings and two community forums. Traditionally the elected body holds far more than two community forums per reporting period.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Page 22 of the annual report for the 2015-16 year lists the meeting frequency and confirms three community forums in that 2015-16 year.

MR MILLIGAN: I have another question in relation to Gugan Gulwan, which is overcrowded, out of date and in desperate need of significant infrastructure upgrading and spending. Is the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs working with Gugan Gulwan and TAMS to get some movement on this to improve or upgrade its space?

Mr De'Ath: Thank you for the question, Mr Milligan. We are taking a coordinating role through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs on the matters relating to Gugan. I will hand over to Robyn to talk in a little more detail.

Ms Forester: With Gugan Gulwan, the office is actually looking at coordinating a bit of a working group with all of the directorates responsible for what needs to happen with Gugan Gulwan to bring everybody to the table so that we can actually look at what needs to happen and what parts of government need to do what. As you can appreciate, the office is situated within CSD, which means that we do not have the day-to-day responsibilities for a lot of things. But we do have that responsibility to advise, coordinate and support, and that is something that we will be doing.

MS LE COUTEUR: Are you having the same role as far as Boomanulla Oval is concerned?

Ms Forester: Yes, we are.

Mr De'Ath: That is correct.

MR MILLIGAN: Do you have a time frame in relation to the Boomanulla Oval on when a decision could possibly be made as to where the government wants to head with that?

Mr De'Ath: Mr Milligan, thank you for the question. We do not have a specific time frame on this. We are in the process of taking this coordinating role and establishing some governance, as Ms Forester has described. But we hope to have clarity on some time frames around both of those issues in the near future.

MR MILLIGAN: Are you able to confirm how many expressions of interest were put forward for taking over and managing Boomanulla when that closed in April of last year?

Ms Stephen-Smith: My understanding is that four expressions of interest were received, but you will probably need to confirm that with the sport and rec responsibility with Minister Berry.

MR PETERSSON: The outlook section says, "Maximise outcomes of Aboriginal

and Torres Strait Islander grants program.” What goes into the consideration of maximising? Is it a simple dollars question or is there more to it?

Ms Forester: Yes, it is a dollars question. We are provided with X amount of dollars in the grants program and what we hope to achieve is that the grants program gets fully expended. We have had a greater number of applicants for grants over the past three years, so we are getting better at getting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people applying for the individual grants and organisations applying for organisational community grants. It is around trying to encourage as many people as we can to apply for those grants.

MR PETTERSSON: I am a bit surprised by that. You are saying that there is grant money that is not getting taken up at the moment?

Ms Forester: We have had grant rounds where the number of applicants and the amount of funding for those applications is less than what we have available.

MR MILLIGAN: Can you clarify what that amount is? What is your budget?

Ms Forester: It varies.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Sorry, Mr Pettersson, would you be able to give us a page reference for that?

MR PETTERSSON: Page 57 in the outlook section. It is the last dot point. It is not particularly substantive.

MR MILLIGAN: It talks about it a little bit on page 55 as well.

Ms Forester: To give you an example, in the 2015-16 grants project for scholarships, we had \$83,685 available and we expended \$69,447 in that program. In the leadership program we had \$48,000 available and we expended \$35,000. In the cultural grants we had \$48,000 available and we expended all bar \$5,000 in that program.

MR PETTERSSON: Is it a case that there are individuals and community groups that would be suited to some of these grants that are not applying that should be applying, or is it a case of we are meeting the demand?

Ms Forester: It is very possible that there are lots out there that are not applying. With this particular round of grants we did a very good consultation process. We let people know that they were available. Particularly with the scholarship grants, we visited a lot of the educational institutions. We had a lot of information go out through the networks. Some people will apply and others will not apply for them. One of the things that we attempt to do if any funding is left over is carry that forward into another round of programs. We have done that. We have offered two and three times when we are putting the grants out. If we do not expend it all in the first round, then we will put a second round out.

MR MILLIGAN: Is any support given by your office to those people who are interested in these grants who may not know the process or how to apply?

Ms Forester: Information sessions are available. We will explain to people how the processes work and what they need to include in that. I know the elected body does a bit of that work as well. As I said, we went through the educational institutions as well. We visited the four tertiary institutions talking to each of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education units, letting them know what was there and what was available, and they provided support for those individuals.

THE CHAIR: We will move on to multicultural affairs for the last half hour.

MS LE COUTEUR: This is possibly a minor issue, but I notice that on page 66 there is a slight increase in the number of citizenship ceremonies, but I was interested there was exactly the same number—31—for citizens from other states and territories. Is this a coincidence? Again, on the same page, the work experience and support program, while I am really in favour of stability, is it a coincidence that we have the same number of participants—36 out of 40—as the previous year?

Ms Sheehan: Thank you, Ms Le Couteur, for that question. Yes, it is a coincidence. Specifically, with citizenship ceremonies it is the number of people that are approved, which is not within the control of the ACT government. However, the work experience and support program is an ACT government program and we do offer 40 places. It is usually oversubscribed. We do have a target in our performance measures, of 80 per cent completion. The good thing about completion of the program is that you gain a certificate III in administration as part of the training and you get I think it is an eight-week placement in an ACT public service department. But most often the reason people do not complete that particular program is that they are offered a job either in the area they are training in or somewhere else, and this goes to the calibre of the program. They get a job, which is what we really want, but they just do not complete the program.

MS LE COUTEUR: On the same page, the community interpreter program, there were six participants and 17 completed. Is that the maximum number of scholarships available per year? I am aware there is a shortage of interpreters available to the community. I personally have an involvement where more interpreters would make life an awful lot easier.

Ms Sheehan: I am not able to answer that question about whether that was just the number of scholarships available. I would have to take that on notice. But I would say that the ACT, as all jurisdictions are, is actively involved in the national authority. Certainly, qualified interpreters is a really important issue and we are aware of that in many areas where people would prefer to not have a family member interpret on their behalf because it may make them reluctant to reveal what the issue is, particularly in the health area. We certainly want to encourage the qualification, and that is why we have established the scholarship program.

MS LE COUTEUR: Or, in some cases, there is not a family member who has sufficient English skills so it is not even an option.

Ms Sheehan: Of course.

MS LE COUTEUR: In my particular instance, we resorted to Google Translate. Has that made a difference to the need for interpreters, because that was all we could do?

Ms Sheehan: I am not aware that it has made a difference. The telephone service is the one that is most often used. That is a high quality service and people are very happy with that. Minister Berry would talk about this, but you would be aware that as part of the safer families package one of the initiatives was the introduction of interpreters into the court system, which was very much appreciated, and also to homelessness services because of commonwealth reductions to funding of interpreters there. That has been very much appreciated.

Mrs Mitcherson: I have read the privileges statement. The other issue we discussed recently with some stakeholders is that where there is violence or issues around safe families for women they do not really want to use an interpreter that is local. There is quite a demand for interstate interpreters. We were recently talking about the use of Skype or other visual opportunities—because it is good to see the person that is doing the interpreting for you—for women particularly who want to have a discussion and disclose issues that may be very personal. If it is a small community in Canberra, that may not be possible in terms of their confidentiality and privacy, so that is another complexity.

MS LE COUTEUR: Does that happen for health as well for that reason? I know health is one of the areas where interpreters are clearly required.

Mrs Mitcherson: I cannot answer for health, but I would assume they would have the same sorts of issues in terms of privacy because often it is same client group. The other issue is it might only be a very small community of a particular language group and there is just no-one in the ACT who has that ability. I recall in a previous role having to source a psychologist from interstate who could speak a certain language and paying them to come across to do some work in terms of understanding mental health needs for a particular client. It is very complex but it is also compounded by the smallness of the community in the ACT.

MS LE COUTEUR: Do you target the Canberra Hospital as a place to get interpreters? I know anecdotally of people who have had interpreting done by food services staff because they were what they could find when they were needed. Is there an effort to get more qualified interpreting services?

Ms Sheehan: The multicultural area of Health, which used to be in the CSD building, we have a good relationship with them and we work closely with them. In terms of provision of interpreting services generally across the ACT, it is not specifically the CSD responsibility to constantly monitor and generate and provide interpreters to other parts of service delivery. Obviously we are keeping an eye out and we have a good relationship with our colleagues across government and take advice from them.

You will be able to see in the multicultural framework that the general goals in the strategy show the level of consultation and contact that we are having across areas of service delivery where we are not actually responsible for the service provision, as Ms Forester was saying with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs. But we have the whole-of-government responsibility and we take that seriously and work

with our colleagues in other directorates.

MRS KIKKERT: According to page 67 of the annual report, of the 144 applications to the multicultural grants program 122 applications were funded. Specifically what criteria were used to determine which applications received funding?

Ms Sheehan: Thank you for that question. The criteria for the grants are published on our website. When people apply for the grants it is very clear, open and transparent what are the criteria for assessment. Really, apart from failure to meet the eligibility criteria, the only thing that stops a successful application is lack of funds. But you will also see on page 67 we have the reference there to our website which will give you a complete list of successful applicants for the grants in this financial year.

It is a very wide group that get grants. The grants are small but effective and particularly support participation in the Multicultural Festival. That is really important, of course, because the generation of income through participation in the festival and stalls there can be really important for the community groups that are participating.

MRS KIKKERT: Of those groups that received the funds, what mechanisms are in place to verify that awarded funds are spent in full on the exact items or services specified in each grant application and who oversees the accountability process?

Ms Sheehan: The organisations are required to acquit the grant. Because of the size of the grants, it is a formal acquittal, and in the theme of reducing red tape we do not require, for example, a shopping list of everything that the grant was spent on. But the organisation has to certify that they have acquitted the grant or that they have spent the money, and that is the acquittal process. If it was a \$200,000 grant, it would be very different.

MRS KIKKERT: Yes, of course. We want to see the receipts.

THE CHAIR: I have some questions about the festival. They link in, I think, quite nicely. I want to ask about the 2017 festival, even though I know it is not covered by this report, but I will put it in the context of the 2016 festival. What challenges came out of the 2016 festival that have resulted in changes to the 2017 festival? No doubt, that planning started to happen in the last financial year as well.

Ms Khan: Thank you for your question. Clearly, 2016 was a successful Multicultural Festival year, as was 2017. Out of the 2016 festival there were a range of areas that were highlighted that could be improved upon, and that is what we did this time around. We took on board the feedback which, I guess, the annual report actually talks about.

The biggest issue was crowd and space. We addressed that in the 2017 festival by a number of measures, the first one basically being increasing the size of the footprint and reducing the number of stalls so that there was not the same number of stalls in certain areas, for example City Walk, and around particular areas where there were pinch points where last year, we understand, the stalls that were located in those areas obstructed the comfortable flowthrough of people.

This year we paid special attention to the footprint, to the actual size of the footprint and the placement of the stalls and stages. We reduced the number of stages from eight to seven this year for that very reason as well. Crowding and crowd crush issue was the biggest one that I think we addressed. It has only been nine days since the festival but the feedback that we have received to date has been that people felt a noticeable difference in the comfort level, particularly along City Walk and Garema Place. That was a way of, I guess, confirming that it did have some positive results as a result of making those changes to the footprint.

THE CHAIR: And the footprint was expanded to Bunda Street, is that correct?

Ms Khan: Correct. This year we included Bunda Street.

MR PETTERSSON: Were there any other areas that were—

Ms Khan: Essentially that was the biggest increase but we made some smaller changes around the location of some of the stalls on London Circuit. We reduced the number of stalls along that area.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Correct me if I am wrong, but I think in 2016 the footprint had gone on to the bus interchange.

Ms Khan: Yes, that is right.

Ms Stephen-Smith: There was a reduction in the footprint on the bus interchange and an expansion to Bunda Street instead. I might just say in response to your question, one of the things I have talked about in the chamber—you are probably aware of this—is the improvement in disability access that occurred at this year's festival as well. Again, feedback from 2016 from some people with disability was that they were finding it hard to navigate, partly because of the crowd crush issue but also partly because of things like there being quite a lot of electrical cords crossing the walkways with those safety protective covers, which were making it difficult for wheelchair access. A lot of work was done with the electrical contractor to reduce that, to either locate generators so that those cords would not have to cross the pathways or to lift up the cords so that those obstructions were minimised.

MR PETTERSSON: You said there were fewer stalls this year. Has there been any feedback from community groups that may have missed out on a stall that wanted a small or were there fewer applications for stalls?

Ms Khan: In fact, no we have not actually. There was a small reduction in the number of applications. We believe that everyone that really applied for a stall was able to have their stall. We had a number of cancellations as well. I do not believe, or we have no feedback to suggest, that anyone missed out.

MRS KIKKERT: Following on that small reduction in applications for stalls, what do you think that could be caused by?

Ms Khan: That is a good question. It is a bit early for us to know exactly what the underlying reason is there.

MRS KIKKERT: What is the difference from last year to this year?

Ms Khan: The number of stalls in 2016 was 453 three-by-three sites. In 2017 it was 419.

MRS KIKKERT: That is quite a bit.

MS LE COUTEUR: That is quite a big reduction actually.

Ms Khan: That is right.

MRS KIKKERT: Do you think it could be the cost of stalls?

Ms Khan: The cost of stalls has not changed for community organisations. The fee or the charge has remained static for the past four years, I believe. So I do not think that cost is a factor in that.

MRS DUNNE: What was the mix between community stalls and for-profit stalls? I had a feeling that over the years there has been a fairly large increase in for-profit mainly food outlets. Is there a differentiation in price for stalls?

Ms Khan: Yes there is a differentiation. Commercial stalls are obviously charged a commercial rate, which is significantly more than the \$300-odd that community organisations pay. Obviously it also depends on the size of the stall. So it could range from anything from \$2½ thousand up to \$9,000 for a commercial stall.

Just on the broad numbers I have got in front of me, there has actually been a slight reduction in the number of commercial stalls in 2017. But the number of community stalls has actually remained almost the same. In 2016 we had 150 community stalls and in 2017 it was almost the same figure—151. So there has not been really any drop in community stalls. The difference has come in in the commercial stall space. This year I think we have retained similar numbers to last year. As to the diplomatic stalls, we had 76 in 2016 and 75 in 2017. So the numbers are proportionate to last year.

MRS DUNNE: Does that mean that the area that has been the drop-off has actually been the commercial stalls?

Ms Khan: That is right.

MS LE COUTEUR: Do you think weather has anything to do with this? As Canberra and the world have been getting warmer compared to when it first started, you did not really worry about, “Oh my God, it is going to be really hot.” But now it is something that is an issue for the festival. It is a pretty hot environment being on the roadways. Is that something you are thinking about going forward?

Ms Khan: That is a very good question, and I think there are a lot of things that I think we are going to have to consider going forward with the festival. The question of weather has always been a challenge for the festival. This year we were very fortunate that, for whatever reason, the date was put forward by a week and that

helped us no end because the week prior to the festival was, in fact, the hottest weekend we had in Canberra. We had all the emergency situations arise. We were just very lucky and very blessed that the festival was, in fact, moved a week forward, probably more good luck than good planning on my part.

I guess we will consider the issue of weather and the timing of the festival going forward. It is a bit early for any, I guess, decisions or discussions about that. I think there will be some assessment done at some point and decisions will be made accordingly.

Mr De'Ath: I think it is fair to say that there would be a comprehensive review of this year's festival, as there was last year. Changes were made, as you have heard, as a result of last year's review. And we will go into that review process very shortly around the current year's festival. That will clearly be a matter for consideration.

Mrs Mitcherson: If I can just add to that, we did have a number of plans for situations. We did have a very comprehensive heat plan that we worked very closely with other agencies on in relation to how we might manage if we did have that kind of weekend. As I say, we did have a lot of discussions and a plan related to how we would manage the different areas.

MRS KIKKERT: Going back to the annual report, on page 67, it notes that parts of the Theo Notaris Multicultural Centre were hired out to various community organisations for a total of 786 bookings in the 2015-16 financial year. This equates to an average of more than two bookings per day seven days a week. During the year, how many times were booking requests turned down because the centre was at its capacity?

Ms Khan: I do not have that information. I will take that on notice, if that is okay.

MRS KIKKERT: That is fine. If the centre is struggling with capacity, what plans have been discussed to guarantee that the ACT's growing multicultural communities will have access to suitable, affordable venues in the future?

Ms Sheehan: Thank you for that question. The first thing I would want to say is that I do not think there is any evidence that the centre is struggling with its capacity. It is one of the tensions, is it not, in having a centre where you want to provide office accommodation for organisations but largely people are not there during the week because they are volunteer members and they are at their own jobs or at their own homes? We try to strike the right balance between the use of space for administrative purposes and then the use of space for services such as the Multicultural Youth Services, the Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services, which are located in the centre, and then the use of the centre for function spaces.

In terms of accessibility of other community spaces owned by the ACT government, that is a very important issue that we are having a look at. And we take feedback from the community all the time about how welcoming and how accessible they find other community facilities owned by the ACT government. That is something that we really want to have a good look at and work with community organisations on.

The committee might be aware that the ACT government constructed a substantial amount of extra community space which opened in about 2008-09. That was the four community hubs, which are themed hubs, around the ACT. It also constructed about four additional halls. Those hubs and halls are managed by community groups and we do work with those community groups on making sure that the facilities are accessible by people from the multicultural community. But it is not just: can they get a booking? But, is it a welcoming space? That is something that we are working with community groups on.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Just to build on what Ms Sheehan has said, as the annual report notes, there are a number of community associations that lease offices in the Theo Notaris centre, and these bookings throughout the year—I agree, it is actually great to see the centre being so well utilised—do include meeting room bookings. So it would not be unusual for the meeting room to be booked, I imagine, a number of times in a given weekday because we have got community associations with their offices but they will be sharing a meeting room space and booking that out through the day. Correct me if I am wrong.

Ms Sheehan: Not at all, no. That is right.

MRS DUNNE: On the subject of community meeting spaces, is the directorate getting feedback about whether there is an increased demand or unmet need for community meeting spaces? There are a lot of communities that might come together two or three times a year to have a community meal or something like that or some sort of cultural event for which they might be looking for a large facility, depending on the size of the community. Do you have a feel for the extent to which we are able to meet that demand through school halls and public halls and things like that? Do you have a sense of whether there is an unmet need?

Ms Sheehan: Thank you for that question. As you would be aware, the Community Services Directorate used to manage those community facilities in the ACT. Previously we had direct access to information about the demand for bookings and the allocation of bookings. That responsibility was transferred to the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate and is managed by the property group, as Ms Khan was talking about earlier. That is the directorate and the minister who would have information about access to the community facilities. It would then be the education department and the minister for education who would be able to tell you about spaces in schools and so on.

