



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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

(Reference: [Annual and financial reports 2016-2017](#))

Members:

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

PROOF TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

THURSDAY, 16 NOVEMBER 2017

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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.....91, 151, 174

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 9.29 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

Collis, Dr Mark, Deputy Director-General

Evans, Ms Jacinta, Executive Director, Inclusion and Participation

Dunne, Ms Ellen, Director, Office for Disability

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

Pappas, Ms Helen, Senior Director, Children, Youth and Families

Saballa, Ms Melanie, Director, Children and Families

Jordaan, Ms Elise, Senior Manager, Child Development Service

Starick, Ms Kate, Acting Executive Director, Strategic Policy

Murray, Ms Christine, Director, People Management

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

Khan, Ms Azra, Acting Senior Manager, National Multicultural Festival

THE CHAIR: Welcome to today's public hearing of the health, ageing and community services standing committee on the 2016-17 annual reports referred to it by the Assembly on 26 October 2017. The committee is to inquire into the annual reports referred to it and report to the Assembly on the last sitting day of March 2018.

I remind witnesses of the protection 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 and understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Yes.

Mr De'Ath: I have. I do.

THE CHAIR: Please note that the committee requires answers provided to questions taken on notice within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof transcript. I remind members that questions today should relate to the 2016 annual report, broadly. Before we proceed to questions from the committee, Minister, would you like to give an opening statement?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Yes, thank you, Chair. This is not my first annual reports hearing but it is my first year in the job. It has been a real privilege working with the dedicated staff across the Community Services Directorate. I would like to put on record my thanks for the support that they have provided to me in settling into the job in my first year.

This hearing is an opportunity for them to talk about the great work that they did and the progress made by the directorate and our community partners in 2016-17. This work is absolutely critical in supporting some of Canberra's most vulnerable individuals and families. But it is also vital work in building social inclusion and social capital right across the community, helping us all to come together to celebrate our diversity and our successes.

The directorate aims to deliver excellence in client-centred services. This is built on a strong evidence base and a deep understanding of the complexity of some of the situations directorate staff deal with every day, especially in the areas of child protection and youth justice.

I want to highlight some of the achievements over 2016-17. In the disability space this was, of course, the year in which the ACT fully transitioned eligible participants to the NDIS. This has not all been smooth sailing, and I am sure we will touch on that, but it was a massive achievement and I again thank the staff involved.

In late 2016 the government established the Office for Disability to continue to support both the transition to the NDIS and our broader responsibility to ensure that Canberra is as inclusive and engaging a place for people with disability as we can be. The office has certainly had its work cut out for it. I cannot speak highly enough of the work they have done, their effective advocacy and close work with service providers and the NDIA.

In making the transition to the NDIS, and with the closure of Therapy ACT and the delay in establishing the NDIS Early Childhood Early Intervention Service, the ACT government recognised the need to ensure that support services continue to be available to children with developmental delay and disability in their early years. The Child Development Service at Holder was established in early 2016, so 2016-17 was its first full financial year of operation. I was out there just yesterday talking about the great work they have done not only in providing drop-in assessment services and regular group and individual support services but also in bringing services together from across government, particularly health and education, and the outreach they are doing to ensure that we can get to as many people as possible who need their service. The CDS works closely with the wonderful child and family centres in Tuggeranong, Gungahlin and West Belconnen. These centres engage multiple disciplines, directorates and community organisations in providing both universal and tailored support for children and families. I encourage members of the committee to visit the centres if you have not done so already, particularly those in your own electorates.

The directorate is delivering major reforms through the continued implementation of A step up for our kids to provide better outcomes for our community's most vulnerable children, young people and families. This is multilayered work aiming to deliver a trauma-informed continuum of care and better support for birth families and carers, enable the voice of children and young people to be heard and, importantly, strengthen governance, accountability and oversight. This is very difficult and fraught work. The systemic changes involved in implementing A step up have been significant, especially in the face of a sustained increase in demand through increasing child concern reports, at least partly as a result of increased community awareness and vigilance.

The directorate has brought a lot of expertise to bear in making these changes, whether it is the work they do with the Australian Catholic University's Institute of Child Protection Studies, with the Children and Youth Services Ministerial Advisory Council, or with the joint governance group and its subcommittees described on page 75 of the annual report.

Youth justice has been a particular topic of interest over the past few months, so I take the opportunity again to point out a great achievement that occurred during the 2016-17 year: the ACT government's blueprint for youth justice being awarded the gold award in the community-led category of the 2016 Australian crime prevention awards. I also acknowledge a more recent award and congratulate Jeff Hunt from the Murrumbidgee Education and Training Centre in Bimberi on recently being named the ACT secondary teacher of the year. This is a very well-earned recognition of Jeff and the team at the METC, whose efforts, as noted in the citation, led to the first student completing year 12 at Bimberi last year and has seen multiple students completing year 10 each year.

In the broader area of youth engagement, I have enjoyed meeting with the Youth Advisory Council and am keen to ensure their work is better linked with other work both the government and non-government sectors are doing. The Youth Advisory Council is supported by the Youth InterACT team, which also oversees grants and scholarships. During this reporting year the highlight in youth engagement was undoubtedly the youth think tank on social inclusion held in August 2016, in the lead-up to the election, with my predecessor Minister Berry.

The directorate continued to progress the government's social inclusion agenda through the provision of a range of community grants, supports and engagement opportunities for youth, families, multicultural groups and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as well as in the portfolios of my colleagues Minister Ramsay and Minister Berry: women, veterans and seniors. For instance, in the 2016-17 period the government provided almost \$260,000 for multicultural groups via the community participation group grants and another \$170,000 under the community languages grants program, as well as a range of community groups receiving a total of \$107,000 under the community support and infrastructure grants program.

In particular I draw the committee's attention to the achievements of the directorate in meeting the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as detailed in a dedicated section of the annual report, and as such I will not go into a great amount of detail. The information in this section demonstrates the broad range of services and supports provided by the directorate and our commitment under the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2015-2018. One highlight was the establishment of the stronger families portal to provide a central access point for information on services, initiatives and events relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Throughout the year, work continued on the outcomes framework under the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement. I look forward to shortly publicly tabling the outcomes framework and the most recent annual report.

During the year the Community Services industry strategy was finalised and released in September 2016. Work continues with the community sector through the joint

community-government reference group to develop the first action plan focused on work force and to lay out the plan for delivering this 10-year strategy with the community sector. I take the opportunity to acknowledge the contribution our community sector partners make in delivering the outcomes that we seek to achieve, whether that is through the community development program or through the range of other programs supported by CSD.

CSD has begun 2017-18 with a new organisational structure and new governance arrangements. This will enhance its capacity to operate as a leading organisation and deliver high quality services to the Canberra community. Directorate staff will welcome your questions. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: My question is in relation to page 63 of the annual report. The report notes the significant increase in demand for speech pathology services. I am wondering whether you might be able to elaborate on where that demand is coming from and how the government is meeting the demand.

Ms Dunne: I acknowledge the privilege statement. The demand for speech pathology services is as a result of the children who are requiring early childhood early intervention services. There are a number of children who are ineligible for the scheme who, however, have developmental delays which would require speech pathology.

Ms Jordaan: Regarding speech pathology, there is an ongoing trend, as we saw previously when Therapy ACT held responsibility for these services, that children's early language development around speech and communication has always been quite high demand. We continue to see that trend regarding children's development.

With the Child Development Service, as we have reported, that trend has continued for families wanting access to speech pathologists. The Child Development Service offers a very universal access model where families who have concerns about their children's development, in particular speech and language and communication, can come to a drop-in clinic which is held weekly across Canberra. The access is easy: families can just step in and ask a speech pathologist to have a look and provide them with an assessment of their child's speech and language development.

What we have seen is that the drop-in clinics are really well attended. In order to meet that demand, we have increased the period of time when the drop-in clinic runs. We have also increased the number of staff on that clinic so that when families come in the likelihood of them being seen is very high, so that at that point they are able to receive services and receive access to a speech pathologist, who then will either advise them to come in for further assessment or come in to the service and proceed with them around the information they require.

Another aspect is that we ensure that our speech pathology positions are always filled, so timely recruitment is always really important. We work with a cohort of staff who are in their childbearing years, and many are female, so we ensure that we recruit to those positions very tirelessly and that we retain and maintain those positions to be fully covered for the service as well. There are a number of other things that we have embarked on as we have developed the service.

We have also looked at student placements. Students have the propensity to provide you with a sustainability for your service and your work force. Within the first year and a half we have had agreements with universities across Australia. We have already had five speech pathology students have placements within our service, and that has led to one staff member being appointed into our service next year. So there is a sustainability model and there is a way of looking diversely at how we are responsive to families.

Secondly, as the minister mentioned, we are doing outreach services for families into the Aboriginal community. That is where we are finding a higher demand for children around their language development. What we have commenced over the past year is a drop-in style clinic out at the Koori preschools so that when teachers have a concern about a child's speech and language they are able to see a speech pathologist in place for them, in the community. We have also developed drop-in style clinics out at the Gugan mums and bubs group. A speech pathologist attends the mums and bubs group weekly. That model is more about building capacity within the community for the community to have access to speech pathologists within their community, and working closely with those partners in the community and with the staff in Gugan and, as well, at Winnunga.

THE CHAIR: Are the other drop-in clinics at the child and family centres? Is that where they are based?

Ms Jordaan: That is right. The drop-in clinics, as we have mentioned in the report, run across all three child and family centres and our Holder centre. But outside of that we are aware that our families that experience vulnerability do not always even come into those settings. That is why we have gone out into the community, particularly to try to provide that outreach approach so that the families that would generally not come into any of our services do have those services available to them in the community.

THE CHAIR: What is your engagement like with early childhood education and care services outside of preschools? You mentioned Koori preschools. What about the non-government early childhood services that have a large cohort of young children who may be experiencing developmental issues? Are they referring families to you?

Ms Jordaan: Absolutely. Early childhood educators are absolutely one of our key community partners. You may have noticed in the annual report, in terms of some of our new initiatives, that one of our speech pathologists identified the need to support early childhood educators around stimulation of language development and developed a program called talking tots, which we spoke about in the report.

For children in the nought to two-year range, we know that the longer term trajectories for children with language and developmental issues have the propensity to lead to further developmental issues and impact on their learning outcomes later in life. So the staff member piloted a project out at one of our childcare settings in the ACT and had really good outcomes with teachers and early childhood educators around providing some very key strategies for them to very quickly and very easily assimilate some of those early language stimulation and oral language stimulation

activities into their programs.

We are now looking at the AEDC data. We are trying to look at focusing that community capacity building project, as we see it: rolling out talking tots probably more into childcare centres where there are high needs. Some of the centres around West Belconnen have engaged with us over this last quarter. So the childcare setting is definitely one of our key partners in the community.

THE CHAIR: Are you breaking down the AEDC data into the subdomains of the language and cognitive skills domain to look at in what areas children are particularly experiencing language difficulties?

Ms Jordaan: Absolutely. In terms of the AEDC data we know that we travel quite well in many of the other areas, but language is an ongoing area that we all try to achieve better outcomes with. Looking at that trajectory around evidence-based practice, it starts really young. We are very aware of some of those impacts even before three. So, as a service whose objective is really to work on building capacity in the community around child development, language is obviously a key focus. Our staffing profile has more speech pathologists than other disciplines. We will continue to work with the community and with services that request those services from us, to look at building capacity as well.

MRS KIKKERT: It is good that the drop-in clinics are going really well with seeing patients and families. What has been the longest waiting time for a child to seek further assessment or treatment from their speech pathologist? They go into the drop-in clinic and get assessed and then referred to a speech pathologist. What is the longest time a child would have to wait to see that person?

Ms Jordaan: To give you the exact number, I would like to take that on notice. But on average I can explain to you how that process works. If the child had to be seen this quarter, the next quarter the therapist would have availability in her diary. That can vary within a quarter. The longest, on average, could be up to 12 weeks. But it could be as short as next week.

MRS KIKKERT: Twelve weeks?

Ms Jordaan: It could be a term, 10 weeks. Within a term the child should be seen for services. I have to also mention that, in terms of our service offer, a priority for all staff is, if they determine any vulnerability within a family around psychosocial issues or if the family is having difficulty accessing the service in any other way, to try to be more flexible. If we are approached, we try to be more flexible in providing that to a family sooner. But in terms of the general, standard process and the numbers, which are quite large, as you may be aware, that we are seeing, if I had to give you an answer I would say the outreach would be that.

MRS KIKKERT: I have heard many stories of families waiting beyond 12 weeks to seek further treatment on their children.

Ms Jordaan: With the Child Development Service?

MRS KIKKERT: That is correct, yes: to see a speech pathologist after they go into the drop-in clinics. Their waiting time has been longer than four months.

Ms Jordaan: Okay. We are happy to—

MRS KIKKERT: What is the government doing to address the need for children to seek immediate help or support after they have been into the drop-in clinic?

Ms Jordaan: As I explained, the process is generally that within that next term an assessment is offered. If there were any outside of that, I would be happy to take that up, to find out exactly what happened in that instance.

MRS KIKKERT: While they are waiting, is there any sort of support that is given to them in the immediate time?

Ms Jordaan: Are they waiting for an assessment?

MRS KIKKERT: They have been to the drop-in clinic and they are seeking further assessment, but they have been referred to see a speech pathologist. Is there something the government can offer these families in support while they are waiting for further assessment and treatment?

Ms Jordaan: We do not provide treatment as such. We are a support service for children who have needs—

MRS KIKKERT: I am just saying “treatment” as in to help them improve their speech.

Ms Jordaan: We run a range of group programs for parents: parent information sessions, things like speech sound development: “Is your toddler talking?” There is a whole range of workshops that run quarterly. Some families would be offered to come into that, to provide some information generally on what their identified concern was. Following that, if they have further concerns, individual further assessment is required.

If a therapist—and that is a 15 minute consultation—has very serious concerns about the child’s development, they will provide them with an assessment, because those children’s pathway is really into the NDIA; those children require longer term supports. The children who are waiting for services are children at risk, maybe, of some language issues; they are not children who require medium to longer term supports. That is what our partner is there for. We work closely with a partner around those children, providing them with information following a comprehensive assessment.

MRS KIKKERT: Would you say that there is a lack of speech pathologists here in the ACT to provide that assistance? Considering that the waiting list is quite long and—

Ms Jordaan: I would not say that we have a waiting list. I am happy to follow up with any particular concerns that you may have identified.

MRS KIKKERT: Do you think that we have enough speech pathologists to meet the demands?

Ms Jordaan: In terms of the demand within the ACT, I would prefer that my colleague respond to that in terms of the private sector. In terms of CDS, we are currently well serviced in terms of the staffing levels that we have.

Mr De'Ath: I reinforce the point that if there are people you are aware of who are beyond the 12-week time frame that has been described, we would welcome the opportunity to talk with them, see if there are issues there and look at it on a case-by-case basis.

MRS KIKKERT: That is good to know. Thank you.

Ms Dunne: Once a child is referred to EACH, the provider that works in partnership with us and the NDIA in relation to early childhood early intervention services, they are assessed for their eligibility and for what short-term, medium-term or long-term supports are required. In relation to speech pathology services, they would be referred to the private sector. A lot of development has been provided to allied health service providers. We have seen an increase in the number of private practices and sole providers in the ACT.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Having said that, though, we certainly also get feedback about a shortage of speech pathologists particularly and allied health professionals generally. We often get that feedback. Part of this is about the growth in NDIS and the number of participants. That has placed extra demand across the system. The fact that the University of Canberra is introducing a speech pathology course will help, I think, to ensure that we get enough speech pathologists in the ACT. It is much easier to keep people than to attract people to a region, so I am really hoping that that will also make a difference. That is a great response from the University of Canberra to an identified need of the community.

MRS KIKKERT: I have a question regarding special needs transport. This issue continues to bounce between NDIS and ACT education and transport, depending on whether a student has an NDIS plan. What changes are likely to the future delivery of this service?

Ms Dunne: This is a really complex issue, one that the commonwealth is struggling with, and of course the ACT and other jurisdictions are working jointly to try to unravel these problems. The service is an eligible service under the NDIS, and the problem is that each jurisdiction has different eligibility criteria. The model currently in operation is more relevant for a group-type service rather than an individual service. The issue for us is to work with the senior officials working group, which is designed to support policy development, to enable full scheme operation. This is a policy area that we have been working on for some time. It is a vexed question. The issue is around eligibility, a person having eligibility and their identifier being able to use the system. It is something that we continue to work on. Hopefully by early next year we will have a solution and certainly an answer in terms of how we move forward on a national basis.

Ms Stephen-Smith: It is not correct to say that there is bouncing around for individuals between NDIS and the special needs transport service for schools in terms of the current structure of the system. Across the country, special needs transport for school students for getting to and from school is provided as an in-kind support, so it is counted in an individual's NDIS plan as an in-kind support. With the service that is provided in the ACT, although the responsibility for it has transferred from the Education Directorate to TCCS, my understanding is that the actual service itself has not changed as a result of the NDIS and that the eligibility criteria have not changed.

Ms Evans: The minister is correct in saying that, while the responsibility for transport is with transport and city services, eligibility has remained. This is one of the really great examples of government working collaboratively across directorates and also with the commonwealth to come to a conclusion around what is quite a difficult issue.

When the NDIS was being developed, the principles of individual choice and control were absolutely central. However, when you are developing a program that is actually about mass transport, it is very hard to have a process that is about individual choice and control, because to run a fleet of buses you need to know approximately how many students and what routes are running. So at the beginning of each year or the end of each school year there needs to be consideration of who is eligible, what routes would be running, how many buses that takes and how many staff are therefore employed. So there is a whole range of issues that the ACT government are considering, quite aside from how the commonwealth will deal nationally with this difficult question of group support in an individually funded way.

As the minister said, that does mean that there are a couple of directorates involved. The Office for Disability are working really hard to consider how the scheme supports these transport needs for children and young people who have to access their school. Eligibility is an issue. I am sure it would have come up in the education hearings around eligibility.

MS LE COUTEUR: I want to go to page 41, continued support through the ILC funding. I note that four organisations were given further transitional funding until February 2018. Can you let us know which organisations they are and what is the plan for them after February 2018, which is not that long off?

Ms Dunne: Let me just say that there is a further round of ILC grants funding in operation currently.

MS LE COUTEUR: A round from the commonwealth?

Ms Dunne: From the commonwealth, and I understand that the ACT has been allocated \$4 million. The NDIA have implemented an ideas portal, so these organisations are able to put their ideas in ahead of their submission to make sure that they are well prepared and that some of the difficulties that may have been experienced in the last round, which was really the pilot round nationally, are ironed out. Also, we have implemented a series of workshops to support organisations in the same way. I will just check the number of organisations.

MS LE COUTEUR: The annual report says there were four.

Ms Dunne: Yes, there were four. The organisations that were funded were—I have not got my list with me; I am sorry.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Pegasus Riding for the Disabled; Radio 1RPH, Technical Aid to the Disabled and Epilepsy ACT. SHOUT had previously received some transition funding and then was moved to a different support model.

Ms Dunne: We are really hopeful that, with the extra support that we have provided for organisations in this current round, there will be a greater success rate, and we are hoping that there will be lots of great ideas that are funded for the ACT.

MS LE COUTEUR: Are you anticipating that this will be the last bit of transition funding from the ACT? It sounded like that.

Ms Dunne: Transition funding from the ACT has closed off. The funding that ILC receives now is actually commonwealth funding. These four organisations missed out last time, and we were quite surprised because in the work that had been done previously we were quite sure that they would be categorised as an ILC organisation and confident that they would be successful. Once we understood that they had not been successful, we engaged with the commonwealth, with the NDIA, and we negotiated further funding for them. That was commonwealth money. So the commonwealth funding for ILC will continue.

MS LE COUTEUR: The funding that you are talking about in the annual report was commonwealth funding? Is that what you are telling me? Those four organisations got additional—

Ms Dunne: With those four organisations that were funded until February, that was commonwealth funding.

MRS DUNNE: What do you see in the future?

Ms Dunne: The future around ILC?

MRS DUNNE: I was not actually thinking about ILC; I was thinking about funding for those organisations, which are ACT organisations.

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes, as I asked about earlier.

Ms Dunne: The ACT no longer funds ILC organisations. That has been cashed out. It has been transitioned to the commonwealth as part of our contributions.

MS LE COUTEUR: You would be aware that in the last few days ACTCOSS has called for a contingency fund to deal with situations effectively similar to this for the commonwealth's transitional funding for organisations that are ACT based where it is not clear that they are being appropriately funded. Do you think that idea has merit? And what will you do if these organisations, which were previously unsuccessful and then got some transitional funding, are unsuccessful again? What happens?

Ms Dunne: I think that we have to wait to see what happens in this next round. As I said, there has been a lot of work and investment put in to make sure that we pick up on the needs of organisations. If you look at the Productivity Commission's review, it is saying that it is false economy not to fully fund ILC organisations; it is recommending that the commonwealth put more money into this. The issue for us here is that we have cashed out that funding envelope that has gone into our contributions; the money has gone to the commonwealth; and what we need to do now is work very closely with the commonwealth and with organisations to make sure that we are comfortable with the reality of what happens.

Mr De'Ath: Can I just say that this and other questions and comments highlight the very reason why we established the office for disability, staffed that up and are constantly in extensive negotiations, discussions and advocacy with the commonwealth. The minister has been extremely active on a number of fronts. As I think all members are aware, with the ACT being first cab off the rank in this regard, we have identified a vast range of issues and made strong representation to the commonwealth in relation to these. And I think it would be fair to say that that had a significant impact in some of the results. This is just one component.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I think that our feedback will be reflected and is being reflected in the next round of ILC grants. But also, in addition to the work that the NDIA has done with the ideas portal et cetera and getting feedback on ideas, as the annual report notes, three of the organisations also received grants through the ACT government, through the sector development funds, to look at their own business model strategies to better prepare themselves for the next ILC round grant.

In I think the last hearings—certainly in the ones before—it was discussed that there has been \$12 million put into transitional support over the years of trial and transition to the NDIS. A lot of funding has gone into the community sector to help organisations prepare for the transition. In the last year of the NDIS rollout starting to ramp up, some goalposts moved and organisations found themselves not as well prepared as they might have been.

Three organisations have received additional sector development funding to help them think about their business models and alternative sources of funding. I know, for example, that TADACT identified a potential source of funding in the aged-care sector and have received some funding from the aged-care sector, which is potentially a more sustainable form of support. The other challenge they have faced is issues with getting equipment support through the NDIS, with significant delays and red tape around approval for equipment and assistive technology. That has meant that their core business of providing assisted technology has involved a lot more administration than would otherwise be the case.

There are multiple challenges for a number of these organisations. It is not just about ILC funding. We have really tried to support organisations to think about their own business, to think about how they apply for ILC.

