



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

Thursday, 30 November 2017

This is an **EDITED PROOF TRANSCRIPT** of question time proceedings that is subject to further checking. Members' suggested corrections for the official Weekly Hansard should be lodged with the Hansard office (facsimile 02 6205 0025) as soon as possible. Answers to questions on notice will appear in the *Weekly Hansard*.

Thursday, 30 November 2017

Questions without notice:

ACT Health—insurance claim	1
Centenary Hospital for Women and Children—aluminium cladding	1
ACTION bus service—NXTBUS information service	2
Tourism—future strategy	2
Minister for Health and Wellbeing—briefing	4
Municipal services—Dickson.....	4
Public housing—renewal program	5
Light rail—work health and safety	7
Municipal services—fix my street.....	8
Housing—housing choices	8
Justice—suspended sentences	10
Bimberi Youth Justice Centre—health assessments	11
Housing—affordable housing scheme.....	12
Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse— government response	14
Housing—affordability.....	15
Families—preparatory programs for preschool children.....	17

Questions without notice
ACT Health—insurance claim

MR COE: My question is to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. Minister, when does your directorate expect to finalise the insurance claim for the hospital switchboard fire in April this year?

MS FITZHARRIS: I will take the question on notice. I note that this came up in annual reports hearings because in the 2016-17 annual report there is an estimate of that insurance claim. I will come back to the Assembly with the date on which that claim is expected to be finalised.

MR COE: Minister, what is the approximate value of the claim or the estimate, and what impact do you expect it will have on the forthcoming premium?

MS FITZHARRIS: I recall from annual reports hearings that it was around \$1.3 million, but I will clarify that and take the second part of the question on notice.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, what is the value of the damage done to the hospital by the fire?

MS FITZHARRIS: I will take the question on notice.

Centenary Hospital for Women and Children—aluminium cladding

MS LAWDER: My question is to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. Minister, in your answer to question on notice 521 you said that ACT Health was first made aware of the fire risk posed by the cladding at the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children on 30 June 2017. You also said that you were advised of the risks on 24 July 2017. Minister, why did it take your directorate three weeks to advise you that there was flammable cladding on the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children?

MS FITZHARRIS: ACT Health advised me when they had further information to advise about their approach to identifying and fixing the cladding issue that had been discovered at the Centenary hospital.

MS LAWDER: Minister, what concerns did you raise with your directorate about the delay in advising you, especially given that there had already been a fire at the Canberra Hospital campus earlier in the year?

MS FITZHARRIS: When I was advised I was also advised that the percentage of the cladding on the building was very low. I was also advised that there was no risk to the building and that ACT Health's prior approval of the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children had been verified by ACT Fire & Rescue. They advised me that the building was very safe but that they would take extra precautions in the context of the broader work happening across the ACT government responding to that incident. I was assured that the building was safe, and I continue to talk to ACT Health about briefings.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, why have you failed to take action to ensure that you are advised quickly of problems in your directorate?

MS FITZHARRIS: I have not.

ACTION bus service—NXTBUS information service

MS LE COUTEUR: My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services and relates to the NXTBUS information service. Minister, I am a regular NXTBUS user and I have noticed ghost buses that turn up at the stop but were not on NXTBUS. I know I am not alone; quite a few people have commented about this online. Minister, why is NXTBUS missing some services?

MS FITZHARRIS: I will take the question on notice.

MS LE COUTEUR: Minister, when light rail starts, will NXTBUS also cover light rail? If so, will it be renamed?

MS FITZHARRIS: On the second part of the question, I do not believe so. But certainly what I can tell Ms Le Couteur about light rail, as I think she knows, is that in a sense light rail is operating so frequently along a set route that any passenger seeking to use the light rail route will know that in peak hours there will be very frequent light rail—around about six minutes—and outside of those times just a little decreased frequency. So the purpose of NXTBUS, in terms of real-time information, is probably less relevant to light rail; which, again, is one of the benefits of light rail that we will see when it starts operating here in the ACT.

MR COE: Minister, what is the status of the redesign of the local bus network following the introduction of light rail and the possible use of NXTBUS on that?

MS FITZHARRIS: There may be three or four questions in that. I am pleased to advise Mr Coe that currently there is consultation underway on how Canberrans would like to link into our rapid transport network. There will be nine rapid transport services. The consultation at the moment is how Canberrans would like to feed in to the nine rapid transport routes that will be operating next year. Eight of those will be buses, one of those will be light rail.

As I have said, once this current phase of consultation is complete we will take the community's feedback and go out for further consultation in early 2018 with that feedback already received about how local bus services will then feed in to the rapid network. That, of course, will include light rail.