We can obviously have a look at what the demand is for space inside the facilities that we control. The Community Services Directorate controls bookings, as Ms Forester said earlier, for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander centre, obviously the multicultural centre, and we have our three child and family centres and the child development service. We do rent out rooms and use rooms for meetings and for community groups and so on in the child and family centres and even the child development service. The child development service is slightly different because it is clinical appointments for children. We cannot have the same level of accessibility to the community in terms of—

MRS DUNNE: I was really trying to get a feel for what I hear anecdotally from

community groups which is that sometimes it is difficult. As the groups grow, for instance some of the African groups are becoming larger, where they used to meet is not big enough. I am just trying to get a feel for whether you know whether the stuff that members are being told anecdotally is actually the case, that it is difficult to find places for multicultural communities to meet as a community?

Ms Khan: I guess there is no factual data about it but we are hearing from communities that there is a bit of a challenge to find suitable spaces for their meetings. I think it is probably a symptom of the very effective operation of the Office of Multicultural Affairs. I think that the work we do is really reaching out to communities across Canberra and the ACT and encouraging their participation and bringing them together as cultural groups. I think that awareness is growing and that is possibly also one of the driving reasons behind this overall sense of need to meet, to participate and to celebrate their individuality and their diversity. Anecdotally, I would agree with you that there is a growing sense of a need, an unmet need, in that space.

MRS DUNNE: A brief follow-up on a related issue of access for places of worship, some community groups will use halls and the like—and I know that this is partly a question for the LDA et cetera—but are you a first stop for people or communities who are looking to establish a place of worship? Do you have a feel for the demand for places of worship outside the usual churches, temples and mosques?

Ms Khan: To answer your first question, I think it is the first stop where communities would raise that need through contacting the office or having meetings to discuss their particular needs out of which would come a need for a place of worship. I would say that is a yes to your first question.

MRS DUNNE: Can you quantify that unmet need?

Ms Khan: I cannot. I have only fairly recently been in this role. But I would need to consult and provide—

Ms Sheehan: I do not think that we would be able to say, from our information through our responsibilities for multicultural affairs, what is the unmet need for places for religious worship.

MRS DUNNE: I am just trying to get a feel for how much knowledge we have in these areas.

Mr De'Ath: I do not believe it is a dataset that we collect, but I think your question is a very good one. It is one that we will consider: how to monitor our role in the Office of Multicultural Affairs. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: There is a lot of interest in the multicultural affairs area. Perhaps we can put those questions on notice because we are out of time. We will break for lunch and come back at 1.30 for the rest of the portfolio regarding aged and disability services, early intervention, child abuse and protection.

Hearing suspended from 12.33 to 1.30 pm.

THE CHAIR: We might get underway slightly late. We will start with community participation and youth engagement. I have a couple of questions in this area. I suspect this might be a short one. What issues are currently being explored with the Youth Advisory Council's work plan for 2016-17 and the previous plan?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I am not sure. Have we got the Youth Advisory Council in here? I met with the Youth Advisory Council late last year, and they had just set their work plan for the next year. Two of the issues that I can recall were on their work plan. I think there were three, but I cannot recall what the third one was. One of them was about the treatment of young people in the workplace and issues around insecure work and the exploitation of young workers. I advised them to make sure that they were engaging with Unions ACT around that issue and with relevant unions in the sectors that those issues are particularly problematic in.

One of the other issues that they were looking at was, if I recall correctly, online safety for children and young people. There were some issues around what happens with online bullying, sexting and that kind of thing. That is off the top of my head, from my recollection.

Ms Sheehan: Housing and homelessness and social inclusion, I think, were the other issues that they are very interested in, and issues for the LGBTIQ community.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Yes.

THE CHAIR: How long are the work plans? Are they just an annual work plan or would that have crossed over the two financial years?

Ms Stephen-Smith: We will ask Nicole Moore to come and talk to us.

Ms Moore: Thank you for the question. The council is a new council. They developed their priority areas at the beginning of forming a new council. Those priority areas will take them through for the whole time that the council are together. Each year, they obviously look at that work plan to reflect and make sure that they are still the right priorities.

MS LE COUTEUR: How is the council selected? I note that you had 25 applicants and 10 people, but how do you choose which ones?

Ms Stephen-Smith: They choose. My understanding is that the council is not all replaced at one time; the vacancies are replaced over time. They have a panel of themselves to interview new potential council members. I do not know if there is an independent person who sits on that panel as well.

Ms Moore: Yes. The Youth InterACT team support the process. What they did this time, which was really great for young people, was hold it as a model workshop style interview. They had all of the young people come together, they ran through some team-building activities, and they gave the young people an opportunity to demonstrate their leadership in a group environment. Then the current members of the council were able to select from that process those that they felt had connections into

different groups of young people—we will see that one of the main things for the Youth Advisory Council is that they can represent a broad view of young people—and are able to engage with young people from different areas of our community. They were some of the things they were looking for. They were also looking for not only those who showed leadership in that environment, but also those who were able to work collaboratively with other young people and take on board other young people's perspectives.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I have to put on record that it was a very impressive group of young people that I met with.

THE CHAIR: There being no other questions about youth engagement, we might move to disability and therapy services. Do you want to start on that, Elizabeth?

MS LEE: Thank you for the opportunity. Minister, I want to start in relation to a topic on the information linkages capacity funding, the ILC funding. As you know, SHOUT is an umbrella organisation providing assistance to a number of support groups in the ACT. On 23 February, in a *Canberra Times* article, you stated:

The ACT government will continue to work with SHOUT to see if there are other funding options available to the organisation and how they can apply.

Can you outline for us what other funding options are available to groups like SHOUT?

Ms Stephen-Smith: As I have said on radio as well, and as SHOUT has acknowledged, there are ongoing discussions with Health around potential for a funding source from that directorate. As Rebecca Davey noted in her radio interview on ABC Radio Canberra, SHOUT does support a number of organisations in the health space as well as in the disability space and broader community self-help groups, so that is one possibility for some potential funding.

Some of the groups that they support also would support—again, correct me if I am wrong—a significant number of people over 65, so there may be potential for some support in that area. I cannot say there definitely is. The other thing that I think it is important for community groups to look at is support from outside government. I know that some community organisations that have been affected by the transition to the NDIS have made significant efforts to reach out to the philanthropic community and to try to increase their reach into the community and the support that is coming from philanthropic community and business donations and also from the broader community in terms of smaller donations.

MS LEE: In terms of your ongoing discussions with SHOUT, can you just give us an update on where that is up to and the future progression?

Ms Stephen-Smith: There are ongoing conversations from the health minister's office. I am meeting with SHOUT shortly, but I do not have the date of that meeting on me. Maybe I will hand over to someone from the directorate to talk about it.

Ms Sheehan: Thank you, Ms Lee, for the question. The minister was referring to the

ability or the willingness of organisations to reach out to the philanthropic sector and to look at the business model for them going forward. In that regard, SHOUT was able to get a \$20,000 business development package to look at their business model. As the minister said, we have worked with the commonwealth, and this is a transitional period. I need to emphasise that it is a transitional period from 2016-17 for the whole information linkages and capacity building capacity of the ACT, so this is very important.

At the moment, the rest of Australia is not in our position of having fully transitioned across, so the NDIA, the National Disability Insurance Agency, is a bit behind where we hoped they would be. They had not released their framework for ILC, and they had not gone to tender for ILC services. We were hoping that the tender process that is in train at the moment would have happened 12 months ago, and then all of our organisations would know where they are.

In this transitional period, SHOUT has received about \$125,000. The amount of funding that is going to be available that has already gone to tender is \$3 million, which is over \$1 million more than the NDIA provided in the transitional period. The ACT had previously had about \$3 million in this type of service, and because the NDIA has been a bit slow, that is what is causing all of the uncertainty.

SHOUT are very well positioned. They have looked at their business model. They are providing a sterling backbone support service to groups that are largely, I would say, specifically disability focused, that have volunteer populations. Obviously the NDIA will determine the tender, but if you look at what they are doing, it is absolutely tailor made for information linkages and capacity building.

One of the ways that the NDIS will remain financially sustainable is the continuation of support for volunteer organisations. Again, it is ticking all of the boxes around the sorts of organisations that are very important and that are providing that support.

In fact, as part of our sector development work for the NDIS, we did a small piece of work looking at the role of philanthropy in the NDIS. The NDIA had been concerned, and the commonwealth were concerned, that there is so much philanthropic effort already in the disability area that people would think, once the NDIS was here, that we do not need any more philanthropy and suddenly the commonwealth will pay for everything. Of course, that would send the scheme ticket over.

All organisations are realising the importance of hanging onto their volunteer base, supporting their volunteers, supporting organisations like SHOUT. I am not predicting the outcome, but I am saying that in our view, and we have had a very close look at it, as you would imagine, SHOUT ticks all of the boxes.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I guess that is probably where I should have started. We are encouraging all of the organisations that have received transition funding to apply for the ILC grants. They close on 8 March. Those decisions are not known yet, as Ms Sheehan indicated, so I think it is premature to be saying that any of these organisations are going to close at this point. We really need for them to take this process seriously, to put in a good application. As Ms Sheehan has said, SHOUT is well positioned to do that.

MS LEE: Thank you. You made reference that SHOUT does also play in the field of health outside the disability sector. Would you say that it is fair to say that organisations like TADACT fall into that category as well? And if that is the case, would they be encouraged by the ACT government to also seek funding from outside the disability sector; outside the ILC, maybe from health or other options that you just covered?

Ms Stephen-Smith: One of the interesting things I have found in going through all of the organisations is that they all are a bit different from one another.

MS LEE: Many of them.

Ms Stephen-Smith: TADACT are probably a bit different in that they are more likely to be in the space of supporting people who are ageing, who need assisted technologies as a result of ageing-related disability or support needs rather than being in the health space, although there may be some crossover there as well. I do not know if anyone is in a position to talk more about—

Ms Sheehan: About other funding sources?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Yes.

Ms Sheehan: As the minister said, it is really important to look at the span of clients that are serviced by organisations. Earlier on today, we were talking about the community services industry. If you look at the community services industry as a whole, it is some health organisations as well as disability organisations as well as other community organisations. The specific funding source I am not able to say today, but certainly, in working with the sector generally, right across the whole range of services that community organisations provide, we are looking for all sorts of different areas where funding is possible.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I went and visited TADACT last year, and just this week I wrote to the executive director suggesting that she get in contact with one particular company—I had met someone representing them—who are in this space in terms of their philanthropic support already and who might be a useful link. Again, there are no guarantees, but I think all of us have this in mind when we are out and about in the community. How can we link people together? How can we support organisations to find alternative funding sources? But also, as Ms Sheehan said, how can we think about their business models and what kind of expertise can we link them with to think about how they might set up their businesses a bit separately in the new NDIS environment?

MS LEE: Can I just have one final follow-up?

THE CHAIR: Is that a separate—

MS LEE: No; it is a follow-up.

THE CHAIR: Yes.

MS LEE: Finally, I understand and acknowledge that you have been having ongoing dialogue with these organisations but, aside from the options that they have to seek other sources of funding, what guarantees can the ACT government provide to those organisations and their member groups that they are not going to fall through the cracks, that if the worst comes to the worst they are going to have something to rely on so that they do not fall under? What is the reassurance that the ACT government can provide?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I think it is a bit premature to start talking about what is going to happen to them if they are not successful in the ILC round. I think at this point all of those community groups need to be focused on putting in a good, strong ILC application. And then, where there are other areas where we are already talking to them, we will continue those conversations.

MS LEE: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I remind members that we are talking about the 2015-16 annual report as well. Following on from the discussion around support provided to organisations through the NDIS, business investment packages are referenced on page 35 of the report. Could you please provide some further details on how these packages have been used by service providers?

Ms Sheehan: Thank you for that question, because the business development packages, as I said earlier when we were talking about sector development generally, were an example of where we developed a particular product to support community organisations. A consultant came in and looked at the business model and then gave advice to the organisation about what some faults might be and what improvements might look like—that we develop that in the ACT context. The NDIS then came along and we had \$12 million of sector development funding from the commonwealth. We had already had 20 organisations that had used that package to look at their own businesses.

To have a product ready to roll out put us really ahead of the game. If the question is about what was actually found in this process, \$20,000 sounds like a lot of money; it is for a community organisation. The main task of those packages was to analyse the organisations themselves and to then give advice on their governance. In making the move from block funding, as many organisations have to, to fee for service, you have to have a really strong governance model that can move your organisation from a community, government-reliant model to a provider of choice, because you are competing with other providers for someone to choose you. It is about looking at your governance model, looking at your business model, looking at your financial model, and then identifying what is the go-forward position. In the NDIS environment we were then able to offer, in the following year, larger packages, \$50,000 packages, which looked at implementation issues.

A question that arises is: how do you know that you are directing it in the right direction? National Disability Services, which is the national peak for disability organisations, and there is an ACT branch, have developed a really terrific tool which was already in existence which organisations could use to do a quick ready reckoning

about how ready organisations were for the NDIS. We made it a requirement of receiving both grants that organisations had undertaken that ready-reckoner approach to get a sense of how ready they were. If it was an organisation that had not previously provided disability services but were interested in doing so, they had to have undertaken some level of self-assessment. We also had overall reporting from the consultancy firms that had undertaken that first business assessment on the readiness of organisations. These larger packages were properly targeted to organisations that had done a level of self-assessment, they had had a consultancy assessment and they were ready for implementation.

It was very important to us that we were growing the market, that we were growing providers and that we were making sure they were resilient and able to move into the new environment. The biggest risk in moving to a market environment is that the market falls over. That is why these packages were really directed to making sure that organisations were ready for the NDIS.

THE CHAIR: They were disability service providers, but we also know that Disability ACT and Therapy ACT were transitioning to a new system—

Ms Sheehan: They were.

THE CHAIR: through the child development referral service in particular. How did that transition go, and what sort of outcomes are we seeing from that? Particularly, what was the transition like for staff who were previously working in those agencies?

Ms Sheehan: I will start with the issue of how the transition was achieved. The government had taken a decision in early 2014 that the ACT government would no longer be a service provider for therapy services in Therapy ACT and for all the services provided by Disability ACT, which were largely accommodation services. In that NDIS environment we are working with providers, some of whom are already providing accommodation services. So we had a smallish market for accommodation services, but not a market big enough to absorb government getting out of service provision.

On the therapy side, we knew that we would really need to grow the market for the allied health professionals. With the commonwealth agreement, we were able to use several million dollars of the sector development funding to transition Therapy ACT and, more importantly, the Therapy ACT clients and staff into the new environment.

With respect to what we needed to achieve, bearing in mind that the market needs to grow, not fall over, what do you know that you are going to need for the sector not to fall over? If we go back to the earlier discussion about workforce, you know that you are going to need a workforce. I will hand over to Christine Murray in a moment to talk about the way in which we supported the workers inside the accommodation services and the therapy services to transition into a new environment so that they did not work for government but they were able to still provide services in the community sector.

That is the work that we were doing with our own staff. But the work that we needed

to do with the clients of Therapy ACT, and particularly the accommodation services, was incredibly important. If you think about the major driving force for the NDIS, which is control and choice in the hands of people with a disability—and that is the paradigm completely shifting—with Disability ACT running group homes, we did not just want to say, “Someone else should just come in and run all the homes, but it can be someone in the community sector.” People living in the group homes needed to make a choice about who was going to provide a service to them.

That was where the staff of Disability ACT were able to work, household by household, with the clients of each house to make a choice, usually supported by parents, guardians and family, about who they would like to provide their disability support services, and also who they would like to manage their tenancy in the house that they were in, because previously the tenancies were managed by Housing ACT.

Those sector development funds from the commonwealth enabled the support of the clients—not just providers—of current services to choose new providers and to be able to move out of government service delivery into a community-based service delivery that they had chosen for themselves. Ms Murray will talk about the way in which staff also made choices about how they would support clients to move into the new environment.

I will just add, before I hand over, that we also made available business development packages to staff to establish their own businesses. Quite a number of therapists from Therapy ACT established themselves as sole traders, or as individual traders, and in some instances the staff of Disability ACT set up their own business to move with clients into the new environment. I will hand over to Ms Murray to talk about the other ways that we supported our staff.

Ms Murray: I spoke earlier about taking a people-centred approach to the way we were responding to things in the people management space. I think this is a good example of where it would only work if we took a person-centred approach to the transition.

One of the bases was a really sound governance structure for the management of such a significant change. We had around 523 staff who were affected by this transition. Around 140 of those were temporary and casuals, and the rest were permanent employees. We worked solidly with all of the unions who were involved with representation in that space and our colleagues in the Chief Minister’s department to establish a memorandum of understanding. It was a cornerstone governance document which allowed us to set out the ground rules in terms of how we were going to transition such a large body of staff.

As Ms Sheehan outlined, we took a staged approach. We needed to maintain services for clients while they were in our services. They needed to be quality services in both Therapy and Disability ACT. So we needed to step down, but we also needed to maintain those staff. It is a difficult planning balance that we undertake when we are trying to achieve both those things.

It is an encouraging note that a majority of the Disability ACT staff—picking up on the choice and control of the clients—moved with their clients into the

non-government sector. That is a really reassuring thing for our disability clients, so that they do have quality staff who transition.

Any time you survey staff about these sorts of changes, they say there is not enough communication. On this occasion they would probably say, “Death by communication.” We had frequent staff meetings, from the top level down. We engaged in large staff meetings and small staff meetings. We had an inbox where people could ask questions, and they formulated the basis of question and answer type fact sheets that we produced, and they were a constant, rolling thing as we moved through. We did staff notices and there was a constant conversation.

We also took the opportunity, as people were leaving the services—we had people who had been disability support workers for 30-plus years—to celebrate their career, and also celebrate them as individuals and workers. I will not talk to my colleague Ms Starick about the healthy weight initiative; however, I may have put on a few kilos eating cakes at the staff farewells.

If we look at the case management approach, that person-centred approach that we took—and I think that is critical—when we first made the announcement, senior staff sat down with each individual employee and spoke about how they were feeling about the transition. That took some time, but I think it was an investment worth making. That helped us to establish where we were sitting—really quite comfortably. We established a people management subunit looking at case management. So each particular staff member had a case manager who they could talk to about how they were feeling, what they were thinking, planning their training, planning realistically for their counselling support needs, sometimes, because there is a lot of grief potentially associated with a transition. They had regular face-to-face meetings.

We did scenario planning and mapping with individuals in that space. There was a huge investment from the directorate into tailored training programs. As I said, people have been in the sector for 30 years. The thought of writing a CV or attending an interview was quite a scary prospect. We were able to run specific training around those. Everything was quite bespoke and tailored to the individual needs of the staff members. Staff members were entitled under the enterprise agreement to \$1,000 of financial advice, and many took that up as well.

Ms Sheehan spoke about the fact that, particularly in our Therapy ACT space, there were a number of people who were more interested in, rather than redeployment options or transitioning to an alternative business, creating their own business. We walked them through those processes. A lot of them worked with the Lighthouse innovation centre for mentoring, coaching and training around business development. Ms Sheehan is probably far more across that, because I was focused only on our staffing.