One last thing I would add is that funds have also been made available for ACTCOSS to deliver two grant writing workshops for organisations, to assist the smaller organisations. This is since the end of this financial year that we are talking

about. Part of the impetus for that was the ILC round.

MS LE COUTEUR: Page 40, just opposite what I was talking about, talks about the ACT allied health market capacity building project which was to conclude in August 2017. On the basis of what you have said already, Ms Dunne, I assume that this is now fully commonwealth and there will be no more assistance from the ACT.

Ms Dunne: That was a sector development funding project, yes. It has concluded. I think that it was very worthwhile in relation to the allied health provider sector. They were able to gain from the knowledge that they acquired during that process to sustain a model to allow them to find creative ways of delivering services. But that funding was commonwealth funding and the project has been concluded.

MS LE COUTEUR: Is that the same with Involve, which is on page 46? Above the picture, it says, “The work of Involve,” which is a website, “will continue to be implemented until the end of 2017.” Does this imply that after 2018 that website will no longer be available?

Ms Dunne: I am hoping that the website will continue. At the moment we are having a really close look at the Involve commitment. We are reviewing it. We are working with the DRG to have a look at what we might replace it with at the conclusion of 2017. The website had some positive features, and I think that it was useful for people to engage within the community. Whether or not the website continues is something that we will consider in the fullness of our strategy moving forward.

THE CHAIR: We will move to questions on early intervention services and youth engagement, while also continuing discussion around disability, therapy and child development.

MRS DUNNE: I would like to ask about the making a solid start program, which is referred to on page 64 of the CSD annual report. It says that the program aims to help families successfully introduce their babies to solid food. Can someone tell me how the program works, what it aims to do, what is the involvement of speech pathologists and why, and how are families referred to the program.

Ms Jordaan: The partnership with the dieticians at the hospital was around supporting mothers of young children, of four to nine months, who are transitioning to solids. We are finding through our casework across the directorate with Health that we are getting lots of referrals for mothers having difficulty with their young babies. Our staff met and we have successfully run these sessions with up to about 20 mums at a time at the child development service, with the dieticians attending as well. That is a partnership—

MRS DUNNE: What is the purpose? Is it just general education about introducing solids or is there a specific aim?

Ms Jordaan: The specific aim is to support mothers who have identified that they are having difficulty transitioning their children to solids. The idea is to provide general information but also to support the mother through the dietician or the speech pathologist if there are some specific concerns that she is having. The child is present

at the group with the mother; they provide general information about transition to solids but also provide some specific advice for the mother.

MRS DUNNE: What is the role of the speech pathologists?

Ms Jordaan: The role of the speech pathologist is to support the parent around some of the feeding issues that may be present around swallowing, around what solids to use, the textures of the food and some of the sensory issues that are involved around feeding. There is a whole range of speech pathology information that the speech pathologists have around supporting feeding young children.

MRS DUNNE: I am stunned.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I must admit, Mrs Dunne, that I was stunned when I first heard that this is one of the things that speech pathologists do, but it is actually one of the core skills of speech pathologists.

MRS DUNNE: Is there an underlying understanding that some children who do not take to solid food have ongoing speech issues, which is why the speech pathologists are there?

Ms Jordaan: No.

Ms Evans: Just very briefly, speech pathologists are equipped for feeding, swallowing and language issues right across the lifespan, from babies right through to people with, say, Parkinson's, who are having swallowing difficulties. You will see them in all kinds of different settings.

MRS DUNNE: Okay.

Ms Evans: It is not a pathology; it is not that these children will go on to have a problem. But often parents miss the little window of opportunity to move from bottle and breast to solid food. Babies know their own mind, and sometimes there is just a little bit more support required around that oral stimulation to get the bub to move across.

MRS DUNNE: Apart from just starving them until they do.

Ms Evans: Yes; the things we would have done, Mrs Dunne, that are not permissible.

MRS DUNNE: They will eventually.

MR PETERSSON: Back on disability and therapy services, I am wondering if someone can tell me about the staff transition support for Disability ACT and Therapy ACT workers.

Mr De'Ath: I will ask Christine Murray to respond to your question. While Christine is coming to the table, I will just say that this has been an absolutely massive reform, as I think you are all aware. You are hearing about various components of it on implementation, moving that stock of staff through a process, expertly managed, I

might add. Christine will give you some of the detail.

Ms Murray: I would like to acknowledge the statement. Disability ACT and Therapy ACT ceased services in 2016-17. It is probably one of the largest transitional changes within ACT public service history. There were about 523 staff involved in this process, not all of those permanent; as you would imagine, with the structure and the construct of disability housing, we had quite a number of casual staff in that space. What we wanted to achieve was not a pure redundancy process; we had to preserve the skills to grow the sector and transitionally support staff to enter into the non-government sector. Some of the government sector required different training levels, training expertise, in addition to what some of our staff had.

The only approach that would work was a case management approach. Ellen Dunne and I met with every staff member who was involved right at the start of the announcement and explained individual questions. With the announcement, people went through a grief process. Then, as we talked it through, sometimes in two or three conversations, we established where people were currently sitting and what their future directions were and encouraged them. Some people went into co-op opportunities; some people went into private practice; some people have been very well engaged within the disability services space.

We were really pleased with how we preserved the skills within the sector. We provided training support to 254 staff in DACT and 99 in Therapy ACT. The major upskilling in that space—and I have to acknowledge the support from CIT in this area—was a certificate III, a certificate IV and a diploma and double diploma. As I said, the majority of that was provided by CIT.

We have done an assessment. The majority of staff have been retained within the ACT and have been retained within the ACT sector, which is very positive. The conversations that I had with a number of people, particularly in the Therapy ACT space, were along the lines of “I came straight from university as a speech pathologist into this particular space and I really want to start a business but I don’t actually know how.” I imagine that is relatively daunting.

There were 65 staff who got together and got particular funding and support from the Lighthouse innovation centre, which included training support and mentoring on establishing a business. There are different structures of business. Am I a sole trader? Should I go into a cooperative arrangement?

I would like to nod again to the work of Ellen Dunne and her very small but dedicated team of case managers who worked individually with staff over the period of the transition. Quite rightly, Ellen and her team have been given a number of awards in this space, but I think even more it is the feedback that you get on a day-to-day basis in terms of the transition, of staff saying, “I was worried because I had been an employee for 30 years. However, it’s actually fantastic and I’ve found this is how the reality will be into the future.”

I cannot comment as much about individual people with disabilities in particular who have transitioned into the non-government sector. However, the emails that I see talk about the clients who on many occasions transition with people who have been

working with them for a long time. Does that answer the question?

MR PETTERSSON: Well and truly. How many people have started businesses? A couple of times you mentioned people starting their own business in the wake of them closing. Do you know how many started businesses?

Ms Murray: The number that I have—I do not want it to be quoted as an exact number—is around 60 to 70 people who have gone out into private business in that space. The feedback around the support that they received from the Lighthouse innovation centre was “It gave me the confidence to do so.” We all know that you can be an amazing speech pathologist but you do not necessarily know how to do a business activity statement. “How do I actually set it up?” “What sort of business?” It is about that 60 to 70 mark who have stepped out on their own. It is particularly in the Therapy ACT space, as I think we touched on earlier.

MR PETTERSSON: And with the people redeployed within the ACT public service, has that been across the service or has it been focused in particular areas?

Ms Murray: It has been focused on particular areas. However, I would like to note that there has been quite a high level of support across the ACT public service. The reason that it is relatively limited is the skills matching that we have. Essentially, a disability support worker grade 1 is equivalent to about an ASO 2, but that does not fully encapsulate the skills that they bring. A school assistant in education working with young people with disabilities or in the hospital—we saw a number of our staff transition into a hospital setting—can build on those skills rather than enter the admin stream.

When we talk about the senior managers, the managers and the policy officers, obviously there is a broader scope for redeployment and skill matching across the service. I would say that, in standing up for the child development service, we directly redeployed from Therapy ACT and Disability ACT into that space. However, many a HR directors whole-of-government meeting focused on how we could provide support to keep those people within the service who want to stay.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Anecdotally, at the National Multicultural Festival, as I was wandering around—lots of Community Services Directorate staff volunteer at the festival, as I am sure you are aware—someone came up to me and said that it was her last weekend, she was finishing up at Disability ACT and she could not speak highly enough about the support she had got and the training she had received. She was happy to be moving on. It was a real tribute to the team.

MR PETTERSSON: That is good to hear.

THE CHAIR: I have a question in the early intervention space in relation to how the child and family centres are trying to expand the numbers of families they are engaging with. I know that some specific programs are mentioned, in particular the new kids and families holiday program. Can you elaborate on how the child and family centres are engaging with more families?

Ms Saballa: Yes, I would be happy to. Good morning panel. That is a really excellent

question.

MRS DUNNE: We always like that sort of feedback.

THE CHAIR: We notice we do not tell you when it is not.

Ms Saballa: It is an excellent question because it presents me with an opportunity to talk about the work that we are doing in the child and family centres. I extend an invitation from the minister: if any members of the committee would like to come to visit the child and family centres, you would be so welcome.

There is nothing like spending time in the centres to appreciate the vibrancy, the diversity of what we deliver and the expertise of the staff, and also engage with children and families to hear their experiences of what it is like to receive a service in the centres.

Specifically to your question, we always look at our service offer in the child and family centres. As the committee would appreciate, there are three key things that we aim to do. We focus on young children; so it is families with young children. We are committed to investing time, expertise and commitment to improve outcomes for young children and to change life trajectories for children. That particularly relates to more vulnerable children in our community.

That is a really important point. The child and family centres are across three sites in the ACT, but we are much more than that. We are an early intervention and university accessible program. It means that all families with young children are welcome to drop in, engage with staff.

There are then a whole lot of services that families can be engaged in. There can be a combination of those services. It might be drop in. It might be a parent or a carer coming in and asking for some parenting tips. It might be about being new to being a parent. It might be a grandparent being new to having a child in kinship care. It may be strategies about their child's behaviour. You can phone up or drop in and get some one on one support. That is a lighter touch support.

There is then a range of services and programs that we provide. There are good programs. They are focused on particular issues that families may be experiencing. It may be around parental skills development and gaining some strategies about how to better understand your child's cues, or some strategies about attachment and how to be able to positively guide your children's behaviour.

We have programs for children. For example, primary aged children can learn strategies to use for childhood anxiety. We have our multicultural playgroups. These are really well subscribed and they are fantastic opportunities for the community to come together. It is a welcoming, culturally safe and inclusive environment. It is an opportunity to meet with the expert staff that we have in our centres. Importantly, it is an opportunity to have fun with your child in those playgroups.

We are always looking at how we engage with our community. There are some new things that we have done. In January this year we piloted a new program. That was the

kids and families free events and activities. The reason that we did this is that—from the work that we do in the directorate and the knowledge of the families that we see coming through the doors of the child and family centres—we know that there are families that may not have the resources and the supports to be able to access the wide range of fantastic free activities across Canberra, and there are lots of things available.

We wanted to look at how we could run a holiday program using the child and family centre as a base. It was rolled out across the three centres. It was a pilot. Something that we like to do in the child and family centres is really look at the data. We like to utilise the facilities that we have. We want to use the expertise of our staff and our wider linkages with community sector partners and government. So we developed a program of free events and activities, and it was really successful.

For that pilot we had over 600 children participate over the four weeks. The beauty of a pilot is that you learn about what works. Of course we had a hunch that it would be successful. Our services are child friendly, and are culturally safe and inclusive. Our staff have great expertise. We were able to open up the doors to the centres and offer something a little bit different. That is one thing that we have done.

From that it was really interesting. We had families that engage with the centres already. It was a wonderful opportunity for them to come and spend time with their children—some of them with the older children; we had grandparents; we had friends—and really participate in activities like yoga and gardening. There was a real focus on culturally safe activities as well. We brought in a lot of expertise.

The other thing that we did is partner with CMAG, the Canberra Museum and Gallery. This year for the first time we hosted the children's sanctuary. Again this was another part of Canberra being a city that values and welcomes children and their families. You can imagine the environment of CMAG.

We also partnered with the Canberra language association. We were able to provide a sanctuary. It was a whole lot of activities in a wonderful environment away from the hustle and bustle of the Multicultural Festival. It was an opportunity for parents and their carers to engage in a range of great activities and see a range of performances. We got such positive feedback.

The other thing that we do in terms of engaging with families is that we seek feedback not only from parents and carers but also from children. "What was your favourite thing about the children's sanctuary? What did you like best about the kids and families program and what could we do next time?"

THE CHAIR: Sorry to interrupt you; I know we are coming up against it time wise. You have said that 624 children were involved in the kids and families holiday program. Do you track the total number of families that you have engaged with across all three child and family centres including all of those different programs as a total number?

Ms Saballa: In terms of those new programs that we have just put in place or more broadly?

THE CHAIR: More broadly across the whole centre: people who drop in or people who are involved in the different programs that you offer.

Ms Saballa: When you have a look at our strategic indicator for the child and family centres you see that it is around occasions of service to clients that engage with the child and family centres. We then have a number of accountability indicators that sit below that, that are actually focusing on the type of service people get. It might be engagement in a community development education program. It might be more targeted assistance.

In terms of looking at the exact number of families, I do not have that exact number. It is not part of our reporting framework. But certainly it is something that we are asked about. We are currently looking at our performance indicators to reflect, I guess, our service offer and how that shifted over time. We do look at the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children accessing our services. You would be aware that, through the growing healthy families initiative, we have been able to really build the number of children and families accessing the services.

MRS KIKKERT: My question is about youth engagement, and youth homelessness and poverty, which is on page 52. *A Picture of ACT's Children and Young People 2016* notes that the number of youth who are homeless in the ACT more than doubled between 2006 and 2011. That is from 355 to 755. I note that the 2016 report is not available yet. What is the ACT government doing specifically to address youth homelessness in the territory?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I think that that question would be better addressed to Minister Berry as the minister for homelessness. That is in her portfolio.

Mr De'Ath: We are happy to take that this afternoon.

MRS KIKKERT: Are you doing anything in regards to youth?

Mr De'Ath: I think we could give you a pretty comprehensive answer this afternoon, Mrs Kikkert.

MRS KIKKERT: The same report indicates that the percentage of children and young people in the ACT who live in a household experiencing rental stress increased 40 per cent in the decade before the 2011 census. What are you doing specifically to reverse this trend and to help the youth?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Again, that is a housing question. That probably could be more comprehensively answered with the housing people here this afternoon.

MRS KIKKERT: What do you know about the youth experiencing physical and mental health, and educational outcomes and so forth as a result of being homeless?

Ms Evans: I am happy to take a general response, Mrs Kikkert.

MRS KIKKERT: A general response would be fantastic.

Ms Evans: I say general because I think my colleagues in the housing area will be able to talk very specifically about some things they have in place. I think that will be a really comprehensive response. What I can talk about is that we do have more than \$2 million in the budget that goes to youth services generally. That is a whole range of things.

MRS KIKKERT: To service mental health in youth?

Ms Evans: I will talk generally to start with and I will then narrow down a little bit. Mental health in youth, in those middle years of high school and into college years, is sometimes not diagnosed. It might be that a young person is experiencing stress or anxiety, depression, those sort of things.

We have a whole lot of funding that goes to one-off supports: someone wanting to be able to drop in to talk through something that is going on in their life, short-term case work, and activities to increase social and community inclusion. That funding across a whole range of providers does really support young people.

Woden Community Service is a good example. They are funded to provide network coordination, case management and youth engagement specifically in the area that they work. They have great opportunities for students and young people to drop in at a youth centre. They can talk to a qualified youth worker. That could be in the mental health area. It could be about family stresses and pressures. It could be around things that are happening in their peer group.

Often teenagers are not able to specify what it is that is bothering them. They just need a safe space and someone to talk to. That is why those particular services are funded in that way. If it is around specific mental health issues, of course we partner with our colleagues in Health. Housing of course would speak to programs in the housing area.

MRS KIKKERT: I am glad that you mentioned the Woden health community centre. I recently read an article. They mentioned that they are underfunded in regards to providing assistance for youth programs. Do you as well see that they are underfunded or do you believe that they are fully funded to meet the demands of the youth?

Ms Evans: I think it is a variety of pressures. There are many young people and many things we could do to assist. Woden Community Service works with us in our partnership arrangements and we work with them to say, “Amongst the funding you get”—Woden Community Service is funded more than \$2 million annually—“what part of your funding is going into these specific areas?”

MRS KIKKERT: Did you just say Woden community centre receives \$2 million a year?

Ms Evans: Across a range of services it is funded, yes. They can use their funding for a variety of things. And they do indeed. As I said, network coordination might be one area: case management, youth engagement, a whole range of other services they provide into our community, youth being one part of that.

It is impossible to silo or compartmentalise what we provide for youth because they are part of our broader community. Woden might be providing them some supports but those same young people might have a different cultural background and they might be also engaging with Multicultural Youth Services, which is another funded organisation.

The supports are varied. They are across the whole community. Young people will choose how they engage. School is a significant part of how they engage. We obviously partner with our Education Directorate around that.

MRS KIKKERT: Would your response to them be, “You have enough funding. You do whatever you can with the amount of money that has been given to you”?

Ms Evans: That would not be my response, Mrs Kikkert, because as a public servant that is not my call to make.

MRS KIKKERT: Would that be the response from the minister?

Mr De’Ath: I think it is fair to say that we can never put enough funding into the range of community services that we would love to provide. But we are confident that what is being provided here is exceptionally well considered, good value for money and people are doing a really great job of what they have got.

Dr Collis: I have been in communication with Chris Redmond from Woden Community Service over recent weeks around matters to do with youth engagement in Woden. I think Chris pointed out in that article that a range of services for youth come together in his area, including programs offered through the police like the Police citizens youth club. PCYC are involved there as well.

Indeed, I believe that the pressures that Chris was talking about were related to the ceasing of programs like Youth Connections, an Australian government program which ceased in that area right across Australia about two years ago. There is a changing nature to this terrain which we have to look at on a regular basis.

Without stealing the thunder of Minister Berry this afternoon, I point to the OneLink program which, coincidentally, is run by Woden Community Service, and has now been in operation for a full year. It is about coordinating and receiving referrals for all people in community but particularly young people, and coordinating that service provision right across the service sector.

OneLink brings together all of the programs that sit around child youth services and housing services. We have a place where there is a lot of intelligence and problem solving around particular issues. There are intersections between youth services and homelessness services in that space.

Mr De’Ath: I can add to that, Mrs Kikkert. It might be useful to note that in 2016-17, 599, or 31 per cent, were young people under 25 years of age accessing the OneLink service, which is pretty phenomenal.

MRS KIKKERT: You mentioned that Youth Connections ceased operating two years ago. What has been the outcome of that? What have you seen as a result of that program stopping two years ago? What are the youths doing?

Dr Collis: I think there are a number of responses. A lot of the slack in terms of the Youth Connections program may have been picked up by our colleagues in Education as a provided support for young people in terms of employment and training outcomes.

Youth Connections had a very strong employment training goal. What we are seeing now I cannot quantify. What I can say is that people who are in the field like Chris Redmond are saying that there is a growing need for that kind of service to be provided and that we need to work together, through the whole of government and all governments, to provide that kind of service.

MRS KIKKERT: Will you provide that service to Chris?

Dr Collis: I do not think Chris was saying that. I think he was saying that the investment had been reduced; that we need to work through all our forums, including our forums with the Australian government, across governments to ensure that there is an investment right across the community to support youth.

Ms Evans: I will provide some more examples of numbers around the way that is being picked up. Through the funding from January to June of this year around youth engagement, seven service providers were funded under the children, youth family services program to deliver youth engagement. There were 11,999 young people who came into contact with the youth engagement services. That was an increase of about 1,500 on the previous reporting period. That is really great capacity pick up.

Of the 11,999, a total of 1,089 received individual supports and about 150 needed some short-term case work; they had specific concerns. And 193 young people sought assistance with employment preparation, education or training. You can see that there is still great capacity in the sector; they are still picking that up. Of those, 399 were not engaged in any education, training or employment at the commencement of the reporting period. This was able to be reduced by 188 at the completion of the reporting period. There was a halving of those numbers of young people who needed supports to get into employment training. That is really still a very significant investment being made in that area.

MS LE COUTEUR: At the bottom of page 52 it refers to emergency and financial material assistance. I note that UNSW has just undertaken a review of contemporary approaches to material and financial aid. What were the outcomes of this review and will the ACT government adopt the recommendations?

Ms Evans: We have been working with our community sector partners around the emergency material and financial aid program, and the report was just one part of that. Another part of it was that we had two very significant workshops with community sector organisations to consider best value and how to approach the EMFA redesign, if you would like to call it that.

The paper really gave us some things to consider. The one that is probably the most

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key, and that we have certainly adopted, is that for most families who need some level of emergency support there is more going on in their life than needing some groceries. The report was really saying that this needs to be more holistic, and it needs to take into account what else is going on for that family. If they are coming in, and it is very transactional and they get some food vouchers or whatever, are they just going to be back in two weeks needing more food vouchers? Are the kids going to school? Are there other things going on with that family?

We have been developing a statement of requirements for the next step of procurement that we will do for EMFA. That will include that each organisation needs to tell us how they will make it more of a wraparound approach; how the outcomes will be reported on rather than just the numbers.

Rather than just saying 20 people came through the door to get a voucher this month, 20 people came through the door and, of those, 15 were referred to another service, or with 10 of them we were able to give some individual counselling around what else might support them. So we have taken up the recommendations, and we will have a really solid approach to EMFA as a result.

MS LE COUTEUR: How much money is provided? I appreciate it is not all in money but how much is provided? I assume that in general no-one is expected to repay this, for the food vouchers or—

Ms Evans: In terms of the food vouchers—

MS LE COUTEUR: They are not repayable; am I wrong about that?

Ms Evans: No, you are not wrong about that. It is given to them as a support. It is more than \$1½ million in terms of total supports across the whole of the EMFA program. That is across a number of years, though. Food supports in particular are about \$86,000, I think, a year.

MS LE COUTEUR: Not much.

Ms Evans: No, but sufficient, particularly when you take into account that, if you are talking about what other services people need, while the initial food vouchers or whatever are helpful, often for them it is more about, “What are my ongoing supports?” Sometimes it is about linking with the schools. Schools also provide supports and that sort of thing. I think we get really good value out of the total amount that goes in, but families will greatly benefit from having more wraparound supports.

Mr De’Ath: This is yet another example of the particularly privileged nature of our work in CSD. One entry point through one avenue, which might be some support around food, is an entry point into a raft of things to support people. Jacinta has done a great job of describing that. That is characteristic of so much of our work and it is a privileged position to be in.

THE CHAIR: We will break for 15 minutes.

Hearing suspended from 10.46 to 11.01 am.

THE CHAIR: We will continue with early intervention services and youth engagement questions as well as going into child and youth protection services. I understand there may be a correction.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Christine can provide some clarification.