Tourism—future strategy

MS ORR: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, what action is the government taking to attract more visitors to Canberra in 2018, off the back of the recent announcement by *Lonely Planet*?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Orr for the question. We certainly seek to take full advantage of our city receiving this very significant tourism accolade. Following on from the

success of the announcement, we are fully focused on implementing a range of marketing activities in both domestic and international markets to raise awareness of Canberra and to encourage more people to visit our city.

This news was globally significant and VisitCanberra is collaborating with Tourism Australia on an ongoing public relations strategy targeting our key international markets: China, Singapore, Malaysia, the United Kingdom and New Zealand. During the most recent Canberra week in Wellington, I met with a range of key stakeholders in the tourism industry, including New Zealand's new tourism minister, Air New Zealand, and Wellington City Council and their tourism folk.

We look to continue to expand opportunities for direct transfer into Canberra. Qatar Airways begin their service in February next year. We will continue our engagement with Air New Zealand and the Australian airlines to get more direct domestic, low-cost and international flights into Canberra. We will, of course, continue to work with Singapore Airlines to raise awareness of their capital express service, with a medium-term goal to see that service's frequency increase from the current four times a week.

MS ORR: Chief Minister, what impact will this have on the Canberra tourism industry?

MR BARR: A very significant impact. It was certainly very clear at the Canberra and region tourism awards held earlier in the month just how much optimism there is in Canberra's tourism sector. Clearly there is an extraordinary opportunity in 2018 for the tourism industry. We have seen over the past few years the number of hotel rooms in this city rise from about 5,000 to 7,000, and there are another 1,000 additional rooms coming on line in the coming years. Our hotel occupancy rates have remained above the Australian average. We are seeing an all-time record number of both domestic and international tourists in our city. We are well on track to achieving our tourism 2020 target of growing overnight visitor expenditure to \$2.5 billion by December 2020. It was over \$2 billion in the 2016-17 fiscal year. We are experiencing a tourism boom and we look forward to building on that success in 2018.

MS CODY: Chief Minister, what will be the benefits for the broader Canberra economy?

MR BARR: In addition to this recognition of Canberra as a place to visit, it does, of course, come on top of a range of other accolades for our city, such as recognition by the OECD as the world's most livable city, and a range of recent and significant investments in the ACT in many different areas of the economy.

Innovation and creativity are at the heart of the transition in the ACT economy. We have nearly 14½ thousand international students studying in Canberra. Our work with UNSW Canberra will see that number expand considerably. Education, higher education in particular, is our city's single largest export.

This is a very timely announcement from *Lonely Planet*. It certainly has been utilised by our universities as further evidence of Canberra's international reputation. We boast innovative companies; we have a diverse workforce; we have world-leading

universities; we have cutting-edge research institutions; and we are home to the Australian headquarters of many multinational corporations.

This accolade helps attract further investment and certainly enhances the story of Canberra when we tell it nationally and internationally. We look forward in 2018 to further opportunities to promote our city.

Minister for Health and Wellbeing—briefing

MRS DUNNE: My question is to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. Over the past year there have been at least six occasions when you have claimed that you have either not been briefed or evidence indicates that you have not been briefed for several weeks, as was the case with the centenary hospital cladding. These occasions include health data, the AECOM report and the overdue report on opioid guidelines as well as the cladding on the centenary hospital. Minister, why is it that you claim not to have been briefed on important issues?

MS FITZHARRIS: I do not make that claim.

MRS DUNNE: Why are you still not across the health portfolio a year after becoming minister and nearly two years after becoming assistant minister?

MS FITZHARRIS: I am.

MR WALL: Minister, what actions have you taken to ensure that you are better briefed in the future?

MS FITZHARRIS: I am well briefed, and I stay in touch regularly with my directorate.

Municipal services—Dickson

MS LEE: My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, in response to a concern that I raised with your office for a constituent, you wrote to my office on 31 August 2017 confirming that your directorate had identified that the raised paving at Dickson Place would be designated as a shared zone and that appropriate signage and public notice would take place by the end of September 2017. Minister, why has this still not happened?

MS FITZHARRIS: Forgive me: off the top of my head I do not know the location of Dickson Place. Could Ms Lee clarify?

Ms Lee: I can certainly clarify if it will help the Minister. It is the area within the Dickson shopping centre in front of the Woolworths, where the car park is. There is a raised area there.

MS FITZHARRIS: I will take the question on notice.

MS LEE: Minister, given the current confusion over the status of the raised paving at that location, what is the government doing in the meantime to alert pedestrians to

exercise caution in that shared zone where there are cars and pedestrians quite frequently?

MS FITZHARRIS: I will take the question on notice.

MS LAWDER: Minister, are there any areas in other local shops involving raised paving that have been identified to be changed into shared zones, yet have not yet had the appropriate signage erected?