As at February, a total of 355 staff have separated from Disability ACT and Therapy ACT. Two hundred and eighty one of those accepted a voluntary redundancy. We were very pleased that 59 elected to be redeployed and have been successfully redeployed within the ACT government as a whole. We have five people who we are currently actively working with—only five who have not secured permanent employment at the end of the process. We are continuing to work with those

individuals as we head towards the 30 June date. Just to put a number on it, there are 14 Therapy ACT staff members who have established their own businesses, which I think is quite significant.

I would feel remiss if I did not take the opportunity to comment on some of the people who have made this all possible, if I could. I acknowledge the work of the executive, working really closely with the unions in this space. It has been a partnership throughout the whole process. Where staff have been uncomfortable sharing information with us, we have worked with the unions to make sure that they have a voice, for those people who do not necessarily have that voice.

I would like to mention Ellen Dunne and her team. Ellen is in the room, and I am going to embarrass her. Her team led the people management transition, and in my experience that was second to none in terms of that case management. Through a number of ministers there has been really strong ministerial support for this program. In a nutshell, it has been a very busy two years.

MRS KIKKERT: Thank you, Ms Murray. On page 143, the report says that as at 30 June 2016, the directorate had a workforce of 1,046 employees, a reduction of 178, primarily due to the withdrawal of disability and therapy services. By classification group, where were the reductions?

Ms Murray: We had about 90 officers within Therapy ACT; they range as health professional officers from health professional 5s down to health professional 1s and 2s. We also had a large number of reductions in the disability service officer classifications. I do not have those exact numbers in relation to the ones that were reduced. That was the primary reduction, our largest workforce, those disability support officers. The disability support officers had house managers at a higher level. It is really that area that was constricted by the greatest amount, because it was the largest group. Does that answer the question?

MRS KIKKERT: Yes. Did you mention before the number of staff who took redundancy, and also who transferred to other directorates? You mentioned a couple of numbers of staff before? Is that covered?

Ms Murray: I probably am taking us up to a point in time as at now, which is why there is a slight change. I thought it was useful to give the committee up-to-date figures.

MRS KIKKERT: Yes.

Ms Murray: So they will not match up exactly. However, the figures are that 281 have accepted a voluntary redundancy, 59 have been redeployed, and we have five staff who we are supporting to achieve that permanent redeployment.

MRS KIKKERT: Thanks.

MS LEE: Are the redeployed staff in the directorate or other directorates?

Ms Murray: Across the whole of the ACT government.

THE CHAIR: How many are going to remain in the office for disability?

Ms Sheehan: I can answer that question. The office for disability is now part of the community participation group. It does not have a discrete staffing per se, because the community participation group services a number of officers. I think that one or two people from Disability ACT were redeployed into the whole of the community participation group, but they have not been specifically allocated to work on disability issues. If you think about the range of things that the community participation group does, particularly around social inclusion, not just for people with a disability but for people from a multicultural background, for women, for seniors and veterans, for young people and so on, the attitude and the culture of social inclusion that come from Disability ACT is really tailor made for that environment of social inclusion generally in the community participation group. We thought it would be a real pity to just pigeon-hole someone, saying, “Well, you worked in disability before, so the only thing you can ever do in the future in government is to work in disability.” We wanted to take that broader approach.

MS LE COUTEUR: Given that there is an office for disability, do any of the people there have disabilities?

Ms Sheehan: In the community participation group?

MS LE COUTEUR: You have just told us that there has been, there is, something called an office for disability.

Ms Sheehan: Yes.

MS LE COUTEUR: My question really was this. There is an office for disability. How many of the staff identify as having disabilities? You have sort of answered by saying that it does not have any staff. Nonetheless, from a community point of view, you would ask whether an office for disability includes people who identify as having disabilities.

Ms Murray: Can I answer that question, Ms Le Couteur?

MS LE COUTEUR: Sure.

Ms Murray: We have 3.7 per cent of our entire workforce who have identified as people with a disability. I personally know that that is a lot larger within our workforce. However, the sensitivities that Ms Forester indicated in relation to disclosing are consistent in the disability space. Whilst I might be able to answer in the affirmative, based on the knowledge that I have, I think that I would be walking a very fine line in terms of breaching people’s personal privacy to do so categorically.

We do have a large representation; 3.7 per cent of the workforce as a total have identified as having a disability. As the director of people management who supports individuals with reasonable adjustments—we are supporting workplaces—I am aware that it is a much larger figure, and I am also aware that there are still those significant sensitivities in terms of reporting. I would be loath to say a specific yes or no for a

small cohort.

MS LE COUTEUR: I appreciate that. There is just the constant criticism that disability policy is entirely made by people who are not part of that community, and that is the flip side of it. People have said that to me frequently. I am sure they have said that to you.

Ms Murray: I do understand that, and we certainly do have people who identify in that space. But, as I said, with a smaller cohort I would not want to put a number on how many. I would go so far as to say that working in a particular policy space does attract people with a particular passion for an area, and I think that that is what has occurred in this space.

Mr De'Ath: I think it would be fair to say that the directorate is acutely aware of the issue that you are raising; very aware of it, very conscious of it. We monitor that closely in terms of people who either have a disability or have lived experience in the space. I can confidently say, without breaching privacy of individuals, that I think we are well served in this space.

MS LEE: Can I just clarify something I heard? Is it 3.3 or 3.7 that you said earlier?

Ms Murray: Sorry, it was 3.3 in the reporting period; it is currently 3.7.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Can I just add to what the director-general said on that, just to return to the point that Ms Le Couteur made about making disability policy. I think it is also really important to note that policy is not just made by public servants working in the directorate. Currently we have advertised for expressions of interest for the disability reference group, and we will announce some new members of that shortly. It is a very important reference group. One of the things I have been talking to the chair of that group about, to the directorate, is how we engage and hear the voices of the broader community of people with disabilities, not just across disability policy but across all areas of policy for which the directorate is responsible. That is something I talked about a lot during the campaign. Officials here are probably sick of me saying—

Mr De'Ath: The message is clear.

Ms Stephen-Smith: that we need to get out, we need to be engaging the community and we need to have some of those more participatory democracy processes. We need to engage and hear the voices of people who have not necessarily been heard in this policy space.

Mr De'Ath: Thank you, minister. I can just give a further example, slightly deviating in a way, a really good example of how we do that. We were talking about the Multicultural Festival earlier on. We were specially advised by the disability advisory group on the festival and access and issues for people with a disability. That was really reinforcing the point I made earlier, that these are matters we take very seriously in terms of whom we consult, whom we work with, representation, et cetera.

MRS DUNNE: Could I, with the indulgence of Mr Chair, go back to the question

about the disbandment of Therapy ACT. We talked at great length about the managing of the staff in that process. Many, but not all, of the clients would have been directed to the NDIA for a package, but there are clients who would have gone to Therapy ACT who do not qualify to go to the NDIA and there are limited services available through the family community centres. Could somebody talk me through the situation for a young child who might need a certain amount of occupational therapy or a certain amount of speech therapy? How do they get that? How do they access it? And how do we assess whether they are getting enough to ensure that they make progress when they do not qualify for disability funding?

Ms Sheehan: Thank you for that question, Mrs Dunne. As we were phasing down Therapy ACT as the provider of therapy services, we established a new service, which is called the child development service. It now has the responsibility for working with that same group of children, but it has a very important diagnostic function. I will hand over to Elise Jordaan, who is the head of the child development service, and she can talk to you about the way in which they work with clients.

Ms Jordaan: Thank you for the question, Mrs Dunne. The child development service was established in January 2016. The main aim of that service is an integrated service. A cross-directorate group came together across government, Health, Education and Community Services, to set up a service that was previously provided in quite a disparate way across the directorates. What we determined was that there was a need for a very streamlined and integrated allied health and medical assessment of children to determine which pathway they need to go on in terms of therapeutic supports or services that they require throughout the service system.

The main function of this service is to identify children at risk between the ages of nought to six, children at risk of a developmental delay. The service has a strong function around early intervention and early detection. We have a range of allied health professionals, similar to Therapy ACT. But, more importantly, we also have the medical staff who are part of our team. We have community health paediatricians who are collocated with us in this service. And through our comprehensive intake assessment process, we determine which pathway a child needs to go on.

Coupled with that, we have that universal access model of drop-in clinics. There is no waiting period. If a parent has a concern about their child's development, they are able to access the service through a drop-in clinic which runs weekly across Canberra. The process—

MRS DUNNE: And they run through the child and community—

Ms Jordaan: Like they used to, yes. It is a similar model to the one that Therapy ACT had. We have seen significant numbers of children in this reporting period; in actual fact we saw that there has been quite an increase when we reviewed our data at the end of last year.

The demand is still there. The important thing is that we engage and collaborate with stakeholders, that we ensure with the system—which is quite complex for families; there have been lots of changes and transitions—that we support them. And we do provide a lot of supports for families to engage with the NDIA.

Coupled with that, we also work very closely with the Education Directorate. Obviously there is an interface there with preschools. And with children moving towards the ages of five and six, there is an interface with the Education Directorate as well.

As a government agency, community service, we ensure that we collaborate with Health and with Education and CYPS. Children from CYPS would be prioritised due to their vulnerabilities. There is also an important part of the work that became apparent in the establishment of the service, that we should provide outreach services to children and communities where they are not able to easily access that service. Although we have the service across Canberra, there are families that are not able to come into our service, so we have set up some outreach programs within the community just to make that more accessible.

MRS DUNNE: The reporting period covers the first six months of operation.

Ms Jordaan: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: We are now another six months into the operation. Can you provide the committee with some data on the number of children who access this program; and perhaps the average period of service, treatment or whatever the appropriate term is, and where they are likely to receive it? It probably depends on age. Are they going to receive that through preschool, through the family and community centres or through schools?

Ms Jordaan: I can give you some of the data now. For the 2016 period, we saw 2,069 children through the child development service. That is children between the ages of nought and six. I did not add earlier that we also see children between the ages of seven and eight who have not had a prior assessment by an allied health professional. We also do autism assessments for children up to the age of 12. That is all included in that cohort that I referenced, 2,069 children.

Of those children, a cohort, 299, were referred to the NDIA. Those children were assessed and evidence of disability was provided to that family. We do not determine eligibility, but we refer them on to the NDIA. The balance of 1,700 children all received a service through the child development service. I am not too sure if you want to know more about that?

MRS DUNNE: I would not mind getting some sort of breakdown of what the services are and also some sense of whether there is a perception of unmet need. Anecdotally, again, as a member of parliament, you get feedback that particular subgroups are not having their needs met, et cetera. Does the department have any concept of whether there is an unmet need, and the extent of that?

Ms Jordaan: Would you like me to answer that now?

MRS DUNNE: Yes, if you can.

Ms Jordaan: In terms of the supports that we provide, we are not a therapeutic

support service, so the 1,700 children that we saw were children at risk of a developmental delay. Those children would receive services, parent information sessions, small group sessions, around demonstrating to families and working with children in small groups around the identified developmental delay as part of the whole package of also linking people into the service system within the ACT, child and family centres. A lot of the work that we do is out of the child and family centre.

I can talk a bit about some targeted work that we do around identifying families with vulnerability, around either their socioeconomic status or any vulnerability that that family may have. The child may not have a significant delay, but within the context of the issue where the child is in that context, there may be psychosocial issues for the family.

With the educators that we have employed, we have developed small group work, which is known as the developing kids group, which we run out of the child and family centres. That is a play-based model. It is run by an early educator, and the allied health staff consult to that group. Part of the aim is to work with the family, children of 18 months, right through to preschool, to support the family with supports. It is not intensive therapeutic support; it is about engaging that family with supports in the mainstream. Some of them are actually eligible for the NDIA, but, because of perhaps mum's mental health or other psychosocial issues, we are supporting them to transition.

Then there are those children with vulnerabilities. To ensure that they transition really well, there is sort of a wraparound service. There are many programs within the child and family centres that we link them into, and we support them to transition into the preschool environment.

MRS DUNNE: I will ask a specific question. It seems that with that sort of small group and generalist group there are not direct clinical therapies provided as was the case with Therapy ACT. For instance, a child might turn up at preschool. The preschool teacher will pick up, for example, that the child does not have very well developed fine motor skills or might be behind in their speech. It might be a speech therapy issue or something like that. If a child presents like that, and they clearly do not qualify for the NDIA, how do we address those clinical therapeutic needs that might require six months or something like that to get the child back up to where they should be?

Ms Jordaan: Yes, in terms of that, it is about determining what that need is and what that gap in the development is, if I could put it that way. We are aware that there is a new early childhood early intervention service partner. Funding will be provided through the NDIA for some of what might be called those "light touch" services. There is still some discussion around exactly what that will look like.

MRS DUNNE: But the directorate does not provide those services?

Ms Jordaan: The directorate does not provide services for children over six that have extensive therapeutic needs, but—

MRS DUNNE: Under six? No, I am sort of thinking about an experience I had—

Ms Jordaan: A specific person?

MRS DUNNE: taking a child to Therapy ACT because his fine motor skills were not up to scratch when he was four and having two or three interventions with some extended therapy and then homework, essentially—

Ms Jordaan: That is right.

MRS DUNNE: which sort of got him on track. Do those services exist today as they did in the past?

Ms Jordaan: Depending on—because that is quite relative—what that need was. But this child development service will provide small group work like that for children up to the age of six where the developmental delay is not in excess of 12 months; so if there are just some mild delays around how to hold a pencil, things like that. There are also other mainstream services. For example, the University of Canberra runs programs for that particular—if you are talking about that particular issue—

MRS DUNNE: I was just using that as an example, but it might be speech therapy or it might be something where there is a mild delay. You need to get them up to speed sooner rather than later and those services were provided through Therapy ACT on a one-on-one basis, not on a small group basis. Do they still exist on a one-on-one basis provided through the directorate or do people need to go to a private provider?

Ms Jordaan: Up to the age of six, I could say that if the developmental delay is not more than 12 months, the child development service will provide that. To answer your question around whether it is individual or small group, I guess that depends on the capacity of the parent. If the parent has the capacity; our continuing service offer is related to what that family's capacity is. If the family has the capacity to come in and to attend parent information sessions and do small group work, we will do that. If they are not, we are flexible and we are able to provide an individual service.

MRS DUNNE: So you may actually go and visit a home?

Ms Jordaan: Yes, we visit homes; we visit preschools; we go into day care settings; we do a lot of health promotion as well. That is another function of the service. So it is getting out into childcare settings as well.

MRS DUNNE: Thank you.

MS LEE: Moving away from the therapy topic, what is the progress of the negotiations with the federal government as to the level of the ACT's contribution to the NDIS and the time frames involved?

Mr De'Ath: Thank you. Can I first say that there was no negotiation about the cost, if that is more precisely what you were referring to, Ms Lee. We are in constant discussion with the commonwealth in relation to ongoing implementation of the scheme. Those discussions have been constructive in nature and are continuing in relation to a number of matters. When I say “constructive”, we have worked in a

manner with the commonwealth that assists them around being able to cleanse their datasets and work with them, given that we no longer have direct line of sight to the data. It is now held by the commonwealth.

It has been a process of working carefully through a range of issues that have supported the commonwealth to become much more accurate around the picture of data that they have for the ACT. But I reiterate that there is no negotiation on the number. Ms Sheehan may want to add to that; I am not sure.

Ms Sheehan: Thank you. The problem that we encountered near to the end of 2016 was that the National Disability Insurance Agency had not cleansed its data about people who may be eligible for the NDIS in the ACT since the time that it started writing out to anyone who had ever received a service in a school, in Therapy ACT, in a health setting and asking them if they were interested in coming for an assessment at the NDIS.

At that time, we found that the NDIA were double, triple, quadruple counting individuals because if an individual had a service from four agencies, they counted four times in the dataset. So it was extremely unfortunate; we had been asking the NDIA to cleanse the data and we were in a very good position to be able to help them, because as our clients were moving across to the NDIS over nine quarters, we could see people who were getting a service already having transitioned to the NDIA, not receiving any more services in the ACT and already having an NDIS package.

It was not until September last year that the NDIA told us that they were still operating off the idea that there might have been 9,000 or 10,000 people who might need a service, because they were, as I say, double, triple, quadruple counting people. We have been working with the NDIA over the entire period to prove to them the transition of clients out of ACT services into their own services. We have been able to then identify people who had not been using any services, who were new clients.

Over this period of time there has also been, you would call it, some throughput. In the NDIS, once you are over 65 you become the responsibility of the commonwealth and you can choose to stay receiving NDIS-style services but you do not technically count as an ACT participant that the ACT needs to be funding. There has been that sort of throughput.

There have been plan reviews with early intervention services where the service works. So the person has a service for a time, but then they do not have a plan after, and so on and so on. We are really narrowing down the level of difference. I think it would be fair to say that the commonwealth department of DSS has been working really closely with us and the NDIA to try to get down to the final number.

That is really positive, but it was just very unfortunate that the NDIA had not moved more quickly to cleanse that data. I think at the moment the difference is really around that throughput: who has actually left the scheme? Of course, some people die, unfortunately, and those numbers need to come off. Some people move interstate; those numbers need to come off. We are getting closer and closer to a figure where there will not be a disagreement between us anymore and all this nonsense about renegotiation will disappear too, because the numbers will be identical.

Mr De’Ath: I would like to make it very clear to the committee that, despite the issues that we are working through with the commonwealth around data cleansing, the figure that was agreed with the commonwealth on establishment of the scheme in the ACT is a fixed figure and a signed agreement. That is not a point of negotiation, irrespective of where these discussions land.

The other point that I would like to make is that when the NDIA did close off their planning, our primary concern was for the client group and their families. In some cases that was potentially a very distressing event. We stepped in very swiftly to get that back on track. I would also like to acknowledge our sector partners in this space, who were also very vocal at the time and made very solid representation on behalf of the territory.

MRS DUNNE: On the question of the NDIA, the strategic objectives in the annual report talk about the strength and the capacity of people with disabilities to maximise control over their lives. It goes on to say that the transition has been smooth and people have had access to effective support in preparation for the NDIS. Minister, do you agree with that statement, especially in light of the fact that the client satisfaction rate has dropped off from 78 per cent in the previous reporting period to 65 per cent in this reporting period?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Yes, obviously I was not around at the point in time of the 2015-16 year; so I can say that I trust what the officials have put into the annual report. I would also say, when we are looking at transition in terms of the group homes and the way those have transitioned, that it has been an incredibly impressive, thorough process. Certainly the feedback I have had is that that process has been as smooth as, if not smoother than, could have possibly been expected. Obviously, that has also been completed ahead of time and that is because of the hard work that the officials have put in and the staff in those homes have put in to consult with people with disabilities, their families and carers and guardians in that transition.

As the speed of rollout nationally of the NDIS has picked up pace, people’s experiences have changed. The introduction of the my first plan process by the NDIA, as new people have come into the scheme more recently, has had an impact on people’s experience. We have heard of some people who had done significant pre-planning. They then went through just after the my first plan process was introduced. They did not necessarily have the same experience as people who had gone in earlier, who had done pre-planning and who had a very personalised experience in that.