Ms Murray: I would like to provide clarification on one of the questions that I answered earlier in the session. The question was around how many businesses had started that we are aware of. The number I spoke of was around 60 employees who are employed within those businesses, our staff who have transitioned. I would just like to clarify that there are around 16 actual businesses that have started, some of those employing between five and 10 people. I just wanted to clarify for completeness.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MRS DUNNE: I want to go to child and youth protection services. There is a range of statistics that come out of the annual report, including increasing child concern reports and children spending longer times in out of home care. I am particularly taken by a comment on page 68 of the annual report. It says:

... further work is required to evolve and mature services before we see tangible outcomes.

That is in relation to A step up for our kids.

Minister, is this an admission that after nearly three years, the government's new out of home care strategy has produced little by way of tangible outcomes? The report seems to be asking us to be patient. When would you expect to see more tangible outcomes than are reported in the annual report?

Ms Stephen-Smith: It is important to clarify the time frames. While the step up document was launched in January 2015, as you would be aware, Mrs Dunne, there was a period of making legislative change and commissioning services. The actual service continuum of care was not completely rolled out until, I understand, October last year. I understand that that was the final part of that rollout. I might hand over to Dr Collis to talk about what that is referring to.

Dr Collis: As the minister said, the services commenced rollout at the beginning of 2016, and it was completed in October of 2016. This refers to the capacity to deliver on some of those very intensive services.

An example of this would be the uniting child and families program, which commenced rolling out in January-February of 2016 and was completed by June 2016. This program is a long-term intensive program. Its intention is to work with families over an extended period of time and to deliver change over an extended period of time.

At the time of the annual report, we were unable to report against outcomes directly against the child and families program, other than participation outcomes. We know

that the program, for example, engaged with a significant number of families, and we know the breakdown of those families in terms of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous families. What we did not know was whether, after completing that program, three months and 12 months on, that program had been successful in keeping children out of the out of home care sector. That is part of the outcomes framework that we are measuring so that we can track the success of that program.

As I mentioned before, we had early green shoots around that program, that is, people were engaging with it and anecdotally we were getting good feedback around the people who had received that service. Our initial data that is available now, as of the first quarter of this year, appears to go beyond green shoots. What we are getting now is indication that the program is looking to be quite successful at keeping children out of out of home care. The data we have at the moment indicates that the program is 91 per cent successful, on completion, in keeping children out of out of home care for three months and 85 per cent successful at keeping children out of out of home care over a period of 12 months. Clearly we could not report on that until the 12 months was up.

It is just a matter of understanding that to do reform in this space is complex and is going to take not just a year or two but five years, the strategy, to start realising those full benefits as we move forward.

We are starting to track other pieces of data. We are able to start to see now that there was a reduction in the growth of children coming into the out of home care in the 12 months to this period of time, despite quite significant and unusual growth, above trend growth, in the two years prior to the implementation of the services.

Mr De'Ath: Can I just add to and qualify that a bit? To June 2017 there were 146 families participating. That was 320 children. Approximately a third of those families were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people. That is a very significant achievement in terms of keeping out of the tertiary system the very things that we are wanting to do to strengthen and support families.

Dr Collis: The other aspect of step up, which, of course, is a multi-faceted multi-tiered approach to the issue of how to improve the area of child protection and out of home care, is the role that our community partners, ACT Together, Uniting, play and how they partner with government. We are really thrilled with ACT Together's professionalism in bringing their capacity to recruit foster carers, for example. Their professional and innovative approaches to the development of foster care have already this year resulted in 50 new foster carers being approved in this space. That is an unprecedented growth. So there is significant growth and there are significant improvements being seen now, but it is still early in this process; we are not two years into a five-year strategy.

MS LE COUTEUR: Can I specifically ask about foster care, out of home care? To what extent, if at all, is the sexuality or gender identity of the young person or child being considered in the context of providing out of home care?

Dr Collis: I will defer specifics to my colleague Helen Pappas in this regard, but as a jurisdiction we and ACT Together actively recruit diversity in foster carers. That has

been the case even prior to A step up for our kids. The matching of young people into the appropriate family is undertaken by a panel of people. As to the broader question of how sexuality is inputted into that, and how children and young people are supported in that process where sexuality is an important factor to consider, I will pass that on to Helen.

Ms Pappas: I acknowledge the privilege statement. As Dr Collis was saying, in the context of responding to the needs of individual children and young people, the sexuality of who they are going to be living with is not a key feature. Whether they are a single parent, a same-sex couple or any other version of that, if they are able to respond to the needs of children and young people, that is absolutely satisfactory to us. We also have same-sex couples who adopt. That is not a restriction.

MS LE COUTEUR: That was not really where I was going. It was more that if the child has issues in that regard they go to a family that is sympathetic to their issues. I am not suggesting in any way that you would not be having foster parents of that diverse range; I am asking about whether the foster parents' views on sexuality and gender identity, particularly in instances where I am aware that some children have left their birth homes because of those issues, are considered.

Ms Pappas: There are not great numbers of kids in care. There are some young people who are making some decisions. Those foster carers and kinship carers particularly are supported by ACT Together and by child and youth protection services to make those decisions well; they support them in making their decision. That includes additional training and support to carers, information so they understand what is happening, and additional support for those children and young people who are making those decisions around sexuality.

MS LE COUTEUR: That is decisions specifically about sexuality, not just decisions in general?

Ms Pappas: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: This may be something to take on notice, but can you provide for the committee—we are two years into A step up for our kids, so for the two years prior to that—the number of children entering out of home care. So it is for this year, the first year of the operation, and the two years before, just by way of comparison. And also can you provide the number of child concern reports for that period and the number substantiated, just to give a continuum.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Those numbers should not be very difficult to provide. They are reported publicly in AIHW.

Dr Collis: They are reported in the annual report.

MRS DUNNE: It is a matter of extracting them from each of the annual reports.

Dr Collis: Sure. We can provide that. That will be just looking at our previous annual reports. As you will see in this annual report, I believe 763 was the number of children under the parental responsibility of the Director-General. I can tell you that

as of the end of last quarter there were 764.

MRS DUNNE: But that is not the number of new entrants; that is the total number.

Dr Collis: That is a total, yes. There are ins and outs.

MRS DUNNE: I would like to know ins and outs as well as the total number, because that would be a measure of the quantum of the issue, and also some progress in that space.

Dr Collis: Certainly, and it would be a measure of the success of restoration as well as prevention in regard to that. We can give restoration. For example, in the reporting year I believe 90 children were restored home. That is a significant increase on the previous year, which was an increase on the previous year. We can give that sort of data for you. We are preparing for the minister to table a report twice yearly on this data from our performance recording, so there will be a comprehensive report before the Assembly early in the new year around this.

Mr De'Ath: I think it is fair to say, as Dr Collis has just described, that we are moving to a process which will make it much easier for that information to be seen openly about how this is tracking.

MRS DUNNE: That would be good. It would be great.

MS LE COUTEUR: Mrs Dunne referred to the step up program; you have talked about the foster care advocacy service and the children and young people engagement support service. Are these government provided or are they NGO provided?

Dr Collis: Thank you for the question, Ms Le Couteur. Part of the design of step up was to have independent providers of advocacy. They are independent not only of government but of the providers of services, such as ACT Together and Uniting.

The provider for the birth family advocacy service is Red Cross, who have brought forward and developed a very innovative model which they have used elsewhere in terms of advocacy for families in this space. We are very pleased about that. Of course, Create, whom we have a longstanding relationship with, are commissioned to provide engagement. Essentially, the mission for Create is to help the providers and government to hear the voice of young people and children in the system. It is not essentially advocacy, but, as you can appreciate, it is related to advocacy.

The reason why it is not directly advocacy is because there is statutory advocacy that occurs in terms of the Public Advocate's office, which is really clear about this. It is not a feature of all systems around Australia that they have such clear statutory advocacy built into the act. It is really great that we are able to, through Create, have that focus on the voice of a child, because it is essential to whether we are going to be successful or not here.

MR PETTERSSON: Can you please tell me about the consultation that took place regarding the charter of rights for young people at Bimberi, as well as what the response has been to the newly released charter?

Dr Collis: The charter of rights has been a project for some time. It was set up as part of the deliverables for the youth justice blueprint, as part of the actions from that. The previous children's commissioner was a great advocate and was instrumental in working with children's commissioners nationally around advocacy, and particularly a charter of rights for young people in detention.

This consultation process commenced about 18 months ago, with significant consultation in Bimberi by young people with the children's commissioner. Consultation more broadly then occurred with families, and with key stakeholders, including service providers within Bimberi, as well as the Aboriginal Legal Service, the Women's Legal Service and the general legal groups that are involved. The Youth Coalition, I believe, were particularly strong in the consultation around this.

With any consultation of this nature, and bearing in mind that the charter of rights is modelled on broader commitments we have about children's rights generally—specifically, children's rights within the justice system—the rights came already with a strong template that Australia had been a signatory to, in terms of international covenants. It brought that broader perspective in terms of consultation. However, it was necessary and appropriate that the Human Rights Commission be consulted, to ensure that the rights as stated were consistent with our Human Rights Act.

In terms of how they have been received, the young people have variously received them as “That's interesting” to “That's not very interesting,” as you would expect teenagers to be engaged with rights. School has been really useful in engaging in conversations, and school was used as a vehicle with which to engage in those conversations.

We have received feedback from staff. As part of our training we looked at getting feedback from that training. Staff are really positive about it. It clarifies a number of things and makes very transparent people's behaviours and what is expected. Having that capacity to have common language is appreciated by the staff. The rights also go to what obligations people have in this—young people, staff and visitors to the centre—which is a very useful dimension to the rights.

MR PETTERSSON: It is my understanding that there are 12 rights outlined in the charter. What are they?

Dr Collis: My expert topic! I will take that on notice, if you do not mind.

Ms Stephen-Smith: There is a poster in my office, Mr Pettersson.

Mr De'Ath: You might just drop in and have a look.

MR PETTERSSON: I will swing past. Okay, I will find out later. Staff are clearly engaged in this process. What kinds of training are the staff receiving in regard to the new charter?

Dr Collis: The charter is part of our human rights training, which is a mandatory part of our induction process for all new staff. That training is most frequently undertaken

by the children's commissioner staff as part of that induction training.

We are very fortunate that we have a very comprehensive induction training, for seven weeks, so that we can devote some time to not only familiarising with but talking through what the implications of the charter of rights are, and, more broadly, what it means to be someone who works within a centre which aspires to compliance with the Human Rights Act. What does that mean in the day-to-day practicalities of operating in the centre? That is a really important conversation.

It does not stop with induction; it goes on into refresher training and opportunities that arise from time to time about refreshing people's understanding, ensuring that young people are familiarised with the charter and that we can get from our Education colleagues in the Murrumbidgee Education and Training Centre information about how that is being received. There are ongoing training and familiarisation.

Ms Stephen-Smith: To answer your question very briefly, children have in the charter the right to be safe and looked after; the right to be respected; the right to be treated fairly; the right to have fun, play and be healthy; the right to be heard; the right for privacy and to have your own things; the right to ask questions about what is happening to you; the right to have contact with the people you care about and who know about your family and cultural history; the right to go to school; and the right to talk to people about things you do not like or do not understand. I can certainly confirm that the couple of young people I had lunch with at Bimberi a couple of months ago were very well aware of the existence of the charter and happy to talk about it. That was maybe a little tongue-in-cheek; as Dr Collis indicated, they are teenagers, after all.

Dr Collis: We do have a couple of examples, which probably should not be seen as tongue-in-cheek, where complaints that young people have made have referenced the charter. That, for me, is a demonstration. I think it is an indicator. But, again, it is early days.

MRS KIKKERT: I have noticed that back in 2009 there was an actual charter of rights for children and young people in out of home care. Eight years ago this was launched. That charter of rights is exactly the same as what you have just said: 12 points, exactly identical. Why did it take eight years for the Bimberi youth justice system to have exactly the same charter of rights as they do in out of home care? These youths are just as vulnerable as the youths in out of home care.

Dr Collis: The charter of rights for children in out of home care and the charter of rights for young people in detention are distinct processes. There are different conditions that—

MRS KIKKERT: It is identical. I can read it out. It is exactly the same as what the minister has said: "The right to be safe and looked after"—right down the 12 points, identical. So why did it take eight years for the Bimberi youth justice system to have exactly the same as what the out of home care youth had?

Dr Collis: I would like to direct a discussion about the charter of rights for children in out of home care, which has developed into standards for children in out of home care.

I suspect that, as the charter is a vehicle with which to educate young people on rights that they already have and are enshrined in the operating policies of Bimberi Youth Justice Centre as part of its compliance with the Human Rights Act, it would not be unusual for rights to be very similar, because they come from the same construct, which is the human rights construct. However, as to the nature of which words are the same or not the same in that, I cannot answer. What I can answer is that the process in Bimberi around the identification of the requirement for a charter of rights, which was brought to the attention of this jurisdiction by a previous children's commissioner as a consequence of a discussion and discourse of children's commissioners across Australia, did not occur in 2009; it occurred about two years ago.

MRS KIKKERT: I find it really irresponsible that it happened eight years ago and then eight years later we are finally realising that the Bimberi youth justice system needs one. We have seen countless reports that the Bimberi youth justice system needed to have this charter of rights several years ago. Why has it taken so long?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Mrs Kikkert, I am responsible for this problem. We actually googled the wrong charter. So you are right: the one that I read out was in fact the charter of rights for children in out of home care. It is not identical to the charter of rights for young people at Bimberi. So to answer Mr Pettersson's question correctly—

MR PETTERSSON: The question is still on notice.

Ms Stephen-Smith: The rights young people have at Bimberi are actually quite significantly differently worded. They are to be treated equally, with respect and dignity, by staff; to be kept safe while you are at Bimberi; to be given a copy of the Bimberi rules and information about your rights and responsibilities when you arrive in a way you can understand; to have a say about things that affect you, including decisions about your rehabilitation; to remain connected to the outside world; to receive proper health care; to access education and programs; to get help to see a lawyer and to talk to them privately; to have good living conditions; to practise your religion and/or express your culture; to make a complaint; and to get help to successfully return to the community. There are indeed 12 of them but they are quite different. I think that speaks to the difference in process that Dr Collis was talking about. I am sorry to have misled the committee inadvertently, and I hope you accept that correction.

MRS KIKKERT: That is fine. It just gets to the bottom line that there was a need within out of home care and the Bimberi youth justice system for a charter of rights. What I do not understand is that out of home care recognised this eight years ago and went ahead and did the ACT charter of rights; however, eight years later Bimberi finally picked it up, recognising the need for it. Why did it take so long?

Dr Collis: I need to point out again that the charter of rights that you have just heard, the charter of rights in detention, is entirely consistent with the approaches to forming the operational policies within Bimberi. One of the decisions early in the development of the youth justice blueprint was the commissioning of video material for young people on induction. That was seen as the appropriate vehicle to communicate their rights and wishes at that particular time, which it does. It is a very well used vehicle for informing young people of what their rights are, including the rights enshrined in

the charter.

Why did the vehicle of a charter happen at that particular time in history? The answer to that is that there was a broader discourse amongst children's commissioners who said, "Not only should we be informing people in this fashion but also it is important to have a symbolic charter within detention for that to happen." We are one of the early adopters of a charter of rights for young people in detention. The understanding of the history and development of ideas about whether we go to information sharing versus a charter is part of a broader discourse with children's commissioners.

Mr De'Ath: I would describe it as a very healthy evolution of systems that happens from time to time. Dr Collis has just indicated some of the drivers for it. We are very pleased to have it in place.

MRS KIKKERT: I would not call it a healthy evolution when a number of staff and Bimberi detainees have been hurt by this whole process of delay in seeking the needs of Bimberi staff and detainees. I would not call it a healthy process.

THE CHAIR: We will take that as a comment on the question. Following on from Mr Pettersson's questions regarding the youth justice blueprint, what progress has been made on the blueprint and, particularly, what elements were seen as innovative as part of the recognition that it has received nationally?

Dr Collis: As people would be aware, this year is the 50th year of the youth justice blueprint. The minister alluded in her opening address to the Australian Institute of Criminology award that was awarded last November, about 12 months ago. This is a prestigious award from the pre-eminent body in this area, who looked into the outcomes that the youth justice system as a whole, including Bimberi Youth Justice Centre, were achieving. It was a gold award. There was only one of those awards delivered in this space. It is a recognition from the most pre-eminent body.

The outcomes from the youth justice blueprint have been fairly dramatic and sustained. That goes to a significant reduction in the number of young people detained in Bimberi since 2010-11, from when the benchmark commenced. The number of children and young people who are under community supervision orders has also reduced significantly. All of these have been tabled in the Assembly, the extent of that. But an example of that is that in 2010-11 the average number of young people on any day in Bimberi was 21. Of that 21, 12 of those young people were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. As of this reporting period, the average number was 11, I believe, with the average number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people being fewer than three.

This has led to some interest by the Australian Institute of Criminology, which encouraged us to put in our performance data to interrogate and provided that significant award. It has also caught the interest of a number of other jurisdictions. We have had significant interest from Western Australia, New South Wales and the Northern Territory in understanding and looking at the work we do here as best practice.

In the past year we have continued to see a continuation of that data. However, we are

halfway and it is important for us to take stock of where we are. The circumstances are changing. So the announcement of the re-formation of the youth justice blueprint task force to get together to look at what the priorities should be for the next five years is a significant outcome, I think, to take stock and see what it has to achieve. This is not an achievement of the ACT government alone or even in major part; this is an achievement that the community sector, our government partners and, in many ways, many families who are involved in the system and the young people themselves can take credit for. We need to re-form and understand how we can maintain the momentum going forward. Obviously the charter of rights over the course of this last year was seen as a milestone. That was always a milestone that we had planned for in the youth justice blueprint space. That continues.

The other thing to be aware of in terms of success is that the offending rates for young people in the ACT have been trending lower over this time, quite significantly, and are in fact some of the lowest in Australia. I would suggest that much of that work can be sheeted home to our community sector partners, our colleagues in Justice and Community Safety and, indeed, the police. We are very lucky in this city to have very progressive, forward-thinking policing responses to young people. They have been instrumental in any reform that we have developed, including the after-hours bail support service. They opted in early and were an early adopter of that. So the reduction in numbers of young people remanded to Bimberi, which was very dramatic, was really largely about the partnership that policing and the community services directorate put together.

I could go on about this for some time, because I think this is something that we should be very proud of. We should be very proud of our staff, who work with very difficult children and families around this.

THE CHAIR: I think that the Northern Territory is picking up on some of the prevention services, the after-hours bail service initiative in particular. Is the task force that is being re-formed going to look at the findings of the royal commission in the Northern Territory to see what is relevant for us here as well?

Dr Collis: The Northern Territory royal commission into protection and youth justice, will bring down their report tomorrow, at 11 o'clock local time. We have received a pre-briefing from the Northern Territory, not the commission, around this. In view of the fact that on many of the reforms that may come out of that we may be subject matter experts, I draw attention, not by way of the royal commission so much, to the fact that one of the reforms that have occurred over the duration of the youth justice blueprint is the integration of youth justice and child protection services into one integrated uniform service delivery. This supports the Children's Court and our Children and Young People Act, which gives one integrated response to child protection and youth justice, so we can leverage lots of benefits out of those factors. That, too, should be seen as a benefit of the youth justice blueprint.

Mr De'Ath: It is important to note in celebrating these achievements that the Northern Territory, with the issues that they have faced, have made, I think, two formal visits to our jurisdiction to look at our facility, our staffing processes and procedures and the education component. They are planning a further visit. The director-general of that department has personally communicated to me his huge

appreciation of the extent which they have learnt from what is happening in the territory and the quality of the work that they have evidenced. I think we need to celebrate those things around facilities like this and pieces of work like this that have really had a significant impact.

MRS KIKKERT: My question is in regard to domestic adoptions. On pages 111 to 113, the recent data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare shows that, after years of decline, adoption rates in Australia are on the rise, up by 14 per cent on the figures from 2015-16. Is there a similar trend here in the ACT? And exactly how many domestic adoptions were finalised in the territory in 2016-17?

Ms Pappas: There were seven domestic adoptions in 2016-17; they were out of home care adoptions. Then we had three inter-country adoptions in 2016-17.

MRS KIKKERT: Say that again, please.

Ms Pappas: Three inter-country adoptions and seven domestic or local adoptions. The other piece of data that sits alongside the adoption data is the data that goes to the permanency of children living with people in and out of home care, which we call enduring parental responsibility. That effectively shifts the legal responsibility of the carer away from the foster carer to the parent: they have roles and responsibilities, and legal rights, just as any parent would.

MRS KIKKERT: Thank you.

Ms Pappas: So in total for 2016-17, the number of kids that were able to achieve permanent long-term stable orders was 17.

MRS KIKKERT: The annual report notes that half of the recommendations from the review of the domestic adoption process in the ACT have yet to commence. When can we expect to see all of these recommendations commence, and when will they be completed?

Ms Stephen-Smith: That report was tabled only in February 2017, in the second half of the financial year which this annual report reflects. The actions that got underway immediately related to communicating information with respective adoptive parents and families. Those actions, as you can see from the table, are complete. Other actions will rely on other processes, but Ms Pappas can talk more about that.

Ms Pappas: The actions that are yet to be progressed go to exploring the dispensation matters of consent. We know that in adoption matters it becomes particularly complicated where biological parents do not consent to the adoption. There is quite a detailed and complex process to work alongside those parents to go to a process of dispensing with their consent in the Supreme Court. That is very comprehensive and takes a long time. We have to demonstrate to the Supreme Court that we have taken every action to ensure that that parent's rights have been heard, have been understood and have been considered in the assessment report. It is quite complex, and it does have some human rights implications for parents along the way.

The other issue related to exploring integrated birth certificates for children and

people who have been adopted. Upon their request, they were able to get a birth certificate where they were able to see that they had been adopted and that was clearer. We will do some work with Access Canberra along those lines.

MRS KIKKERT: In the annual report, it says that the Community Services Directorate continues to transition the delivery of permanency support services to the community as outlined under A step up for our kids. I understand that has been completed. Is that correct?

Ms Pappas: Yes.

MRS KIKKERT: Could you please explain the process, how that was done?

Ms Pappas: The process of the transition?

MRS KIKKERT: That is correct.

Ms Pappas: ACT Together are the consortium who are the community providers. It has Barnardos Australia as the lead, OzChild, Relationships Australia, Australian Childhood Foundation and Premier Youthworks. That is the ACT Together consortium.

The process we used was that we identified those children and young people on long-term orders who were stable. They were the kids and carers that were transitioned over in the first instance. Then we took the 12 months, longer actually, and moved those children and young people and their carers over to ACT Together, which effectively means that ACT Together now does the case management direct, the day-to-day contact with carers and supporting of children.