MS FITZHARRIS: Not to my knowledge, but I will take the question on notice.

Public housing—renewal program

MS CODY: My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. I understand the public housing renewal program has just reached the midway point. Could you provide the Assembly with an update?

MS BERRY: Yes, I can. The government's public housing renewal program has reached the halfway point. To get there the government has so far: committed \$608 million for the delivery of this significant program; supported hundreds of tenants to move home, with the wants and needs of the individuals considered during the relocation process; successfully implemented an expression of interest program to purchase suitable land and properties from the private sector, supporting the local development industry and increasing diversity of the public housing portfolio; delivered public housing in more than 20 suburbs across Canberra, including both new and established communities, enabling public housing to be spread across the city; and engaged with a wide range of communities in areas where new public housing is being developed, including holding information sessions and public meetings.

To ensure that the second half of the public housing renewal program can be just as successfully delivered the ACT government is: responding to community feedback about new public housing developments, including refining the designs prior to lodging development applications; entering into new contracts for construction of more than 160 dwellings in new suburbs such as Taylor and Throsby, as well as commencing work in sites in established areas, including Monash; and continuing to support tenants as they move home, including working with community organisations as part of the linking into new communities task force and transforming communities partnership.

MS CODY: Minister, what evaluation has occurred on the program, and what does it say about the experience of housing tenants?

MS BERRY: The Linking into New Communities Taskforce has undertaken some evaluation that has captured the experience of public housing tenants who have been relocated during the first half of the public housing renewal program. The findings of the evaluation highlight the importance of the collaborative and co-designed approach by government and community sector partners.

Key insights show that there is a strong alignment with the service provided and that

the renewal program is performing well with: successful early tenant engagement; one-on-one engagement being positive and constructive in the ways it meets tenants' needs and delivers quality services; and quality life improvements for tenants who have been through the relocation process. As well, gaps in services were routinely identified and addressed by the LINCT and transforming communities partnership, and specialised services were engaged in the project.

Tenants have been complimentary about the support they have received, with many saying that they appreciated being treated so respectfully and sensitively throughout this process. Some tenants noted that the help that they have received has relieved their anxiety and stress in making the move. All members of the LINCT and the TCP have seen the positive impacts that the relocation process has had on individual tenants that they have been working with.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, could you provide the Assembly with an update on the extensive consultation process that has been undertaken for the first half of the program?

MS BERRY: Yes, I can. Obviously, working closely with communities gaining new public housing has been important during the program to date. We have seen some great examples of communities coming together to support the idea of new neighbours. This was the case with one of the first developments delivered in Chisholm and more recently through design consultation in Mawson. I would like to quote from the Mawson Citizens' Group.

The Mawson Citizens' Group have been genuinely and pleasantly surprised by the willingness of the Minister and the Taskforce to listen to local residents' concerns and adapt the design accordingly.

The MCG are satisfied that the resulting design is one that addresses key issues raised by the community and provides a high quality environment for new tenants, to enable them to successfully integrate to the neighbourhood and prosper.

More than 200 residents have engaged in public forums held at new public housing sites. The public housing renewal program task force has held almost 30 meetings with resident groups. The task force has also worked very closely with community councils to brief and consult them about developments of public housing dwellings in their areas, including the Weston Creek Community Council, the Woden Valley Community Council, the Tuggeranong Community Council, Molonglo Valley community group, Gungahlin Community Council and the Inner South Canberra Community Council.

Tom Anderson from the Weston Creek Community Council recently wrote to me and said this:

The Council congratulates the Taskforce for the way that they engaged with the three groups—

That is the groups in their area—

and took into account the comments and the information provided by the community in relation to the three separate sites.

I would also want to acknowledge the work of the community sector representatives in working with communities across Canberra to understand their concerns and welcome this program.

Light rail—work health and safety

MR WALL: My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, WorkSafe ACT has issued improvement notices and prohibition notices, as well as fines totalling \$14,000 for safety breaches on the light rail construction site. What were the breaches issued for, and when were you informed of those breaches?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Madam Speaker, I will take the question as the Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations.

Mr Wall: Just to clarify, it was actually a question to the Minister for Transport and City Services, as the minister responsible for the project.

MADAM SPEAKER: You ask the question; the executive can decide who is the best fit to answer the question. Ministers, can you make your minds up and provide an answer?

MS FITZHARRIS: Mr Wall asked two questions. One would come to me; I think one would come to the minister for workplace safety. If you would like to ask one question, we will then determine which one we answer.

MR WALL: Allow me to restructure the question, please, Madam Speaker. Minister, when were you informed of the breaches, and what steps have you taken to ensure work safety law is followed on that site?