One of the things that we are trying to do at the moment is to gather those individual stories and the experience of service providers who have also obviously experienced some hiccups with the portal and who have made some commentary around the quantum of funding available for particular types of support.

What we are trying to do at the moment is really gather all of that information that people are feeding back to us. I encourage any of you who have that feedback information to make a very robust submission to the Productivity Commission review. But also I am raising those issues at the Disability Reform Council. There is another

DRC meeting later this week; they are done by teleconference.

I regularly also have written communication with the federal minister. There is a lot of communication back and forth around approving different parts of the scheme; the rules and this and that. I take that opportunity to raise issues that have specifically arisen in the ACT context. As Ms Sheehan mentioned earlier, the ACT being the first jurisdiction to go to full rollout means that we have some experiences that it is valuable for us to share with the commonwealth, to share with the NDIA, and to try to improve the rollout across the country.

Mr De'Ath: If I could add to that, chair, acknowledging that it is not actually in the annual report, I think it is very important to remember that this is an absolutely massive reform that is being undertaken. What has become very apparent to us—indeed, we have received very clear direction from the minister on this matter—is our ongoing role in the territory government in terms of monitoring and advocacy and managing with the commonwealth on behalf of ACT citizens. That is a very important role that we have mobilised to undertake and, moreover, to gear up a little more to make sure that we are absolutely monitoring this carefully and across the different aspects of representation that need to be made.

MRS DUNNE: In the reporting period you note that there were about 1,050 clients who had not yet received an approved plan. What would the number be now and what are the things that cause people to be still waiting for plans? Is it the time at which they entered the program?

Ms Sheehan: I am sorry, Mrs Dunne. We would not be able to answer the question about how many people are still waiting for an approved plan. In our reporting period, because we were transitioning through, we estimated that we were transitioning through 5,025 people. We were able to say who the people were that had not gone through yet. But we would need to get the data from the National Disability Insurance Agency itself about people who were still waiting for an assessment or who had received an assessment, found to be eligible but who were still waiting to undertake the planning process.

MRS DUNNE: That is right; there are two phases.

Ms Sheehan: Yes, that is right.

MRS DUNNE: It is assessment of eligibility, then the plan.

Ms Sheehan: And then the plan, yes.

MRS DUNNE: Thanks.

MS LE COUTEUR: I would like to ask a question about a couple of one-off programs. Advocacy for inclusion had funding of \$150,000 to assist people living in supported accommodation or institutional settings to develop their self-advocacy skills. I am interested in how many people were assisted. But, more than that, why was this one-off funding? Presumably there is a continuing demand for it.

Ms Sheehan: Could you please refer me to the page in the annual report?

MS LE COUTEUR: Page 34, promoting self-advocacy, the second last paragraph.

Ms Sheehan: Thank you, Ms Le Couteur. That is specifically funded under the sector development program. I am going to ask Ms Starick to talk about this. When I was talking about the \$12 million investment that was available, I focused very much on how we help organisations change and then how we help staff change. But the most important thing was: how do we help people with a disability move into the new environment? Supporting them to make choices and decisions and to advocate was an incredibly important part of what we did. Ms Starick was the inaugural director of the NDIS task force with a particular specialisation in assisting in programs that assisted people with disabilities, so I am going to hand over to her.

Ms Starick: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. In preparation for transition to the NDIS we took a very broad view of the sector and who needed to be ready for, as you have said, the massive social reform the NDIS represents. Our primary cohort were people with disabilities and their families.

With the funding we received from the commonwealth, the experience that people with disabilities and their carers had provided us and the information provided through previous surveys, we developed a program called the enhanced service offer. That was two grant rounds that Ms Sheehan mentioned earlier that allowed people with disabilities to receive funds through a grant program of \$7 million and then use those funds in a way that addressed a particular need that was important to them.

Over 3,000 people received a grant through that program. They then approached the sector and the sector was then asked to respond to their needs, as in a market situation, without us actually affecting their base funding. This funding was on top of their existing funding through the ACT government. They could then learn from what people with disabilities were choosing and prepare to reorient their businesses to respond to those changes, if there were changes in trends in demand.

We then undertook to provide the information around different market trends and purchasing trends that we received from the ESO to providers so that they could then use that information when they were applying for their business infrastructure grants or investment packages and the other market supports that we provided.

We found that one of the things that people with disabilities needed was somebody to help walk them through a process such as this. From the learning of the ESO, we then developed the program of supports around individual advocacy in a transition environment. Of course, the NDIS is continuing to fund advocacy so that people have representation and support when they are having a discussion about what is important to them and the services they would like to receive.

MS LE COUTEUR: So the answer to my question is you believe it is not actually one off and the NDIS is continuing to fund that? Have I got it right?

Ms Starick: Yes, advocacy is continuing.

MS LE COUTEUR: The question was around the self-advocacy that you funded: advocacy for inclusion—

Ms Starick: So advocacy for self-advocacy is—

MS LE COUTEUR: You funded advocacy for inclusion to do self-advocacy training.

Ms Starick: Yes, it can be funded.

MS LE COUTEUR: So I think you are saying that this is now funded through NDIS; or am I not understanding you?

Ms Starick: Individual advocacy can be funded through an individual package through the NDIS.

MS LE COUTEUR: But are not people going to need advocacy to get the first package, or have I lost it somewhere?

Ms Starick: No, there is still advocacy funded in the ACT for people with disabilities, individual advocacy. Systemic advocacy is a different approach and is a more systemic approach for people with disabilities and their capacity to participate in the community.

MS LEE: Does that funding go to training for carers of people with a disability or is it limited to people with a disability?

Ms Sheehan: Over the period of implantation of the NDIS and the \$12 million that we have talked about a lot, quite a lot of funding was provided to assist carers and families to participate with the person with a disability in the planning process. The way I would like to characterise one of the paradigm shifts as we move to the NDIS is that in the past, with the severe shortage of funding to people with a disability, in that system of scarcity, advocacy is incredibly important because you are competing against so many people for the scarce resources.

As we move into the new paradigm, which is, “You will be funded for reasonable and necessary supports under the NDIS”, it is not the same environment of massive competition for really scarce resources. It becomes more about, “I can now control and choose who is going to provide a service to me. So what I need isn’t an advocate to get me the scarce money; I need someone to help me think about what I would like to see in my plan,” and then working with the NDIA to get the plan. It is another one of those paradigm shifts.

All of the support we put into working with people with a disability and families to plan for a different future has been about that paradigm shift. In terms of advocacy, advocacy will now be a lot around, “If I’ve got a level of dissatisfaction with my plan, what do I do?” In fact, the NDIA itself is funding ADACAS to assist people to do internal appeals and even appeals to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. Again, it is just moving into this new exciting environment where it is going from, “I’ve got to get the scarce resource” into “I need a plan for how my life can be different and I want to be in control of my fate and my plan”.

MS LE COUTEUR: Okay. The other question I was going to ask was about the housing options facilitator, which role was ceasing in September 2016. I understand this was basically facilitating disabled people's housing options. Has this been absorbed somehow into NDIS or—

MRS KIKKERT: Can I just say something? After this question, can we move onto the next topic, because we only have 45 minutes to cover two more areas. Is that okay Caroline?

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes, this is my last question anyway.

Ms Sheehan: Thank you for that question. The housing options facilitator, again in that different environment with scarcity of resources, that person was working with people with a disability and families to look at issues of, "If I'm not going to live in my parents' home forever, what are some of my housing options going to be?" Very often, because the number of group homes was quite limited, parents were looking for, "What housing can I get and what support can I get?"

In an NDIS environment, if you need to live in supported accommodation, you will get a package from the NDIS to cover that. Then there are other options around affordable housing, "What might be some other housing options for me?" They are the sorts of issues that are being dealt with down in OneLink, where, for example, the Real Estate Institute are providing information about housing options.

Ms Gilding and Minister Berry will talk about other work around social housing and social housing reform. Again, in the new environment, the NDIS picks up a lot of the housing issues that were previously around. Then there are other affordable housing options that are being dealt with by Housing ACT.

THE CHAIR: We will now move on to early intervention services and child youth protection services.

MRS DUNNE: Together, serially?

THE CHAIR: I do not mind, but I think doing them together is probably best. We have already touched on a lot of early intervention.

Minister, could you provide an update on the A step up for our kids out of home care strategy and how that is being implemented?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I could, but I probably would not do it as articulately as others.

Mr De'Ath: I will open this first by saying that many of you will be aware I am relatively new to the role and to the ACT. This is quite a phenomenal piece of policy work and initiative that is well into implementation now. I previously had significant responsibility in this space in Victoria and I must say that I am particularly impressed by the work that we have underway here. I will hand over to Ms O'Leary to talk you through where we are at with the implementation, but I wanted to preface it with that

remark.

Ms O’Leary: I have the responsibility for the A step up for our kids implementation. Over the past 12 months we have seen a significant amount of change as far as establishing A step up for our kids is concerned. As you may be aware, the majority of the past 12 months has been around completing the procurement process to identify the partners that we will be working with in A step up and then starting to establish the services.

I would like to touch on what A step up is about before we start talking about what has been established. A step up for our kids aimed to have a look at our out of home care system to make sure that we can stem the rate of growth of children entering out of home care, so implementing some preventative strategies to keep families together, basically. The ultimate aim is to stop kids from coming into care. But then if they do enter care, the other element of that is to try either to restore them home as quickly as possible or provide them with stable, permanent placements. That is ultimately what we are aiming to do.

A step up for our kids has three core domains or planks. The first one is strengthening high-risk families, which is where we actively engage with those families whose children are at risk of coming into care and help them through targeted supports to keep their family together. Another plank is the continuum of care, which is about maintaining placement stability and giving children a safe home for a long period of time and also implementing a trauma-informed therapeutic support to look after their particular trauma needs. The third element is around establishing a strength and accountability framework and creating a high performing system. That is really what the strategy is about and it is a five-year reform program.

The past 12 months was about the procurement; identifying who was going to deliver those services for us. From January this year most of those services came into place. Throughout the year we stood a lot of the services up, so by October 2016 we were pretty much up and running and into the actual implementation phase of the step up. That is the journey we have been on over the past 12 months.

MRS DUNNE: If someone reports mandatorily or otherwise a child at risk, what are the processes? Where are the contact points? Where are they in the departments and where are they in the service providers outside? Could you talk us through a typical substantiation of harm and how you would react and who does what to whom?

Mr De’Ath: Thank you for your question, Mrs Dunne. We will refer that to Ms Pappas.

Ms Pappas: I was in transit, so I would not mind you repeating the question.

MRS DUNNE: With new service providers in place, if someone makes a report of a child at risk, how is that handled through to substantiation and beyond?

Ms Pappas: I acknowledge the statement. In the context of how the child protection system receives information, ordinarily it is somebody out in the community has identified that they are concerned. They do not have to make a determination whether

a child is at risk or not; they have to form a reasonable suspicion that they believe a child may be at risk. The process is that they would ordinarily call in or communicate with the system in some way and then our staff make a determination about what then to do with that information based on what they hear from the reporter and other information we already have within our system.

They also then go through a process of gathering information. So if it related to an eight-year-old and had something to do with education and not attending, ordinarily we would call the school, we would call police. We try to get some information to get a real sense of how you make a determination about risk. If the child protection service decided that there was substantial concern for that child, then we would make a decision about doing an appraisal.

This is really a process that is very focused on the individual circumstances of that family. An appraisal is an investigation of allegations, and our staff go out and speak to—

MRS DUNNE: Sorry, Ms Pappas, when you say “our staff” you mean directorate staff?

Ms Pappas: Directorate staff.

MRS DUNNE: At this stage we are still working in the directorate?

Ms Pappas: Within the directorate, yes. But we have gathered information over the course of that day and following days to make sure that the information that we have is current, accurate and we are informed about what is happening in that family.

Our two directorate staff go out and interview a series of people. That could be the mandatory reporter or a voluntary reporter if it was a neighbour or somebody that knew the family, the parents either together or separately, and children as required. They put the concerns to those people and then make a determination about whether those children or that child is safe or not in that family home.

If we believe a child is at some risk, you can substantiate that. So you can say, yes, balance of probability is that something has happened to this child. That does not mean that that child needs to come out of that home. What it means is that we have got to respond in some circumstances to put services into that family to maintain those children at home. That is actually the preferred method; we do not want children to come in, but we do want children to be home safely and supported. Substantiation does not itself trigger children coming out of home.

In those circumstances where we think we can maintain children at home with the right services, that is, when you see our partners in the community organisations under the step up for our kids reform. Uniting, for example, would come out with the directorate staff and talk to families about what they can offer and how are they going to support keeping those kids home safely. The child protection worker sets the bottom line, “What we need to see is this. You need to respond. You need to get some support. You need to agree to this, and we would be satisfied if you did that, that those kids can stay home.” Then we work alongside our step up partners to maintain

those kids home safely.

Sometimes they do need to come into care, because we cannot be sure that kids are going to be safe. Again, our step up partners walk alongside us in those decisions in terms of offering either a short-term crisis placement until services can go into that family home or something that is a bit more permanent or long term.

MRS DUNNE: If a child comes into care for a lengthy period of time, who is their guardian under the new structure? Is it the director-general?

Ms Pappas: If a child has come in under emergency action, the Children's Court has then considered all of the evidence before it and made a decision. If the child is to remain in care, they come under the guardianship of the director-general.

MRS DUNNE: The Director-General is still—

Mr De'Ath: There is no change.

Ms Pappas: There are different options that the court can take; you might get a shared arrangement.

MRS DUNNE: Yes, but if there is a guardianship decision, that rests with the director-general, as was always the case.

Ms Pappas: It does. That is right.

MS LE COUTEUR: You were talking about A step up. Can you tell me a bit more about ACT Together, who I understand are the service providers? Can you give me assurances that none of those organisations is in fact a profit-making organisation?

Mr De'Ath: In terms of who the providers are—

MS LE COUTEUR: Particularly Premier Youthworks, as I am sure you are aware.

Ms O'Leary: ACT Together is a consortium under the lead of Barnardos. The partners within that are OzChild, Premier Youthworks, Relationships Australia and the Australian Childhood Foundation. As far as I am aware, Premier Youthworks is the only for-profit organisation, but their role is in the provision of residential care services for young people with intensive needs.

Mr De'Ath: In relation to Premier Youthworks, the directorate has appropriately focused on the outcomes we are seeking for the children. There was a procurement process undertaken in terms of the ultimate formation of the consortium. The fact remains that if one of those participants or members of that consortium intends to make a profit, our primary interest is in the outcomes for the young people.

MRS DUNNE: Going on from the point that Ms O'Leary made, does that mean the provision of residential care for high needs young people—these would be young people, not infants or children—is outsourced? There were a variety of places that were essentially in the government portfolio and providing care. Are all of those

outsourced now and what has happened to some of the buildings that were previously used as homes for high needs children?

Ms O’Leary: As part of the establishment of our contract or arrangement with ACT Together—contract is not the right term, because we are contracted with Barnardos, but as part of the consortium—we transferred the leases of the homes to Barnardos. They now manage that portfolio of properties and they have responsibility for identifying appropriate placements for each child who comes into care. That is all based on the assessment of that child’s needs.

As a child comes into care, the directorate conducts therapeutic assessments. Part of that therapeutic assessment process is to identify their particular needs, and, based on those needs, we identify the appropriate type of placement and the support that that child requires. ACT Together then work through their partners or the consortium to find the most appropriate placement for that child, given their needs.

MRS DUNNE: How big is that portfolio of property that was transferred to Barnardos and who is responsible for the maintenance and care of those properties?

Mrs Mitcherson: I can help with that answer. I have read the privilege statement. The houses remain the property of Housing ACT, so we have a regular maintenance program that supports that, which is an asset management system. We also have official visitors going in monthly and doing separate reports to the minister. I have spoken to the official visitors and I know they know the young people individually because they talk to me about them and how they are.

We also have, as well as the Premier Youthworks staff, caseworkers going in there. So there is a lot of activity in the residential homes themselves. It is not just Premier Youthworks or Barnardos caseworkers; it might be our staff going out there. As I say, we own the homes, so we want them to be maintained. We do not want them to be not maintained, and we are very vigorous around that. Helen’s staff went out last September and visited all the homes as well, just as an extra step, which is something we always do. But we do own the properties.

Mr De’Ath: It is probably important, if I can elaborate a little bit, Mrs Dunne, that strengthening the oversight and assurance mechanisms within the directorate through this reform is reasonably significant. You would know about the community visitors who report independently to the minister. I have also met with them; the deputy director-general meets with them; others meet with them.

We also have an oversight committee that has very senior representation from other jurisdictions who oversee all of our work in this particular space. I chair that meeting. That is an incredibly valuable asset to the territory, having the input of those outside experts. I am very pleased to report that the feedback those experts give us on what we are doing here in the territory through this reform, as opposed to what is happening in some other jurisdictions, is extremely favourable. It is very encouraging, and I would actually encourage any jurisdiction to set up an oversight group like that.

MRS DUNNE: What was the genesis of the oversight group?

Mr De'Ath: That is a very good question.

Ms Stephen-Smith: That came out of Glanfield.

Mr De'Ath: The safer families report? Yes, out of the Glanfield report, I think.

Ms Stephen-Smith: It was part of the safer families funding in the last budget.

MRS DUNNE: Can I also ask about the relationship between the care and protection system, Barnardos, the providers and the Public Advocate? The Public Advocate has a statutory role. I presume she will appear before the JACS committee next week. What is the relationship like there? I have been out of the care and protection stuff for four years or so, but Ms Le Couteur would remember that, four or five years ago, the relationship between CSD and the Public Advocate was not great and she was very critical of what was happening. What is the relationship like with the Public Advocate now?

Mr De'Ath: I have personally met the Public Advocate. I will say it is a very constructive relationship. You might want to comment in more detail, minister.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I also met her earlier this week and certainly received positive feedback from her on the relationship. She wants to ensure that there is a positive relationship maintained and that feedback is constructive rather than adversarial in this space. Other people can talk more specifically about the day-to-day relationship.

Ms Pappas: The relationship is a good one; it is a robust one, it would be safe to say. As an oversight, it does need to be. There are open lines of communication. They absolutely identify issues for us to address, and we address them and tell them when we have done that. They have oversight in terms of the child protection system but they also have oversight in terms of the youth justice system. She is also the children's commissioner. The relationship is good, it is growing and we are getting to a point where we have some agreed areas for us to focus on. We will work with the Public Advocate over the course of this year and into the next year, to see what we can do to continue to make our institutions and our systems safer for kids.

Mr De'Ath: The words I would use in terms of these very important relationships with oversight bodies are what I would call a constructive tension. We are very clear about each other's roles. We know when we are engaging with the Public Advocate exactly what the responsibilities and accountabilities are, but we find a constructive way forward through any issues that we might identify.