Currently, as children come through the Children's Court and long-term orders are secured, there are arrangements once a month where ACT Together and child and youth protection services come together, talk about families that are able to transition to the community provider, and ensure that information is shared and carers are informed and involved. Then they transition out on that tier and they take on the responsibility of case management. The reason we do that is to ensure that government does not stay in the lives of children and young people where we do not need to be in there. It is to normalise those arrangements as much as possible and let those kids and their carers get on with their life.

Ms Stephen-Smith: It is probably important to clarify that the entire responsibility for the adoption process has not shifted to ACT Together. I do not know if you want to clarify the role that CYPS continues to play?

Ms Pappas: ACT Together are able to develop and do assessments for enduring parental responsibility. There is a panel that considers those assessments. We are able to progress that through the Children's Court. In the context of adoption, ACT Together are able to development the assessment report and work alongside those parents. Then they work with us to make those applications to the Supreme Court. The Director-General remains a legal parent to those children until the Supreme Court makes their decision. We work together. They are able to do the work

independently; then we come together and we make that application.

MRS KIKKERT: I understand that the adoption task force made six recommendations. Three of them have been completed. When will the other three be commenced or completed?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Ms Pappas just spoke about the issues around dispensation of consent, and that is ongoing work. While it says that it is to commence at the end of 2016-17, that policy work is something that I think the directorate is currently undertaking?

Ms Pappas: We are; we have written to Justice and Community Safety and we will be working with them to progress that work. It has not commenced yet.

MRS KIKKERT: When do you think it might be completed?

Ms Pappas: We will have to be guided by JACS in terms of their ability—

Mr De'Ath: Mrs Kikkert, without having a specific conversation with them, at this stage I do not think we can give you a definitive answer on that.

MRS KIKKERT: You just do not know?

Mr De'Ath: We want to know, and we will know.

MRS KIKKERT: That is it. So it is as simple as: I do not know.

Mr De'Ath: We just do not know at the moment.

Ms Stephen-Smith: We obviously want to progress this as quickly as we can, but it is a complex piece of work and there are a lot of other pressures across both directorates. There is a lot of other work that is going on between the two directorates in terms of things like information sharing and external oversight, which I know you are very interested in. It is how we progress all of these pieces of work within the resources that are available. Obviously there is not an endless bucket of resources. I do not know if Dr Collis has anything to add on the time frames.

Dr Collis: Just that we are in active conversation with our colleagues in Justice and Community Safety to prioritise the work in adoptions. But it is a priority decision.

MRS KIKKERT: Finally—take this on notice, please—can you provide to this committee the assessment criteria currently used to determine if a person or a couple should be allowed to adopt in the ACT.

Ms Pappas: Yes; I will have to take that one on notice.

MRS KIKKERT: Thank you.

MS LE COUTEUR: I note that the Human Rights Commission report said that notifications made to the Public Advocate under section 507 of the Children and

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Young People Act take, on average, four months, and in 12 cases took over six months. Can you advise what is causing these delays?

Dr Collis: As the Public Advocate mentioned, we are working very closely together in terms of abuse in care notifications. We already have systems in place that go beyond our compliance requirements in this. To get that information clear, we do notify of abuse in care matters early in processes; we provide that right at the beginning.

The extent of time it takes to get to the final report is probably reflective of the thoroughness of the appraisal and investigation processes which are undertaken from that point onwards. We are aware, in working with the Public Advocate, that they would like the information early, but they would like the information more comprehensively at the point of appraisal being finalised. We actually have the systems in place now to do that. We also have indicated that it would be simpler if we just provide the appraisal report, rather than a summary of our involvement, so that they have the full and complete set of information that happens. That has not been a part of the protocol in the past, but it is clearly one that this Public Advocate would like, and we are more than willing to participate in it.

MS LE COUTEUR: That sounds like an excellent idea. With your changes and improvements, how long is it now taking to get reports from you to the Public Advocate? Is it still the average of four months?

Dr Collis: My understanding—and I might get Helen to go into the detail—is that our compliance with this is absolute; we comply with what is required in the act.

MRS DUNNE: There is no time line in the act.

Dr Collis: The time that the Public Advocate is talking about is a negotiated protocol in time. I will hand over to Ms Pappas.

Ms Pappas: The act requires us to inform the Public Advocate at the completion of an appraisal. As Dr Collis said, that can take some time. The arrangements are fairly new, so we do not have enough time under our belts to understand the impact of time around when the Public Advocate receive that information. But they are receiving it at the point of a child protection report, which is at the earliest point, and they have other opportunities to engage in those conversations, including seeking additional information, attending care team meetings and participating should they wish to. It gives them the opportunity to contribute and intervene as they need to.

MS LE COUTEUR: They are now being told at the beginning of the process—

Ms Pappas: Right at the beginning.

MS LE COUTEUR: not just at the end?

Ms Pappas: That is right.

MS LE COUTEUR: Basically, what we are all concerned about is ensuring that any

abuse, any problems, stop. What are you doing to ensure that, with a child in placement, if they are suffering from abuse, there is speedy remedial action?

Ms Pappas: What was the question?

MS LE COUTEUR: If there is a child in placement and there is abuse of some sort, which is the sort of thing—

MRS DUNNE: Which is substantiated.

MS LE COUTEUR: that you would be reporting, what is being done to ensure that there is speedy remedial action?

Dr Collis: Abuse in care reports are our highest priority, and we would be responding immediately to any abuse in care report. The role of the Public Advocate is to oversight the process that we use, not to insert themselves necessarily in the decision-making around that. We actually want to respond, potentially, in minutes or hours rather than days, weeks or months. We have a very clear protocol internally to get the abuse in care matters dealt with as an absolute priority.

You would appreciate that, with the scrutiny of families in the out of home care sector, there are a number of child concern reports that come in that relate to things like neglect. We may want to get out very quickly and find that there is a simple support that can be put in place to grandma, who has had an income change or a housing change in her situation, and someone has reported a neglect situation. We would want to get out and put those supports in place very quickly. If there is immediate, imminent harm for children, which is very rare, we would want to get out straightaway.

The Public Advocate does not insert themselves in that process; rather, they look at our decision-making from that point of view and provide both systemic and specific advice about how we should go forward from there.

MRS DUNNE: In relation to stability in out of home care, the annual report seems to reveal a two-year decline in the proportion of children exiting care having experienced no more than two placements. It dropped from 82 to 75 per cent. One of the things we have said we would be aiming for is increased stability in placements. What exactly is the directorate doing to reverse the trend and ensure stability of placement for children in out of home care?

Dr Collis: You are absolutely correct; stability in care is a really important outcome measure to find out the success and health of the system. A step up for our kids has had input regarding a more sophisticated approach to understanding this area. With respect to our joint governance mechanisms with the consortia—us and Uniting—this is one of the pieces of data which we put before that governance group to investigate, explore and find out what the actual situation is for young people on the ground, so that we can understand what changes in that data actually mean.

Over the course of the past 12 months we have set up a fairly robust governance system which can explore this performance data. With that figure of 75 per cent, that

still places the ACT at the top end of jurisdictions nationally around that. However, there are some matters that could affect that. For example, since the act in 2008, children have been staying longer in care. We are going to start to get young people come through who are going to age out of care, and we do not know what their experiences were. If they had an experience early in their care of two or three placements to stabilise that placement, before the stability, that may start featuring in our data. That may be one source of fluctuation in that data. But suffice to say it is a piece of data that we take very seriously and we put before our appropriate governance organisations across A step up to explore and provide the best possible answer, and we are doing that currently. We are exploring that issue right now.

MRS DUNNE: In exploring that issue, what conclusions are you coming to?

Dr Collis: I would not like to pre-empt what is happening there. We are at the point of looking at all of the young people who have made up this dataset over the course of the 12 months, and looking at their particular experiences. We are early in that process, so I would not pre-empt it.

I know the likely nature of why there would be such a fluctuation. As I said ageing out is one possible factor that could impact on us, as it is more likely that there will be more than one placement the longer children stay in care. It could be a feature of our restoration. Our restoration emphasis has meant that young people have come in and out of care over the past 12 months in the plan to restore to the birth family. We may be capturing an increased focus on restoration in that particular data source as well. There are a number of possibilities. I would not want to pre-empt what the actual answer would be.

MRS DUNNE: When will we see the answer?

Dr Collis: We would hope that this would be part of an explanatory note to the performance reporting that we would make on a biannual basis. This is one of the headline indicators for our evaluation of A step up.

MRS DUNNE: We discussed this earlier this morning: when are we going to see the first of these biannual reports? Early next year?

Dr Collis: Early next year.

MRS DUNNE: Is that February or March?

Dr Collis: It is likely to be in March, as we input the full-year data into the performance reporting.

MRS DUNNE: But we already have the full-year data, have we not? This is what the annual report is. It is supposed to be a full year of data.

Dr Collis: I think there was interest in the committee to report in a more sophisticated way than in the annual report and to have a better understanding of the performance of the system. We have taken on board that the annual report data does not allow as nuanced an understanding of the performance of the system as they would wish. That

is why we are moving to a more nuanced, two-yearly reporting against the step up program.

THE CHAIR: Mr Pettersson, noting that we are moving into the area of community participation.

MR PETTERSSON: I have one last question. Can you tell me about the ACT Together carer recruitment campaign? What have you been doing to recruit more carers?

Dr Collis: Catherina O’Leary is overseeing the change process of implementing A step up for our kids. Whilst she is getting ready, I would like to beg the indulgence of the chair to congratulate Tina Brendas, who is in the audience today, as director of the Bimberi Youth Justice Centre. That is a new executive position that reflects our growing interest in how important this area is.

Mrs O’Leary: ACT Together set themselves a target for this year to recruit an additional 80 foster carers. They have been embarking on quite an innovative recruitment campaign which has included lots of information sessions and panels. They have done lots of social media campaigns as well. They have had many videos of current and former foster carers talking about their experiences. They have been really active in the recruitment process. We as a directorate have been supporting them with complementary campaigns and complementary media, so it has been quite a concerted effort.

The current figures are that they have approved an additional 50 carers for this current period. They are on track to have 66 on board by the end of this calendar year. I think they are doing really well in maintaining interest in caring and getting new carers on board.

MR PETTERSSON: Are you doing anything new to recruit these carers or have you just refined previous processes?

Mrs O’Leary: They have been quite targeted in their campaigning. They have done quite a bit of campaigning for particular cohorts of carers as well as talking about the children that carers may take on. Some of their social media campaigning has been saying, “We are desperately in need of people to look after young boys who like soccer,” for instance. They are talking about the type of children they have currently in care so that they can then generate some interest from particular people who think, “I like soccer too. I might have some time to take a child out to play soccer.”

They are saying that if there is any hour you have in your week where you can support a child, they are happy to help you to become a carer for that purpose. They are being very open in terms of being flexible in the recruitment of carers and the hours that carers can contribute as well as the type of people that they are engaging with. There has particularly been some campaigning around getting a diverse pool of carers; they are looking into particular cultural groups. Earlier in this session we spoke about diverse relationships as well. It has been quite a broad campaign, but also targeted at the same time.

MR PETTERSSON: Have there been any public forums?

Mrs O'Leary: Yes, there have been quite a few. We do have numbers.

Ms Stephen-Smith: While Catherina is looking for those, I should add that there have been information stalls at various community events. There was the Volunteering and Contact ACT volunteering expo. ACT Together were there talking about all of the work that they do, particularly around recruitment of foster carers. They have also had a stall at the SpringOut festival, providing information about the diversity of carers that they are looking for.

Dr Collis: It is also worth noting that, in bringing Barnardos in as part of the consortium, they brought with them a significant amount of intellectual property in this space. They have a virtual research and development unit that is specifically focused on this. They have been able to turn those kinds of learnings in a very targeted way for the ACT community.

Some of the strategies that we hear about are not accidental or just good ideas they have thought up; they have actually tested in the market. They have looked at motivation; they have looked at what the research has been. There has been a bit of research in recent years about motivation for caring. They have looked at that and then they have looked at their own results. I suspect that the real success rate we are getting is them applying that intellectual property to our community.

Mrs O'Leary: In terms of actual information sessions, ACT Together have conducted 16 information sessions; they have had 296 participants attend those, which has been fantastic. They have four future sessions planned for the remainder of this year. Some of those are panel sessions and there are sessions for people to just come along to carer information nights. There is quite a lot of activity.

THE CHAIR: For couples who are looking to adopt who are working full time, is there a bar to being able to adopt or foster children?

Mrs O'Leary: No; I do not think so at all.

Ms Pappas: Is there a bar? Are they prevented?

THE CHAIR: Yes, that is right. Are they prevented effectively? There may not be a guideline explicitly preventing them from doing it, but when they go through the process, where both people are working two full-time jobs and may not be able to provide care during the day, is there a bar on them having a child with them during the week?

Mrs O'Leary: I would not think so.

Ms Pappas: I may be able to answer. There is not any restriction in terms of people working full time. There are a lot of people in this community who work full time who have children. There is no restriction on that at all. What we do to support those people is to have a look at some early childhood options, such as child care, who else is in their natural family that can provide support. If you are working full time, is

there an aunt, a sister or a grandmother in the foster carer or the extended family who can provide support? We look at the natural supports and what other support services can offer those people. We are interested in having people who are best matched to the needs of that individual child, and we will work around any other issues that come up.

Mrs O’Leary: To add to that, some children have particular needs. A lot of children that come into care suffer from trauma; they have been through pretty bad times. Some children have more intensive needs than others; it depends on the child. We definitely try to match the child to the carer to make sure that it is the best fit and the carers are able to provide the right support. But, as Helen said, we also bring in other supports to support the carers as well.

Ms Pappas: We are also conscious that there is lobbying on behalf of foster carers around paid parental leave and access to paid parental leave for foster carers and new adoptive parents. That is an issue primarily for the commonwealth, but ACT carers have been quite actively lobbying around that, and it is something we are taking into account in terms of ACT public servants and the enterprise agreement.

THE CHAIR: My understanding is that there is a requirement that at least one of the parents in the couple takes off a period of time when the child is first placed with them. Is that correct?

Ms Pappas: For adoption?

THE CHAIR: For foster care or adoption.

Ms Pappas: Perhaps for adoption if it is a newborn, but I will go and check that. I do not think that there is, but I will go and check that. It is probably specific for adoption, but I will check and come back if it is not.

Dr Collis: Can I just point out that while, when we look at the out of home care cohort, we sometimes think of really challenging behaviours—and there are significant challenging behaviours within that for young people and children who have experienced awful trauma—the fact is that many of our children are just normal kids in normal neighbourhoods. In fact, our NAPLAN results for our out of home care sector are the highest in Australia, with 85 per cent reaching the benchmarks in literacy and numeracy. These are kids who should be at school, because they are obviously achieving at school. We would expect, particularly in a community such as this where participation rates are so high, that having both people in the family working would be almost the norm, not the exception, in this regard. But there may be some transitional issues that we will look at getting some explanation for around that.

THE CHAIR: My question is about the working with vulnerable people background checking scheme and the legislative review that was undertaken and tabled in the Assembly. There were significant changes suggested in the review and I was just wondering what the status of the implementation of those changes is and what work is being done to consult on those changes with the community?

Ms Starick: The review is completed and the review was undertaken by consulting

with those who whose lives are impacted by the working with vulnerable people scheme, including employers, employees, governments and people who receive care from people with working with vulnerable people checks.

The status of the review is that the 26 recommendations have been tabled. Those recommendations go to a range of issues, including increasing protections for vulnerable people, strengthening information sharing capabilities, relieving the administrative burden on employers and Access Canberra, strengthening compliance and monitoring, and risk assessments, guidelines and definitions.

Some examples of the recommendations include increasing protections for vulnerable people. Currently anybody can apply for a working with vulnerable people check. We have looked at introducing what are called disqualifying offences and this would mean that an individual who has committed an offence such as murder or intentional harm would be disqualified automatically from being assessed for a working with vulnerable people check. This is consistent with the standards and the administration of this scheme in other states and jurisdictions.

We have also looked at some of the information sharing provisions that enable us to meet some of the recommendations that have come from the royal commission into institutional abuse of children and young people. Another example is that we have looked at extending the registration period from three years to five years. Again, this brings us in line with other jurisdictions as well as helping us to manage the number of individuals who are seeking renewal in any given year.

Where we are up to is that those recommendations are now going to PCO, the parliamentary counsel, for drafting. But we will also be commencing consultation again with those whose lives are impacted by the working with vulnerable people checks and those who have specific interest and expertise in this area, including the Human Rights Commissioner.

The recommendations from the royal commission are likely to include national harmonisation requirements. We are participating in those national harmonisation discussions and we believe that the recommendations place us in a very good position to be able to align our requirements with the recommendations from the royal commission and what will be happening nationally.

The next step will be the consultation on a number of those recommendations broadly. A number of the recommendations really are somewhat technical in nature and impact the administration of the scheme. We will be discussing those with the administrator of the scheme.

THE CHAIR: Do you think that national harmonisation might result in registrations being recognised across jurisdictions? My personal circumstance is that I think I hold three registrations—blue card, the New South Wales working with children check and our WWVP check—having worked across different jurisdictions in my previous role. Is that something that they are considering as part of that?

Ms Starick: I do not want to pre-empt the outcome, but certainly it is on the table for consideration. There is a range of considerations on the table. As to how far we get to

a single working with children or working with vulnerable people check, I think it would be too early to say.

Ms Stephen-Smith: This is an important topic of national discussion and of course the ACT and Tasmania are the only jurisdictions that have the broader working with vulnerable people check and working with children check included within that broader sphere. As we move down the path of national harmonisation of working with children checks, we need to take that into account. We have quite a comprehensive and streamlined system within our own jurisdiction, where one check covers the field, and we are now facing a potential national harmonisation of working with children checks and national harmonisation around NDIS safeguarding and background checking, which could lead us to end up with a more fragmented system which might be more consistent with New South Wales in some aspects but will end up potentially with people needing multiple cards within the ACT, so those issues are a topic of ongoing discussion between jurisdictions.

Mr De'Ath: It is an interesting challenge for the commission, in that they have been at pains to point out that in no way do they want to diminish places like the ACT that have a more comprehensive system or for them to lose things at the expense of national harmonisation. It is a relatively delicate area and needs to be carefully stepped out. So we will be as interested as anyone to see where those things sort of land and what that will mean for us.

MRS DUNNE: This is one of these “I told you so” moments. The annual report shows that the government’s expectations in terms of applications for the card have been exceeded by 330 per cent. Apart from me during the consultation, who else told the government that they had underestimated the demand for the card?

Ms Starick: I do not have the breakdown of the commentary that we received in the development of the act through 2011 and its implementation in 2012, but I will acknowledge that it became fairly clear in the rollout of the scheme—and we are four to five years into a seven-year rollout—that it is a victim of its own success.

At the time of reporting, about 141 people had registered and 95,000 people had an active registration. That demand was certainly one of the issues that was taken into consideration during the review. I will say, though, that, despite the high demand, there was very little appetite from employers, employees, government officials, or people who are vulnerable, to wind back the criteria for the scheme.

MRS DUNNE: No, I did not think that there would be.

Ms Starick: Yes, but it was interesting.

MRS DUNNE: The whole thing was that, because the criteria were such, it was clear from the outset that the government had seriously underestimated the demand and the need for the scheme.

Ms Starick: One of the recommendations that we have got from this review is to try to clarify the criteria. Some of the anecdotal evidence that we received is that people are opting into the scheme; they are choosing everybody in their organisation, as an

employment requirement, to have a working with vulnerable people check, whereas not all the roles in their organisation require a person to have a working with vulnerable people check.

Mr De'Ath: And that is an unanticipated consequence of what was put in the scheme.

THE CHAIR: My understanding of the legislation—I am trying to remember it—is that for seven days in a given year you can basically be in the presence of children or a vulnerable person as long as you are under supervision; you do not require a check. But those sorts of things probably are not very well known and so people are taking a cautious approach. Is that correct?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I think so. I obviously was not around at the time, but I suspect the initial estimates were on the basis of who would be required to get a card, whereas in fact a lot of people who are not required to get a card for the roles that they undertake are getting one anyway, either because employers are being cautious or because volunteer organisations, sporting organisations, et cetera are being cautious and are asking their volunteers to all go and get one, or because people just think: “I might be in that situation. I am going to go and get myself a card in case I need it for a job or something down the track.” So I think it is that demand, which is outside the actual requirements to have one, that is probably a key driver of the underestimation.

MRS DUNNE: But also the seven-day rule probably encourages people to go out and get it because it is easier to get one than to do the record keeping. If you work, volunteer or whatever for one or more organisations, the cross-organisational record keeping for you and that organisation is too horrendous so it is easier to get the card. My staff, who I am sure are listening, are probably saying, “I told you so.” These were the circumstances that we anticipated. Because of the blowout, it takes a long time to get one, which also makes it difficult for people to do the work or do the volunteering that they would like to do.

Ms Starick: Currently under the working with vulnerable people scheme, after each three years you need to apply for a new working with vulnerable people card, so your current check expires and then you apply for a new one. One of the recommendations is that it is a renewal, which means that you remain eligible, if you like, until you renew, rather than it expiring.

Mr De'Ath: I think one of the really fantastic things about this is the way that, while it was a card for specific purposes, in effect it has also been a proxy for absolutely heightening people’s awareness about the need to be cognisant of the safety of children and the people who are in your employ or working or in the proximity of children. That is a very good thing to have in our community.

THE CHAIR: It being 12.30, we will have to continue the discussion around community participation into the next section, which will begin at 2 pm. So we will break. Thank you.

Hearing suspended from 12.28 to 1.59 pm.

Ms Stephen-Smith: We are starting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

affairs?

THE CHAIR: We are. I am conscious that two members are not here who may have a burning desire to ask a question in that space, but I will check with them when they come in. We will begin with the office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs.

MRS KIKKERT: I will pass my question to James Milligan.

MR MILLIGAN: Thank you, Mrs Kikkert. I would like to start by asking where the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agreement framework for 2015-18 is up to.

Ms Stephen-Smith: The outcomes framework?

MR MILLIGAN: Yes.

Ms Stephen-Smith: We have a draft outcomes framework that is currently being considered by government; I am expecting that I will be tabling that in the next sitting week.

MR MILLIGAN: Excellent. I thought that one was not too difficult to answer.

Mr De'Ath: It is quite a significant achievement for the territory to get in place an outcomes framework. This is something that a lot of jurisdictions grapple with and do not get to an endpoint on. The fact that we are so incredibly close to that is something that we are very pleased about, and it gives us the opportunity to work even more closely with various parts of government to demonstrate what impact the agreement is having.

MS LE COUTEUR: Does this relate to the COAG targets, many of which expire in 2018?