MS FITZHARRIS: I was informed on Friday the 24th, I believe it was—last Friday—of the incident. I have made sure, as Transport Canberra and City Services do every day, to prioritise with Canberra Metro, the contractor for light rail, that they are ensuring that safety is the highest priority. I can inform the Assembly that the territory meets regularly with Canberra Metro to review safety performance and, importantly, the culture of safety on the project, which is very high. Canberra Metro is regularly audited on its safety processes and procedures, both internally and externally.

MR WALL: Minister, have you personally spoken to the consortium or subcontractors on the light rail construction project about these safety breaches?

MS FITZHARRIS: No.

MR COE: Minister, why have you failed to provide a safe workplace on the highest profile and most expensive project since self-government, and were not the EBA and strong union presence meant to avoid these sorts of problems?

MS FITZHARRIS: On a point of clarification, Madam Speaker, in two of the

opposition's questions they have asked at least two or three questions within each question. I seek your ruling on whether that is in order.

MADAM SPEAKER: I will allow the question, but it goes to some other commentary we have had about supplementary questions. I have foreshadowed that in the review of standing orders this will be a matter to be considered.

MS FITZHARRIS: To answer the first part of the question: I have not.

Municipal services—fix my street

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Regulatory Services. Minister, a number of constituents have contacted the opposition this year after jobs logged on the fix my street portal were described as fixed in replies sent to the logger, even though no repair work had been done. Minister, how often do errors of this nature occur, and what is your office doing to fix the problem?

MR RAMSAY: I thank the member for his question. I certainly welcome the improvements there have been with the fix my street website this year, encouraging people right across Canberra to report matters. It is important to have people's eyes and ears out and about, helping the people from Access Canberra.

It may not necessarily be that there has been an error. I will need to clarify further with the member and also with Access Canberra. One of the things that does happen is that people report that a matter has been resolved or at least has been completed from Access Canberra's point of view when it has been passed on to another appropriate regulatory body if it is not something that is done by Access Canberra. Those ones fall outside my portfolio, so it would be inappropriate for me to comment.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, if errors such as this occur and are pointed out, why is an apology not issued to the constituent who has been incorrectly informed that the job has been completed?

MR RAMSAY: As I said previously, I am not accepting that there have been errors, so it is a matter of working through it further.

MS LEE: Minister, what is your directorate doing about the fix my street portal that removes logged jobs before they are fixed?

MR RAMSAY: I will take that on notice.

Housing—housing choices

MR PETTERSSON: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Land Management. Can you outline to the Assembly the purpose of the housing choices discussion paper you recently launched for community consultation?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mr Pettersson for his interest in housing outcomes for all Canberrans. I was very pleased earlier this month to begin a conversation with the Canberra community on broadening the mix of housing in the territory with a new

housing choices discussion paper. The ACT government is committed to providing housing that works for all Canberrans and has listened to community feedback about their desire for a greater range of housing options, including freestanding houses, apartments, townhouses and other housing types.

The housing choices discussion paper provides background to the ACT's planning and housing policies and offers an opportunity for the community to contribute ideas on interesting and innovative strategies to get better housing outcomes. The housing choices paper provides a dedicated forum for conversations on housing choice and diversity to continue

As Canberra matures into a major metropolitan centre, residents are becoming more diverse and calling for a city that meets their differing needs. The discussion paper on housing choices is looking at exactly that: how can we better meet the needs of our residents, be they single, couples, families or groups.

As I found out during the consultation on the minister's statement of planning intent, there is no longer the presumption that everyone aspires to a large suburban block with a garden. People want different forms of housing in the suburbs as well as in centres and mixed-use areas. This includes townhouses, terrace houses, secondary dwellings and apartments, as well as a continuing demand for detached homes. While this is being driven to an extent by the younger generation, it is also being sought by older residents who do not want to leave the suburb they may have lived in for 50 years but no longer want or are able to live in a big home that can be better used by a larger family.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, how can the community provide their feedback on the housing choices discussion paper?

MR GENTLEMAN: We want to get the residential planning and design right. Community engagement on the discussion paper is a valuable way for Canberrans to contribute their ideas on how to achieve better housing outcomes and be part of the planning process for our city.

There are several ways in which the community can have their say on this important issue. The first stage of consultation will include online engagement, via the your say website, followed by facilitated workshops and community presentations. The online community engagement will run until Friday, 9 March 2018. Interested members of the community have the opportunity to complete an online survey, join a discussion group or provide a submission.

The online engagement has already proven to be of great interest to the community. In the first week alone—that is, from 15 to 21 November—there were over 900 unique visits to the your say website and just over 200 responses to the online survey. The facilitated workshops and community presentations will occur during February and March 2018.

The next phase of the consultation will be the establishment of a collaboration hub through which we will talk to both industry and community on how demonstration housing projects could be used to showcase innovative housing design and delivery in

Canberra. We are seeking to test future policy direction using real world projects while also delivering more innovative, sustainable and affordable housing for the city.