MRS DUNNE: You would be able to tell the committee that you are meeting your statutory obligations to inform the Public Advocate of those things that the Public Advocate needs to be informed of. Substantiated incidents of harm while a child is in the care of the territory: those things are being reported as and when they arise? That has been an ongoing occasion of failure over a number of years.

Ms Pappas: In the legislation we call them 507s, which is the clause in the legislation.

MRS DUNNE: Yes, I remember that. Thank you, Ms Pappas; it is all coming back to

me.

Ms Pappas: We are here to help. Absolutely; when there is a determination that a 507 is in play, which is a substantiated allegation of abuse or neglect of a child who is in out of home care, that is provided to the Public Advocate. The process backwards and forwards is that if more information is required, if the Public Advocate requests that information, we make our information available to them and we address any concerns they might have in relation to those instances.

THE CHAIR: What initial improvements are you seeing from the early intervention part of the strategy?

Ms Stephen-Smith: If I can just open by saying—and it also relates to Mrs Dunne’s question—we also have a ministerial advisory council with a range of expertise in child safety. The experts in this field overseeing this process meet for a day or two very regularly, every quarter. They meet with the non-government providers and advocates and then with government officials to provide feedback on the overall implementation of the step up process. That has been an ongoing mechanism and that continues.

The reason I raise that specifically in response to your question is because their feedback is that the early intervention aspects of step up are in fact making an enormous difference. They have given figures. I will not give them because they are a bit of a guesstimate, but there are 10s of children and young people who would have been removed from their families but for that early intervention: people who are not in the out of home care system that otherwise would have been. That is incredibly positive feedback from that group of genuine experts chaired by Bev Orr. On that basis I will hand over to Helen to talk more about that process.

Ms Pappas: As I mentioned earlier, the early intervention component is really a tertiary early intervention. These are families where the child protection service and Uniting work together because, if we did not, these children would be in care. I will just take this paper from Catherina. The number of children is 109.

THE CHAIR: Is this at the point of notification being made?

Ms Pappas: Yes. This is at the point where the system is seriously concerned about the safety of the child and, if we were not able to keep them home safely, they would have to come out.

THE CHAIR: They are known to child protection already?

Ms Pappas: Yes, they are known. All of the services under step up are about diverting families from the child protection system. The pathway to those services is usually through the child protection system. From the point of commencement, the Uniting children and families program has seen 109 families, of which 33 are Aboriginal. I do not have on me the number of kids that we have maintained out but, as the minister was saying, there have been about 30-odd children. We can certainly come back to you with the exact number, if that helps, who would have gone into care if Uniting had not been able to engage those families. It is really early days, but we

are optimistic that the skill and the expertise that Uniting bring to the ACT in this space will prove to be very successful in the long run.

MRS DUNNE: I have missed something. Who are Uniting?

Ms Pappas: The Uniting children and families program is the program that Uniting New South Wales-ACT delivers here under the strengthening high risk family domain of step up. This is our prevention, early intervention response for kids to prevent them going into care.

Mr De'Ath: We are deviating into following the specific annual reporting period, but already the cost-benefit of the work that we are doing here has become very clear to us, as I think the minister was saying. There is not a jurisdiction in Australia at the moment that is not suffering from excessive demand in this space. That is very clear, and the territory has not being any different. In fact, it has probably been affected just as much, if not more significantly.

To actually see that the costs are being reduced in terms of what that demand could have looked like, as opposed to what it does look like, is significant. But the money is just one part of the story. This is about better outcomes for young people who are highly at risk. The cost savings are merely a reflection of the fact that we are already being able to keep more young people safe within their families, certainly within kinship care arrangements. In fact, our stats on kinship care—for example, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people—are amongst the highest, if not the highest, in the country at 59.4 per cent. There are some very good outcomes emerging from this, and this is about better outcomes for young people.

MRS DUNNE: In the process of assessing a family that is at risk, do you also look at things like housing problems, poverty and employment? To what extent is the wraparound process complete? You have mentioned the cost-benefit analysis. That is one aspect and it is the one that often gets the Treasury most interested. In providing or assessing those services are you also directing people to employment programs, for instance, or hooking them up with Housing so that they have better and more appropriate housing for their family size and structure?

Mr De'Ath: Mrs Dunne, I am very pleased you have raised this. There are a number of significant drivers, obviously, to what we are managing here at the tertiary end of the system, for example, mental health and drug issues. The housing one is important because we have some direct responsibility and accountability for that. There is indeed a strengthening through this reform about supporting families in that space. I will let either Catherina or Helen talk about just how that happens.

Ms Pappas: The short answer is yes. We know that if you continue to respond to an event you are not going to change the circumstances. We are trying to take a holistic view of the crisis that brought that family to the child protection system. There are a number of mechanisms that we can use. Usually it is through the process of a case conference. Through the assessment process we identify the individual needs. What is going to keep kids home safe? What does this family need? We then invite people to a case conference and declare a care team so that information can be shared freely and openly. Quite often families are there. Sometimes families choose not to participate.

That is the mechanism where we can bring people together, within the context of step up—housing, education, health, police, whatever the issue might—as regularly as we need to in order to support the family to move along. We use that mechanism because information sharing is not problematic in that space.

MRS DUNNE: Services that are provided inside the ACT government like housing are easy. But do you actually get to the stage of saying, “Dad would be less unhappy and there would be fewer relationship problems if he had a meaningful job”? Are you in a position to make those assessments and then try to direct people into that sort of assistance as well?

Ms Pappas: Our staff are very qualified and they have a lot of information about a lot of things, but they are not experts in everything. They are good at looking at the service system and seeing where the expertise lies. In the first instance, the focus of those conferences is around the safety of children. In order to move on to those other longer term issues, we have to resolve the safety of children first. That will always be where we start. Our position is always that the children’s needs are paramount to the adults in their lives. I think that is an important statement and we make best interest decisions in that context. Once we have assessed the situation to be safe for children then we can go on and talk to the family about what else they need. Is it a drug and alcohol response? Is it a domestic violence service response? Is it a housing issue? Is it an education issue? There are a whole lot of things that these families can get access to in a coordinated way through that process.

Mrs Mitcherson: I might just add to that, if I may. With strengthening families we actually put workers, through Uniting, into the family home for up to 20 hours a week. So we are actually working with a parent. It might be one parent alone or two parents. Sometimes, when you are dealing with generational trauma, people do not learn how to parent. They actually need help with what I would call the infrastructure of life type-stuff.

MRS DUNNE: Because they had had the same experience.

Mrs Mitcherson: Yes. I think we have over 100 families at the moment where parents are willing and agree, because it is voluntary, to have someone in the home to help them do all that sort of living stuff; get the kids to school and all that. It is really quite significant. We have a relationship with OneLink and we have the child and family centres. If you can get families to engage in services with young children—because we know that if young children who are engaged in services get to school we can build up that resilience—it may have better outcomes down the track as well.

Housing are part of CSD and we are working very closely—Louise Gilding is here and will speak later—in terms of looking at the role of housing managers. They are a point of contact sometimes to see things in a home that might warrant a referral. They might see that children are not at school or there might be some other issues or some paraphernalia in the home. They can pick up on things. It is about getting into a house or home early and doing referrals early so we do not get to that sort of statutory system. That is the key for the strengthening families in terms of that intensive support in the home. It makes a big difference. I have referred to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. I think a third of the staff running that organisation are

also Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. It is maturing but it is early days. It is very positive.

Mr De’Ath: If it would be helpful to further build this picture for the committee, we have mentioned that generational trauma—and, indeed, the trauma on these young people—is significant. Melaleuca Place is having significant success. While we cannot talk about individual cases, we certainly are very aware of cases that have worked through there for very positive outcomes. We are happy to talk about that.

THE CHAIR: We have only got five minutes.

MRS KIKKERT: I have a question. The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the care of protective services is not reported in the main section of the annual report, either the number or the percentage. Can you explain this omission?

Mr De’Ath: Unless someone else can? I do not think I can. We will have to take it on notice.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I am sorry; could you just point out which part of the report? Do you have a page number?

MRS KIKKERT: It is not in the report.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I know it is not in the report, but which section would you be referring to?

MRS KIKKERT: It would be between pages 71 and 76 or pages 123 and 124.

Mr De’Ath: Would you mind just repeating the question, please?

MRS KIKKERT: Sure. I can move on to the next one and then you can answer that.

MRS DUNNE: There used to be a table showing the number of children in the care and protection system and then the breakdown and there was usually a subset of how many were Indigenous.

Mr De’Ath: I think we have got that.

Ms Pappas: We do. Page 363 is the page you are looking for.

MRS KIKKERT: Thank you.

MS LE COUTEUR: My question is also a 363 question. The youth justice case plan has been completed. You have a target of 90 per cent, but you have only completed 69 per cent. What is happening with the young people whose youth justice plans are not completed? This is a significant underperformance. There have to be some young people who are potentially very adversely affected by this.

Mr De’Ath: Ms Robinson will take that question, Ms Le Couteur.

Ms Robinson: I have read the statement. During this reporting period there was a significant reform process that was underway in child and youth protection services, which was the integration of both care and protection and youth justice. What that materially means for a young person that is receiving a service from both child protection and youth justice is that they now have one case manager. There is a single case management approach to ensure that their holistic needs are met across both the care and protection continuum and the youth justice continuum.

It is fair to say that during this period there was a decrease in productivity related to that indicator, but it is important to understand the count for that indicator. It is really quite a specific count on that data. It is counting that there was a case plan completed within six weeks of the sentencing of a particular young person. It is quite common in the ACT. We actually have a case plan for young people from the moment they are known to our service. So it is quite possible that they had a case plan prior to being sentenced. It is common that as a young person is sentenced they literally walk from the Children's Court down to our office. They are inducted into our service on the same day, so the conversations are commencing with them during that day. Over that six-week period we are engaging with them and engaging with the critical carers in their lives—whether it is their family members, someone that they identify or foster carers—and putting that care plan in place. It is a very specific count. I would not say it is reflective of the work that is happening in that period of time, notwithstanding that it is critical that we continue to work to improve that.

MS LE COUTEUR: That all sounds great, but what is happening to the 31 per cent who have fallen through the cracks because it has taken too long or what have you? What has happened to those kids?

Ms Robinson: In relation to that 31 per cent, what that is measuring is that within that six-week period from the moment that they are sentenced their care plan is not complete, but in actual fact it is highly likely that they have already got a care plan in place that may have been developed in the short time between them being charged or being known to our system and being sentenced and that we are engaging with them during that period. It is an administrative issue for us that we have not completed their care time during that period, but during that six-week period we are actively engaged with them. In fact, it starts from the moment they are sentenced, when they physically walk from the Children's Court down to our office, and that care planning process commences.

Mr De'Ath: I think, Ms Le Couteur, this goes to part of the structure of the reporting arrangements. I think that we should pursue that following these hearings.

MRS DUNNE: I go back to Mrs Kikkert's question. On page 363 we have the number of reports requiring appraisal, the number of protection reports that have been substantiated and the number of children in the care of the territory. But that is not broken down by whether or not those children are Indigenous.

Ms Stephen-Smith: So g is a subset of f.

MRS DUNNE: Yes. But where is the subset of the number of child protection reports

received and proceeding to appraisal that were substantiated and also the total number of children and young people for whom the director-general has parental responsibility? Once upon a time—I am sorry; I have been doing this for too long—they were broken down. There was a subset relating to Aboriginality. It seems to have changed. If there is a good reason for it to have changed—probably on notice at this stage—is there an explanation of why it has changed and if there is not a good reason why it has changed, can you provide that breakdown to the committee?

Mr De’Ath: Obviously I am not familiar with the former reporting format, but I absolutely take your point and I understand the point you are making. I think two issues have been identified in terms of the reporting format for this annual report.

MRS KIKKERT: Yes. That is what I was curious about because it is not on the main page.

Mr De’Ath: Correct.

MRS KIKKERT: We knew it was at the back.

Mr De’Ath: I am sure we will be able to identify the information. We will take that on notice and also pick up on the reporting issues you have identified.

Ms Stephen-Smith: It is clear that that data is available. It is reported in a number of other places.

MRS DUNNE: Yes, I think it is in the ROGS data.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Yes, ROGS reports.

Ms Pappas: It is ROGS; and AIHW report on that data as well.

MRS KIKKERT: A growing number of children are not placed with a kinship group or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers. In fact, the number of kinship placements has decreased over the past 10 years. Can the government explain why 40 per cent of Torres Strait Islander children and young people are placed in residential care with non-Indigenous carers, and why has this number increased over the past 10 years from 35.5 per cent in 2007 to 39.6 per cent in 2017?

Mr De’Ath: Thank you for your question. I think it is reasonable to say that I have previously alluded to the various drivers of what puts young people into the tertiary part of the system. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are no exception to that. I will hand over in a moment to get further detail on this. In essence, there is a very clear process that is followed in decision-making in relation to the placement principles. If, indeed, it is determined that any kinship arrangements are considered to not be in the best interests of the child then we do not go down that path, obviously, with the interests of the child being paramount. It is also fair to say that it is a very challenging space in which to find kinship placements for both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. I will hand over for any further insights that either Ms Pappas or Ms Robinson can provide.

Ms Pappas: The priority, when children come into care, is always to find kin or somebody that that child knows within either their immediate family or their extended family. There is quite a process around trying to track those people down in order to do the right assessments for those kids and then to facilitate the placement. Sometimes those people just do not exist for those kids and the only solution is foster care with people they do not know. But when that happens we are still making efforts to find extended family or have those children returned home. Our direction to staff is always family is the first place and if you cannot find family then we have to look for those other alternatives. Because we have made a decision that kids are not safe we have to find the next best alternative for them.

Mr De'Ath: It is, sadly, probably a natural consequence of increase and demand on the system that the pressure to locate suitable kinship has increased as well and therefore we are unable to perform as well as we would like.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Mr De'Ath mentioned earlier that, relative to other systems, we are not doing terribly badly on kinship placements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the out of home care system. A total of 59.4 per cent of placements are with kin. Obviously, we would like that to be higher. Compared to other jurisdictions and given the small size of our jurisdiction, we want to be better, but it is not a comparatively bad outcome.

Mr De'Ath: It is unfortunate that we claim we are pleased about something when it is in a tragic space. I can only reiterate that placement principles and the best interests of the child are paramount irrespective of what statistically we might like to achieve.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister, for your presence here today. Thank you, everyone.

Short suspension.

Appearances:

Berry, Ms Yvette, Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Women and Minister for Sport and Recreation

Community Services Directorate

Gilding, Ms Louise, Executive Director, Housing and Community Services
Duggan, Mr Frank, Senior Director, Housing and Community Services

THE CHAIR: We will get underway. We are running slightly late. Just a reminder again, this is the first public hearing of the standing committee into annual reports referred to it by the Legislative Assembly. The committee is to inquire into the annual reports by the last sitting day of May 2017. Today the committee will be holding hearings on the Community Services Directorate annual report and from 3.30 to 4.30 we will be considering social housing services and community participation and the office for women.

I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the pink privilege statement before you on the table. Will you please confirm for the record that you have read it and understood the privilege implications of the statement?

Ms Berry: Yes.

THE CHAIR: I remind witnesses that proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes as well as being webstreamed and broadcast. I might start with the opening question if that is okay and we might try just a slightly different process of just going around one question at a time, given we have some guests with us today as well.

Ms Berry: Excuse me, Chair, would it be okay if I start with an opening statement?

THE CHAIR: Sure.

Ms Berry: Thank you. I will try not to be too long so that everybody gets a chance to ask all the questions that they want to ask. I do want to thank the committee for giving me the chance to talk across my portfolio responsibilities as the minister for housing and as the Minister for Women.

The annual report shows the reach and effectiveness of the ACT's social housing system which consecutive Labor governments have grown to be the most significant in Australia. We can see the results of the government's support for the ACT's specialist homelessness services which provided support to 4,652 people in 2015-16, reflecting the ACT government's commitment to provide housing where it is needed most, with 96.8 per cent of new public housing in the ACT allocated to those households who are most in need. This includes people who had been homeless, escaping domestic and family violence, in unhealthy living conditions or who were

facing unaffordable housing costs. Our growing public housing total stock numbers reached 11,688 as of 30 June 2016 and the average stock life is about 30 years.

In 2015-16, 21,850 people were provided with affordable and secure accommodation in public housing through 10,587 tenancies. In 2015-16 there were 591 new tenancies created with approximately 1,230 people in public housing. Of these, 97 per cent were priority and high-needs allocations. In 2015-16, 1,025 public housing tenancies ended, and this includes 467 tenants who moved into alternative accommodation.

With demand on public housing continuing to grow, what the annual report is showing, as well as other recent reports such as the report on government services, is that there is still a clear need for federal funding certainty under the national partnership agreement on homelessness. The commonwealth really does need to do better than the current one-year outlook which creates ongoing uncertainty for service providers and their staff and clients. It means that they have to continually be trying to maintain those service levels whilst having the threat of a funding cut looming over their head because of the federal government's inability to provide some certainty for those service providers. I have consistently advocated for a longer term commitment from the federal government.

Last August I announced new funding arrangements for the ACT's 48 homelessness services where they would have a minimum of three years from 1 July, with the provision of an extension of two years. This provides those service providers with more certainty and the ability to provide those services that are so important to our community.

Just recently, following some media reports around funding cuts by the commonwealth government to the national affordable housing agreement, I called together some key homelessness service providers that would be affected by such a decision. Earlier this week I wrote to a number of federal government ministers, including the Assistant Minister for Social Services, Senator Zed Seselja, to raise the government's concerns.

At a local level the ACT government is committed to a new housing strategy as part of our election platform last October. I initiated the first consultations around this strategy in mid-2016 and I am looking forward to working closely with our housing and homelessness sectors and others in related fields to deliver on this commitment.

In 2015-16 Housing ACT took receipt of 106 dwellings under the public housing renewal program. The public housing renewal program task force will appear at a hearing next Friday, but the scope of this hearing touches on the work that Housing ACT has done to engage with public housing tenants and community service providers to make sure that people are fully informed and supported as the public housing renewal program progresses.

We have been working closely with our tenants over many months to give them time to prepare and express their preferences for their new homes. Tenants are being provided with new homes in advance of the redevelopment of the Northbourne Avenue sites in a case-by-case process based on consultation with each individual's household.

A number of people have already moved into more modern, fit-for-purpose homes which better meet their needs and this process is continuing with tenants who are currently still living in complexes along Northbourne Avenue. Supports in place include dedicated relocation teams assisting tenants throughout the relocation process, shopfronts located at Owen and Allawah courts, the chance to discuss issues at various community events as well as public notices and letters. We have been working closely with these tenants to ensure that those who require additional assistance are supported to move to their next home and are provided assistance for relocation costs such as removal costs and service connections.

In addition to the renewal program, in 2015-16 Housing ACT acquired and constructed 143 properties valued at \$59.9 million. Housing ACT managed the construction of 75 new dwellings ranging from one-bedroom units to six-bedroom homes and from small, multi-unit complexes to stand-alone houses. These new properties were built to a minimum six-star energy rating so that they are not only comfortable to live in but they are also more affordable to run.