Ms Stephen-Smith: This reporting framework will replace us reporting against the closing the gap framework. Obviously at the national level we report against closing the gap targets. As you say, they are due to expire; there is a process underway at a national level to refresh the closing the gap strategy. That is going to be the subject of consultation with the community soon, we hope. Quite a lot of work has gone into that. There is some disagreement between jurisdictions about that process at this point in time. Our outcomes framework is designed to encompass the targets that we have previously reported on in those closing the gap targets. It encompasses the areas that are covered by closing the gap, but it is a much broader reporting framework, because the current closing the gap targets only cover a relatively small number of areas.

MR MILLIGAN: Are you able to give any details as to where you are up to in the COAG agreement and negotiations and re-establishing that agreement?

Ms Stephen-Smith: COAG itself has considered a draft discussion paper. That went to Indigenous affairs ministers. There was some feedback on that paper. I understand that is currently being finalised. There was some concern expressed by Indigenous affairs ministers about the proposed consultation time frame in relation to that. The

commonwealth had proposed consulting with the community between November and early February, so in January, really. As you would understand, for a number of areas in Australia, that would be a difficult time to consult, either because people are participating in cultural activities or for weather and season reasons.

There was some concern expressed about the need to ensure that we are genuinely engaging with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community across the country, particularly in the context of the proposal to move the closing the gap framework—it has been around for 10 years and it is a very well understood framework for overcoming Indigenous disadvantage—to a strength-based approach. Our community here in the ACT is very used to working with a strength-based approach on a strength-based document. That is what our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agreement is about. With our community, we would have been able to consult through November and December much more easily than some other jurisdictions. But in terms of being able to consult nationally, there was a significant concern around that.

So both the paper, in terms of its usefulness as a consultation document, and those time frames are still being finalised between the jurisdictions.

MR MILLIGAN: Do you think that the COAG agreement will have any effect or impact on the body agreement with the outcomes framework? Do you really need to wait for the COAG one to be completed before completing the outcomes framework for the elected body?

Ms Stephen-Smith: No. We have our draft outcomes framework at the moment, but it is never going to be a static document. There are always going to be things where we identify new sources of data or we come up with new indicators that we have got data for that we did not previously have data for. We may determine that some things are more valuable as indicators than other things. So some things will come on and some things will come off. And we are about to start the process of refreshing our own agreement as well.

While we have developed this outcomes framework—it is going to be very useful, as Mr De’Ath said; it is a significant achievement and there has been a lot of work across the directorates to get to this point—it is not going to be the be-all and end-all. It will be influenced by the closing the gap refresh, and it will both feed into and be influenced by the refresh of our own agreement. I do not know if Robyn has something to say.

Ms Forester: It is really important to note that what they are doing with the COAG closing the gap agreement and what we are doing with the whole-of-government agreement basically complement each other. It is really important to note that with the current closing the gap agreement and the targets that are in there, there are a lot of initiatives that do not apply to the ACT. There are a number of them which we have been unable to report on because of significantly small numbers; that is why our agreement is much broader than what the commonwealth are doing. For us in the ACT it is important to focus on our community and meeting the needs and aspirations for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

The processes will complement each other. We are going to be trying to work closely

with the commonwealth through the consultation process on their new framework and doing that in tandem with what we are doing for the consultation process for our refreshed agreement as well.

MS LE COUTEUR: Going to the elected body hearings, I understand that there is some consideration of making these public, with the sorts of protections that committees such as this have. Can you let me know what is happening with those considerations?

Ms Stephen-Smith: From my perspective, I am going to take the advice of the elected body on any changes to their hearing process. I did raise it informally with the elected body at their induction session and then had to talk to a few of the elected body members again informally as to whether there are changes that they would like to make to their hearing process.

I have a draft letter to the chair; I will be writing to the chair of the elected body shortly about this, formally asking for the elected body's advice on how they would like to see those processes change. I think it will be important probably, given that there are a number of new members on the body, for them to go through one hearing process to understand how it works at present before they provide any advice back to us about how, if at all, they would like to change those processes. Robyn, are the current hearings open to the public?

Ms Forester: Yes, they are open to the public.

Ms Stephen-Smith: But they are not broadcast?

MS LE COUTEUR: They are physically there.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Yes, and the full *Hansard* is not made public.

Ms Forester: The full *Hansard* is not made public, but the report is made public after the event.

Ms Stephen-Smith: There would be potentially some legislative and resourcing implications in making those changes. All of those things would need to be taken into account.

MR PETTERSSON: The annual report says that in this year's budget you are undertaking measures to strengthen Ngannawal culture and history in our schools. Can you expand on that for me?

Ms Stephen-Smith: The primary responsibility for that would sit with Education, but Robyn might have some information.

Ms Forester: That is a program that sits with Education, and it is a program where they are looking at engaging local elders in the revitalisation of culture and language. We could provide some additional information on that at a later date—take that on notice—but it is a responsibility of the Education Directorate.

MR PETTERSSON: That is fine; thank you.

MR MILLIGAN: I would like to find out where the regulatory framework is up to in relation to the new legislation that was passed for the elected body. I recall from our briefings that you were working on that framework. Can you give an update as to where that is?

Ms Forester: The regulation has now been drafted, and it is moving through a process for the minister, for her endorsement. We have consulted on two occasions with the elected body on what is in that regulation. We have also had some good conversation with directorates, particularly through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander subcommittee of the strategic board. There have been a number of internal consultations that have happened with that in ensuring that we get a regulation that is going to be workable for both the elected body and government.

MR MILLIGAN: When could we expect to see that finalised?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I think it is pretty close to being ready for sign-off. I have seen the previous draft; I think it then went back to the elected body. It is pretty close.

Ms Forester: It is pretty close to sign-off.

MR MILLIGAN: On page 28 the report states that two of the five meetings of the elected body were cancelled during the last financial year. Can you give an explanation as to why that occurred and what you are doing to ensure that these meetings go ahead as per the legislation, as per the elected body act?

Ms Forester: The reason for the cancellation of those two meetings was that they did not have enough numbers to meet a quorum. That was the only reason that those meetings did not occur. As you may recall, that was at a time when the elected body membership was down, through a series of resignations of individuals.

MR MILLIGAN: The latest resignation has been filled in the elected body?

Ms Forester: Yes; the new member has been brought on.

MRS KIKKERT: How many people do you need for a quorum, for the meeting to go on?

Ms Forester: I think it is four. It used to be five and now it is four.

MRS KIKKERT: How many people are in the elected body?

Ms Forester: Seven.

MR MILLIGAN: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: My question also relates to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body. The recent elections were very successful in terms of the reach. Apparently, according to the annual report, the directorate worked with Elections

ACT to try to maximise the engagement in that election participation. What role did you play in supporting the commission?

Ms Forester: The election process is always a joint venture between OATSIA and the Electoral Commission. We always work really closely with each other to ensure that we can get the best outcome for both parties and for the elected body. The thing that was really good about it this year was the extension of promotion and the types of promotion that we did for the elected body process.

You will recall that this was the highest number of candidates ever to stand for the seven positions. We put a lot of that down to the work that was done between OATSIA and Elections ACT in promoting what the elected body was about, providing opportunities for people prior to the nomination process to find out what their role and responsibility would be as an elected body candidate. When it came to the election process we doubled the number of polling booths that we had in the last election. Given that we had the increase in candidates, some young people put their hands up, which meant that it brought some younger voters to the polls as well.

As we go on and progress with the elected body, the more that the community learns, understands and knows about the value of the elected body the more people are going to be inclined to participate, not only as a candidate and an eventual elected body member but also to vote for those people that are representing our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

THE CHAIR: What communication channels do you use to promote the election?

Ms Forester: A lot of social media, a lot of promotion through particularly the free newspapers like the *Chronicle* and so forth, and using a lot of radio time where we could get any information out through radio spots. Social media is probably the biggest opportunity that we have, whether that is through Facebook, Twitter or email networks. We have a number of really good email networks in the ACT.

MRS KIKKERT: I would like to go back to the community participation group. My question is about volunteering. That is found on pages 53 and 54. SHOUT chair Rebecca Davey has stated that funding pressures on not-for-profit providers mean a greater reliance on volunteers but that this is also causing volunteer burnout. Likewise, the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations has stated that its greatest challenge is too few volunteers, resulting in those who do volunteer being spread too thin and becoming burnt out. Sarah Wilson, the general manager of Volunteering and Contact ACT, has said that increasing bureaucratic requirements were on some occasions serving as barriers to volunteering. Minister, what feedback have you received about barriers to volunteering?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Thank you, Mrs Kikkert, for the question. I will hand over to Jacinta in a moment. As part of the work that we are doing with Volunteering and Contact ACT, you will recall that earlier this year we released a new ACT government volunteering statement outlining the principles of how we see it and the importance of volunteering in our community. That talked about both recognising volunteers and, particularly, ensuring that volunteers receive the support they need from within the community, and particularly within the organisations that they work

for, and how we will work with community organisations to deliver that.

The next stage of that process is that officials have been working with Volunteering and Contact ACT to develop an action plan that puts more meat on the bones of that statement, to develop the volunteering strategy. Clearly, in that process, and from the feedback that Volunteering and Contact ACT had in undertaking the initial consultation, they did receive feedback about some of the challenges and barriers that volunteers face in things like matching skills to jobs, finding the right places for volunteers to be matched up to, ensuring that they have the support they need to understand their roles et cetera. Jacinta is probably in a better position to talk in more detail about that.

Ms Evans: It is really important to acknowledge that in the ACT we have a very strong volunteering culture. About 40 per cent of people in the ACT do some form of volunteering, which is an amazing effort from the community. It adds well over \$1 billion annually to the economy in terms of that work that people are doing.

We want to make sure that volunteers are recognised and that volunteers feel that their skills are being valued. We are not in any way wanting to suggest that that is taken for granted. For that reason, as the minister said, we are moving towards an action plan against the volunteer statement. We have been working closely with Volunteering and Contact ACT. There is a new CEO over there, Ms Vicky Darling. I met with her about two weeks ago and officials have been meeting with her and her team to make sure that what we put into that action plan does acknowledge those issues that you have raised, and that we are not just paying lip-service but that we are taking on board that feedback.

What we really want to achieve through the action plan is against those four themes that the minister mentioned, including valuing, recognising and celebrating volunteering. We will be making sure that these are concrete actions. Some will be government actions, things that we will do. Some will be the sector's actions. We will be putting that forward in the near future. We are hoping to do that in early 2018.

MRS KIKKERT: Early 2018?

Ms Evans: Yes. We are just doing—

MRS KIKKERT: February, March?

Ms Evans: I do not think the minister has chosen a date yet to launch the action plan, but it will be quite soon.

Ms Stephen-Smith: The original intention with Volunteering and Contact ACT was to have that done by December so that we would be able to do that on the international day of volunteering in December. But with their change of CEO and some of the work throwing up issues, we need to have some further consultation with Volunteering and Contact ACT about the shape of that action plan. So we are probably looking at February-March now.

Ms Evans: Our day-to-day interactions certainly continue, despite not having the

action plan announced yet. For instance, the minister has just announced that we are calling for volunteers for the National Multicultural Festival. We always get a fantastic response and have a great range of volunteers both from within government and from within the community, so that is something to look forward to.

MS LE COUTEUR: Page 22, the strong families portal: how does this interact with OneLink?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Its purpose is somewhat different from OneLink.

MS LE COUTEUR: OneLink is also meant to be a central access point for—

Ms Starick: They are two separate portals and sources of information. OneLink is, as we discussed earlier today—and we will probably discuss it a bit a later on as well—a central access point for people seeking a whole range of supports across the ACT community. The portal that is being described in the annual report is set up specifically to link events, services and information regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and community in the ACT and regional surrounds. It has been established under the seven key focus areas of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agreement and was a deliverable under that agreement. There is some linking or crossover in the type of information that could be found there, but they are not established to hook up in the background of those two IT systems.

MS LE COUTEUR: Generally speaking, if you are an Indigenous person looking for homelessness services, you would go to OneLink?

Ms Starick: Generally speaking, yes.

Ms Forester: If you are an Aboriginal person looking on strong families and you want information on housing, you will click on the housing link and it will take you to the various points of contact.

MRS DUNNE: Can you talk me through the kickstart program? What sorts of statistics do you collect about, for instance, how many young people have been supported, how many of those remain in school and how you verify that, and how many have gone on to worthwhile careers as a result of being supported by the program. What is the nature of the support that is offered for the kickstart program?

Ms Forester: The kickstart my career program is one that is supported through the Education Directorate, with environment. It is based on providing opportunities for young people who are disengaged with the education system to gain some skills, particularly in the environmental space. There has only been one program fully run, and there are graduates from that program. We would have to get some additional information and take it on notice to provide you with a fulsome answer to your question.

MRS DUNNE: Why is it reported on in the office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs part of the CSD annual report if you do not know?

Ms Forester: It is in there because it is an initiative out of the whole-of-government

agreement, which all directorates feed into.

MRS DUNNE: Which whole-of-government agreement?

Ms Forester: The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander whole-of-government agreement.

MRS DUNNE: I am a bit flummoxed.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Which page are you referring to, Mrs Dunne? That might help us.

MRS DUNNE: It is mentioned on page 54 in a list of other things. You do not do this? CSD does not do this?

Ms Stephen-Smith: No. This is a list of things that were included in the 2016-17 budget as part of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander omnibus package. From my understanding, as I was not around, the office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs brought that together as a single package of measures that supported the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agreement. As you can see, a number of those, if not all of them, have primary responsibility sitting in another directorate. We have talked about culture and history in schools, kickstart my career and the justice reform program. The mentoring of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff across the ACT public service is obviously a whole-of-service activity but primary responsibility for that would probably be with CMTEDD. That—

MRS DUNNE: There is no central maintenance of performance measures or anything like that related to those programs?

Ms Stephen-Smith: That is part of it; there are two elements. There has been internal traffic light reporting in relation to the programs that sit underneath the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agreement, and then there is an outcomes framework which will come out.

Mr De'Ath: And will be much more sophisticated.

MRS DUNNE: What is internal traffic light reporting?

Ms Forester: Traffic light reporting is the directorates providing us with a status update of where they are with particular initiatives that they have agreed to be included in, under the whole-of-government agreement. The traffic light reporting that we do forms the basis for our annual report on the whole-of-government agreement, which was previously the closing the gap report. That is what that reporting is about.

Mr De'Ath: The outcomes framework is the next step towards getting much more specific about what the deliverables are, as opposed to a red, amber or green signal on how we are tracking.

Ms Stephen-Smith: As the name suggests, it is about outcomes versus what we are doing: what are we doing and what are we achieving?

Mr De'Ath: Hence my comment that it is a significant shift.

MRS DUNNE: When are you going to report on that?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I am intending to table that annual report in the next sitting period, alongside the outcomes framework.

MRS DUNNE: It seems odd that these things do not coincide with annual reports so that you can feed an inquiry in. I suppose we could inquire into it separately.

Ms Stephen-Smith: One of the things that have been done in this annual reporting round, which I understand is for the first time, is that every directorate has included a section in its annual report on how it is specifically supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. For the Community Services Directorate there is a specific section in our report. B.1.9 is our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander reporting. My understanding is that all directorates are doing that for the first time this year.

MR PETTERSSON: I am hoping someone can tell me about all the different ways the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural centre was utilised in the 2016-17 period.

Ms Forester: The cultural centre gets utilised for various different things. It will get used for meetings and conferences. It also gets used for events like markets and information days, those sorts of things. We still do have two tenants at the cultural centre. The Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre is a tenant there and the gallery Burrunju is a tenant there. The centre also is available for private events. From time to time various members of both the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and the non-Aboriginal community will book the cultural centre for those sorts of events. The government, community and NGO sectors will use the cultural centre for varying purposes. We do not have the exact breakdown for the last financial year on what types of events and how many with us today, but we can provide that to you if you would be interested in that information.

MR PETTERSSON: Yes, thank you.

MR MILLIGAN: You might not be able to provide me with any details, as with Mrs Dunne's question. It states here that the office will be focusing on a number of initiatives for the 2017-18 year. My question is in relation to the seed funding grants program. How are you approaching that for the next financial year?

Ms Stephen-Smith: That has been quite an interesting process. The office has undertaken some quite detailed consultation with relevant parts of the community about how that grants program should be designed.

Ms Forester: We have conducted some initial consultations with a number of stakeholders who we know will have an interest in this program. Part of that has had us reflect on exactly what those grants should be used for, what the purpose is, how much and so forth. It is interesting to note that we are renaming those from seed grants to new and emerging organisations, NEO for short, grants. We are going to

continue consultation early in the new year, with a goal of having them open probably towards the end of the first quarter.

MR MILLIGAN: So it is still quite a while until organisations can apply for these grants?

Ms Forester: Yes; it is a few months away.

MR MILLIGAN: And also until they know the amount of money that is available for those grants?

Ms Forester: Yes. The initial discussions were around the amount of money that we should be providing first up. Through the consultation with the stakeholders they have given us some ideas and concepts, their thoughts, on amounts of money. We really need to ensure that what we are going to put forward and provide for the community is useful and not tokenistic. So I think it is an important thing for us to take the time to get it right.

MR MILLIGAN: Did you say that these grants are only available for new and emerging organisations?

Ms Forester: The purpose of them is new and emerging.

MR MILLIGAN: Organisations or businesses also? Not-for-profit or profit?

Ms Stephen-Smith: That is one of the subjects of consultation. My initial view was that we should at least ask people about whether it should be opened up to businesses. I think the view from the consultations has been that, no, it should be for not-for-profit and community organisations.

MR MILLIGAN: Have you been given a budget at all for the total number of funds available for these grants—not individual but the total amount?

Ms Stephen-Smith: The commitment was \$100,000 over four years, \$25,000 a year. That is obviously a relatively small amount of money. Part of the conversation with the community is about whether it is more useful to do a larger number of smaller grants or whether it is more useful to do a smaller number of more significant grants that will genuinely help one or two organisations a year get off the ground. That is the nature of the conversation that the office is having.

MR MILLIGAN: In previous financial years was it \$100,000 per year that was available? Has the government recently reduced it from \$100,000 per year to \$100,000 over four years?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I think we had this conversation last time. We are talking about two different programs.

Ms Forester: The \$100,000—

MR MILLIGAN: Is it just renamed?

Ms Forester: No, it is a totally different program. We did have this conversation last time. The original \$100,000 that you are referring to was part of the omnibus bid. That was into Enterprise Canberra, specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business development, some for mentoring and support and others for initial development. This \$100,000 is a different bucket of money.

THE CHAIR: We will move to the office of multicultural affairs. I have a question in relation to the ACT Multicultural Advisory Council. Where is progress up to with the establishment of the council?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I announced the membership of the Multicultural Advisory Council, from memory, in mid-September. I think it was 15 September. We have appointed 15 people to the council; that is 10 community members and five representative members. There are five organisations that are being represented on the council. The council will meet for the first time in early December. I also recently appointed the chair and the deputy chair: Antonia Kaucz as the chair and Kirk Zwangobani as deputy chair. Those positions have been filled.

The council will have its first meeting in early December. I am hoping to attend that meeting and to meet with all of them. I am really looking forward to that. They have quite a significant job of work to do over the next 12 months or so, because not only do they have a role in ensuring that we are implementing the whole-of-government multicultural framework, but we have committed to a multicultural summit which we are intending to host and hold in the second half of 2018. The Multicultural Advisory Council will be very important in helping us to structure and plan for the summit and play host to some of the lead-up events. Ms Khan can talk more about that.

Ms Khan: There is a big agenda for the advisory council.

Ms Evans: They have a massive agenda. There are a whole range of social cohesion issues that we would love to see the ministerial advisory committee have the opportunity to address, to go beyond the issues that face them as an individual cultural group to the broader issue of what does social cohesion look like across the whole of the community and how do each of our groups contribute to that. That is certainly something that we will be putting to them. I think the summit will be a really good opportunity for them to get their teeth into issues of that kind.

THE CHAIR: Has there been a like body in the ACT government before with a similar role?

Ms Evans: As in a ministerial advisory council in general?

THE CHAIR: On multicultural issues.

Ms Evans: Not in the same way. We have had other opportunities for ministers to interact with the community, but this will be, as I understand it, one of the—

Ms Stephen-Smith: I think there used to be a body. I am not sure if it was structured in the same way. I am not sure if any of us have the history.

Ms Evans: Not in the most recent of times.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MRS KIKKERT: My question is regarding the Multicultural Festival. The Canberra media recently reported that up to 100 stalls will be cut from next year's Multicultural Festival. In a radio interview on 3 October, however, the minister said that, instead of making cuts, organisers would just be enforcing the 320-stall limit that was supposed to have applied to this year's event. I was wondering why nearly 100 extra stalls were approved for the 2017 festival and who approved that decision?

Ms Evans: Can I give some background?

Ms Stephen-Smith: That is probably helpful, yes.

Ms Evans: Mrs Kikkert, the number of stalls is absolutely dependent on the footprint of the festival. Over the years, committee members might be aware that we have tried a number of different footprints. That has had to do with what streets we have closed, what shopfronts we were able to have stalls in front of and all those kinds of things. We always try to be mindful of safety and security, so access and egress are always things you have to take into account when setting up that footprint. And also it is taking into account all our stakeholder feedback after each festival. Each given year we get particular feedback. On this occasion, for a whole range of reasons but very much safety and security, we have made decisions to keep the footprint a bit clearer. There is somewhat lower capacity for stalls for that reason.

MRS KIKKERT: Who approved that decision?

Ms Evans: That would be me, as the executive director responsible for the festival.

Ms Stephen-Smith: For the 2017 festival, though, in terms of approving additional stalls, that would have been the previous festival organising committee.

MRS KIKKERT: Going back to the footprint—

Ms Evans: Each year it is approved, usually by the executive director. Of course, the minister is spoken to on what we are intending, but we make those decisions based on the best advice we have from our colleagues in Emergency Services, ACT Policing and environment and planning. Once all those conversations have been had, we can decide on a footprint. We have not finalised one for next February yet. It is very much a work in progress each year. It would have been approved based on the number of stalls; it would have been approved based on what the footprint looked like.

MRS KIKKERT: Did you just say that the one for February is not finalised?

Ms Evans: It is not finalised, no. It is pretty well done, but we have not informed our stallholders yet.

MRS KIKKERT: How many stall allotments were given to persons or groups who

did not apply before the deadline? If so, who made that decision and how many?

Ms Evans: That is an interesting one. We are talking about for last February. You are saying anyone who applied after the deadline?

MRS KIKKERT: After the deadline, as in 2017.

Ms Evans: I do not know. Azra, do you know? I think that the truth of the matter would be that we usually do have a deadline but we have a total number of stalls. It is not that because they apply after the deadline we then add extra stalls; it is that we know the total number of stalls, we get all the stallholder applications, and then we pop them in. If the deadline came and we had filled 380 of our 400 stalls, and then past the deadline a few more people applied and we still had 20 stalls left, they could have had them. It is not that more people applied so we just kept adding stalls.