MS LE COUTEUR: Minister, what values or criteria will you be using to evaluate the various suggestions for change that you will get from the public as part of this community consultation?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Ms Le Couteur for her question. There are a number of criteria set in the discussion paper. Some of the opportunities we are looking to showcase are innovative housing design and delivery in real-world examples, as I talked about earlier, including infill compact housing, small homes, co-housing, mixed tenure, design-led, and long-term rental housing. Early next year the government will seek innovative development proposals that target a number of demonstration areas, including environmental performance, innovative design, innovative delivery of tenure, and affordability. Proposals will be evaluated and assessed in accordance with all relevant territory procurement and legislative requirements. Shortlisted proponents will be invited to submit a suggested site location and detailed design for their proposed development.

The second stage of the housing choices engagement, the collaboration hub, will play an important role in the assessment and selection of proposals. There will be a further opportunity to get involved during the development assessment process for each site. That will occur once we have completed the festival of Kim Bailey, which starts today, and when this discussion program is completed.

Justice—suspended sentences

MR HANSON: My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney, the Victims of Crime Commissioner's report on suspended sentences notes that the ACT is the only jurisdiction that allows suspended sentences for any offence, even serious assaults and child sex abuse cases. One example cited was of a man who breached his suspended sentence for domestic violence offences and was given a new suspended sentence with fewer conditions. Another was of a child sex offender who was given a suspended sentence even though the offences were committed while he was already serving suspended sentences for similar crimes. Attorney-General, will you now move to limit the availability of suspended sentences for serious crimes and child sex offences?

MR RAMSAY: I thank the member for his question. I start by briefly acknowledging the work of the Victims of Crime Commissioner, who is about to retire. I want to put on record the appreciation of the government for his strong work and his very strong advocacy in the area.

In relation to the question, as I mentioned earlier this week, I have already instructed my directorate to consult on this. We will be consulting and taking views across the profession, across the justice system—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Gentleman: I raise a point of order, Madam Speaker. The minister is trying to

answer the question. The opposition keep interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Please can you allow the minister to answer the question.

Mr Hanson: On the point of order, Madam Speaker, there has been very little interjection from the opposition. The minister is not being relevant. The question was quite clear: whether he would limit the availability of suspended sentences. He is not being directly relevant.

MADAM SPEAKER: The minister has some time left to go straight to the point. But he has talked about consultation, which, I believe, will be part of that discussion and thinking.

MR RAMSAY: Indeed. This government acts on the basis of good consultation across the justice system. We have already heard a number of views that have been expressed in relation to this particular matter and we will continue to consult broadly on this, as I indicated earlier this week in question time.

MR HANSON: As a flagrant preamble, I also would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge the work of the Victims of Crime Commissioner and acknowledge the work he has done in the ACT.

MADAM SPEAKER: I do not think you will be ruled out of order, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: You are very kind, Madam Speaker. Attorney, will you now introduce a presumption in law that an original sentence will be activated in the case of a breach, especially if it is for a similar crime?

MR RAMSAY: Given that that is going to the same point as the previous question, my answer, surprisingly enough, is the same.

MRS JONES: Attorney, will you commit to a full review of sentencing in the ACT and include all stakeholders, including the opposition?

MR RAMSAY: Madam Speaker, we love to hear from the opposition.

Bimberi Youth Justice Centre—health assessments

MRS KIKKERT: My question is to the Minister for Corrections. Section 160 of the Children and Young People Act requires that young people admitted to Bimberi must be assessed for immediate physical or mental health needs or risks as soon as possible and never more than 24 hours after admission. Yet mental health, justice health and alcohol and drug services have reported that in 2016-17, two Bimberi detainees were not given initial health assessments in the required time frame. In response, an ACT Health spokeswoman said that a new procedure has now been developed “to establish clear lines of communication”. Minister, why were these detainees not assessed in the required time frame?

MR RATTENBURY: As has been reported, and I think it was discussed in the annual reports hearings, there was an oversight in this case; there was a degree of

human error involved. That is why ACT Health has taken additional steps to ensure that there is not a repeat of this incident. I agree with the premise of Mrs Kikkert's question that this should not have occurred. It is clearly not the standard that we expect to be operating; there has been an oversight in this matter and I expect that it will not happen again.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, what exactly is the new procedure that has been developed to fix this communication problem?

MR RATTENBURY: I will take that on notice.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, now that you have clear lines of communication in place, will you assure the Assembly that no more Bimberi detainees will be put at potential risk by late health checks?

MR RATTENBURY: As Mrs Dunne may have heard in my first answer, I made it clear that I expect this will not happen again.