With regards to women, the ACT government has continued to address gender inequality, reduce discrimination and create opportunities for women. As you know, we do have a small but robust team in the office for women whom I acknowledge and who have delivered a considerable agenda over the past 12 months.

Probably the most notable achievement for the 2016 year was the development and launch of the ACT women's plan. Since the plan the government has worked hard to develop its first action plan which will deliver initiatives to promote better opportunities, safer communities and better health and wellbeing for girls and women across the ACT. I am looking forward to launching the action plan in coming days.

A significant achievement for the office was also the release of the *ACT domestic violence service system final gap analysis report*. This report was the ACT government's response to family violence and was tabled in the Legislative Assembly in June 2016. It included the appointment of a Coordinator-General for Family Safety. I note that the coordinator-general will be appearing next week before the justice and community safety committee to talk in more depth about the work that is already being delivered under the safer families package.

Other major initiatives delivered in 2015-16 included the women's safety grants which delivered \$290,000 in funding to 12 organisations to focus on anti-violence initiatives; the return to work program which provides guidance and grants of up to \$1,000, assisting 126 women in 2015-2016; and the women's information service provided 2,294 occasions of support to women to access relevant and timely information to make choices that impact their quality of life. The office for women should be happy with the work that they have done to enhance the status of women in the ACT and in doing so build a stronger community in Canberra.

Of course not everything was rosy over the past 12 months and we did have two organisations that closed or are closing their doors and they were Inanna and Capital Community Housing. Both organisations provided services that were well valued by their clients and if the committee would like more information about the process for

both of those organisations and the assistance that Housing ACT provided to the clients and to the employees of those organisations we would be happy to provide more information for you. I will leave it there and look forward to having a chat.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. My question is in relation to public housing tenants moving to private ownership of their own homes. I was wondering: what initiatives have been continued to make home ownership more realistic for public housing tenants?

Ms Berry: Because the ACT government's focus and Housing ACT's focus has been to provide housing to those people in our community who are most in need, we do have only a very small number of tenants in the ACT who pay market rent. However we do have a shared equity scheme that allows those tenants who are in a position to move on from public housing to sharing ownership with the ACT government. That program is available but it is only a very small number of tenants who could be able to afford to be able to participate in that. Louise, did you want to expand on that a little more?

Ms Gilding: Absolutely, thank you, minister. I acknowledge that I have read the statement there. Yes the minister is right: due to the higher targeting of the Housing portfolio over the past decade we have seen fewer and fewer market renters. And one of the exit pathways or one of the exit strategies is through our sustainable income review. We write to tenants who have an income over a certain threshold. That is indexed. I think it started off around \$89,000. We have seen that grow to \$98,000 and I think we are sitting at around \$101,000 in terms of income. But what we have got to understand is the very small number of tenants.

We have a couple of pathways for them. One of those is a shared equity program where they can purchase 70 per cent of the house up-front and then, once they have paid off that much, the 30 per cent at a later stage. Housing retains ownership of the remaining percentage until it is actually purchased outright by the tenant.

In 2015-16 we had 27 active applications. Seven been carried over from the 2014-15 year and then we had 20 new applications. Of those 27 applications, nine properties were sold under the program, 12 did not proceed and then six applications have actually carried over to this year. We have got a target this year of about 10 sales under the shared equity program and we are tracking well to date. We have got about six at the moment on that.

The other one is actual outright sale to the tenant. Not all of our properties are suitable for sale to tenants—obviously if it is in a complex where we do not have strata title or unit title for a tenant to purchase—but certainly there are particular properties that can be available for sale to the tenant. In 2015-16 we had 41 active applications. Six were carried over from the 2014-15 year. There were 35 new applications. Of the 41, 11 were sold, 15 did not proceed, seven properties were not available—they were in that category in terms of the complexes—and again were carried over to this financial year. We have got a target of about nine.

I think the annual report actually details that overall I think we have had 84 properties under the shared equity scheme sold to tenants and I think—I have not quite got the

sales to tenants—again they are similar numbers in terms of the property portfolio.

MR PARTON: Can I ask: under that outright sale who determines the price point? Who determines the price of the house?

Ms Gilding: We would do a market valuation on that.

MRS KIKKERT: My question is in regards to Spotless. What key performance indicators must Spotless meet and did you receive any complaints in 2015-2016 regarding Spotless?

Ms Berry: As you know, the Auditor-General audited the Housing ACT's maintenance provider, which is Spotless, and that was in April last year. Then in August last year I announced that the maintenance contract would go out to tender. We have been working through all of the recommendations, the 18 recommendations, that were made in the Auditor-General's report on the maintenance contract in Housing ACT and the work that Housing ACT was doing with Spotless to implement all of those recommendations. I understand a number of them have been resolved and completed. Most of them are being worked through and are on their way to completion. Is that right?

Mr Duggan: That is correct.

Ms Berry: Some of the issues that were raised were around some of the quality of the maintenance that was provided by Spotless to Housing ACT tenants. And that has been part of the work that Housing ACT has been doing in making sure that Spotless does provide the service that we expect as a government to some of our most vulnerable residents here in the ACT that we are responsible for as well. Frank has been the person responsible for doing all of that work; so he is probably the best person to give you some more detail on that.

Mr Duggan: There are 16 key performance indicators for Spotless. We manage Spotless through what we call the performance management system. They deal with routine properties, vacancies, maintenance, call centre operations, complaint management decisions and condition audits, the state of the condition of the actual property over a five-year period. Then we actually measure them against repairs and the speed of those repairs. Each repair is categorised into a triage, maybe four hours for an emergency for health and safety or security purposes right through to 20 days for routine maintenance. We manage their work audits and how many work orders they actually achieve in a monthly period and also manage their budget.

Within the key performance indicators, of the 16 that they have, 14 are tracked and are an abatement or an incentive, depending on how they track. We manage them monthly through a data interface and then we categorise which of those receive abatements and which receive incentives.

In relation to the Auditor-General's report, as indicated by Minister Berry, 14 of the 18 recommendations have now been completed. The Auditor-General did make very strong statements about the governance structures and how they managed those, the contract structure itself, the comprehensiveness of KPIs and also the fact of the

financial controls within the contract.

The Auditor-General asked us to concentrate on quality assurance mechanisms going forward. They asked us to look at a new KPI regime which we are devolving as part of the new procurement and also how we actually dealt with planned and responsive maintenance. So we are very well on track to meet the Auditor-General's recommendations. They were handed to us in June and, as I say, 14 of those have been completed fully.

Ms Gilding: If I could just add, you asked specifically how many complaints have been received. In the 2015-16 year Spotless handled 414 complaints and certainly since the Auditor-General's report we have been actively engaging with tenants through our joint champions group, through survey work, to make sure that in this new procurement process we have a definite feedback and the tenant voice actually comes through.

Ultimately the contract is about delivering services to our tenants and in their houses. They are a vulnerable client group and we want to make sure that that interface is working smoothly and that Spotless is actually responsive in all of their systems to the tenants. For example, they have certainly made some critical changes in their call centre so that when tenants call up they have actually got the right people on the end of the phone in terms of people who are able to communicate well with our cohort.

Ms Berry: One of the other things that we are looking at for Spotless employees is front-line training around domestic and family violence to make sure that they can properly provide support where they need to and have some understanding about the issues for some of those ACT Housing tenants.

Ms Gilding: That is right.

MR PETTERSSON: On a different tack, what is the government doing to help sustain vulnerable Canberrans in public housing tenancies that they may be in?

Ms Berry: That work is done through OneLink now. Is it still through Woden Community Service as well?

Mr Duggan: Yes.

Ms Berry: Woden Community Service work with tenants not just in public housing but in private rentals to maintain their tenancies. They act like a broker, to put them in touch with different kinds of support services to manage their finances so that they can continue their tenancies, primarily in private rentals more than public housing, but in public housing as well. OneLink have the contract for the housing gateway, which we can talk about in a bit more detail soon. That service, which is about maintaining people's tenancies rather than public housing being the only option for them, has been really important and it is a really good success story. From what I understand from Woden Community Service, it has been working really well.

Ms Gilding: We take very much a whole service system approach. We see our role in public housing as one part of that service system. Certainly, we have people who need

help and support to sustain tenancies outside that. There might be a variety of reasons in terms of events that happen in life that mean they need extra help at that time.

Generally, clients will call OneLink. We will do an initial assessment. In terms of the priority that is placed on that, they might have a need for supports or they might have a need for accommodation. Somebody might actually have a roof over their head. They might have a tenancy already in place. One of the things that Woden does is to step in and provide that support to maintain that tenancy in the private sector.

We also have a lot of our wraparound services. We have made some quite significant reforms in terms of the public housing tenancy management space. I might hand over to Mr Duggan to talk about the MTS reforms.

Mr Duggan: Modernising tenancy services was our articulation of the blueprint principles that were part of the CSD human services blueprint. We wanted to move away from a purely tenancy management service to a person-centred service so that we could tailor services to clients in a more focused way. In doing that we examined the demographics of our profile of tenants, and what issues were facing them. We then developed a fairly detailed service delivery framework whereby we could work with tenants more readily and accept that each tenant may present with different issues. Some are at a very low level. The majority of our tenants get on with their lives, but there are a good 20 per cent in any given period that we intervene with in a more assertive manner.

We developed an intake process coupled with the OneLink program whereby we assess issues pertaining to tenants. We look at how we can engage them and how we can follow up. Under the Residential Tenancies Act you are allowed to visit within 90 days of a tenancy. We negotiate three visits with the tenant's permission, so that we can get them up and running, and work with the agencies that are working with them to sustain their tenancy.

When tenants get through the three months, and if they are very stable, they go into our normal tenancy service. We started to realise that at least 20 per cent of tenants do not need a yearly visit. They are doing exceptionally well, they are feeling empowered and they are working. They are like everyone else in a rental property in the community. We have used that resource to build what we have called our intensive service system. There was a question earlier about sustaining tenancies. From our perspective, we have developed an intensive team, which we call the intensive tenant support community connections officers. They work with people who are exhibiting either complex issues vis-a-vis behaviour or maybe have mental health or other issues.

MR PETTERSSON: How many people are engaging with these services? I know there is probably a bit of a scale to it, in terms of intensive and—

Mr Duggan: With intensive, we average about 50 portfolios. So at any one time there are between 300 and 500 tenants that we will have put in the intensive service provision. The length of that service provision could be very low, depending on what issues we have. But there is an absolute flexibility to engage and work with people for a longer period. With our normal tenancy portfolio in our normal support program there are about 250 houses or tenancies per staff member. The intake team deals with

the numbers of people who come through; on average, about 400 or 500 new tenancies a year.

MR PETTERSSON: Ultimately, what is the risk for these individuals in the short term and the long term if they cannot sustain a tenancy?

Mr Duggan: We work exceptionally hard to sustain tenancies. We have a very low eviction rate. As you will see from the annual report, I think there were 19 evictions last year. We will engage people very actively and we will continue to engage them. We see eviction as a last resort because we do not want to make people homeless. That is the work we do. We will link in to other service systems and other providers, both in the intake period with OneLink, which gives a lot of support, and as we work with clients throughout their tenancy; we really focus on sustaining them.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, how many people in the ACT are homeless at the moment as opposed to those who are waiting on the list for housing assistance?

Ms Berry: What has been good about the ACT's OneLink, and that one human services gateway, is that we have been able to identify, better than with any other kind of census data, the exact numbers, because we know our people. We are a smaller jurisdiction and we have the agility and ability to be able to get to know the people who are seeking homelessness support or are experiencing homelessness right now. Are you after the census figures, because they are a bit out of date?

MRS DUNNE: No, your best assessment of how many people are homeless. If you think that your gateway data is better than the census, which is very static—

Ms Berry: Yes, at a point in time.

Ms Gilding: There are a number of different datasets, as the committee probably well knows. The census is the main dataset in terms of the prevalence of homelessness. We are all certainly waiting for the release of the new data to come out.

MRS DUNNE: Because it is five years old now.

Ms Berry: Yes, that is right.

MRS JONES: What are the numbers?

Ms Gilding: In terms of—

MRS JONES: Both ours and the census. What are the numbers?

Ms Gilding: In terms of how the census actually defines “homelessness”, you have to drill down into that dataset, in terms of the different categories that they were looking at. There are people who are sleeping rough. They are the folk who are sleeping out. In the census data we had 0.8 per 10,000. That was about 29. Today, in terms of the best number that I have, about 27 people here in the ACT are sleeping rough. All of those folk are known to our services, such as street to home, the night patrol and the early morning centre. We actively outreach to provide support. I think all of those

27, bar two, are engaging in some sort of support. Of course, there are various issues and complexities that those people are dealing with which empower them, or not, to be able to do that.

If we keep going through that census data, we come down to the category which is the anomaly for the ACT, and that is people in supported accommodation. Within our homelessness system we have about 314 accommodation places at any given time with our 28 specialist homelessness housing providers. That figure, however, throws our ratio out. We have the highest rate of any jurisdiction of people who are in supported accommodation.

When you add that in to the census data, along with people staying temporarily at other households, people staying in boarding houses, other temporary lodging or in severely overcrowded dwellings, you get a very high figure for the ACT, which is why we have that rate of 50 per 10,000 of population. You take out that 30 and all of a sudden we are looking very good in terms of our figures.

MRS DUNNE: Ms Gilding, can you explain to us why we have a higher representation of supported accommodation? My recollection is that that has been the case for a very long time. In the old state of the territory reports it was something that was reported on and marked. Are you saying that we are doing more in supported accommodation or that it is harder to get people out of supported accommodation and move them on, out of supported accommodation? What are the factors?

Ms Berry: The thing is that we are investing more in supported accommodation and supporting people who are experiencing homelessness or are in homelessness. We are giving them support for longer, which means that, in the end, there will be better outcomes for them and their families. That is the short answer.

Ms Gilding: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: Is everybody in supported accommodation necessarily homeless? For instance—

Ms Berry: By definition they are.

Ms Gilding: By the ABS definition, yes.

MRS DUNNE: So the people who are in crisis accommodation—

Ms Gilding: Correct.

MRS DUNNE: Shelters?

Ms Gilding: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: That comes under that supported accommodation definition?

Ms Gilding: Correct.

MRS DUNNE: If they move from a shelter to something which is more permanent, so that they can get themselves back on track, that is still counted as supported accommodation?

Ms Gilding: It is a fine line there in terms of what we call a stable tenancy. If it is just couch surfing or in somebody's room, it is still considered homelessness, but if there is an occupancy agreement, a tenancy agreement or that becomes an address, it does not make it into the homelessness count.

MS LE COUTEUR: I refer to page 77. In 2015 you worked with the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute to do a review of the effectiveness of the ACT government's affordable housing action plan. This ended up producing a discussion paper. What happened to the discussion paper?

Ms Gilding: That discussion paper was used to inform the community consultation that we did last July with the minister. That informed the discussion paper that went to those participants there. We certainly have followed that up with a communique and outcomes in terms of that workshop. Minister, do you want to talk more about what we are doing there?

Ms Berry: Yes. The parliamentary agreement states that we will hold a housing affordability summit, which we will do. In the meantime we are working on making sure that, through that conversation we are having with the community, it goes beyond just the normal stakeholders, the homelessness providers and supportive services. It will also include advocates, people like ACTCOSS in community services, education experts, and it will really dig deep into the issue in the ACT. We used that paper as the start of a conversation with a group of people last year to see how we were going to address the system in the ACT, with the levers that we have responsibility for, and how we could actually do something with it.

At the same time as we are doing that, we are waiting to hear from the federal government about what they are going to do with their funding. We have that uncertainty around the NPA, which seems to have a 12-monthly waiting program for all the services. We also have the national affordable housing agreement. Every single state and territory minister is absolutely red hot to have a conversation about how we can provide more affordable housing and better services to people in our community and make sure that those support services are continuing to do the best they possibly can to support people who need it. At the same time, while we are doing all of this, we have this threat of that funding being withdrawn.

That is a real challenge for service providers, and it is not the best way for a federal government to proceed. Four ministers in the federal government are involved. They are all basically saying to service providers that they are not doing a really good job. With all of the NAHA funding that they are saying they do not want to continue with or that they want to change, they are saying there have not been any proven outcomes. All of us know of outcomes and support services that have been provided, and that people have been provided with support into housing or more permanent accommodation or other kinds of support, drug and alcohol or rape crisis support. All of that comes out of the national affordable housing agreement.

We have seen the outcomes and the difference that it can make in people's lives. So to say that it does not give any outcomes and does not make any difference is just rubbish.

MS LE COUTEUR: Is the discussion paper available anywhere?

Ms Gilding: Certainly, we can provide it to the committee.

MS LE COUTEUR: Thank you.

Ms Gilding: The AHURI work was very informative in that it really honed the problem for us. You can look across the housing ecosystem, in terms of reducing homelessness, strengthening public housing assistance, affordable rental and affordable purchase. What it really showed, when we did some of that data analysis, was that we have a shortfall. It probably will not surprise people that we have a shortfall of affordable rental for those folk in Q2. If you are in public housing, you are okay; you are not in housing stress. But if you just fall outside that and you are not eligible in terms of income tests and what have you, it can be quite difficult to find an affordable rental property, even more so because we have what we call the crowding out effect, in terms of those people on higher incomes.

MRS JONES: Did you want to go housing first so that members can ask the questions relating to women afterwards?

MR PETTERSSON: Yes.

MR PARTON: Mine is a relatively broad question. If you want a reference point in the report, it would be page 78, figure 9, delivering and managing housing services. In recent years we have seen enormous pressure placed on homelessness services and all forms of public and social housing. Your public housing applicant list at all levels is still very high. The waiting time for all forms of public housing remains quite high. Under that scenario, how is it possible that we have a declining number of people in public housing tenancies? If we follow that diagram through to the end, why is the number of housing properties beginning to exceed public housing tenancies? That has happened since 2014-15. It is almost as though so many people that want to get on this train cannot get on and there are empty seats on the train. How does that happen?

Ms Gilding: That is a very good question. It is a very astute question in terms of the story that this particular graph is actually telling us. I am going to take the committee to page 78 and talk about the green line that you see there. That green line shows, as you rightly pointed out, the number of people in public housing. As you also see, it is falling. That is not so much about the number of overall properties that we have, which is the black line. It is relatively stable and, in actual fact, we saw an uptake of around 92 properties. But what that is showing is a different cohort of people in our houses and also a different dwelling mix.

MRS DUNNE: Smaller family sizes?

Ms Gilding: Exactly right. So we have seen a decrease. In terms of our occupancy rate, it was 1.9 in 2014-15. That dropped to 1.8 this year. But that is because we have

a lot of single-person households, but then also we have a lot of large families at the other end. We have a stock that sits in that middle because it is a legacy from the commonwealth in terms of the three-bedroom houses that housed commonwealth public servants when they moved here back in the 60s and 70s. That is what you see there.