MRS KIKKERT: So you filled the extra stalls that you already had available?

Ms Evans: Yes, if there were extras. Yes, absolutely.

MRS KIKKERT: In an ABC radio interview on 3 August, Ms Khan said that she was expecting about 300 to 400 applications for stalls for next year's festival, but in reality only 268 were received. Why has participation in the Multicultural Festival become less attractive? Do you think that it may have something to do with the cost?

Ms Khan: The 268 figure is for applications. That is what were received as at the deadline or the closing date of 30 September. It is highly likely that a number of those applications would be for multiple stalls. That figure of 268 is only applications, not stalls. That number could potentially be up to 300. We are still processing. We have not yet finalised the allocations of those applications. We also have late applications that have come in since the deadline. We have a waitlist, which has grown quite significantly; there are 40 plus applications on the waitlist.

MRS KIKKERT: How many stalls are allocated for 2018?

Ms Khan: We will come back to the footprint. As Jacinta has explained, this time around the footprint has been configured in such a way as to provide more open space in a number of areas that were previously fairly congested. In 2017 we had all of Bunda Street included in the footprint, but for 2018 we are not going to have all of Bunda Street included in the footprint. So we have reduced the space. As a consequence of those decisions, the overall number is less, as Jacinta has explained. We are working to a number of around 315 to 320, but there is potentially some capacity to increase the number. We have not yet put a ceiling on the final figure.

MRS KIKKERT: On the last day of this year's festival the *Canberra Times* reported that "patrons reported easy movement at this year's festival", citing the fact that organisers had "changed the layouts of stalls to ease mobility". Furthermore, according to the annual report, 95 per cent of festival attendees said that they would recommend the festival to a friend.

The minister, however, said in her radio interview that the cut in stall numbers for

2018 is because of complaints of overcrowding. How do you explain the discrepancy between the contemporary reporting and participant surveys on one hand and what is now being said about needing to shrink the size of the festival because of overcrowding on the other? How were these complaints of overcrowding obtained and from whom?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I think there is a difference depending on which day or night you are talking about in the festival and what time of day or night you are talking about. There were clearly times of day at this year's festival when it was very easy to move around and there was plenty of space. There were also times of day, particularly, for example, around the opening concert on the Friday night, when Garema Place was extremely congested. Walking through there, trying to find a pathway out of there, speaking from experience, was quite slow. The area was quite congested.

We get the feedback from people attending the festival. We also obviously get feedback from ACT Policing about their concerns around how we ensure that the festival is a safe place for everybody. As you would be aware, in the last year there has been the release of the national crowded places strategy. We need to take into account those developments this year. We are taking into account feedback from people who attended the festival. There is not just our own experience and the experience of the many across CSD who participated as volunteers in the festival in managing the crowds and that kind of thing—managing the stalls and stallholders, and the stages—but also the experience of the policing and emergency service providers who have monitored this year's festival and who are providing advice for next year's.

MRS KIKKERT: How many community groups applied to be involved in 2018?

Ms Khan: I do not have that information. We are still working through the applications.

MRS KIKKERT: What about 2017?

Mr De'Ath: We will take that on notice.

Ms Khan: We will take that on notice.

MRS KIKKERT: Can you also take on notice how many multicultural groups applied and got a stall and also the community vendors?

Ms Evans: Absolutely.

MRS KIKKERT: That would be great. The most important feedback that we got from the multicultural community was that they did not receive a stall that had heavy traffic coming through. They felt cheated that the commercial stalls were in the more high traffic areas and that hardly anybody noticed the multicultural stalls were there. For 2018 is there a way that they will be first placed, because the festival is a multicultural festival?

Ms Evans: It absolutely is. Thank you, Mrs Kikkert, for that question. One of the things that we have absolutely focused on this year is the fact that this is a family

multicultural event. We want communities to feel a part of it. We want families to feel a part of it. Some of the commercial aspects are probably not our highest priority. How do we signal that to the community? We have had a really great uptake of our multicultural grants; that is, our communities applying for small amounts of money to have a presence at the festival, whether that be for purchasing costumes or things like that. They are all excited; they are all involved. We really need to make sure, as you say, that the festival does allow for that.

I know that Ms Khan has worked with all the members of the community. She is always meeting with members of the community to ask, “What was it about last year that did not work for you? What did you perceive as being not a very positive thing?” In one instance, members of the community were saying that one section of the footprint was extremely hot. It was an area that did not have natural shade and trees or taller buildings around it. At the moment we are negotiating to look at some additional shade covers to cover the areas that crowds will pass through so that people are not inclined not to go through that spot.

We are taking feedback. We try to be fair and move things around a bit so that no one group is always on the outskirts of the footprint. But, as you can imagine, there are other considerations. Some particular community groups want to be grouped together to have a showcase kind of effect. Other community groups, for whatever reason, do not want to be near some particular cultural areas. Taking all things into account is a little bit like a jigsaw puzzle. But we appreciate that every group would really like to have a prime position. We try to make our decisions as fair and transparent as we can.

MS LE COUTEUR: My question is about citizenship ceremonies. I have been reading a lot about various councils that have decided that 26 January is not the appropriate day for it. At first I was a little bit confused about the role of the ACT government in the ones on 26 January. But I notice it is very clearly in the annual report that the ACT government runs the ceremonies.

Ms Stephen-Smith: What page?

MS LE COUTEUR: Page 57.

Ms Stephen-Smith: We run citizenship ceremonies pretty much every month, but we do not run the citizenship ceremony that is held in Canberra on 26 January. That is my understanding.

Ms Evans: That is correct, minister.

MS LE COUTEUR: I thought that could be the case, but then I got confused by seeing the smiling gentleman who just became an Australian citizen. In that case you presumably have no particular view as to whether or not the 26th is an appropriate day, given that it is not relevant to us in the way it is to other jurisdictions.

Ms Stephen-Smith: That is right.

MR PETTERSSON: Could you provide me with an update on the 2017 Multicultural Awards?

Ms Evans: Absolutely, I can do that. Obviously we are always thinking about opportunities to recognise the amazing contributions made. The information I have is for the reporting period of 2016-17. In the 2016 award winners there are a number of categories. We have a business enterprise award, a community organisation award, an education award, a media award, a multicultural advocate, multicultural young person of the year, our public sector award and the outstanding volunteer award.

Across each category we call for nominations. The nominations for 2017 closed only on 8 November. We have not yet got those in place. But some people in the committee would probably be aware of the outstanding contribution of people who were awarded last year. For example, the ACT Community Languages Schools Association received an award for education. They have a membership of over 50 schools. They complement the 360 teachers who provide language education.

It is worth putting up these nominations. We have the opportunity to showcase some of the excellent contributions that people are making. The Young Person of the Year was a young person, Laura Welsh, who served the ACT community as a home tutor and a volunteer for Red Cross within the multicultural services program. The awards are always very successful in the sense that there are many people out in the community who are providing fantastic support and services. It is our opportunity to make them known.

MR PETTERSSON: What is the judging process? Is there a panel that chooses the winners from the nominations?

Ms Evans: Yes, there is a panel. Azra, can you speak to that?

Ms Khan: I understood from last year's process—and it is going to be a similar process this time around—that an assessment panel convenes. It comprises CSD staff as well as external members of the community. They basically assess each application under each of those categories. Through the criteria assessment process they rate each of the candidates. From that would result a recommendation to the minister of the ones deemed to be the most deserving applicants for the minister's consideration.

MRS KIKKERT: How many external members are involved in that judgement panel?

Ms Khan: I cannot be exact, but there would be at least two.

MRS KIKKERT: How many from CSD?

Ms Khan: Two.

MRS KIKKERT: Are they senior staff?

Ms Khan: I will need to take that on notice. I do not know the details of this year's assessment panel.

Ms Evans: It generally is senior members of staff. It would be the senior director,

who is responsible for the office of multicultural affairs. So it would be that senior person and then somebody else perhaps from the directorate who might have some knowledge or experience in the multicultural sector. It could be from another part of CSD. And then there are the community members. We are trying very hard to find community members who have not been nominated so that we do not have conflict of interest issues. Often, if there are many nominations, it is about finding the right person.

MRS KIKKERT: How do you find them?

Ms Evans: We put that out through the various channels available to us. Certainly our Multicultural Advisory Council members will be able to put their hand up. We do that with all our ministerial advisory councils. We usually say to them, “We’ve got a grants round,” or “We’ve got something and we’d like a nominee.” If we are really stuck, we have our email and phone contacts, so we will ring around or put it out by email and say, “Is anybody available to support that?”

Hearing suspended from 2.56 to 3.15 pm.

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 ACT

Duggan, Mr Frank, Senior Director and Chief Operating Officer, Housing ACT

Evans, Ms Jacinta, Executive Director, Inclusion and Participation

THE CHAIR: Welcome back. We will go on to the housing section. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the pink privilege statement before you. Could you please, the first time you speak, confirm for the record that you have read and understand the privilege implications of the statement. Minister, would you like to give an opening statement?

Ms Berry: No. I am happy to take questions from the committee.

THE CHAIR: I am wondering, with reference to page 83 of the report, how public housing is allocated, with particular reference to who is given priority, determined by the Housing Assistance and Tenancy Review Panel?

Ms Berry: That is a really good question. Something I have tried to do in my role as minister for housing is to try to keep communicating the role of Housing ACT in allocating housing, how that works, what the process is and how people are put into the different categories so that there is an understanding not only for people who apply for housing but also for people who might be representing the interests of people who might want to get support for that.

Ms Gilding: I have read and understood the privilege statement. How do you get into public housing? It is a great question. There are three “A”s involved in that: the application process, the assessment process and then the allocation process.

As part of the assessment process we ask people to fill in an application form. That helps us to understand whether people actually qualify. They have got to meet certain eligibility criteria such as low income, residency in the ACT, age and identity, and obviously provide various documents to support those things.

We then go through an assessment process where folk in our gateway services, assessment officers, contact the applicant and arrange to sit down and talk. We often find we need to talk with people to fully understand their situation and make sure we have all the documentation we require, because that is the point where we identify or provide a needs allocation and whether that might be priority, high or standard. Those three different categories of assessment come in at that point.

Once that person has been assessed, they are then allocated to either standard housing, where people face significant affordability issues in terms of attaining housing on the

private market, or high-needs housing, where people must demonstrate significant needs that cannot be resolved by any reasonable means other than the provision of social housing within a reasonable time frame. This obviously includes significant affordability issues. Then there is the priority housing list, where people must demonstrate exceptional, urgent and critical needs that cannot be resolved by any other means.

As part of that assessment process we are looking at applicants' incomes, but alongside that we are considering issues such as homelessness; mental health or medical issues; disability, including frail aged folk and people who are caring; and women and children escaping domestic violence. We also see some folk coming through who have been facing complex issues and discrimination in the private rental market, or exclusion. In a nutshell, there is an application, there is the assessment, then people are on the waiting list and they wait for allocation from there.

Ms Berry: Part of the assessment of individuals through this process is to look at whether there are some other options for them, rather than just public housing, that they might not have had a chance to identify themselves. That is some of the work that happens. Could there be another option for these individuals? Is public housing the only option and the only outcome for them? Or is there another support service or a private rental that they could go into as well? So it is about assessing the individuals not just for housing but also for what other options there are and what other supports could be there for them, and linking them up to those.

THE CHAIR: So if they had mental health issues, for example, you might allocate them housing and then link them in with mental health services as well?

Ms Gilding: Yes, absolutely. Even while people are waiting for housing we try to help them to sustain a tenancy where they have one. A lot of people who come are already housed. The majority of people who are on our waiting list have some form of accommodation. We will connect them with other community services that will help them continue to sustain their tenancy in the private situation while they wait, provide them with financial counselling and connect them, where we can, to mental health providers. Our other services, such as Woden Community Service, can help people with issues such as hoarding and squalor. There is financial counselling and care as well. Likewise, domestic violence services are key things that we would be connecting people with.

THE CHAIR: On the issue of rough sleepers, when people walk past them in the street, around Curtin and a whole range of different places, they often think, "Why aren't they being provided with housing?" They come to me and ask, "Why isn't the government providing them with housing?" What is the process for them to link in with Housing ACT, be provided with housing and get the support they need to maintain a tenancy?

Ms Berry: Part of the government's funding partnership with the federal government is the street to home program, which is run by St Vincent de Paul, and also the work they do supporting rough sleepers when they do their night patrol work. Recently they were able to get a second vehicle so that they could spread their services more across the city, not just within the city centre. They now have a second vehicle to run their

night patrol programs to support people who might be sleeping rough, for lots of different reasons, not necessarily that they are wanting to be housed in a different kind of way. They are the best ones to provide the support for those people because they have the expertise with some of the complications or complex issues that might be going on in their lives. If people are after support and wanting to be linked up to organisations like Housing ACT, that is what the street to home program does: connect them up with OneLink or other services, or crisis accommodation services if that is required as well.

Ms Gilding: Rough sleeping and homelessness is an incredibly complex area to understand, and to understand why people end up without a roof. We know that there are different drivers for that, but we are starting to see even more complexity in trying to connect people with services.

Mr Parton and I, when we were at the CEO sleep-out, heard a fabulous story from a fellow—I think his name was Daniel—who was third-generation homeless. He had a fascinating story to tell. He is now a youth worker and is really doing quite well. Somebody asked him, “I am a nurse practitioner. What can we do to help you?” His answer quite stunned me and then made sense. He said, “No, we’re always taught to avoid you.” So we often see folk who are homeless who are wanting to avoid the health services, the school services and the support services, anything that looks like a government service. They are not wanting to engage. That is why we find that there are a small number, I think, in Canberra, of people who are particularly difficult to engage.

One of the things we did in last year’s budget with the Early Morning Centre is not only extend their hours but also provide another, I think, \$50,000 for some business development to get in and understand a bit more how we can connect with those people who are not accessing the services. We have street to home, the Early Morning Centre and who’s new on the street, and there is a lot of assertive and active outreach going on, but there will be those cases. There was one at the summit. There was a homeless gentleman, and I was part of a conversation with him and Neil Skipper from Havelock Housing. He said he was sleeping on the street. Neil, to his credit, offered him accommodation four times over in that conversation, and this gentleman just was not ready to accept that service. People have all sorts of different circumstances. It is a complex issue and our service providers, the specialist homelessness system, are absolutely committed to trying all sorts of different ways to connect people with services.

THE CHAIR: Is there evidence of rough sleepers getting the support they need and moving into public housing, whether it is through the street to home program or—does it happen?

Ms Gilding: Yes, absolutely. Common Ground is an absolutely shining example here in Canberra of the housing first approach to providing rough sleepers with the supports that they need. Common Ground in Canberra is achieving some really fantastic outcomes in employment, education and training and, more importantly, sustaining a roof over somebody’s head.

Ms Berry: One of the tenants at Common Ground who I met was a young man who

had been sleeping rough in a tent in a friend's backyard. Through Common Ground and the relationships that Common Ground had with different employers around the place, he was able to get training and get employment, and he was a changed person. He said how much it had changed his life. He had never thought that that was something he could be part of. It is about being able to support these people where they are and then broaden their horizons as to what the opportunities and chances are for them to have different lives, rather than sleeping rough.

I met a gentleman a couple of weeks ago who has been sleeping rough, he says, and sharing accommodation with friends for about four years now. I said, "Have you been in touch with Housing ACT?" He said, "No." I said, "Why don't you get in touch with my office, if you are comfortable with that, or in touch with Housing ACT if you want them to look at some different accommodation for you?" He said he was not ready yet, but I gave him my card and said, "When you're ready, give me a call." You do what you can. I think the street to home and night patrol programs keep people comfortable where they are, thankfully in smaller numbers here than anywhere else in the country, but are always ready to support them if they need it.

MS LE COUTEUR: I am very pleased that Common Ground seems as though it has been really successful. I am aware that there are plans in Dickson, but are there plans to expand it on the site in Gungahlin?

Ms Berry: Not at this stage. We are certainly open to conversations, and I have been chatting to the Common Ground board about the future for that site out at Gungahlin. We are also looking at the different kinds of cohorts that could be most suitable for those Common Ground projects, the one proposed at Dickson and also the future for Common Ground in Gungahlin: what is going to be the best fit for the future and where are the gaps which are being identified through the conversations we have had leading up to the summit? And what are the different kinds of people that we can support in a different kind of Common Ground?

MS LE COUTEUR: So Dickson is going to be a different kind from Gungahlin?

Ms Berry: We are already talking to Common Ground, Argyle and Northside Community Service about what could be better. Some of it is the infrastructure, the actual layout of the building. There are always ways things can be improved, and that is what we have been engaging on with the current Common Ground. It is looking at what is happening around the country as well, but it is about how that could be even better.

MS LE COUTEUR: I was told that the current Common Ground had space for another block and that in fact that had been designed.

Ms Gilding: There is certainly space on the Gungahlin block, and I understand that the board has done some preliminary work, really early sketch designs, to see whether expansion could actually happen. But there is still a lot more work to be done to confirm whether it could, whether it is feasible. You would be aware of all the processes and studies that have gone on.

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes.

MR PARTON: Can we talk CHC, please? The question is specifically to the minister. Could you just explain very briefly the relationship between Housing ACT, the ACT government and CHC? What is the actual relationship between them?

Ms Berry: Which one is it, sorry?

Ms Gilding: Community Housing Canberra?

MR PARTON: Yes.

Ms Gilding: Formally there is not a relationship between Housing ACT and Community Housing Canberra. I think the old environment, planning and development directorate was where the land release program sat; it is under the planning directorate now. In terms of their loan, that sits with treasury.

MR PARTON: With particular regard to land release, I understand that in the early days there was an MOU between CHC and the LDA at that time. The LDA would supply, under this MOU, 120 blocks or units, things that could become dwellings, to the CHC each year. It was 120 in that MOU. What is the current agreement in terms of—

Ms Gilding: Unfortunately, I do not have a line of sight to the MOU on that. That would need to be—

Ms Berry: As Louise said, this relationship is through a different directorate. There was a loan facility that was provided through treasury, through Community Housing Canberra. Then there was a stock transfer under the affordable housing plan. That is pretty much it at the moment. Their MOU is that they will grow their business in the ACT and provide more community housing options for individuals. I am not sure what you actually want to know.

MR PARTON: It is my understanding that there was an MOU in place that actually delivered each year 120 units or blocks, so 120 dwellings, at the end of the process, but in an undeveloped form that would go to CHC from LDA each year. That was an agreement that was in place for some time. I am trying to ascertain what agreement is in place now in terms of the supply of undeveloped land to CHC.

Ms Berry: I will take that on notice and see if I can get you some more information. I do not think there is anyone here that can do that.

MR PARTON: All right.

MS LE COUTEUR: My question relates to pages 83 and 85. They are related topics about tenancies ending and performance orders. I note from page 83 that you have had 18 tenants evicted. What happened that ended up with people actually being evicted?

Mr Duggan: I have read the privilege statement. The 18 matters that are referred to there would have been evictions that we proceeded with through the ACAT. Normally the evictions are for debt and non-payment of rent. We go through fairly significant

processes before we make that decision. We will work with the individual tenant and family to try to do anything other than evict them from their property, but unfortunately, on numerous occasions—only 18 occasions when you think of the size of the stock and the portfolio we have—we have actually been forced into an eviction process.

MS LE COUTEUR: Where do people go who ACT Housing evicts because they cannot pay their rent?

Mr Duggan: We try to re-engage them through our homeless—

MS LE COUTEUR: Seriously, where are they going to go?

Mr Duggan: We try to re-engage them through our homeless services and the provision there. Some people exit voluntarily, even before we get through the eviction process, to go into other forms of accommodation. A number of people will eventually reapply through our housing process, and we will take them back as tenants in the future, depending on how the circumstances are presented and what has changed.

MS LE COUTEUR: A related question is from page 85. You have performance orders. You only have a total of three issued by ACAT. You have 940 complaints about disruptive behaviours and three performance orders. Can you talk a bit more about this?

Mr Duggan: Again, we go to the ACAT. The performance order would probably be in advance of any eviction order we may take. We would ask for a performance order to challenge the behaviour of the tenant. That can be in relation to performance such as antisocial behaviour. It is a mechanism we use, but it is a very hard mechanism to apply through the ACAT to get that order.

MS LE COUTEUR: What do you do, apart from performance orders, when you have complaints from neighbours about antisocial behaviour?

Mr Duggan: We have a vigorous process of engagement on antisocial behaviour. We try to intervene fairly quickly when it starts to escalate. There are a number of disruptive behaviour issues that are basically between a range of tenants, and we have to wait until we can ascertain exactly what the issues and causes are. We will do visits to the family home or to the tenant and we will try to negotiate with the tenant on the behaviour. We will also take one—we have taken and we are about to take another one—on a community basis when there is behaviour that is affecting the broader community. We will do that. We will often use the AFP community police for that.

We have a dispute resolution agency that we will engage fairly early. We try to get people to engage in that sort of process so that we can minimise the issues very quickly. If that fails, we continue to offer intensive support. At the end of that period—and it can take quite a period to get through that process—we will seek some sort of legal mandate. That is usually about a notice to remedy, which is basically saying, “You need to improve in your behaviour.” The ultimate sanction is to go before the ACAT. But, as I mentioned in the last comment, the majority—it would

probably be 17 or even 18 of the evictions last year—were not for behaviour but for debt.

MS LE COUTEUR: In your behaviour management program, how much do you involve the surrounding neighbourhood? There is an instance I am aware of very close to my place where there is a neighbour who is not a public housing tenant but is very close to a public housing tenant, and they are the people having the issue.

Mr Duggan: We try to work through and maintain privacy and confidentiality where we can. If, for example, it is a situation where it is impacting on other neighbours within that environment, and if those neighbours have also joined the complaint and told us about that, we will convene a meeting in a neighbourhood. We are about to convene one; I am not sure if it is the one that you are discussing at the moment. We will get the neighbours together and go through a resolution with them.

We will also use the dispute resolution provider. We will also use the community police, through the AFP. We will try to broker a deal where behaviours are addressed very constructively. Then, as I say, we will follow that up with our intensive housing managers; they will continue to visit and resolve the issues in the neighbourhood.

MS LE COUTEUR: I might talk to you afterwards to see if it is the same location, because I have had a series of emails from this dissatisfied neighbour and constituent.

Mr Duggan: I would be happy to do that. At each of these hearings we are very happy to take those as a conversation, and we will certainly follow it up.

MR PARTON: You told us that with those 18 evictions your belief is that at least 17, and possibly 18, were just about paying the rent. So we had no tenancies terminated due to antisocial behaviour or criminal activity?