Housing—affordable housing scheme

MRS JONES: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. On 16 November *CityNews* published a letter from Mr Jon Stanhope to the affordable housing project team. In it he noted the low number of blocks for detached housing available to families on incomes below \$100,000. Mr Stanhope claims that the government refused to answer and says:

One can nevertheless assume that the two most likely explanations for refusing to respond to the request are that the information either doesn't exist or if it does exist that the government has reasons for not wanting it to see the light of day.

Minister, does the information exist or does the government not want Mr Stanhope to have it?

MS BERRY: I am not aware of the request that has been made. Of course, as much as we like to hear from the opposition, we also like to hear the views of former Chief Minister Jon Stanhope. I will have to come back with the detail on the second part of that question, but I will take the opportunity to talk about some of the things the ACT government is doing around housing and homelessness in the ACT which were announced at the housing summit. They include the start-up innovation fund for HomeGround and a submarket rental real estate model, as well as applying land tax to vacant investment properties from next year to encourage more rentals into the market.

We have set affordable public and community housing targets and improved targeting so they go where they are needed. We have been advocating very strongly and very publically for federal government tax reform and for the federal government to make a bold and courageous decision to use the tax levers in their control to make changes to negative gearing and capital gains tax in the same way that the ACT government made the bold and courageous decision to make changes to the tax levers we are responsible for to ensure that more people can get into housing of their own.

MRS JONES: Minister, how many houses are available in the ACT on average that are affordable to families with an income under \$100,000, for example, entry level three-bedroom, one-bathroom houses?

MS BERRY: The actual number I will have to take on notice for this point in time. Of course, that will move depending on when houses are being built and when they are completed for purchase. But I want to note for the Assembly's information an article in the paper last week. It is headed, "Canberra has an oversupply of housing, according to new research from the Australian National University." It states:

Canberra has the biggest oversupply of housing of any jurisdiction other than the northern Territory, according to this research.

In the ACT we have a surplus of 6,700 dwellings relative to that assumed balance—

Mr Parton: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Resume your seat, please, minister.

Mr Parton: Point of order, Madam Speaker, on relevance. The question was specifically about affordable houses for families with incomes under \$100,000—

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Parton, but the minister started by taking the first part of that question on notice and is providing additional information in the broad policy area. Minister, do you want to continue?

MS BERRY: Yes, thank you, I do, Madam Speaker. As I said, in the ACT, the report says that there is a surplus of 6,700 dwellings relative to an assumed balance of housing in 2001 and that Belconnen and the inner north and south have the most substantial housing surplus, mostly driven by unit development, of course. The report states:

Dr Phillips, whose calculations are based on population numbers and the number of people in each household, said more homes had been built than population growth demanded.

I think that was an interesting article to bring to the attention of the Assembly to show the number of houses and dwellings in the ACT that have been developed over the past couple of years and that the ACT government is meeting the demand for housing in the ACT.

MR PARTON: Irrespective of any Ben Phillips report, can the minister explain why housing that is affordable for families earning under \$100,000 has disappeared almost completely under the Labor-Greens government?

MS BERRY: It is missing the whole point of the challenges and the complexity around housing and housing affordability. There is never one part of this whole complex story that can resolve the issues that each state and territory is facing under this federal government. It is not about placing blame on any federal government, but a bold and courageous government could make the changes that would make a real

difference for states and territories to be able to provide more housing for people who need it. That is the real thing that we need addressed here. The ACT government has committed to housing and housing affordability targets; we have held a summit; we are having a big conversation with the community; we have implemented an innovation fund.

Opportunity members interjecting—

MS BERRY: We are not selling off our public housing. The last time the Liberal Party were in power, they sold off 1,000 public housing dwellings. That is not the ACT government's commitment. We will continue to hold the highest proportion of public housing per capita in the country, something that we are very proud of and that we will continue to maintain.

Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse— government response

MS CHEYNE: Madam Speaker, I note that you are in a slightly generous mood. I just wanted your indulgence for a moment to acknowledge that this is the Deputy Clerk's final question time, I believe. I want to thank him for all his work and support and, indeed, patience, particularly during this hour of the day.

MADAM SPEAKER: Your question, Ms Cheyne. My generosity goes only so far.

MS CHEYNE: Back on track. My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney, what steps is the government taking in response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Ms Cheyne for the question. The work of the royal commission has been thorough and evidence based and it has focused on the experience of survivors. It absolutely crosses many portfolios. This government is committed to a whole-of-government focus on supporting survivors of sexual abuse. The latest report focused on criminal justice and made 85 recommendations for reform.