However, what you have also there, in terms of the green bar, is the number of actual tenancies within public housing. The purple bar is actually the number of properties within public housing. You can see that there are a couple of gaps there. There is a gap between the green one and the purple one and then there is also that gap between that black line.

We also have a significant number of properties that we call head leased in the community sector. There are about 600-odd. That is that gap you see between the purple and the black lines there. They are people like Havelock Housing Association, ECHO and all of the supported places—the 314 accommodation places that I was talking about under the specialist homeless sector—that sit within that gap.

You will then notice that there is a gap between the green bar and the purple bar. What we have also got to remember about housing data is that it is point in time. This is a snapshot for that one day. What you all know is that we have got the public housing renewal program. It is quite a significant program where large multi-unit properties of, say, 144 folk are moved. Prior to those moves, that stock becomes vacant. Those vacant numbers stay on my count, on my numbers, until such time as the full property is vacated. Then we transfer that over to the Economic Development Directorate for their part in that process.

What you see there is that gap of about 300 tenancies. Of those 300 tenancies, 165 of them were what we call untenable because they were in that redevelopment pathway. The rest of them are general vacant process and the general churn of public housing stock in general.

Mr PARTON: Excellent. Thank you very much.

MRS JONES: Can we move to the women's portfolio?

THE CHAIR: I am happy to move to women. I have a question that relates to the national partnership agreements. I just want to know how many—

MRS JONES: Chris, can I confirm that we will come back to this after your question?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

MRS JONES: Back to here?

THE CHAIR: Yes, we will. We will go around. But new members will have a priority.

MRS JONES: Of course.

Ms Berry: Are we going to women or are we staying—

THE CHAIR: We are going to move on to women, but this is broadly a question that actually overlaps. It is in relation to the national partnership agreements. How many housing organisations that have a family violence focus are actually funded by the commonwealth— not by the ACT government but by the commonwealth?

Ms Berry: It is matched funding; so it is about \$3 million altogether.

Ms Gilding: I think it's a little bit more, about \$4 million.

Ms Berry: About \$4 million that the commonwealth contributes.

THE CHAIR: It would be very useful if you could take on notice which ones those are and potentially how much?

Ms Gilding: Yes, absolutely. Can do.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MRS KIKKERT: I refer to page 57 of the Community Services annual report where it states that the community participation group comprises a number of units, including the office for women. What funding is allocated to the office for women for 2017-20 and what activities are funded?

Mr De'Ath: Thank you, Mrs Kikkert. Ms Sheehan will respond.

Ms Sheehan: Thank you for that question. The answer is that the community participation group is a broad group of about 29 full-time equivalent staff. The totality of that 29 staff support all of the offices that sit within the community participation group. None of the offices has dedicated discrete staffing. The office for women has the resources available, 29 people available, to assist. We have got the office for women, the office for multicultural affairs, the office for disability, the office for seniors and veterans and youth engagement. Also, we do community recovery and the committee has heard a lot about that today already.

We have seven areas of responsibility. What we do is divide the work across the staffing profile generally. We can see what peak periods for the offices are across the year. We draw in resources to the peak periods. For example, the minister was saying she is about to release the first action plan under the 10-year plan for women. She will release that on the day before International Women's Day at the Women's Awards. There is a bevy of activity going on over in Theo Notaras at the community participation group organising the awards, finalising the plan and so on.

Two weeks ago there was a huge amount of effort across those 29 staff and elsewhere in the Community Services Directorate working on the Multicultural Festival. The committee will see from the annual report that we actually have for most of those areas a high level 10-year strategy which sets the policy framework for all of our activities. We have the positive ageing framework, we have the multicultural

framework, we have the 10-year women's plan and so on. All of those plans have been developed within the community participation group. You would imagine that at the time those plans are being developed there was massive effort in the development of the high level strategies.

What I cannot say is that there are five women or four women in the office for women, but what I can tell you is that there are 29 staff who are full-time devoted to providing support across all of those portfolio areas.

Mr De'Ath: I can add to that, and I acknowledge the privilege statement.

MRS DUNNE: I think once is enough.

Mr De'Ath: I think this needs to be said about the 29 people across a range of portfolios like this: if we were to focus on the outcome, as opposed to the number of people, there are somewhat significant achievements that are generated out of this team of people. You have heard that it is multidisciplinary in nature. It is extremely well managed to deliver on the range of work. I remind the committee that if we think of the territory public service, it is about 100th the size of the commonwealth public service. Translate that, for every 100 people you see doing something in the commonwealth, we have one. I want the committee to note that. There are significant achievements out of this small group of people who deliver across a range of portfolios very, very comprehensively.

MS LE COUTEUR: I direct your attention to page 61, which shows a very nice graph. It says at the top that there were 2,294 occasions of support provided. If you add up all the bits in the circle—I have just re-added it on my phone as we were waiting—there are 1,636 actually, which is a 658 difference.

Ms Berry: It might be that there were double-ups on the—

MS LE COUTEUR: I am wondering how you got the figures.

Ms Sheehan: I apologise; we will have to check.

MS LE COUTEUR: Okay.

Mr De'Ath: We can take that on notice, Ms Le Couteur.

MS LE COUTEUR: Take that on notice. Okay.

Ms Sheehan: My apologies. I generally add up all the figures on my own calculator as well.

MS LE COUTEUR: No worries.

MRS DUNNE: Perhaps you did not have enough fingers on it.

MS LE COUTEUR: Regardless of which number it was, I have a few questions. In the previous year it was 604, which is significantly different. Have you changed how

you are counting your data? How are you actually establishing what is a service?

Ms Sheehan: Thank you for that question, Ms Le Couteur, because the committee is probably aware that several years ago, perhaps four years ago, the nature of the women's information service changed. It came in to have the service directly provided by the office for women. One of the limitations of the old service model was that basically women had to come into the shopfront to get a service or they pretty much did not get a service.

We were not counting all of the things that were done in that office. As the service moved across to the office for women, it was being provided in a different way, including outreach provisions of service. We had not really nailed how to count those different service types. What you would see over the years is that all the time as we were improving our service delivery we were actually trying to find a better way of capturing a service type.

One year, for example, we included hits on the website. That is provision of information. I think most people would say that it is not necessarily a service type. So this now reflects what we believe is a good grouping of what constitutes a service type. Subject to fixing up that problem that the numbers there do not add up to 2,294, the occasions of service should actually reflect what would generally be seen by this committee and in the community as the provision of a service rather than a piece of information, if you see what I mean.

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes. Mrs Jones and I are reflecting on the fact that in the past a lot was done by email and a lot was done on your website.

MRS JONES: The numbers were given.

MS LE COUTEUR: I think that at 604 you are possibly under-representing the past. But what I am probably more concerned about is that today people do not always come in to get service. I want to make sure that you actually pay attention to the non face-to-face methodologies, given you that have said that you are counting only the more face to face. Today there have to be other ways of doing things.

Ms Sheehan: What I meant to say was that in the past we were pretty much counting the face to face but, then, over the years we have tried to get a better capture of it.

MRS JONES: I think at the time of the closure of the women's information referral service there were numbers given to us about the thousands of emails that were received and responded to every year; so it was not just face to face that were being counted.

Ms Sheehan: No, but it is—

MRS JONES: It is incorrect.

Ms Sheehan: I am sorry, I did not mean to say that that is the only thing that we counted, but some of the things that we were counting did not seem to us to reflect a service type. Receiving an email is not actually a service. Someone hitting on our

website is not necessarily a service. We just tried to get better at describing what a service is, understanding it and then counting that so the statistics are meaningful. The minister is reminding me that, of course, outreach support includes to the child and family centres and to OneLink.

MS LE COUTEUR: Is your definition the same as that used by the child and family services centres?

Ms Sheehan: No, it will not be identical to what a child and family service occasion of service is. We do not have one single definition of an occasion of service across the Community Services Directorate.

MS LE COUTEUR: That might be something to look at and also to make sure about. I notice that you have not got a website at all here. I appreciate that a hit does not necessarily mean much, but it does not mean that we should forget about that methodology either.

Ms Berry: But the cool thing about the child and family centres is that they are out in the communities often where women are seeking services, particularly around perinatal and post-natal depression, maternity health checks and all of that kind of thing where we have also outreach from Housing ACT, OneLink and various other organisations.

That is where it is often like a triage. A mat nurse might decide, “Hang on a minute; there’s something else going on here.” Then they can refer a woman on—this is often the case—so that they could be assisted. What we are finding is that a lot of those women can then get access to programs that they might not even have known about. But because there has been this informal kind of triage, I suppose, a person whom they have received a service from in the Community Services Directorate through the child and family centre will have identified another need with that family. They can then direct them on to all other different kinds of outreach services, including the women’s information referral.

MRS JONES: Thanks. I just wanted to go to 3.1, obviously. In particular, I want to talk about both the women’s plan that is upcoming and the gap analysis that is being undertaken regarding domestic violence. Regarding the women’s plan, obviously this is our third women’s plan—is that correct?

Ms Sheehan: Yes.

MRS JONES: It has obviously just been given an additional title. That is right, isn’t it? It is the action plan? In your documentation for the new plan, it says, “Development of first action plan”. Presumably that is just a new name?

Ms Berry: No. It is an action plan for the women’s plan.

MRS JONES: Okay. I am with you.

Ms Berry: The difference between this one and the other two is that the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Women came together with a plan for implementing the plan

that we could look at the outcomes for and where we could see that it was actually doing something rather than just being a plan that nobody knew about it.

MRS JONES: Okay. In the new plan, my understanding is that the following has been left out as opposed to the previous plans. It includes representation and leadership as a priority, safe and inclusive communities, and flexible education and training. They were in the 2004-09 plan. We are up to the second version since then and now we are down to health and wellbeing, housing, homelessness and safety and economic security and leadership. I can see how leadership probably includes representation and leadership, but I wanted to know why safe and inclusive communities and flexible education and training have dropped out. And in relation to the systems gap analysis of the domestic violence strategy that we are implementing now, which is a good move, I just wanted to know what the purpose of the gap analysis was and how it is being undertaken. So it is basically why those things have been dropped off since 2009 and how we are undertaking the gap analysis.

Ms Berry: With regard to the gap analysis, I am happy to talk with you about that now, but I understand that there is another session where the coordinator-general for domestic and family violence will appear.

MRS JONES: Yes, under JACS.

Ms Berry: Yes. You might get a fuller picture of the whole story there.

MRS JONES: Because it is being managed by JACS, not the office for women?

Ms Berry: No; it is being managed by me as the minister for domestic and family violence.

MRS JONES: Okay. So, about the reason that those other priorities were being left off?

Ms Sheehan: Thank you for that question. The priorities are the result of consultation with women over a couple of years and led by the ministerial advisory council on women. It reflects what women are actually saying are their priorities. For example—

MRS JONES: But have we got something we have achieved in those areas that means that we can now drop them off? I understand—

Ms Berry: I do not think they will be dropped off, necessarily. That was the whole idea with this plan and with these action plans: that we could dig deeper into making sure that the plan did something instead of it just being a document, ink on paper, that nobody knows about except us.

MRS JONES: Us, yes.

Ms Berry: When the ministerial advisory group met up and I first became minister for women, we talked about first of all having a conversation with women about their plan and what they knew about their plan. They did not know much about the plan at all. The different people on the committee had lots of different networks with lots of

different women. There is the YWCA, the ANU, academics and various other people that make up the committee. They went out through all their networks and said, “Okay, you don’t know about that plan. What would you like the plan to address and what are the kinds of things that we can work on and report on as outcomes in the work that we are doing?”

MRS JONES: So it is being driven by the committee, is it?

Ms Berry: Yes, pretty much.

MRS JONES: That is good. On the committee, then, how are we addressing things that perhaps the committee does not come up with? For example, when our firefighters go out in the field, there are no portaloos. Women who have got their period and have a tampon in have no way of changing their tampon in a seven-hour shift on the fire field. That is not going to come up through your committee. How can the office for women and the women’s plan address some of the workplace issues that we have in the ACT?

Ms Berry: I would say that that actually does come under the health and wellbeing action plan. That is the kind of gender lens that we want to see the women’s advisory committee, the office for women, all of the government and all of the government directorates and ministers cast over all of their directorates and all their directorates’ work and activities, including firefighting—

MRS JONES: If they are told. If they find out. You know what I am saying.

Ms Berry: No. This is the thing. We do women’s risk assessments for the Multicultural Festival. We go out there with the whole toolkit. We have women from different sectors involved in that whole conversation. Why can’t we do the same thing across government, across all of the work that we do? We will probably miss some things, but we will do better than we are.

MRS JONES: Okay. Can I also ask—

THE CHAIR: No; I think we need to move on. We are actually at time, and Tara has not been able to ask a question.

MRS JONES: No, just about the portaloos. That will be great. This is just to ask the question as to whether you will follow up portaloos.

THE CHAIR: Perhaps you can put it on notice, Mrs Jones. Mrs Jones, I think you should put it on notice.

Ms Berry: I can follow up on the portaloos, yes.

MRS JONES: It is very important. It has been raised by a few people.

Ms Berry: It is, absolutely. Absolutely, we can do that, yes.

MS CHEYNE: I have been waiting, I think, quite patiently.

MRS JONES: Tara is very patient.

MS CHEYNE: Chair, with your indulgence, I just have a short supplementary based on Mrs Jones's line of questioning about the women's plan. Minister Berry, you mentioned in your speech that the next action plan is expected to be released imminently.

Ms Berry: Launched the day before International Women's Day.

MS CHEYNE: Excellent.

Ms Berry: At the awards on the 7th.

MS CHEYNE: Great. My substantive question is this. I want to get some details about how the crisis funding over Christmas for victims of domestic violence runs and, specifically, how it went this year?

Ms Berry: Every year it is becoming more and more challenging as awareness is raised around domestic and family violence, which is a good thing, because more people are seeing that they can access services and get support, but is placing a lot of pressure on our system.

We are doing what we can in the ACT. We provide funding to the Domestic Violence Crisis Service to provide accommodation over the Christmas period. That is from 16 December to 3 February. But the numbers are not getting any lower and some of the people are staying for longer. It is a successful program because it gives people the chance to escape violent and dangerous situations and be safe with their families. Did you want some of the detail of the numbers?

MS CHEYNE: Yes, please.

Ms Berry: During the period this year, 32 people had been supported by the program, which included 13 women, two men and 17 children over a total of 369 bed nights provided for the program. That was a bit lower in 2016-17 from the previous year, when it was 662. That was quite a big year last year. But it is a pattern of very great concern where we are seeing more and more people seeking support over a period of time, for lots of different reasons, because of lots of different things that are going on with their families and within their communities.

But we do not just provide them with accommodation. They are also provided with support and access to specialist homelessness services. The length of stay for different individuals varies depending on their different housing needs and the complexities of some of the issues that they might be facing within their families.

It is one of the things where, again, we have had a lot of awareness around this issue over the past 12 months. There was last year an inaugural domestic and family violence summit which was hosted in Queensland. Every state and territory minister or first minister, apart from here, attended. The Prime Minister attended as well. It was a really good summit, bringing everybody together around a particular issue that

we were all very passionate about. Since then we have heard very little from the federal government around their funding and their support for what is happening on the ground within states and territories.

That is coming not just from me but from every state and territory minister. We are all rock solid on the federal government really coming to the states and territories with some funding that supports the services that people need now where we have told them that we will support them. There is no point in just saying to people, “This is a terrible thing and we’ll give you a hand up when you need it.” If the funding is not there to support them, where are they going to go? That has been the important message that we have been continually saying, every state and territory women’s minister and safety minister as well as premiers and the Prime Minister. But we need to do more than just talk about it.

MS CHEYNE: With the crisis funding, after the 3 February date, if you still have those people you are supporting, what happens?

Ms Berry: There were still a couple of people who stayed beyond that date, to my understanding.

Ms Sheehan: They transition into the specialist homelessness services.

MS CHEYNE: Okay.

Ms Sheehan: That has been the basis of peak period support. We cannot have that many places open for the whole year. When we know that there is a demand, we are able to bring it on, but with the idea that if people have not moved on they can be absorbed back into the specialist homelessness services.

MS CHEYNE: Thank you very much. Thank you, chair.

THE CHAIR: We might end there, thank you. Any further questions can be put on notice. Thank you, minister, for attending today. We will move to Minister Ramsay, the Veterans and Seniors portfolio.

Short suspension.

Appearances:

Ramsay, Mr Gordon, Attorney-General, Minister for Regulatory Services, Minister for the Arts and Community Events and Minister for Veterans and Seniors

Community Services Directorate

De'Ath, Mr Michael, Director-General

Mitcherson, Mrs Bernadette, Deputy Director-General

Sheehan, Ms Maureen, Executive Director, Strategy, Participation and Early Intervention

Hubbard, Mr Ian, Senior Director, Corporate Services

Khan, Ms Azra, Director, Community Participation Group

Murray, Ms Christine, Director, People Management

THE CHAIR: I remind witnesses of the protection obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the pink privilege statement before you on the table. Can you please confirm for the record that you have read and understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Mr Ramsay: Yes.

THE CHAIR: I remind witnesses that proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes as well as being webstreamed and broadcast. As each witness appears for the first time, can you please give your name and position, for the record and for Hansard, as well as acknowledging the pink privilege statement.

Before we proceed to questions from the committee, would you like to make an opening statement, minister?

Mr Ramsay: No, especially given the time. I am happy to go straight into the questions.

THE CHAIR: We might start with Mr Doszpot, if that suits committee members.

MR DOSZPOT: I would like to start with the health round table. In October 2014 there was an older persons assembly. After a delay of 18 months, on 11 May 2016, the Health Directorate and the office of ageing jointly convened the seniors health round table to consider the outstanding health-related issues from the 2014 assembly. It is a little bit verbose. Numerous representations have been made to the ministers for health and seniors for a report on outcomes from this round table. It was said that a summary report of the outcomes from that meeting would be available within three months. That was in May 2016. Ten months later, there apparently has been no response released to the 70-plus attendees.

Mr De'Ath: Thank you for your question, Mr Doszpot. I acknowledge the statement. I will refer the question to Ms Sheehan.

Ms Sheehan: Thank you for that question, Mr Doszpot. The first thing to say is that the directorate apologises that a summary report was not made available within three

months. The other point that I want to make is that at the older persons assembly the agenda for the older persons assembly had been developed over a consultation process across the whole of the ACT which then drew together the major issues that were being raised. The focus there was on transport and the amenity of the local environment. Health was raised as an issue that needed addressing in a different environment. That was the jump-off point for the development of the health round table.

The health round table, as you probably know, was done jointly between Community Services Directorate, because of its responsibility for seniors, and subsequently veterans, and the Health Directorate. As the committee would be aware, the ministerial responsibility for seniors and veterans does not bring with it the line responsibility for the provision of services. Most particularly, for people over 65, of course, the commonwealth provides most of those services. It was very important for us, if we were discussing health, to actually be working with our colleagues in the Health Directorate.