Mr Duggan: Criminal activity is a matter for the police. The police would follow a certain process. If they followed a certain process and someone was incarcerated for a period of a couple of years, we would take the house back, so that would be an eviction. Regarding the threshold for antisocial behaviour as a model litigant before the ACAT, we have to prove to that threshold that it occurred. One of the things you will find with antisocial behaviour is that people do not like to come forward. The example you are giving is an example where neighbours will not come forward. To give that evidence, those neighbours need to present at the ACAT, because the ACAT will not receive third-party information. That would have to be then argued in that environment. It is not that we do not push the resources—

MR PARTON: It is an interesting scenario.

Mr Duggan: We do approach the ACAT, but it is just that these are the ones that we have finalised. We do take antisocial behaviour very seriously.

MR PARTON: It can, as you well know, put people in danger.

Mr Duggan: We are very cognisant of that issue.

MR PARTON: Is there any thought at a higher level to finding a different way here? I get a lot of communication about this. People find that they have no genuine avenue to address it. As you say, the only way they can do it is to go to ACAT. They know that they are going to be still living there at this stage. And if we are talking about violent situations—

Mr Duggan: But what I am saying is that in a violent situation the police are the primary respondent and the police need to take the action that is appropriate. If the police take that action, and we had that action and people were found guilty of criminal matters, certainly we would review it.

MR PARTON: Mr Duggan, you said in response to Ms Le Couteur's question about evictions that if someone is evicted because they have not paid their rent—obviously you go through a process, and I am sure it is quite a drawn-out process—they could just reapply and because they were then homeless they—

Ms Berry: There is more to it than that. There would be a lot of work done on a payment plan. There are tenants who can reapply, and there are payment plans and other plans as well.

Mr Duggan: To evict someone is the last sanction in the arsenal of tools that we have. As the minister said, we work incredibly hard with our tenants to maintain tenancy. I think the figure we are talking about here, of 18 in a portfolio of 11,800, is significantly low.

The process is that we start off engaging the tenant; we work with the tenant. As the minister said, we put them on a very low payment plan to recoup the loss of rental. We will then put service systems in, like financial services. We will work through that. We will attend ACAT. We will even go to the ACAT and not ask for an eviction but ask that it be notified that we want certain conditions built into that. When we eventually work through all of those issues, the eviction occurs. But we still have responsibility; it is either through our homeless services or through re-engagement with us.

MR PARTON: Ms Gilding, I do not know if you were going to add something to the whole scenario about those antisocial situations and the ACAT. Do you want to stay out of it at this stage?

Ms Gilding: I want to pick up on your broader question of whether we have stepped back and had a look at what we are doing. Property and tenancy management has significantly changed in the last decade. With the highly targeted nature of the allocations, we have more people with complex needs and who are vulnerable.

What the organisation did a couple of years ago was to look at its data, look at the numbers and at how we could help people to sustain their tenancies. We introduced the modernising tenancy services framework, which essentially sees housing managers through streams. The first is our intake stream. When somebody has been through that application, assessment and eligibility process and they have been allocated a house, we do what I guess would be termed onboarding, to use the modern term, for that intake, to ensure that they sustain the tenancy.

What we have found is that the data was telling us that most of those tenancies failed in the first couple of months. We have an intake team that does a 90-day visit to ensure that people understand what it is to be a good neighbour, how to pay the rent and about maintenance. They have a portfolio of 90 per staff member that they are managing. They then move into the normal tenancy management process, which is about the normal CSVs on an annual basis, like the majority of our tenants who are just getting on and living their lives. So we have that stream.

Then there is the intensive team, which is what Frank was talking about. When we get to the antisocial sort of behaviour, when we see that we have complaints increasing and we have other flags for that tenant, we can bring in the management of the intensive team to support the other housing managers in trying to manage that behaviour and sustain the tenancy. As you rightly point out, if we evict somebody from public housing, where do they go? Ultimately we are trying to help people sustain their tenancies, but also we want them to abide by their tenancy agreements, which means that everybody needs to enjoy their neighbourhood and peace and quiet.

I have another story. I do not know if you have time for a story; I quite like tenant stories at the moment. My story is about a fellow by the name of Peter. We moved him back in May 2013. I think it was his third property. Moving him was not solving the problem. The neighbours again complained. We worked with the neighbours to try to understand the situation. To cut a long story short, we did end up going to ACAT for orders, and we also wrapped the intensive team around him. We were at the point of eviction, but we managed to get engagement and we were able to get him connected with mental health services. We got him on a treatment plan. His behaviour has settled. We brought in the Canberra Men's Centre, and I think EveryMan as well. Four years later, he is still sustaining his tenancy and the neighbours have said, "Actually, we don't hear anything from him anymore." He had quite disturbing and threatening behaviours.

It is a process. It can take time. It does involve intensive support. What we see there, though, is that somebody with significant mental health challenges is able to sustain a tenancy in public housing, and the neighbourhood is able to be a happy place when we get those right supports in place.

MR PARTON: I want to move to Spotless, on page 84, the contract replacement. Where are we up to with the market testing of the total facilities management contract for public housing? That is a broad question.

Ms Gilding: I am going to start off and then Frank is going to jump in. We went to market on Monday. We released a request for tender. We are now in that period of time where people are considering what we have asked for in our scope of services. The tender is open until February next year.

MR PARTON: I do not know if you want to add any more, Mr Duggan?

THE CHAIR: I think it is up to the minister as to who speaks.

MR PARTON: I will stop directing traffic then. What actions have been taken to

strengthen the client relationship and service delivery requirements for the new contract?

Ms Berry: There has been a lot of work done and Mr Duggan has been doing a considerable amount of analysis. He can give you some more detail.

Mr Duggan: We have tried to give a higher focus to customer experience and customer service responses through the RFT for the new provider. We did quite an extensive examination, through some surveys of our tenants about what they expected to get from a facilities manager.

MR PARTON: How did that go?

Mr Duggan: It was very positive. We do have a reasonable rate of return. We also independently get assessed every two years by Lonergan Research agency about the services we offer. The advice from tenants was that they like to be treated respectfully, like jobs done on time and like to actually feel that they are treated appropriately.

We did independent surveys and we did a range of workshops. One was with our tenant consultative committee about TFM and what their expectations were. We had tenant meetings. We went out to consultation with all our subcontractors so that we could validate the issues we had from tenants, plus so that they understood the subcontractors' relationships with the present provider and other providers they were working with.

Out of that, we developed in the new RFT a principle where we will now assess new applicants based on best customer experience. We have set in the new RFT particular responses that we expect from the new providers, and the applicants actually identify what they are going to do about customer satisfaction.

MR PARTON: When are negotiations expected to be complete? When are we expecting a big announcement of that contract?

Mr Duggan: Once we have finalised the valuation, we will move to the next stage. Once we have valued—

MR PARTON: So there is no time line on that?

Mr Duggan: The time line is to close the tender in February and then move to a valuation, and from a valuation to negotiation and then mobilisation and signing of the new contract. That will take a period of time.

MR PARTON: I am assuming that there will be some measures put in place to ensure that there is not a collapse in service delivery for tenants during any changeover period?

Mr Duggan: That is why we have the mobilisation period. We have a transitional plan being developed with the present provider, which is normal practice. We have a mobilisation period with the new provider. And we are going to do a phasing in and out of both providers, depending on who is the successful applicant. We are very

cognisant of service delivery; our service delivery targets are very high, and we want to maintain those.

MR PARTON: I have got some more Spotless stuff, chair, but I do not want to hog the room.

THE CHAIR: We will be getting to you again shortly. Mr Pettersson.

MR PETTERSSON: How has the community responded to the housing and homelessness summit held recently and what were the outcomes of it?

Ms Berry: I think we are still in the process of doing that. We have done a bit of a survey of participants, a write-up of the satisfaction levels of participants, what the results were, what we heard from summit participants, but also the conversation that was happening leading up to the summit.

All of that is fed through the advisory group that has been advising the government on the best way for us to keep doing this work and to engage with the community. I think so far I have heard that around 80 per cent of the respondents who participated in the survey were satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the summit, so that is a pretty good outcome so far. Always with these things you cannot make everybody super happy all of the time, but 80 per cent is a pretty good outcome of satisfaction from participants. They are your notes, Louise. Do you want to read them?

Ms Gilding: Yes. It was a fantastic day. It was quite a busy day as well, and certainly we did receive feedback that we could have had a bit more space for people, the physicality of it. But overall, with the progression from workshop 1 to workshop 2 to workshop 3, working through the questions that were being posed in each of those different sessions, the people were very engaged, and there was a different sense of connections across the continuums. People from the homelessness sector were working with people from the community housing sector, from the affordable housing sector, and by the end of the day there were certainly some very good connections made, and people had made plans to get together again to see how each of their different skills and abilities could help solve the problem.

Having said that, the survey also told us that people are keen, as I said, to have that more in-depth conversation about the concrete ideas, the data and the outcomes. They certainly want to make sure that they receive that write-up. The other comment that came through from the survey was making sure that that some of our cohorts around our community, our aged-care and disability providers and financial services cohorts, contribute further to the discussion as well.

The next steps for us? The minister said that the advisory panel met again, I think only just this morning, to consider the summary for that day, which you can imagine is quite a task—gathering all of those notes and all of those ideas. That will again be put through to the minister for release at some point in the near future.

Ms Berry: I think pretty much all of the advisory group attended the summit, so they will be able to tell us if what we have put in the summary document is what happened on the day and whether it correctly reflects everything that we heard on the day.

MR PETTERSSON: Roughly how many people were involved on the day, and was it a cross-section of the community?

Ms Berry: Yes, it was. Over the last 12 months we engaged with lots of different people in the community, leading up to the summit, and then seven weeks prior to the summit we put a discussion paper out and encouraged people to contribute their views on the discussion paper. We had 6,000-plus interactions on that discussion paper, so that was really great. We made sure that on our advisory panel we had a broad range of people represented, including public housing tenants, architects, Woden Community Services, Shelter ACT, property group, real estate. We made sure that we brought everyone to be part of this story.

At the summit we had a whole bunch of different organisations represented that probably would not have ordinarily joined up together, and they had a conversation about housing and homelessness in the ACT. That was one of the really great outcomes reflected in the feedback that I heard—that housing support services were talking with property developers that they would never, ever have met with before. The big thing coming from the people that I caught up with on the day was that there were all these different voices that had never been brought together before to talk about housing, but they are all an important part of it.

MR PARTON: I would like to refer to the discussion paper “Towards a new housing strategy” from earlier in the year. In the section entitled “Where are we now?” it states:

... 37,000 dwelling sites have been released over the last ten years against a demand of 30,000 dwellings.

What was the analysis that concluded that the demand for dwelling sites was 30,000?

Ms Berry: I think I will have to take that one on notice.

MR PARTON: On notice is good. If you do not have it, you do not have it. I know it sort of straddles a couple of areas, so we were in two minds as to whether we could even ask it here.

Ms Berry: You can ask any question. It is just that I might not be able to answer it for you, Mark. I am happy to get that in writing. You just might not get the answer that you want.

MR PARTON: I have got a number of questions along those lines, so it might be more beneficial for us, particularly with the little time that we have, for me to submit them in written form.

Ms Berry: That is fine. Is that all of the questions that you are asking? It looks like a lot of ink on that paper, Mark.

MR PARTON: Yes; we do not mess around up there. I am just confused: the way the paper reads it looks as though there are 7,000 sites just lying around and not being

used, and I do not think that is the case for a single moment, but is it?

Ms Gilding: I am not going to jump into my colleague's space to talk about the development pipeline. With that particular paper the way we have organised ourselves is that there is goal 1 and goal 2, which are about reducing homelessness and strengthening public housing assistance, and that is what I guess we can answer today. So if you have got questions on goal 1 and goal 2 we can do those. Goal 3 and goal 4, which are about increasing affordable rental and access to affordable purchase, sit with the land release program and the EPSDD.

MR PARTON: Excellent. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: My question is in relation to the tenant participation grant program. For how long has the program been active and what are some of the specific initiatives under the program?

Ms Berry: Along with being a social landlord, we want to provide opportunities for public housing tenants to access grants so that they can participate and do things that other Canberrans do for their families. It is a really successful program. The total value of the grants for this year was \$14,530. We had a really great take-up, as usual. It is about making sure that people can do the things that they want to be engaged in, whether that is arts, sport or pre-employment programs—different things like that, or being part of different training courses. Do you want me to tell you the different kinds of things that the grants went to?

THE CHAIR: Yes, just to get a sense of what they are.

Ms Berry: Some of them went to fees for dance classes, sport registration fees, swimming, membership of different groups like the guides or the scouts. There was somebody who used it for ongoing education, and there was somebody who was getting their fees for a certificate IV in security operations. There were a wide range of different purposes that met individual needs.

THE CHAIR: Is it just to improve their participation in the community?

Ms Berry: Pretty much. It is about providing some of the things that the rest of us just take for granted—joining a gym, joining up to a sports club, or maybe a registration fee for their kids for a sport. Their kids might have been accepted into an elite athletes program, which are generally more expensive than just general registration fees. They can apply through the grants process to have the fees taken care of.

THE CHAIR: So it is both adults and children who are eligible?

Ms Berry: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Can groups of tenants apply for a particular initiative?

Ms Berry: It is usually individuals. I am not aware of groups.

Ms Gilding: We could certainly look at that. If we had an application from a group,

we could consider it. If I could link that particular program, which is just one part of participation, back to page 79, at strategic indicator 2, it is one of the outcomes that we are trying to achieve in providing tenants with the opportunity to be part of the community. Housing ACT does a survey every two years, and we ask tenants what the impact of public housing has been. How has having a house through public housing helped them in general?

The most recent survey was done in April 2017, and we know that public housing helps tenants to feel more settled. Ninety-four per cent of them said to us that having a house helps them to feel settled. They enjoy better health. They are more able to cope. They feel more part of the community. They are able to continue living in the area, which was really important; 93 per cent of people who responded to the survey said, “Actually, it’s really important, and my public housing house helps me to continue living in my community.” We know how important those community connections are, those social connections, connections with services, connections with family and connections with skills. So that is a really stand-out response there. It improved the job situation for 74 per cent. Eighty per cent were able to start and continue education. Better access to services was mentioned by 86 per cent, and better access to public transport again was mentioned by 86 per cent.

The tenant participation grants are one part of how we help tenants, or how public housing, having a roof over your head, helps you to participate, contribute and live in this city.

Ms Berry: I think that is the story of how much public housing has changed over the last decade or so—probably longer. Housing ACT are no longer just a landlord collecting rent. A whole part of being a social landlord, if you like, is giving people the chance to have the same goals and aspirations as the rest of us do, for themselves and their families.

MR PARTON: I am going back to Spotless. The first question is in regard to the Spotless housing maintenance contract that has been in place until now, and please excuse my potential ignorance on this. Is Spotless required to work to an annual funding cap for repairs and maintenance of public housing? If that is the case, will that be the case under the new contract?

Ms Berry: I will ask Mr Duggan to give you some information on that.

Mr Duggan: Spotless have to work through a cap for services that we purchase, so we set the budget. It is our budget, our determination, and we set it. They need to manage that with us. If they do not manage it correctly within the areas that we limit, there is an opportunity to look at abatements. For the last three or four years they have amounted to a one per cent variation.

MR PARTON: You have mainly answered the next question; that is, if they are capped, what are the processes? How do you handle client requests for help once the cap is reached, or once you are approaching it?

Mr Duggan: We do two pieces of week. The budget is split into two primary areas. One is planned maintenance and one is responsive maintenance. Notionally, in

commercial contracts, they go for a 70-30 mixture. This year Spotless was able to achieve a 73.5-26.5 split, which is a fantastic result for us. What we have seen is that we are moving away from responsive maintenance here and now into long-term planned maintenance. We review the budget through our financial management group, who meet monthly. We actively manage that budget throughout the year to make sure that we achieve the outcomes that we set. We set the budget early. We set the budget in July. We do a delivery of works. We plan what we are going to expend it on, but we leave a component that deals with the issues that you have raised.

MR PARTON: With respect, Mr Duggan, you are painting a pretty rosy picture of Spotless and their service delivery and customer satisfaction, but you must get a lot of the same emails that I get. How many outstanding maintenance requests would you have at any one time? I know that is a broad question.

Mr Duggan: I would surmise that you get, by way of an email, people saying there is an outstanding maintenance issue. We have a service delivery matrix that we manage daily, and it is reported on. In fact, it will be reported to me tomorrow. That sets the schedule for repairs. We can achieve repairs if there is an immediate health and safety issue. We actually achieve those repairs, 96 per cent or above, within a four-hour period.

We set time frames with Spotless to deliver on the maintenance that they actually deliver. For the four-hour period they score above 96 per cent. Each month we calculate those figures. We then have next-day priority, three days et cetera. We have changed the system recently. In fact, we are ahead of schedule, so we have now let Spotless, where they have a 20-day repair, engage with the client so that they can have the subcontractors in the geographical area. If it was a repair that we said would take 20 days, if they are in a geographical area we give them permission now to contact the client so that the maintenance can be carried out.

We have very little maintenance that is carried over. Where we may carry over maintenance is where they have planned to do a particular piece of work, they have scoped the work, they have gone in to do that work, and there are more and more issues that start to translate themselves because the original work order, the original request from the client, was not what was actually proceeded with. Sometimes that does take a bit more time.

MR PARTON: I would concede that those who are as happy as Larry with Spotless are probably not going to write to me and tell me about it; I understand.

Ms Berry: Sometimes they do, actually.

MR PARTON: They do not write to me. They might write to you, but they do not write to me.

Ms Berry: If they do write to you, Mr Parton, and if there are people that are writing to you and saying that they have some issues with some of the services that are provided by Spotless, please let us know and then we can make sure that they are addressed.

MS LE COUTEUR: If you go to page 87 you will find that it says that over 1,900 people access homelessness services through OneLink. It then gives a breakdown of them. My question is: how many of these people who access homelessness services were able to gain accommodation, as distinct from any other sort of service? How many of them gained what they were presumably primarily looking for: accommodation?

Ms Gilding: You have the annual figure of 1,900 people actually accessing the services there.

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes; that is what your report says.

Ms Gilding: Yes, that is right. I am going to direct you to somewhere that might be able to answer all your questions, the last OneLink quarterly report. There is the data for January, February, March, April, May and June for this year.

MS LE COUTEUR: Where do I find that? We have been asking a lot of questions about OneLink without a lot of success.

Ms Gilding: You will find that on the OneLink website. If I hop online onto the OneLink website—

MS LE COUTEUR: So it is going to be onelink.org.au?

Ms Gilding: If you just do a Google search of OneLink, it will come up.

Ms Berry: We can provide that.

MS LE COUTEUR: But you do not have any idea, out of that 1,900, how many may have gone on to provide accommodation?

Ms Gilding: I do not have the annual figure off the top of my head, but what that report gives you is the monthly figure, how many people on average accessed it. It is www.onelink.org.au/services. I can see that you are all madly looking for it now. You will see that at the end of each month the number of clients that were placed into accommodation and services is that split there.

What we have to understand with OneLink is that of the 1,900 people who were actually accessing services, there were different cohorts within that. Some wanted services; some wanted accommodation; some wanted services and accommodation. When we look at, say, just the June figures, the clients placed in June for accommodation were 43. And 48 went to services. The whole six months is there in a lovely bar chart for you.

MS LE COUTEUR: Can I just double-check the address? I have onelink.org and it does not appear to be homelessness services.

Ms Gilding: I will double-check. If not, we will table the report for the committee.

MS LE COUTEUR: It is talking about the institute being proud to celebrate its

10th year of servicing knowledge, delivering it to thousands of students all over the Western world. I do not think it is the same organisation that you are funding.

Ms Gilding: Are you on the ANU website?

MS LE COUTEUR: No, I am not. That is what I am just asking about.

Ms Gilding: It is the OneLink report in June 2017. I have it right there. I have just found it online.

Ms Berry: We will get it to you if you cannot find it, and you can then interrogate that.

MS LE COUTEUR: Thank you. You do not know of anything more?

Ms Gilding: I will take on notice the question of the 1,900 people over the annual report period and how many of those people were placed in accommodation at the end of the year.

MS LE COUTEUR: Do you think it might be under “How we work”?

Ms Gilding: Are you still looking for the website?

MS LE COUTEUR: I have “How we work”.

Ms Gilding: Yes. It is under “How we work.” If you scroll down, it is under “Reporting”, “OneLink report”. It is the little green part there. If you click on that, you will find it.

MRS DUNNE: If you do not, Ms Gilding will show you later.

Ms Gilding: Absolutely. I am happy to do that.

THE CHAIR: We are moving to the office for women.

MRS JONES: Minister, I have a couple of brief questions to finalise some loose ends and to ask about the action plan for women. First, I wonder if you have had any updates on the deployment of portaloos for firefighter women and how we are going with those additional locks on the breastfeeding room doors?

Ms Berry: I have not heard anything for a little while now on the portaloos. I thought that that had been—

MRS JONES: The last information I had was that there was a promise that an updated version of the requirements when setting up a staging area was being attempted. There was also a claim that there had been a few more times where they had been deployed. I was not sure that it was concluded yet.

Ms Berry: The last brief that I had on that was not long after we had a chat about it. It was that they had changed the way that the requests were made. There was that issue

that the request had to be made by somebody on the ground, and that could be a bit awkward for women who would need to make the request. I understood that there were some changes around the communication channels for how portals could be provided so that there was not the need for a woman to ask a supervisor on the ground. I can follow up whether that has actually happened.

MRS JONES: We know that the locks for the breastfeeding doors have been ordered, but I am not sure if they have been installed.

Ms Berry: Yes. Four or six weeks ago was the last on that. I will check where that is up to as well.

MRS JONES: On the action plan, I wonder if any practical steps are planned or have been taken about women feeling unsafe after dark in Woden and if there are any changes being made there to try to get that number up from 62.5 per cent of women feeling unsafe after dark in Woden.

Ms Berry: The work that is happening through the action plan is on a couple of things. We have talked about this in the chamber as well. One is about using the toolkit to assess whether a place is a safe place for women. The last time that was used by the office for women was at the Floriade festival. That is a physical walk-through of an environment when events are going to happen and things like that.

MRS JONES: But it is the actual environment of the Woden town centre in particular, because it has such a bad score.

Ms Evans: I do not know of any practical steps, but I can say that we have been working closely with other directorates on women's safety audits.

MRS JONES: When you have an event?

Ms Evans: No, not necessarily: any kind of planning. Something that has changed is international concerns about security and safety more broadly. Because there are a lot of conversations—for instance, with the crowded spaces strategy and a whole range of other things—all of our planning and that sort of thing has to take into account a range of other issues around safety and security. We have taken the opportunity to link in with our colleagues in other directorates on the women's safety audits and encourage that they be included whenever. We are looking at planning in any of our spaces. We know that women feel less safe than men in dark areas, for instance, and that sort of thing. So it is about looking at lighting, looking at clear signage—

MRS JONES: Dark corners.