Survivors of child sexual abuse are entitled to a fair hearing in court. And it is important that misconceptions about psychology and cultural prejudices do not affect the outcomes. Our system must be able to work with the way that people who have experienced these most traumatic circumstances actually respond. The royal commission has made recommendations for law reform that are based on the latest evidence about how survivors' testimony, and how their experiences, can be treated fairly in a criminal trial. We will be looking closely at each of those recommendations for changes that need to be made in the ACT's legislation.

There is strong support in the justice system for implementing change in response to these findings. In particular the government has been looking to the Director of Public Prosecutions for law reform recommendations, based on that office's experiences in prosecuting these crimes. We are also consulting with Legal Aid ACT, who often act for people who are survivors of abuse. This government will keep working throughout the coming year to implement the royal commission's recommendations and to ensure

that justice is accessible for all survivors in the territory.

MS CHEYNE: Attorney-General, how is the government working to ensure that survivors of sexual abuse are supported through a national redress scheme?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Ms Cheyne for the supplementary question. Ensuring that the court process treats survivors fairly is critical but obviously we need to go further. This government is committed to a restorative policy and is focused on helping survivors get any support they need. That support should be the same no matter where a person lives. That is why we are participating in the development of a national redress scheme. The royal commission provided us with a well-developed framework for responding to the institutional failings that have exposed so many people to abuse. We are currently participating in a working group with the commonwealth and with other states and territories to develop a redress scheme that is fair and that respects the experiences and the needs of survivors.

The model that is under development will offer redress to people who were abused in an institutional context as children. A key feature of the work is to ensure that responsible institutions take full responsibility and offer an unreserved apology for the failings that allowed for the abuse to occur. The importance of taking full responsibility cannot be understated. Compensation, counselling and other support services are all, at their core, really a recognition that survivors were let down through no fault of their own and that they are entitled to be made whole. The ACT government recognises the vital importance of redress, and we will keep working with other jurisdictions to develop a national scheme.

MR STEEL: Attorney-General, what steps has the ACT already taken that form part of the royal commission's recommendations?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Mr Steel for the supplementary question. As the royal commission brings its work to a conclusion, it is important to remember that so much work has already been done. Here in the ACT, an important step to help survivors seek compensation has already been undertaken. In 2016 the ACT government made amendments to the Civil Law (Wrongs) Act 2002 and the Limitation Act 1985 to expressly remove limitation periods for personal injury resulting from the institutional sexual abuse of a child. This year the ACT government listened to community feedback and then removed limitation periods for personal injury resulting from the sexual abuse of a child, no matter what the context was. These amendments, which apply retrospectively, recognise the length of time that it can take survivors of child sexual abuse to disclose that abuse, and significantly improve access to justice.

This government recognises that a comprehensive, considered approach to the royal commission's recommendations needs to happen. And it needs to address all of the areas that the royal commission considered important. Across the government, and across all of the areas considered by the royal commission, we are working hard to turn what the royal commission has learned about responding to abuse into action.

Housing—affordability

MR PARTON: My question is to the Deputy Clerk; no, it is not. I wish it was.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: No intimidation, please.

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, the *Canberra Times* today has a report on the plight of low income renters and their struggle to survive. In this regard, SQM Research recently reported that Canberra house rents had risen 14.4 per cent in the past year and unit rents 4.4 per cent. These increases far exceed the ACT average weekly earnings increase. Minister, what are you going to say to a student who comes to you to tell you that she is sleeping in a car because she cannot afford rental accommodation in Canberra?

MS BERRY: I did read that report, and I thank Mr Parton for bringing it to the attention of the Assembly today. The calls by ACTCOSS, by Susan Helyar and others, are that one of the fundamental issues around affordability for rental properties across the country, including the ACT, is a real need to adjust the payments, the income, for recipients of welfare and students who are studying away from home, improving their income so that they have the ability to afford rental properties.

I have advocated for those kinds of equality measures in the past, and continue to do so, to ensure that people on low incomes, poor people in our community, have some chance of living and gaining the same kinds of goals and aspirations that the rest of us have in this community.

One of the things that the ACT government is doing is applying a land tax to vacant investment properties from next year. That should free up some more rental properties into the market. For a person who came to me and said that they were living in a car, I would make sure that they were supported appropriately and put them in touch with housing support services to make sure that they could be accommodated or provided with other kinds of accommodation. If Mr Parton or anyone were aware of anybody living in those circumstances, I would hope that they would bring it to my attention.

MR PARTON: When will you lift your restrictions on land release to address the needs of low-income Canberrans?

MS BERRY: There are no restrictions on land release. We release over 4,000 properties a year. We are releasing more than our target for this year and we will continue to do that.

MS LAWDER: Minister, why is your government making it so hard for people on low incomes to live in Canberra with increases in rents of 14.4 per cent over the past year?