The round table itself had six key topics that older people had identified that they wanted to discuss. They were advocacy in decision-making around health; access to health care; transitions in care, particularly transitions from home to a facility or from retirement to a supported accommodation environment; end-of-life care issues; health technology and e-health; and health promotion, wellbeing and healthy living.

The full-day round table was addressed by a number of experts on all of those topics. The participants—70 delegates attended—formulated a series of recommendations and statements of what they believed to be the case based on those six key topic areas. Then the results of that report were written up. Since that time, CSD and Health have taken some time to look at what are the responsibilities of different areas of government, what can the ACT do because it is in the ACT's own domain and what can we actually advocate to the commonwealth about? If you think about the general responsibility of the commonwealth for over-65s, particularly for the home and community care packages and then for the nursing homes and other types of supported accommodation, what is it that the ACT can do to advocate on those issues?

MR DOSZPOT: Ms Sheehan, thank you for that summary. We are well aware of what happened. I am asking about the summary that was supposed to be released three months after that meeting that the health round table had?

MS LE COUTEUR: Can I follow up?

MR DOSZPOT: Sorry, just—

MS LE COUTEUR: I asked a question on notice about this in December and was told that the report would be forthcoming.

MR DOSZPOT: My question to you originally was: where is the report? We are three months after the given date that you or whoever gave. It is now nearly 10 months late. Where is the report? I understand all the interaction that is required, but is there enough priority on getting this issue out for the people who have really advocated for it?

Mr Ramsay: Could I respond to that one? It is a priority. I have been speaking with the directorate and the officials about it. I anticipate that it will be released certainly within a matter of weeks. It is very close. It has been a matter for the last bits of finalisation of the government response. They will be released; I intend to make them available very shortly.

MR DOSZPOT: Okay. And I have a supplementary to that. At the original health discussions at the 2014 older persons assembly there were a number of health-related issues for older people raised. Have there been any tangible outcomes from that 2014 meeting that you can refer to?

Ms Sheehan: The motions that were debated and agreed at the older persons assembly had actions to implement the recommendations. They have been incorporated into the active ageing framework.

MR DOSZPOT: They have been?

Ms Sheehan: They have.

MR DOSZPOT: Can you tell us which ones they are? You can take it on notice; I am not asking for it now. Can you take on notice what has been incorporated?

Ms Sheehan: Absolutely.

MR DOSZPOT: Okay?

Ms Sheehan: Yes.

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Thanks, Mr Chair. In your role as minister for veterans' affairs, there was a recent attack by a member of the government on the RSL—statements in this chamber describing the RSL as having a long history of disgraceful behaviour, saying that it was perverted and disgusting—

THE CHAIR: Mr Hanson, are you referring to the annual report for 2015-16?

MR HANSON: I am getting to the question.

THE CHAIR: Continue.

MR HANSON: I am getting to the question. There has been broad discussion about a range of things that are more topical as well, saying that the RSL club are people who either are or who stand by racists. Do you agree as the new minister? Do you believe that the RSL has a long history of disgraceful behaviour? Do you think they are racists or people who stand by racists?

THE CHAIR: Mr Hanson, what part of the annual report are you referring to? Firstly, you made reference to something that happened extremely recently and then you made reference to something that is perhaps not even contained in the annual report. I would ask you to specify exactly what page you are referring to.

MR HANSON: What I am referring to is that the minister has just taken over. He has talked about things that he has been doing as minister.

THE CHAIR: Not within the financial year.

MR HANSON: Are you ruling it out of order, chair? You do not want to talk about it?

THE CHAIR: I think I am getting to the point where I will rule it out of order unless you can bring—

MR HANSON: So you do not like this bit? There has been a lot of wide-ranging discussion. I have been listening to this inquiry. There has been a lot of wide-ranging discussion, but you do not like this bit, do you?

THE CHAIR: If you can—

MR HANSON: You really do not.

THE CHAIR: If you can relate it back to the report—

MRS DUNNE: We have not asked other people to relate things back to the report. Some things have, but there has also been wide-ranging discussion on—

MR HANSON: And wide-ranging responses as well, it needs to be said.

THE CHAIR: Usually they can be tied in relation to a theme that is in the report, but I cannot see how this even relates to—

MR HANSON: The new minister's relationship and attitude to the RSL, I think, is part of the ministerial responsibilities. If he is going to exclude himself—nothing that happened before he came—he would not even be here.

THE CHAIR: It is not that it is not within his portfolio responsibilities; it is not about the annual report, and that is what we are inquiring into. If you have another question that you want to ask, please ask it. Otherwise, I will have to ask you to leave.

MR HANSON: What—

MR DOSZPOT: Chair, the annual report—

MR HANSON: They do not want to go near it, and I can understand why they would not want to go near it: a member of the government calling the RSL disgraceful.

THE CHAIR: Mr Hanson, refer to—

MR HANSON: That is not something—

THE CHAIR: Mr Hanson, I am going to have to ask you to leave.

MR HANSON: Are you?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

MR HANSON: Do you want me to leave?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

MR HANSON: Okay, sure. I am out of here.

MR DOSZPOT: Chair, if I could just make a point, the annual report also covers all of the responsibilities of the new minister.

MS LE COUTEUR: He should be able to stay.

MR DOSZPOT: These questions are quite relevant—

MR HANSON: I should be able to stay. It is outrageous. I agree, Ms Le Couteur.

MR DOSZPOT: in that context to the annual report.

THE CHAIR: I think I have made myself very clear that we are looking at the annual report for 2015-16, and that does cover the responsibilities in some detail. If there was some linkage back to that that was actually provided, I might have been able to rule differently. But since that was not the case, I have made my decision and we will move on. Thank you. Ms Le Couteur, do you have a question?

MS LE COUTEUR: I do have a question. I would have thought possibly you could debate whether the question was in order, but my understanding is that all members of the Assembly are allowed to attend committee hearings. The question may or may not have been relevant, but Mr Hanson's attendance presumably was. I am not sure what the issue—

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Le Couteur; I appreciate your comments. Understanding order 236, the chair has discretion about who attends. I tried to bring Mr Hanson back to the questions that were relevant to the report, and he did not want to go there, which I think is unfortunate. He decided to do that. I have made my ruling and we will move on. Do you have any questions relevant to the report?

MS LE COUTEUR: I certainly do. Going to the elder abuse line, can you provide some more information about it? I asked a question on notice about it in December and I was told that only 89 calls had been received. However, if you read the legal aid report, on page 30 it says that elder abuse is increasingly being identified by community workers as an issue of growing concern. They are seeing increasing numbers of people. I am trying to work out why there were only 89 calls for the elder

abuse line. Is it the issue that nobody knows about it? I understand that it is staffed by the same person who staffs the women's information line? Do they not have capacity to answer? It just seems very low given what I think everyone here knows is a bigger issue than 89 people over the past year.

Mr De'Ath: Thank you for your question, Ms Le Couteur. Ms Sheehan will respond.

Ms Sheehan: Thanks, Ms Le Couteur. We think it is a very low number as well. We think it is a surprisingly low number. We do publicise the existence of the line, but that is the small number of calls that have come through.

It is interesting to note in relation to those calls that we all know that elder abuse is largely perpetrated by family members against older people. The majority of calls that come in through that elder abuse line are from family members who are concerned about other family members abusing older people. I would say that the nature of the calls is consistent with what is in the national report.

We do publicise the existence of the line, particularly at the time that the national statistics and the national reports are released. It is not the case that there is a long queue, the phone is ringing and ringing and people cannot get through to the elder abuse line. It is simply the case that the calls are not coming in. We can do more to publicise the line, but it may be that people are going to other sources of information about elder abuse. We fund COTA to provide support to older people, and they have information about elder abuse. The Justice and Community Safety Directorate have information as well. And you are probably aware that the Australian Law Reform Commission is currently conducting an inquiry into elder abuse. We have been publicising that and working with the Justice and Community Safety Directorate on that.

We are really keen to raise the profile of the issue. What I would say is that if you have an information line and people are not accessing it, and they have not been accessing it over a couple of years, the question would be to ask the community: how would you like to receive that information or how would you like to report elder abuse and have it dealt with? A telephone line, I would say, with only that level of calls, probably is not the best way of doing it.

The final point that I want to make is that when elder abuse is committed by family members, it is domestic and family violence as well, and we do have that as a focus around our domestic and family violence services.

MR DOSZPOT: Supplementary on that. Ms Sheehan, you referred to the information that people are seeking. Is that same number that is used for reporting actual incidents of abuse?

Ms Sheehan: No, it is not, Mr Doszpot. The reason is that if there was an instance of abuse which constituted domestic and family violence or a criminal offence, we would need to take a decision about whether it would be our responsibility to report it to the police or ask the caller if they would like it to be reported or encourage them to report. There are other ways that the abuse may be reported, so directly to the domestic violence crisis service or directly to the police, for example. It is not a

simple source of truth around the incidence of abuse.

MR DOSZPOT: I understand that. What I am getting at is that you are advertising this service to people regarding elder abuse. If somebody rings up with a specific elder abuse situation, do they get instant advice about where to go or does your phone service provide that instant information, “You have got to ring the police”? Because this would be a fairly urgent activity.

Ms Sheehan: It would. And it would be a warm handover, so to speak. We would provide the support necessary to the caller to get the support into the person where the elder abuse was occurring.

MR DOSZPOT: Can you provide us any advice as to how many of these calls that you get are actually warm handovers or just educational calls?

Ms Sheehan: I do not have that information on me, but with the minister’s agreement, I can certainly take that on notice.

MS LE COUTEUR: Could you also look a bit more at how would people even know about this line. It may or may not be the right way to service people, but I think what is fairly clear is that most people do not even know about it. I did not know about it before I came back into the Assembly. I am not quite sure how people would know about it.

Ms Sheehan: At the moment, Ms Le Couteur, we promote it through our community engagement at shopping centres and libraries. In addition to that, we are working with ADACAS, the disability and aged care advocacy service, and COTA as well on raising awareness. As we raise awareness that includes providing information about the line itself. But it is very clear to the committee that the line is not well used.

I think we need to do more work to find out the reason for that. I am not jumping to the conclusion that it is because people do not know about it. I think we need to genuinely find out whether people want the information in a different way, in which case, that is where we should be directing our resources and our effort.

Mr Ramsay: It is one of the areas the ministerial advisory council on the ageing is going to be actively looking at this year as well.

MRS DUNNE: Could I just clarify: is the line aimed at people who want to report or who want to receive information?

Ms Sheehan: It is aimed at information.

MRS DUNNE: So it is aimed at information.

Ms Sheehan: Its acronym is APRIL, which stands for abuse prevention referral and information line, so it is not a notification service. Though as I was saying to Mr Doszpot, if someone rang and identified that abuse had occurred, then we would work with them on whether we would report it ourselves, whether they would report it and how it is that we would get services in to support the person who was being

abused. Could I just add—

MRS DUNNE: Sorry, I have a substantive question. I know there have been two or three discussions today about staff in the community engagement area, but can you outline, minister, what is the scope of the resources dedicated to veterans and seniors affairs in terms of is there a budget allocation or is it a general allocation to the community engagement area?

Ms Sheehan: Thank you, Mrs Dunne. It is the general allocation of 29 full-time equivalent staff to the community participation group. That services the offices that come within the community participation group, so that is the office for seniors and veterans, the office for women, the youth engagement area, the office for disability—

MRS DUNNE: But also—

Ms Sheehan: and so on.

MRS DUNNE: In that case, what work is actually done by the office in the areas of aged and veterans? In addition to the staffing allocation, what is the full budget allocation and how much of that, if it can be broken down, is allocated to aged and veterans?

Ms Sheehan: The first point would be to refer to the grants program. So there is a grants program annually for seniors and veterans of \$80,000. On the website we have published the recipients of the program. I would be happy to hand a hard copy of that to the committee.

MRS DUNNE: No, that is fine. But what other programs are there?

Ms Sheehan: In addition to that, the resources are largely for staff in the area to provide supports. There is also funding that we provide to COTA. But these are comparatively small amounts of money. If I could give you an example of where it would be different, if you go to something like the early intervention programs, we fund three child and family centres and we also fund the children, youth and family support program. The office for seniors and veterans is not like that. We do not actually then have a large program allocation where we have our own service provision for seniors and veterans.

MRS DUNNE: So what exactly does the office do apart from writing a cheque for COTA and the grants process? What does the ageing and veterans area do for Canberra's elderly and veterans?

Ms Sheehan: In the annual report, Mrs Dunne, from pages 62 through to 65, we run through the major activities that the staff in the office are involved in organising. I referred to the active ageing framework 2015-18, and the staff of the office are involved in working across directorates with the implementation of that. We have already talked about the elder abuse line. They have been doing work on, first of all, the development and then work on the mature age workforce strategy, and staff in the year were involved in organising the large expo for mature age workers which the previous minister launched.

The staff themselves put on the life's reflection photographic competition. They work on Grandparents Week, they work with COTA on the organisation of Seniors Week, and they provide secretariat support to both the ministerial advisory council on ageing and the veterans advisory council.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, what is the government doing to support mature age workers in Canberra?

Ms Sheehan: Thank you for that question, because the ACT has formed a really exciting partnership with the commonwealth Human Rights Commission and the Age Discrimination Commissioner, former Senator for the ACT, Susan Ryan, , in working with the Illawarra Retirement Trust—IRT as we know it—to look at the issue of discrimination in workplaces against mature age workers. We have done a number of things to get to the point where we are working hard now to get jobs for mature age workers where that is what they are interested in.

We began by working with Illawarra Retirement Trust, who have been doing a lot of work in this area, to formulate the agreement. We then have gone on to hold a very successful mature age workers expo. I am not sure if any of the committee members actually attended that expo, but it was held out at Canberra university. The attendance would have been several hundred people.

Mr De'Ath: Two hundred participants.

Ms Sheehan: What was really interesting was that the Illawarra Retirement Trust, which has a number of—I should not call them facilities—home environments in the ACT, take the discrimination really seriously themselves, and they have implemented a mentoring program for their senior executives where an older person mentors their younger senior executive to make sure that they are thinking about always what are the issues that older workers or older people wanting to work may encounter.

The workers expo was not just talking about “Would you like a job” or “Wouldn't you like a job”; it was very specific organisations that came and did a presentation on their ability to provide and implement opportunities for mature age workers. Even naming the issue is incredibly important because there can be an assumption with a lot of people taking early retirement that that is it and they do not want to re-enter the workforce whereas, in fact, people may be quite willing and able to re-enter the work force but it might be on a part-time basis. The assumption is they do not need to do that anymore, but if people are interested, it is really important.

Mr De'Ath: I think this was a really great initiative. We had 18 exhibitors and four careers advisers, so it was sort of a one-stop-shop for people for planning their future. It was a really great thing the territory did.

MR PETTERSSON: What sort of feedback were you getting about the expo?

Ms Sheehan: People loved it.

Mr De'Ath: No-one complained, as far as I know.

Ms Sheehan: We had terrific feedback both from participants but also from people who exhibited. In terms of follow up, people who attended the expo were given an expo passport, and that assisted them to visit the different contributors and look at what opportunities might be applicable to them and what job opportunities there were. As I say, it was not just a general rave about, “Would you like to think about going back into the workforce?” It was much more targeted to employer organisations and businesses and so on that actually had some opportunities for older people.

Can I just add, we have been talking today about the national disability insurance scheme and the fact that we have just finalised a tender for \$1.2 million to support disability issues in the workforce. We specifically identified in that tender process, when we did our industry consultation and talking to the tenderers prior to the tender being opened, priority areas for the government such as maturing employment, because mature workers have a lot to bring in providing support to people with a disability.

MR PETTERSSON: A very important topic, thank you.

MRS KIKKERT: Earlier today we talked a little bit about the free bus service for seniors. Why is it limited to between 10 am and 4 pm weekdays; and have you costed would it would cost to extend the program?

Mr De’Ath: I do not think we can directly answer that question, Mrs Kikkert. I think we would need to refer that beyond CSD. I apologise we cannot provide that information directly. It would need to go to Transport and City Services.

MR DOSZPOT: Could I ask a supplementary of the minister on that?

THE CHAIR: On that issue?

MR DOSZPOT: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Yes.

MR DOSZPOT: Minister, during the election period Mr Barr announced that a re-elected Labor government would try out a free bus service for seniors and concession card holders between 10 am and 4 pm, as Mrs Kikkert referred to. This is an election promise. Apart from the department answering it in their way for what Mrs Kikkert has asked, can you tell us whether the Labor election commitment is going to be met with the information that Mr Barr gave, and is there any scope for extending the program as Mr Barr promised? If you could take that on board, I know you probably cannot answer that directly.

Mr Ramsay: All matters of commitments are working through budget cabinet processes, and appropriately so.

MR DOSZPOT: I am asking if you could take that on board.

Mr Ramsay: I am happy to take it on board. But I assure you that the government has

full intention to meet all election commitments.

MR DOSZPOT: Just in case, we are checking.

Ms Sheehan: Mr Doszpot, when we were talking earlier about the better services initiatives in west Belconnen, we had an opportunity to talk to the committee about the fact that there was a transport expo in west Belconnen because services for older people had been one of the issues identified in west Belconnen as important to that community. In that environment with the local community providers supporting people who lived in west Belconnen, the sorts of issues that came up were not so much that people needed extra public transport or extra cab services; it was that they actually did not know what was available in terms of transport in that area. It was about providing information to people about transport options, including the community transport options that are provided through Belconnen Community Service where the government has funded a 20-seater bus, and active transport options, such as walking places, and that particularly fits in with our idea of the active ageing framework and so on.

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you for that. But the question was not directed at any specific individual transport route; it was for all seniors throughout all of Canberra. I am getting a lot of complaints in my shadow portfolio about seniors asking, “Well, why is it that we have got this concession?” They think the concession is good, but it really suffers quite badly when you consider that they are being restricted to between 10 am and 4 pm.

Seniors have as much need for transport as other members of the community throughout all parts. Why are you saying, “Yeah, we’ll give you a concession, but you can only use it at this time.” There are doctor appointments to keep, libraries to visit, children to visit, all sorts of things for which people need the broad timetable available to them. That is what Mrs Kikkert’s question was, and I thank her for asking it.

THE CHAIR: We will draw to a close as we are going over time. I want to make a final statement: the committee asks that answers to questions taken on notice at today’s hearings be replied to by close of business five business days after the uncorrected proof *Hansard* is issued. Members’ written supplementary questions relating to annual reports will need to be provided to the committee support office within seven business days of the uncorrected proof transcript becoming available. If the committee support office receives any supplementary questions, they will be forwarded to directorates. Answers to supplementary questions will need to be provided to the committee support office five business days after receiving the questions. When a proof *Hansard* is issued, that will be forwarded to witnesses to provide the opportunity to check the transcript and suggest any corrections.

I now formally declare the public hearing closed. Thank you, minister, and everyone who attended.

The committee adjourned at 5.06 pm.