Ms Evans: That is right. “How do you get out of here if you want to go in a hurry?” It is that sort of thing. We are taking some practical steps. I think the culture for women is going to take a lot longer to change.

MRS JONES: Sure. I just wondered if there was something about Woden, but I am sure you will work on something eventually. The other thing that I wanted to ask about the action plan is this. I think there has been a fair input from the advisory

council on women. What is the current membership of the advisory council on women and how long have each of those people been on the council? How do they apply and how are they selected? What are the assessment criteria? I do not mind if that is taken on notice.

Ms Berry: We might take it on notice and then we can give you all the details.

MRS JONES: Do you want to make any comment? I think you have refreshed the council recently, haven't you?

Ms Berry: Yes; that is right. It is a relatively new council. They have been working on putting together this first action plan for the ACT government. Part of that work is about how we can possibly get out information about the plan through the networks of all the individuals who are members of the advisory council. It is the types of things that you are talking about as well. How do we get women and girls engaged in that better?

When I first took on the role as Minister for Women, I asked everybody on the council to go out to their networks and find out what women and girls know about all the plans: the federal plan, the ACT's plans and the action plans that are coming off that. Not many people know about them. We are working on how we get better engagement from the community on this stuff so that they know that there is work being done. There are a group of women that are working really hard and are really passionate about this work. How does the rest of the community feed into that? That is part of this, but the action plan is all available online.

Ms Evans: We can pull together that information on who is on the committee, but one of the important things to note is that the primary policy area that is getting some good traction and getting information out there is gender equality. We had the recent forum case for change. That was really well attended by people across the sector and within government. We had some great guest speakers, which meant we got a bit of media coverage. Sometimes it is about taking the opportunity to talk about things more broadly that resonate with people in the community.

MRS JONES: On the case for change event, if you have time to give me a briefing I would be more than happy to hear a bit more about what happened there. I do not want to take up too much time.

Ms Berry: It was good. One of the actions in the action plan is to hold those biennial events and try to find different ways. One of the challenges that I put to the participants at that event was to go out and talk with the people within their networks and their community about what is happening.

MR PETTERSSON: I have some questions about the women's return to work program. How many grants were given in 2016-17? Generally speaking, what are they normally used for?

Ms Berry: This is timely because last week or the week before I met with a woman who had accessed the women's grants and she told me her story. She had been off work for a long time. She was a mature-aged woman raising her family. She had

found out about the grants through her local member, Tara Cheyne. She accessed the grants, which gave her the chance to buy a laptop and, I think, a printer at home and some internet access. Then she participated in the cert III in early childhood education and care program through SPARK, which is the partnership at Ginninderry which provides some training opportunities for people who live on the north side, in Belconnen.

She said that she probably could not have done as well as she did, participated in that program and succeeded and got the certificate in the end, had she not been able to access the grants to get some basic things. Her whole goal was to get back into work again. She said, "Being unemployed and an older woman, it is harder to get into employment. This grant has been the thing that's got me on the track to getting employment." It was so nice to hear, because you do not often get to hear the follow-up as to where the grants went. She was a really new one who had accessed the grants. The numbers just keep going up.

Ms Evans: A hundred and sixty women of all different ages received grants of up to \$1,000 under the return to work grants. That was fantastic. Sixty-two per cent of the recipients used the grants for education and training, course fees, computers and that sort of thing; eight per cent for child care so that they could go and do whatever they needed to do to return to work; and seven per cent for driving lessons to improve their access, to be able to get into the workforce. That was really fantastic. Another thing that is notable is that 44 per cent of recipients are from a culturally diverse background and 10 per cent are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Those are really high percentages.

MRS JONES: Does the information about those grant rounds go out to all MLAs to advertise through their networks? I am not sure that I am normally advised of it, and I would more than happily put it on my Facebook page.

Ms Berry: We can do that.

Ms Evans: We will make sure you get that link.

THE CHAIR: Minister, I have a question in relation to the ACT Women's Register. Could you update us on how it is promoting women to leadership positions and whether there are any plans to refresh the register in the future?

Ms Berry: Yes. We are planning to refresh it right now. It is all about encouraging more women to participate on boards and in organisations. The organisations can go to a portal and find women who have the skills and the abilities to be part of those organisations. One of the excuses you will hear from organisations is that they cannot find these women. We are going to make it really easy for them, because they are all going to be on this register. One of the other things we are going to look at with the register is the diversity on it, making sure that we have people represented across all different areas: disabilities, culturally and linguistically diverse, LGBTIQ, intersex—everyone. It will be a diversity register with very clear diversity measures on there so that people can come and find the people who best suit the needs of their organisation.

Ms Evans: There are 66 women currently on the ACT Women's Register, but we are

updating. We have a new portal that will allow much easier uptake for people because it is electronic and people can get on board. And, as the minister said, the opportunity to also offer diversity in the people who may wish to be on a board will be really useful. As well as that, we are looking at being able to have a bit more of a matching kind of capability with the new portal so that women can see what is available and people can also see that there are women available, or people with other diverse characteristics.

THE CHAIR: How do businesses and organisations access the portal? Do they have to pre-register with you and receive a login?

Ms Evans: They will register, but I think that once they have registered they will be able to see the listing.

THE CHAIR: How do you encourage women to register their names?

Ms Evans: Through a range of different forums that we have available for women. Through the women's grants and through the Audrey Fagan leadership series, which is a series of leadership forums for women to learn about being board members and taking up other senior roles, those women can straightaway register and express their interest to be picked up as a board member. But, more broadly, through the forums that are available—

THE CHAIR: They do not have to have a qualification or anything like that to register?

Ms Evans: No, just the interest.

MRS JONES: I want to know what the total spend on grants and scholarships by the office for women in 2016-17 was and how it compares to 2015-16. I do not mind getting that back on notice if that is easier. Also, could you please provide me with a collated list of the grants and scholarships, and the recipients of each, from the office for women, and which selection criteria were used for the grants and scholarships?

Ms Evans: Absolutely. It is usually online, but I acknowledge that when it closes each time they take it down again. We will get that for you, if it is all right, on notice.

MRS JONES: Thank you.

MS LE COUTEUR: If you look at the bottom of page 34, going back to women's safety, figure 12, strategic indicator 8, you will see that it is very dramatic. In 2013 safety was at about 27 per cent, then a year later it went up to about 40.5 per cent, and it has gone down again. Have you any idea what happened? That is a dramatic change in women's feelings of safety. I am wondering, given that you do not do the surveying and you are relying on police data, whether this is reflecting possibly that the police have changed the question or how it is surveyed? If that is the answer, how do we find out the information? If that is not the answer, what is?

Ms Evans: That is a good question. The graphs can be slightly misleading, in the sense that the scales are different.

MS LE COUTEUR: No, this is just one. I just mean the one at the bottom.

Ms Evans: I know, but it is interesting that the one above is covering only two per cent but then the one below is covering 20-odd per cent.

MS LE COUTEUR: The one at the top is really just—

Ms Evans: Yes, a minor fluctuation.

MS LE COUTEUR: The one at the bottom is quite significant. That year there was a dramatic change.

Ms Evans: Yes. I would be speculating because, realistically, we have not done an evaluation of that. What we would be hoping, given that it has come up 10 per cent or so and stayed up, is that whatever we have been doing in women's safety has been effective. We would be worried if it was dropping back down again, but we are seeing it up and staying over a couple of years.

MS LE COUTEUR: And stable.

Ms Evans: A bit more stable. I guess it is a watch and see kind of effect there. Sometimes it is about things that have happened, but it could be that we are seeing results from 2013-14. The year before that could have been higher. It is always hard if you are not seeing a very long trend. I do not know exactly what would have happened last year.

Ms Berry: It could be the awareness-raising around domestic and family violence. It could be; I am just speculating. Maybe there is some kind of scientific way that we can find out what happened there that makes sense, because over the last couple of years that has been happening across the country.

MS LE COUTEUR: Would you be able to take on notice, given that you get these figures from ACT Policing, what they actually ask? I am concerned that possibly the indicator is not actually a very good indicator, although I do not know.

Ms Evans: We can definitely find that out, yes.

MS LE COUTEUR: Thanks.

MS LE COUTEUR: Do you have any additional information, given that you are getting it from the police, about perceptions of safety as to where women do or do not feel safe?

MRS JONES: Yes, we do.

MS LE COUTEUR: I know we have it from the Women's Centre for Health Matters, but I am wondering, given that their major source of data is the police—

MRS JONES: They undertook a survey, didn't they?

MS LE COUTEUR: The police may—

MRS JONES: The Women's Centre for Health Matters was—

MS LE COUTEUR: The Women's Centre for Health Matters definitely did a survey, and I have seen a couple of presentations about it. The number of people who were involved in that survey was significantly smaller than that of the police. The police talked to a lot more people, understandably. I am interested in where the police may have found that people felt there were issues.

MRS JONES: Wherever the police go, they find people with issues, Ms Le Couteur.

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes.

Ms Evans: I guess the reality, Ms Le Couteur, is that ACT Policing would tell us that the greatest amount of concern about and lack of safety for women is actually in their own homes, rather than in the streets outside their homes. But I can ask the question of them.

MS LE COUTEUR: Thank you. The question is about feeling safe in public places, but I appreciate that we should never go home and not feel safe.

Ms Berry: Part of that work is the work of the action plan as well. Part of that work is gathering some data on women's feelings of safety, so it will be different. I expect that the police data would be captured from a different audience.

MS LE COUTEUR: That is partially what I am saying. It will be a different and possibly much more diverse audience from the Women's Centre for Health Matters—contact with different people.

THE CHAIR: There being no further questions on the women's portfolio, thank you, minister.

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

Hubbard, Mr Ian, Senior Director, Corporate Services

Evans, Ms Jacinta, Executive Director, Inclusion and Participation

THE CHAIR: Minister, I invite you to make a brief opening statement.

Mr Ramsay: Thanks for the opportunity to speak about my portfolio responsibilities as the Minister for Veterans and Seniors. It is an honour and a privilege to have the responsibility for the veterans and seniors portfolios. Both veterans and seniors bring their skills, their life experience and their wisdom to the continuing contributions that they make to our community. We are fortunate in Canberra to be able to draw on the expertise that exists in the community in relation to veterans and seniors matters. This expertise has been drawn from new appointments to both the Veterans Advisory Council and the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing.

The Veterans Advisory Council focuses on issues that are most important to the veterans community. While some of our veterans may be seniors, it is certainly not always the case. In fact, we understand that the average age of people who are separating from the Australian Defence Force is around 31 years. It is important that the government pays recognition to the contribution of those who have served, often at great sacrifice to themselves and to their families. To this end, over 2016-17 I have been honoured to represent the ACT government at a number of ceremonial events, and I am particularly humbled that I had the privilege of representing the government at last weekend's Remembrance Day ceremony at the Australian War Memorial.

In the area of veterans' transitions to civilian employment, we are looking to create a best practice model here in the ACT public service recruitment process to assist with the retention of former ADF personnel. We have begun taking practical steps for this, including an all-staff survey of ACT public servants to self-identify as veterans, which will help to build an evidence base for what steps we should take next.

The coming year will be an important time to cement our work in the veterans portfolio. We will be actively looking at the experience of the Veterans Advisory Council and we will consult with the relevant stakeholders and the ex-service organisations to inform the next steps in the government's work with its federal, state and territory counterparts to support veterans' transition to civilian employment and to strengthen community and health supports for veterans who are living here in the ACT.

The new Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing, appointed in June 2017, will continue to advise on priority areas such as the prevention of and the response to elder abuse and the continued development of Canberra as an age-friendly city, which I note in passing was the focused topic of consultation at today's meeting of the

MACA.

We are taking a whole-of-government approach to review what targeted improvements are needed to effectively prevent and to respond to elder abuse. A consultation, which will be held by the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing in the first half of 2018, will build on what we already know about elder abuse in our community and will identify the practical steps that we can take in the coming year.

Recently I presented an update on progress with the implementation of the ACT active ageing framework 2015-18. The age-friendly suburbs project has delivered age-friendly improvements in Ainslie, Weston, Kaleen and Monash, and I look forward to continuing these improvements over the coming years. The flexible bus service has provided over 50,000 passenger trips since its commencement, and this year it was expanded to the inner north.

Next year, as the active ageing framework draws to a close, I will be working with the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing and relevant stakeholders to take a fresh look at how we continue to develop Canberra as an age-friendly city. We have a unique opportunity here in Canberra to capitalise on our advantages as a planned city and to become a world leader in the field. All areas of government will be engaged to take coordinated action to ensure that our infrastructure, our housing, our employment services and our culture promote the respect and the valuing of older people and support their continued participation.

I certainly look forward to the year ahead and the many opportunities that it presents in both the veterans and seniors portfolios. I see that one of my key roles, as an influencer across government, is to ensure that the decisions that we make take into account both of these important groups of people, and I look forward to improving their experience of living in this city.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister.

MR HANSON: I am a little nervous, given our last encounter here, so I will be mindful of that. I will start by commending you, minister. In the interim period between my last brief experience in this committee and now, I commend you on what appears to be a very genuine commitment to this portfolio, particularly veterans. I think it is an area that is better served by a bipartisan approach, so it is good to see that we are back on track. Well done. Have you identified a specific budget allocation for the veterans area? Within your portfolio areas, is there a specific budget set aside for veterans initiatives?

Mr Ramsay: Mr Hubbard will come to the table to answer that.

Mr Hubbard: Over the last couple of years, as you know, we have had the budgets for the various community participation groups in one bucket. Due to the greater prominence and request for transparency around seniors, veterans, the office for women, youth engagement et cetera heading into 2017 and 2018, in the budget this year, the budget we brought down earlier, we have identified some funding specifically for the office of veterans and seniors. We have pulled that budget out and we have also set up the various offices so that each of those offices now has a

dedicated budget and a dedicated FTE along with that.

MR HANSON: Within the veterans area, are you able to tell me what FTE is focused solely on veterans and then what is separate from that in terms of providing actual deliverables?

Mr Hubbard: We have set up the office of veterans affairs and seniors, with a budget for 2017-18 of \$650,000 and two dedicated FTEs for that office. They work both across seniors and ageing. It would be remiss of me, and I think I would get into trouble with Jacinta, who is responsible for that area, if I did not also mention that with that group, when big events come up, they share a lot of their resources amongst themselves.

MR HANSON: Sure. I am just trying to narrow down what is being allocated to veterans. When we were last here—it might have been in estimates—we talked about what were the initiatives, and it was the money being provided for the model railway club. You made your opening statement, but a lot of veterans are not seniors. Specifically within that budget, have you further broken it down to say, “There is going to be an amount for specific veterans programs”? I accept that in some cases there is crossover, but as in the employment program or whatever it might be, have you identified a budget that is purely for veterans? If the answer is no, that is fine.

Mr De’Ath: Probably the best answer at this stage is to say that it is a matter of active consideration as to the distinction between the veterans and the seniors budgets. Mr Hubbard is quite correct as things stand at the moment. But, moving forward, this is something we are in discussion about both internally within the directorate and with the minister and his office. Jacinta, you may want to add more to that.

Ms Evans: Not on the budget split, but I would like to say that, even though that sounds like a very small FTE, what is delivered is more than the sum total of grants given to veterans or any kind of discrete funding. In the veterans portfolio there is an enormous amount of funding that is provided through the commonwealth. We work really actively within the veterans team to ensure that we are working to keep across national issues that are arising and that our policy in the ACT is on par with what is happening nationally, or leading in some areas.

There is quite a lot of work done within that team to be keeping up with, and additional research around what is required in the veterans area. That small FTE is doing a power of work in that space. Recently the veterans ministers round table was held; the breadth of work that the veterans ministers are undertaking is everything from mental health and suicide amongst veterans to how younger veterans are affected by coming out of their Defence Force experience and into other aspects of life. I just wanted to make the point that the budget probably does not reflect necessarily the work that is done, because it is spread across the staff.

Mr Ramsay: Can I just note on that that obviously, as I mentioned in the opening statement, part of my role as minister is to be an influencer across a number of other areas. One of the areas that is being looked at, as you are aware, is in relation to veterans’ employment transition. A lot of the work that is going on in that is actually happening within the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development

Directorate. That is not reflected in this particular part of the budget, but it is certainly work that is happening under the oversight of the portfolio.

MR HANSON: All right. That sounds like a good initiative; we might get to that later if we have time. But, beyond that, are there any other specific initiatives of that ilk that have been initiated by the ACT government? As you say, a lot of it might be just the coordination of commonwealth things. You have the employment initiative. Are there any other initiatives that have been initiated specifically for veterans, as opposed to veterans and seniors?

Ms Evans: Most recently we have been working with the Veterans Support Centre. They provide advocacy, legal advice and support for veterans around a whole range of things, as well as social and community type activities that are appealing to a range of veterans. Some of their veterans are the older veterans, but young veterans have also engaged through that particular program. They received \$70,000 this year from the ACT government to support their activities.

MR HANSON: Is that the Woden Valley RSL? Is that the right group?

Ms Evans: No, they are not Woden Valley. It is Belconnen.

MR HANSON: The old Vietnam vets?

Ms Evans: They had a different name. Vietnam vets, yes.

Mr Ramsay: Obviously, as part of the budgetary impact for people, both seniors and veterans, there are a range of things in the area of transport concessions and other concessions. As part of the work that we are doing now, at the most recent veterans ministers round table the ACT took the lead in looking at how concessions for veterans across Australia, across the various jurisdictions, may be able to be developed.

MR PETTERSSON: I note that ACT participation grants for seniors have been revised to include the veterans portfolio. Can you just tell me a little bit about why this was done and what sorts of grants are provided?

Ms Evans: Yes, we did some revision. It is very early days for these grants in terms of being available to veterans. As I said, funding for veterans in the ACT comes from many different sources. These grants are an opportunity for organisations to apply for a small amount of non-recurrent funding, up to about \$10,000 per project, for social activities or events. In 2016-17 we had a sum of money, about \$80,000, which was to go across the seniors and the veterans portfolios. We did not split it. We just put it out there and advertised: "If you have an interest in a seniors area or an interest in a veterans area, please put forward your applications." We got 13 applications for those funds, which used the whole \$80,000.

As an example, south Canberra veterans shed received almost \$10,000 for the establishment of a men's shed specifically for veterans. The sheds are non-gender specific and can be for any age of person, so they are not just for older veterans but have very good uptake from people who are retired or semi-retired and want that

sense of collegiality that you can get by working on projects together. That was one such project.

MR HANSON: With next year being the centenary of the armistice, the end of World War I, have you looked at any specific ACT commemorative activities or are we just linking in with what the feds are doing?

Mr Ramsay: A lot of the work is obviously being led nationally, but that certainly was a key part of the most recent round table. What we have decided across the various jurisdictions is that the service on Remembrance Day, the national service here, is the key focus. Now that we have had that conversation at a national level, we are looking at what each of the various jurisdictions might do on theme so that there is a constant theme but without there necessarily being identical matters across each of the jurisdictions.

One of the matters that is being looked at at the moment is—under some name that is yet to be determined, but on the 11th of the 11th, which is a Sunday next year—how each state and territory as a whole may be able to come to a stop, so to speak, not only marking it in terms of remembrance but also picking up the original sense of Remembrance Day as a day of celebration and honouring, not just quiet reflection and honouring. So there is work that is going on in that sense for Remembrance Day as part of the centenary.

The other work that is happening in there, especially across jurisdictional areas, is how we pivot out of a centenary into what happens next. I think that is the next thing for us in the way that we are working through. We have been building up. There has been a very solid focus on the centenary for the last four years in a range of ways, but I think the key one for us to be considering not only locally but across each of the jurisdictions is: what do we move into? Is there a sense of remembrance fatigue, so to speak? By the time you have been working on a centenary for four years, does it just build into something else or does it start something new? I think there are some good possibilities for that for the second part of 2018 and moving into 2019.

MS LE COUTEUR: I note on page 57 that the elder abuse line got 125 calls, which is up from the year before, at 89. I am wondering how you promote that line and whether you feel that this is in any way capturing the universe of potentially concerned people in the ACT.

Ms Evans: Thanks for the question, Ms Le Couteur. I think 125 calls was somewhat up. But what we are understanding more and more is that, while the phone line does pick up some level of need and concern, a lot more people are going to other places, such as ringing COTA, who are one of our funded organisations, or talking to other professionals, such as their GP. So, while the phone line is picking up some need, we are sensing that there are probably other forums for that kind of reporting.

One funded project which ADACAS and COTA collaborated on was to put together a training package to raise awareness around elder abuse. That is probably having some effect and we are probably getting a few more phone calls on that, but they are also getting calls. ADACAS would be another place where people are able to go. What we do not want is to make people feel that they have to ring that phone line. Sometimes,

particularly for older people, it is not a comfortable thing to do to pick up the phone and talk to someone you do not know at all or have no other contact with.

MS LE COUTEUR: You have talked about a training program. Who are you training?

Ms Evans: It is for people in the health professions, people who have contact with older people, to be aware, when older people say that they are worried about their money, of whether they are worried because someone is accessing it and there is a level of financial abuse, or to be aware, if they say they are not really enjoying it when their grandchildren come over anymore, if there is something more going on there. It is about having an awareness that some older people are very vulnerable and they may not be able to express what is going on with them, in a way. With a little bit of knowledge and support, you might be able to get that information from them.

MS LE COUTEUR: I was contemplating asking about age-friendly suburbs. Correct me if I am wrong: despite its title, it is a program that you do not actually have anything to do with? That is TCCS's program?

Ms Evans: We are very fortunate in the ACT government; we are all very close together. Although that is led by another directorate, we are engaged with them all the time on what that means for our age-friendly framework more broadly. They are running a particular project on age-friendly suburbs, and a lot of that is about infrastructure. It is about safety, footpaths being even and that sort of thing. Of course, they are really happy to share with us what they are learning through that and what changes they are making. We then feed that into our age-friendly city framework for the future.

MS LE COUTEUR: Are you involved in the consultation with older people in the suburbs?

Ms Evans: No, we do not get to do that part. We just get to hear what the outcomes are.

MRS KIKKERT: The Woden Valley RSL, which I have links to, have contacted the shadow minister for veterans to say that they are being charged \$40,000 per year to rent ACT government office space, yet we all know that the CFMEU rents a much more valuable property for \$1 per year. How can you explain charging the RSL \$40,000 and a union only \$1 per year?

Mr De'Ath: That is more a question for our property group. We do not have the capacity to answer that for you here today.

MRS KIKKERT: Will you undertake to find accommodation for the RSL on the same terms as for the CFMEU?

Mr De'Ath: Again, I am sorry; I am unable to answer the question.

THE CHAIR: We will end there. Thank you for your time. The committee asks that all answers to questions taken on notice at today's hearing be replied to by close of

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business five business days after the uncorrected proof *Hansard* is issued. I now formally declare the public hearing closed.

The committee adjourned at 5.01 pm.