MS BERRY: That is simply not true. The ACT government is doing everything it can to support people on low incomes. The ACT government were not the ones cheering on the cuts to penalty rates for low income earners in this town. Over 20,000 people in this town will be affected by a cut to penalty rates. Income is a very important part in a person's ability to be able to afford a home of their own.

Ms Lawder: Policy settings.

MS BERRY: We have set the policy settings. We have made the bold and courageous changes to our tax levers to ensure that more people get into homes. That is what we continue to call on the federal government to do: be bold and courageous like the Chief Minister has been here in the ACT and change the tax levers, remove capital gains tax and negative gearing and make a difference in our city and across the country on affordable housing so everybody can have the same goals and aspirations as the rest of us enjoy.

Opposition members interjecting—

MS BERRY: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for listening to the response to that question.

Families—preparatory programs for preschool children

MR STEEL: My question is to the Minister for Disability, Children and Youth. Minister, what programs does the government provide to support families and children as they approach school age?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Steel for his question and recognise his ongoing commitment to achieving positive outcomes for children in our community.

The Community Services Directorate has been working with the Education Directorate to develop and deliver tailored intervention programs that focus on providing children with the best possible start to their education by enabling a smooth transition into formal schooling. Two such programs that have recently been delivered to families are preparedness for preschool—known as prep for pre—and big school ready.

A key aim of prep for pre is to equip families with knowledge, strategies and confidence to support their child's physical, social, emotional, cognitive and language development prior to starting preschool. As part of these programs, children gain extra skills and confidence by participating in interactive play sessions modelled on what a child will experience in a typical preschool program.

Prep for pre recognises that some families face challenges when it comes time to introduce their children to the early stages of formal education. The program gives families access to specialist expertise to help ensure that children who need a little more support get the best start to their school career. A multidisciplinary team comprising early childhood teachers, child and family workers, speech therapists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists from the child development service has successfully delivered the program across all four sites this term.

Big school ready is currently being piloted in the West Belconnen Child and Family Centre. It is a similar model to prep for pre and focuses on making sure children and their parents or carers have the supports in place to ensure a positive transition to school.

MR STEEL: Minister, what feedback have you received from families who have accessed these services through the child and family centres?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Steel for his supplementary. The feedback has been very positive for these programs. Through the prep for pre program, parents, carers and children all grew in confidence and learnt new skills. The program provided a positive experience for everyone, with families making new connections with other families and children making their first school friends.

I was pleased to attend two prep for pre sessions and heard firsthand the positive comments from parents and carers. I know that the Deputy Chief Minister also attended a session. The feedback provided to the staff involved in the program has also been overwhelmingly positive. One parent said, “It was so beneficial for us as parents, even more so than the children. Our anxieties have been minimised through this program and all our questions have been answered. Thank you.”

We can see that in some cases the benefits of prep for pre have already been realised, as one parent commented, “I want to tell you this program was so good. I felt so lucky to come. I feel like I have learnt so much myself and I have discovered new skills in my child. Since coming to the program, my child is dressing himself.”

The opportunity for participants to speak to other parents who are going through the same process has proved to be particularly beneficial, with one parent commenting, “I have connected with other parents and children transitioning to the same school.” So already, Madam Speaker, networks are being built. Another parent said, “Thank you for the generous program, time, resources, networking and encouragement.”

Through this feedback it is evident that our child and family centres are helping parents feel comfortable with the transition to school and optimistic about their children’s future success in education. This is just one way that our fabulous child and family centres are helping families across Canberra throughout the year.

MS ORR: Minister, what programs will be on offer at the child and family centres over the upcoming school holidays?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Orr for her supplementary question. I am going to disappoint the Attorney-General by not having a number of song quotes in the answer. As we know, summer holidays—we are all going on a summer holiday—are fast approaching, as we have seen this week in this place. Members will be pleased to hear that child and family centres will again be offering the successful kids and families program. This program offers free events and activities for young children and their families and is run from the three child and family centres. The kids and families program is a great way for families to join in fun and family-friendly activities during the school holidays, connect with other families and enjoy time in our welcoming child and family centres. Programs include a variety of fun activities, like cardboard city and recycle play, yoga for children and their carers, clay fun, Aboriginal and multicultural storytelling, basket weaving, water play and much more.

Christmas and the long summer school holidays can be a hard time for many families.

Many families rely on the structure of school to provide connections to their communities. The government's child and family centres are an important point of contact between families and the community, as well as being a hub of important services and supports. The school holiday program is one way the centres help provide additional engagement and support to families during what can be a particularly difficult time of the year. The kids and families program will operate three days a week over three weeks in January 2018. Families can contact their local child and family centre for details; and of course I am happy to provide them to any member of the Assembly who is interested. The success of these programs and of the child and family centres more generally speaks to this government's dedication to supporting families in our community.

Mr Barr: I ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper.