



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL  
TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ECONOMY AND GENDER  
AND ECONOMIC EQUALITY**

(Reference: [Inquiry into ACT Budget 2021-22](#))

**Members:**

**MS L CASTLEY (Chair)  
MS S ORR (Deputy Chair)  
MR J DAVIS**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**WEDNESDAY, 20 OCTOBER 2021**

**Secretary to the committee:  
Dr D Monk (Ph: 620 50129)**

**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

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## **Privilege statement**

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*Amended 20 May 2013*

## **The committee met at 9.05 am.**

### Appearances:

Cheyne, Ms Tara, Assistant Minister for Economic Development, Minister for the Arts, Minister for Business and Better Regulation, Minister for Human Rights and Minister for Multicultural Affairs

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate  
Engele, Mr Sam, Coordinator-General, Climate Action, and Head of the Better Regulation Taskforce, Policy and Cabinet  
Arthy, Ms Kareena, Deputy Director-General, Economic Development  
Clapham, Dr David, Executive Branch Manager, Economic and Regional Policy, Policy and Cabinet

### Access Canberra

Pryce, Mr David, Deputy Director-General  
Lhuede, Mr Nick, Construction Occupations Registrar and Architects Registrar, Construction, Utilities and Environment Protection  
Rynehart, Mr Josh, Executive Branch Manager, Fair Trading and Compliance Regulatory Strategy  
Chan, Ms Yu-Lan, Chief Executive Officer, ACT Gambling and Racing Commission, Governance and Support  
Verden, Ms Jo, Executive Branch Manager, Customer Coordination

**THE CHAIR:** Welcome to the second public hearing of the Standing Committee on Economy and Gender and Economic Equality for the inquiry into the ACT budget for 2021-22. The proceedings today will examine the expenditure proposals and revenue estimates for the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate and Access Canberra.

Before we begin, the committee wishes to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal people. The committee wishes to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region. We would also like to acknowledge and welcome other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today's event.

Please be aware that the proceedings are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard. They are also being broadcast and livestreamed. When there has been a question taken on notice, please clarify that when you take it on notice. That way, the committee will then confirm. And you have five days to get those answers back to us.

In this first session, we welcome Minister Cheyne, the Minister for Business and Better Regulation, and officials from CMTEDD. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. Before you speak, could you confirm for the record that you have read and accept the privilege statement.

We are not inviting opening statements; we will kick straight off with questions.

My first question is about the Better Regulation Taskforce. From budget statements B, I note that the Better Regulation Taskforce has only been allocated \$50,000 in this budget. What is that \$50,000 for, and how did you arrive at that amount?

**Ms Cheyne:** I acknowledge the privilege statement. As we have discussed in question time and at other times in the Assembly chamber, the Better Regulation Taskforce has a broad remit. It is undertaking a large body of work.

One of its primary areas of work relates to automatic mutual recognition. Automatic mutual recognition is quite a bureaucratic term, but it means that we are looking to recognise occupational registrations right across the country. By automatically recognising those occupational registrations in a mutual way, different jurisdictions are recognising the licences that workers have to pay and apply for in a jurisdiction. It removes the need for workers to pay and apply in each jurisdiction. Ultimately, this is a commonwealth-led body of work, but it will make it easier for workers to move around the country to perform different jobs. A significant number of workers in this country require occupational licences to operate.

We have extra funding in the budget for the detailed planning and preparation work in this space, but I will hand over to Sam Engele, who is leading that taskforce.

**Mr Engele:** I acknowledge the privilege statement and I am appearing in my capacity as the Head of the Better Regulation Taskforce. There are two funding lines in this budget for the Better Regulation Taskforce. There is the one that was explicitly listed for the taskforce, which is the \$50,000. That is just a rollover for the work that we have underway for a legislative review. We had a contract signed, but the deliverables for that contract were not fully completed within the financial year, so they rolled over from last financial year into this financial year. That is the \$50,000. There is also, as the minister was outlining, funding that is embedded in an Access Canberra automatic mutual recognition budget item, which is for one policy officer to assist in the delivery of the AMR project.

So there are two funding lines this year for the taskforce. Just to give some more context, the taskforce was funded last financial year for three years. It is utilising existing resources that were reprioritised into the taskforce. Then there were three years—last financial year, this financial year and next financial year—with a small amount of funding to pay for things like workshops and consultancies. That is the totality of the funding for the taskforce in both last year's budget and this year's budget.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, in your ministerial statement in the Assembly, you mentioned 4.9 million jobs and talked about the economic recovery plan. How many local jobs has the Better Regulation Taskforce helped to protect and create, as this was the aim of the plan?

**Ms Cheyne:** I think there is a bit of conflation here. The Better Regulation Taskforce is absolutely about support for jobs and ensuring that the ACT is an attractive place to do business. Economic Development broadly has a focus on creating jobs and

protecting jobs; that is why it takes up a significant portion of the budget, around seven per cent. The Better Regulation Taskforce's remit is about better regulation, quite simply—assisting businesses, looking for where there are areas for reform. As Mr Engele just noted, we are undertaking a legislative review to see whether there are areas where we can smooth things out for businesses.

We have also got a focus on procurement. Through our discovery phase, where essentially we have been talking with businesses, we have heard that businesses are very interested in how they can engage better with the ACT government with regard to procurement. That will be a big body of work in addition to one of the biggest bodies of work, the implementation of automatic mutual recognition.

**THE CHAIR:** In your ministerial speech on the BRT, you said that 10,000 jobs were lost in the ACT within weeks of last year's COVID lockdown. How many jobs have been lost so far during this lockdown?

**Ms Cheyne:** I do not have that figure; I can take it on notice.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. We will take that one on notice.

**MR DAVIS:** In the context of better regulation, I might move a bit tangentially and ask about suburban shopping centres. I have been contacted by a lot of constituents in Tuggeranong who are particularly concerned about commercial space at their local shopping centres that they argue has been vacant for some time.

From my experience before getting elected to this place, I know of a lot of property investors who purposely maintain commercial leases at a loss to supplement their tax situation on profitable residential investments. I wonder if that situation is on the government's radar and if that is an area of regulation you are considering investigating as part of the taskforce considerations so that we can see some of those suburban shops build up?

**Ms Cheyne:** As you know—this strays into Minister Steel's portfolio, and I believe he touched on it in his City Services capacity the other day—we want to create local, vibrant shopping centres. There were some significant announcements this morning as well. As you know, there is investment in the budget to assist with what the government can do to support precincts—improve amenity and make it more attractive for people to invest there. With regard to commercial leasing in particular, obviously we have been engaging with businesses, including the Local Business Commissioner, during lockdown. I might ask if Mr Engele has anything further to add on the detail of that.

**Mr Engele:** During lockdown, the commercial tenancies code was a support measure put in place that essentially requires good faith negotiations between the commercial landlords and their tenants. It was in recognition that—

**MR DAVIS:** Sorry, Mr Engele; I do not mean to cut you off but it might help to clarify that I am talking about something that is not COVID-related. I am talking about shops that have been derelict and almost purposely left vacant in suburbs, for years in some instances, rather than leasing arrangements unique to the COVID

lockdown.

**Mr Engele:** We would probably need to get some more details in relation to the specifics of those shopping centres to understand what the regulation is. It is not something that has come up as part of our discovery phase at this point. We have been engaging with business owners predominantly to understand the impact on operating a business. We have not really focused on land development corporations. Our focus has been on small-scale SMEs. It has not come up, but I am happy to take any details and look into that.

**MR DAVIS:** Just so that I can understand the terms of reference for the Better Regulation Taskforce, would investigating the regulations and some of the government strings and levers around commercial leasing be a part of the remit for such a taskforce? And would the taskforce be prepared to consider this as part of their deliberations?

**Ms Cheyne:** A short answer is that yes, everything is on the table. But the taskforce also is engaging right across different directorates about what we can do to improve the business experience as a whole. It may be something another directorate might take the lead on. We would be very happy to have a long conversation with you about some of the specific shopping centres that you would like us to look at and see if there is a regulatory function that we might be able to assist with.

**MS ORR:** Minister, how is the government working to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses in the territory through this budget?

**Ms Cheyne:** The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business support package is a really significant body of work that we are proud to have delivered through this budget. It is funding to the tune of \$920,000 over four years. It includes an accelerator program. Many of you might be aware of the work we have seen done in CBRIN, for example, that has helped businesses scale up—that is essentially what an accelerator program does—and helped a business idea turn into an actual business or increased a business's level of sustainability or viability.

It also includes a business concierge service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses. We will be working with our partners, particularly the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, in developing this. Once we have gone through a consultation process, we will be looking to identify a suitably qualified provider to help deliver these services through a tender process.

I might hand over to Ms Arthy to give a bit more detail on what we are planning to do with this funding.

**Ms Arthy:** I acknowledge and accept the privilege statement. The background for this particular initiative was a review done last year which showed that while the services that were in market were valuable, there were a couple of areas that were missing.

One was around how we help businesses that were already established to grow. As the minister said, we have learned a lot through CBRIN on how we work to help businesses scale up. However, it is not necessarily culturally specific. So we are

looking at implementing a program that suits the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses.

The other element is the concierge service. This stems from the fact that there are a lot of services out there for business, whether through the commonwealth government, the ACT government or privately. However, a lot of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses do not necessarily know that they are there, and some of the services are not particularly culturally appropriate or do not take into account cultural differences.

The aim of the concierge service is twofold. One is to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesspeople navigate the plethora of assistance that is out there. But our hope is that, in the course of doing so, particularly with the ACT government based services, we can change the way we deliver services to business to make sure that they meet the needs of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business community.

As the minister said, we are working with quite a few of our stakeholders—working with the commonwealth government, which has a lot of experience in this area, and with our local community—with the aim of getting a tender out, probably towards the end of this year or early next year, with services to commence for the end of the first quarter next year.

**MS ORR:** What has been the initial feedback, particularly from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses, about the program and the initiatives within it?

**Ms Arthy:** It has been fairly successful in terms of the process so far. The process so far has been around mentoring. It is about how, when people have a good idea, we can mentor them so they have the courage to actually set up a business. We all know that it is difficult to set up a business. That is what the focus is.

When we did the review, there was a lot of support for being able to take the services the ACT government provides to that next level. That is what we are hoping to do with this next evolution of the program.

**MS ORR:** So the program has a real focus on business start-ups. Is it possible for existing businesses to access the services to improve their business or grow their business?

**Ms Arthy:** Yes, absolutely. That is the accelerator program. If we look at what happens with CBRIN, the Canberra Business Innovation Network, they basically help businesses scale up. It is about people who have had a good idea and have done the initial phase of set-up, but do not quite know how to grow. We are looking to apply that same methodology, but with more culturally appropriate methods for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander existing business community.

**MS ORR:** Ms Arthy, can you just help me out? When you say “culturally appropriate methods”, what sorts of things are we looking at that would better respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses?



**Ms Arthy:** I cannot answer that, because the whole purpose of this process is to engage people who can and do know that. I am just not in a position to talk about that sort of thing, because it is not my area of expertise. But what we want to do is engage people who can facilitate that type of service provision.

**MS ORR:** So it is really identifying that gap? This really is about filling a gap, in a culturally sensitive and appropriate way?

**Ms Arthy:** Correct. That is right.

**Ms Cheyne:** The Better Regulation Taskforce have met with some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses over this year. In addition to the scaling up and the support service that we have the funding for, the Better Regulation Taskforce is intending to hold a workshop with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses to understand if there are any particular barriers or other areas of reform that might have a real benefit in removing or addressing problems for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses. This is a real focus for us as a government.

**THE CHAIR:** How many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses do we have in the ACT?

**Ms Arthy:** I think I can find out, though I do not know whether we would have that. I am not sure that it gets down to that level of detail. I will see if I can find out during the course of this morning. If not, we may have to take that on notice.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**MS ORR:** For a business to be identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, would they essentially have to opt in—declare themselves to be an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owner operation or something like that? I am getting to the question of whether we might have a lot of businesses that might have an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aspect but would not necessarily identify that way—and even vice versa.

**Ms Arthy:** It is an interesting question. We tend to leave it up to the businesses to self-identify. I have just got through that we know that we have more than 200 businesses in the ACT that identify as having Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's ownership. We tend to let people self-identify to access the services that they need. It is not a simple question, unfortunately.

**MS ORR:** That essentially gets to what I was wanting to understand.

**THE CHAIR:** I think it is important to move on. Mr Parton, do you have a question?

**MR PARTON:** Yes, regarding the Gambling and Racing Commission. I am talking about budget statements B. Do any commissioners work for organisations who receive funding directly or indirectly from the Gambling and Racing Commission?

**Ms Cheyne:** I will hand directly to our officials at Access Canberra to answer that.

**Ms Chan:** I am the Chief Executive Officer of the Gambling and Racing Commission. We have a number of independent board members. I believe that one of the board members is required to have knowledge and understanding of the social harms of gambling and to bring that community sector experience to the board. That member is an organisation which is a subcontractor that provides financial counselling to the ACT Gambling Support Service. The other members, I believe, do not have any remuneration that is related to government.

**MR PARTON:** I am looking at this from a public interest perspective. You have identified a commissioner with potentially what could be considered a conflict of interest. Do we have occasions where that commissioner has stepped aside from any commission deliberations?

**Ms Chan:** Yes, we certainly do. That conflict of interest was declared right from the outset of that member's appointment. With the community sector, because of the knowledge that is required for that position, it was always acknowledged that there was a chance that conflict would need to be managed. It has been declared from the outset. In a number of meetings that we have minuted, conflicts of interest are always discussed at the start of a meeting. If a member needs to remove themselves from the room or refrain from discussion, that occurs. We have also at times redacted board papers for that member, just to prevent that conflict of interest.

**MR PARTON:** How much funding goes through this channel to the organisation connected to that particular commission?

**Ms Chan:** I am not sure I have that information. We are funding the Gambling Support Service. As they are a subcontractor, I do not think I have that information at the moment.

**MR PARTON:** Could that question be taken on notice?

**Ms Chan:** I can do that.

**MR PARTON:** We are talking about services managed by Relationships Australia Canberra, supported by Care Financial?

**Ms Chan:** That is correct.

**MS ORR:** Ms Chan, can you run us through the procedures for when someone has a potential or perceived conflict of interest: how you manage that and how having those in place allows for the operation of the board?

**Ms Chan:** Those are declared upon appointment, as a ministerial appointment. Those connections are understood at the time of appointment. If a subsequent conflict of interest was to arise, that member would declare it to the board and the board would deal with it appropriately. It would be declared at the start of every meeting. At the start of every meeting, the chair will ask if anybody has a conflict of interest apart from the declared known interests. And as I said, we minute at every meeting if there are any conflicts or if there are nil conflicts.

The members do discuss in advance if they need to remove themselves for any particular discussion or if they need to potentially stay in the room but not contribute to the discussion or not contribute to the decision-making. That is discussed within the board with any individual conflict of interest governance procedures.

**MS ORR:** If the conflict was very significant, would that member step back from the board? Is that where it would go?

**Ms Chan:** Potentially, yes.

**MS ORR:** It would be managed?

**Ms Chan:** Potentially, yes. That is also something that is considered in the appointment process. Through the recruitment and consideration of candidates, any conflicts are considered.

In the case of this particular member, we wanted particularly the community sector experience to be brought to the board discussions to inform the decision-making. Their knowledge in the sector is what makes their contributions to the board particularly useful.

But they are all managed through the meeting process, through the meeting papers process. And every single meeting asks if anybody has any additional conflict of interest to declare.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Cain.

**MR CAIN:** In regard to—

**Ms Cheyne:** There seems to be an audio issue.

**MR CAIN:** I will log out.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Cain, if you log back in, I will come back to you after my question.

**MR CAIN:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** My question is about the phases of the BRT. On page 42 of budget statements B, it says that the discovery phase is not yet complete. Can you talk to me about that? It says that one of the most important parts was learning how to talk to business about business. Why has there been a delay?

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes, there has been a delay, and it is quite clearly due to COVID. I will hand over in a second to talk about how deep and how broad the discovery phase has been, but I think it is fair to say that, overall, we have realised that with some of the issues we uncovered, we needed to reach out to another sector or broaden our scope in where we are heading. We do not want to unnecessarily limit ourselves while we are still working things through. We will be able to talk about what that looks like in more detail.

I mentioned before that I had some meetings recently with some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses. That was not necessarily a focus, but it will be a focus during this discovery phase.

In terms of the pace at which we were able to go during the discovery phase, that has been halted quite simply due to COVID. Also, the taskforce provided some other support in the immediate phase of lockdown, particularly with the setting up of the Local Business Commissioner and the support for tenancies, which necessarily meant that there was some redirection of resourcing and staffing.

But we have a strong workplan as we head towards the end of the year. I have detailed that a bit. I might just hand over to the taskforce, who can talk to you more about what the discovery phase has looked like and what it has looked like during lockdown.

**Mr Engele:** COVID did impact on our discovery phase a fair bit, but we also had the realisation, as we went through the discovery phase, that we wanted to have more in-depth conversations, to really understand the issues.

**THE CHAIR:** How did COVID impact on that? Businesses were closed, so they had more time to talk to your team.

**Mr Engele:** I am not sure that they were keen to talk to us about regulation issues in the middle of the pandemic; they were looking to maintain the viability of their business over that acute period.

The other impact was that we stopped some of the discovery phase in order to pick up other pieces of work. The commercial tenancies work was one of those pieces of work. Supporting Treasury and Economic Development in the development of economic supports was another.

Probably the bigger issue was just a realisation, as we went through the discovery phase—we started off engaging with the peak bodies from a range of different sectors—that we needed to get more detail and engage further with individual businesses. As part of the rollout, we made a conscious decision—we had workshops with those peaks—then also to do roundtables with different business sectors. There was the recognition that the issues for different business cohorts are quite different, so it was just to get a real spread of understanding about the issues.

We have some statistics. We have met with more than 100 stakeholders. As part of that, we get variable levels of understanding about what the issues are. With some stakeholder engagements where we might be consolidating feedback, peak groups will tell us they want to have less interaction or more streamlined interactions with regulators. For us to be able to action that, we need to understand the nature of those interactions—how important they were from the regulator’s perspective, what are some ways to make them more streamlined, where can we still achieve the regulatory outcomes in a manner that has the least cost to business. It is an ongoing conversation. We initially expected that we would have that discovery phase completed by 30 June, but it rolled over.

The other piece of work that we picked up, which we were not expecting to be as

much effort as it was, was to implement AMR—automatic mutual recognition. That is an intergovernmental arrangement which had a firm commencement deadline of 1 July. That work was not able to slip; it had to be completed, so it was. The relevant elements were put in place for that deadline. That work is now ongoing and, as I mentioned earlier, there has been some additional financial support in the budget for that work going forward.

**THE CHAIR:** You said AMR could not be delayed. Why could it not be delayed, when the report for the discovery phase could be delayed? I do not understand the difference.

**Mr Engele:** I am happy to go into that. Automatic mutual recognition is a nationwide initiative to allow the movement of workers who have an occupational licence to move between jurisdictions, essentially removing some of the requirements to preregister in different jurisdictions. For example, if you are an electrician, under AMR, you can move to any jurisdiction and use your one licence as the single occupational licence. If you are a Queensland electrician, under AMR you can come into the ACT, notify the regulator and commence operating. Because it was a national scheme, and as the ACT is a territory, we were automatically commenced into that scheme on 1 July. It was outside the control of the territory to commence it, and we needed to put in place a number of arrangements to implement it.

**THE CHAIR:** I have one more supplementary on this—around the workshops with the business sectors, not the peak bodies. How many of those have you held and how many actual business owners would you say you have spoken to?

**Mr Engele:** We have had a number of workshops. I might get my colleague Dr Clapham, who ran a number of those for me, to see if he has the individual business numbers that he can provide.

**Dr Clapham:** I acknowledge the privilege statement. As Sam said, we have a total number of around 100 business stakeholders that we have engaged with across a number of workshops. They include focuses on the night-time economy and the entertainment sector. I will have to come back to you with individual breakdowns of attendees at those workshops, but I should be able to get those within the period of this hearing.

There was also a focus on the innovation and start-up sector; a couple of different engagements focused on SME procurement; and additional workshops focused on precinct groups, local business precinct organisations. There were workshops facilitated through the Canberra Business Chamber with their kindred members; workshops facilitated through the Canberra Region Tourism Leaders Forum; and engagement with the clubs industry through the Community Clubs Ministerial Advisory Council. They are the sorts of group workshops that we have engaged with. There were a range of other individual engagements with business owners as well.

**THE CHAIR:** It is the individual engagements that I am interested in. I understand there are lots of engagement with the peak bodies, but could you give us a clear outline of which local businesspeople—people, not bodies—you guys have spoken to? I would really appreciate that.

**Ms Cheyne:** We can do that. We will get that to you.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. I will put that question on notice then.

**Ms Cheyne:** We will try and get back to you during this hearing.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, my question relates to the use of AFP letterheads by Access Canberra staff. As you are aware, I wrote to you in April expressing concern that traffic infringement notices issued by Access Canberra officers were issued on AFP letterhead. And you wrote back in late April saying that was an appropriate practice. The documents I have from FOI indicate that the Chief Police Officer is very concerned about this practice and has asked for it to stop. Is this practice continuing?

**Ms Cheyne:** Thank you, Mr Cain. I will give some background to this, but I just want to check. I did write to you about this on 14 August, so am just confirming you did receive my correspondence.

**MR CAIN:** Thank you, yes.

**Ms Cheyne:** Okay. Since 2016, Access Canberra has operated under delegation from the Chief Police Officer and, by convention, used the AFP letterhead on correspondence to clients where it did relate to camera-detected infringement notices. We received that correspondence from you, and I replied to you in April. Then in April, ACT Policing requested that the use of the AFP letterhead by Access Canberra be discontinued and from July all documentation was updated so that Access Canberra no longer uses the AFP letterhead or logo when acting as a delegate for the Chief Police Officer on correspondence.

I just want to clarify that the letterhead and the logo were not used on the infringement notices themselves but only on the explanatory letters to the drivers. All relevant correspondence is now dispatched on Access Canberra letterhead. The infringement notices themselves necessarily remain unchanged.

**MR CAIN:** Thank you, Minister. Frankly that is good to hear, but are there any concerns with those notices issued by Access Canberra officers using AFP letterhead? Are there any concerns for those Access Canberra officers?

**Ms Cheyne:** No, Mr Cain. As I explained, the letterhead was used on the explanatory letter. It was not used on the infringement notices.

**MR CAIN:** But the practice has stopped on all correspondence, is that correct?

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes.

**MR CAIN:** Okay, thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Are there any other supplementary questions on this one? No. We will go to Mr Davis for a substantive question.

**MR DAVIS:** I think it might be Ms Orr, Chair. I just jumped in earlier as Ms Orr was struggling to get into the meeting.

**THE CHAIR:** Certainly.

**MS ORR:** Thank you. Much appreciated, Mr Davis. I have a question on building quality standards and enforcement. Minister, what measures are there in this budget to help with the resolution or enforcement of building quality standards in the ACT?

**Ms Cheyne:** Thank you, Ms Orr. As members would be aware, building quality in the ACT is a serious focus for the ACT government. In terms of setting the policy settings, Minister Vassarotti has the lead there and is very heavily engaged. In terms of a regulatory function, that is where Access Canberra comes in, but of course we are also supported by WorkSafe ACT. There is significant funding delivered in this budget to strengthen building quality regulation. It is really about enhancing Access Canberra's capacity to support building quality outcomes overall to respond to the increased supply in the construction sector. Everywhere you look there is construction going on, but it is also about supporting the delivery of the government's energy efficiency programs.

What this funding delivers is 7.5 full-time equivalent positions to assist us in employing specialist inspectors with skills in electrical, plumbing, engineering and building surveying, as well as providing five vehicles to support their work. It is really about helping us also proactively review engineering designs as part of audit functions, to prevent issues arising post-occupancy and where existing buildings are identified as having structural defects. I might ask Mr Pryce and perhaps officials to give some more detail about how this will assist Access Canberra in performing these functions and why they are so important.

**Mr Pryce:** Minister, I might throw straight to Nick Lhuede. He is the Construction Occupations Registrar.

**Mr Lhuede:** Yes, thank you, and I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. Just to build on what Minister Cheyne has said, a significant part of the additional funding goes toward our medium-to-high-rise buildings compliance assessment team. This team was actually first established back in 2019-20, and I suppose it reflected a lot of the findings both nationally and locally around building quality in the medium to high-rise sector and picked up on elements of the Shergold-Weir report into building quality.

In last year's budget, in we did receive funding to establish a small team of technical specialists within Access Canberra Construction Regulation. That consisted of structural engineers and building surveyors as well as other officers. It brought a really important capability into the team, as Minister Cheyne said, to start to review and analyse building plans as well as to undertake audits and inspections of class 2 to class 9 buildings. This budget initiative builds upon that, whereby we will engage some additional building surveyors into that team but also build up investigatory capacity. It is important to have those specialist technical skills, but we still need to be able to investigate matters where we find them and where they arise. So that has been a really important part of that capability.

An additional part of that funding went towards our trade inspectorates, electrical inspectorates and gas. There has been a significant increase in numbers of electrical inspections that have been undertaken. Just roughly, there were about 28,000 electrical inspections last year, and that has almost doubled from probably even five years ago. So there are three additional inspectors within the electrical inspectorate, which will help to deal with and ensure that we maintain a very high standard of inspection and 100 per cent inspection of new installations. Likewise, additional capability was provided to the gas inspectorate; however, the increase there was not as great.

**MS ORR:** Can I just clarify. With these additional audits and reviews of plans and inspections, in what part of the construction process are these activities being undertaken? Is it before certification, post certification or throughout the whole process? Can I just get an understanding of where this is going to fit in and also how these reviews actually interact with the certification process?

**Mr Lhuede:** Yes. That is a really good question. In fact, it is almost a whole-life process. The audits commence at the building approval stage. When plans come in for approval, the medium-to-high-rise building team review those plans to ensure they meet minimum documentation standards. That has been really valuable, and they are engaging with the certifiers at that stage to ensure that what is lodged is adequate and what is needed to actually have the necessary records to meet those minimum doc standards and to build the building appropriately.

At the other end of it, we are also reviewing the final documentation that comes in pre issue of certificate of occupancy and use. At that point, the applications for a COU for a building comes in and the team are reviewing the documentation and ensuring lodgement of documentation occurs. In the midst of that, they are also undertaking site inspections. So they have commenced working with builders and with certifiers to go out and undertake and target key areas in doing site inspections. Obviously COVID slowed that down a little bit this year, but that is where a lot of that focus will be.

**MS ORR:** What are the key areas that they are targeting in the inspections?

**Mr Lhuede:** In terms of the buildings, as I mentioned earlier, they are looking at the minimum documentation requirements because that is a very fundamental part of ensuring building quality. And when they are undertaking site inspections, they are looking at the different stages of inspections. So where the building is up to will determine what they look at. It might be looking at—

**MS ORR:** So they are working off the standard hold points that they currently have in a certification process?

**Mr Lhuede:** Yes. They may target those different hold points for particular buildings.

**MS ORR:** Okay, and post construction, what capabilities—

**THE CHAIR:** That is your fourth supplementary on this question, Ms Orr. We might



move on.

**MS ORR:** Can I just ask one more question? Sorry, Chair. It will be quick, I promise.

**THE CHAIR:** Go quickly.

**MS ORR:** Post certification, what sort of capabilities is the team looking at doing on rectifying particularly any defects that arise?

**Mr Lhuede:** That is a really important component. If we become aware of defects or identify them ourselves, the capability of that team has been really valuable in getting really quick technical advice to inform any orders that we may issue. So on a number of occasions we have issued rectification orders that have been informed by the technical advice and analysis of that team.

**MS ORR:** Okay. Great, thank you. And thank you, Chair, for indulging me.

**MR DAVIS:** I just want to ask about the \$528,000 that has been allocated to progress the better application and understanding of the wellbeing indicators. I was just wondering if you would mind explaining to me what resources are being put into a proper gendered analysis and impact, given that gender intersects with a number, if not all, of the wellbeing indicators.

**Ms Cheyne:** Mr Davis, this is not my item. This will be something for the Chief Minister.

**MR DAVIS:** All right. So this is a Treasury question?

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you have another question, Mr Davis?

**MR DAVIS:** You can come back to me if that is all right, Chair.

**THE CHAIR:** Will do.

**MR PARTON:** I refer to the ACT Gambling and Racing Commission—budget statements B, page 124 for those that are following at home. Page 124 of that particular statement refers to the interim outcome being attributable to an increase of \$0.563 million in payments to the gambling harm prevention and mitigation fund and the Chief Minister’s charitable fund. I assume that the GRC has oversight of these two funds. Am I correct in making that assumption?

**Ms Cheyne:** Mr Parton, I will seek assistance from the CEO.

**MR PARTON:** Right.

**Ms Chan:** Thank you for the question, Mr Parton. The GRC collects the funds. There are a number of funds that are, I guess, funded through gambling revenue, one of which is the gambling harm mitigation fund. That one is managed by the Gambling

and Racing Commission. There is the Chief Minister's charitable fund, which is not managed by the commission. We collect the funding, but we do not manage that. And there are also contributions to the diversification and sustainability support fund, and again, the commission does not manage those funds.

**MR PARTON:** In regard to the funds that GRC does manage, in terms of the gambling harm prevention and mitigation fund, what process does the GRC employ to attract applicants and to decide on the successful ones for grants from that fund?

**Ms Chan:** There is an application process. We have been working with the Gambling and Racing Commission Advisory Committee. These are people with experience, from either the gambling industry or from the community support sector, who advise the commission on a number of matters. Research has been a key area of interest to that advisory group. So the commission has now published research priorities and a research agenda on its website. We very much encourage applications, and we work with applicants to put together a good proposal that is then considered by the board.

**MR PARTON:** Is it like a genuine expression-of-interest scenario that is employed here?

**Ms Chan:** That is right. So there is an application form on the website along with a guidance document. You can apply under a general project, which could be an event or a campaign or promotional material. You can apply to run a research project. That would be something we would be very interested in, to build the evidence base that informs the initiatives that we design to prevent and reduce gambling harm. Some of the particular areas of interest that we have at the moment are treatments and what treatments might be successful; monitoring and research data—anything to help us better understand gambling from a particular perspective; what impact COVID might have had on gambling is something of interest to us; the community impact and what contributes to, or protects against, gambling harm; what protective factors might be considered in our initiatives; what are the perceptions and understanding of gambling harm; modes of gambling—

**MR PARTON:** Ms Chan, did they ask the advisory committee about, for argument's sake, the financial counselling tender? Do you advertise for applications? Do you advertise in newspapers, for argument's sake? Where is that publicised?

**Ms Chan:** That was a public tender that was issued a couple of years ago. That was put out to tender. I believe there are a number of proponents who did put a tender in. The usual ACT government tender processes were held, so evaluations were—

**MR PARTON:** Were there other tenderers, potentially without conflict in that instance, can I ask?

**Ms Chan:** I believe there were a number of applicants. When you say "a conflict", being a small community, under the board of commissioners established under the Gambling and Racing Control Act 1999, that legislation stipulates that the board must have a number of members—five members—and it stipulates that one of those members is required to have knowledge, experience or qualifications relating to providing counselling services to people experiencing gambling harm. I guess it is

always difficult to balance that if there is a small number of tenders.

**MR PARTON:** All right, thank you. I think I have had enough time, Chair.

**MR CAIN:** A supplementary question, Chair, if you do not mind.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, Mr Cain.

**MR CAIN:** Ms Chan, you mentioned the Chief Minister's charitable fund. Are you aware that that is not managed by the public trustee as is the greater good, and are you aware why that is?

**Ms Chan:** I am sorry, Mr Cain, we only collect the funds and pass it through to the relevant account, so I am not able to respond to that.

**MR CAIN:** And, lastly, are you aware of how much is paid for the trustee managership of the Chief Minister's charitable fund?

**Ms Chan:** Again, the commission does not manage that, I am sorry, so that would be a different part of the Chief Minister's portfolio.

**MR CAIN:** Thank you.

**Ms Cheyne:** Ms Castley, I have an answer to an earlier question we took on notice, if I may.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms Cheyne:** Questions regarding employment numbers in the ACT are best directed to Treasury, which I believe is appearing next week, but I can tell you that Treasury has advised that employment in the ACT decreased by 7,400 persons over the month to September 2021, in seasonally adjusted terms. This is the latest data that we have available. October estimates are due in about a month's time and over the month to August 2021, I believe in seasonally adjusted terms, employment decreased by 500 persons. Again, I note that lockdown did not commence until 12 August, but further questions about employment figures should be directed to Treasury.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**MR DAVIS:** I want to ask about the Canberra Innovation Network and about small business start-ups more broadly. Last time I met with the Canberra Innovation Network, they were having some challenges around the finite square meterage of their space, which is good; it shows that there is demand for what they are doing. I just wonder if the government has considered expanding their program, or similar programs into the town centres as opposed to concentrating that activity exclusively in the CBD. I ask that question in the context of the Tuggeranong Innovation Centre, which I understand has a substantial amount of square meterage for lease, and they have been speaking to the government about opportunities there. I would be keen to see if there is a plan to put those kinds of programs out all over the place instead of just the city?

**Ms Cheyne:** Mr Davis, I hate to do this to you, but CBRIN is the responsibility of the Chief Minister. I could take a guess, but it may best be directed to the Chief Minister to give you the most up-to-date advice.

**MR DAVIS:** In the context of having you here today, Minister, instead of the Chief Minister, I might just ask you, in the broad—wearing your business and better regulation hat—what the government strategy is to diversify small business outside of the CBD and into our town centres and out into the districts. Is this on the government’s radar as a definitive strategy, or is the government comfortable with the concentration of the economic development happening within the CBD?

**Ms Cheyne:** I am sure the Chief Minister will have more to say on this. You may have seen in the budget—and I cannot talk about it in detail because it is not my initiative—reference to supporting the public service employment hubs in the different town centres. That is about assisting people in terms of where they work and noting the various responsibilities that different people have in their private lives as well. Doing that will necessarily assist with activity generated and the support for different businesses right across the city. But there is a balance to be had here as well. The government has had a very firm agenda on increasing the viability and the vibrancy of the city itself and the density of the city, and that certainly remains a focus for us too.

**MR DAVIS:** I have a supplementary, Chair. You will have to forgive me, Minister, for seeming so confused. It seems as if most of my questioning around the economic development of small businesses in our suburban and district centres would need to go to the Chief Minister, not to you, as the minister for business. Have I understood that correctly?

**Ms Cheyne:** Mr Davis, it depends on the nature of the question, quite honestly. The Chief Minister is the Minister for Economic Development, and then I have a supporting function as Assistant Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Business and Better Regulation. I am happy to share with the committee, the administrative arrangements, if that assists in terms of the responsibility split.

**MR DAVIS:** No, that is fine, thank you. Thank you, Chair.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Cain, did you have another substantive question?

**MR CAIN:** Yes, thank you, Chair. Minister, I make reference to budget statements B, page 15, regarding the ease of dealing with the Access Canberra KPI. As can be seen, the target has not been reached on this KPI since 2017 and 2018. Minister, when will this change?

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes, thank you, Mr Cain. You might be aware that we are in a really trying time and Access Canberra has done an enormous amount in supporting our city. I want to take the opportunity to thank all of the staff, and particularly the front-facing staff, whether it is our compliance team, our customer service operators or our call centre team. Mr Cain, we have seen demand like we have never experienced, and there has been an extraordinary number of questions and breadth of issues that have

come to Access Canberra. Access Canberra absolutely strives to make the dealings that it has with the public, as smooth, as efficient and as friendly as possible. We do have ambition here, but it has been a difficult few years, given the circumstances.

We talk about being agile; those teams are the definition of agile in how they have had to pivot, and are constantly providing the most up-to-date information to the public. I can hand to Mr Pryce to give some more detail about what we are aiming for here and what the experience has been. We do customer surveys as well, which, generally, have very strong and high feedback. To go directly to your question, Mr Cain, and—touch wood—things return to some level of normalcy, given the dedication of our officers, I have confidence that we will come close to, if not meet, this indicator soon. I will hand to Mr Pryce.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, just before you hand over, I have a question that is more about ministerial oversight and responsibility, not any criticism of Access Canberra staffing. You have given them targets that they have not been able to achieve, pre COVID, obviously, as well. As minister responsible, what are you going to do to ensure that the targets you give them they are able to meet?

**Ms Cheyne:** Thank you, Mr Cain. I have been minister for not quite a year. The targets that have been set are developed in consultation with the directorate and I do not think that—

**MR CAIN:** Minister, they are your targets.

**Ms Cheyne:** Mr Cain, could I please finish. They are set in consultation with the directorate. You might believe something happens in a particular way, but it does not mean it is right. They are set in consultation with the directorate. They are targets that we absolutely strive to meet. Access Canberra has a significant amount of extra funding in this budget. We meet regularly; we talk regularly about resourcing and support.

I have met with staff often, but you also need to recall that before COVID we had a period of significant bushfires and hail, all of which Access Canberra has been at the forefront of dealing with, with a community that has been through a lot. I will ask Mr Pryce to provide you some more detail.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, just before that, I realise that there are processes and procedures, but you are the responsible minister. Whatever targets are imposed upon Access Canberra, they are your decisions. For example, to meet this shortfall in your own targets are you going to provide more funding to Access Canberra?

**Ms Cheyne:** Mr Cain, we have provided significantly more funding for Access Canberra in this budget.

**MR CAIN:** But you have given them targets that you are not enabling them to meet.

**Ms Cheyne:** Mr Cain, this is budget estimates. These are the targets that show the interim outcome. They show what we are aiming to achieve. As I mentioned, this has been probably the most unusual experience of any of our lives. And, as I said, when

things return to normal, I have confidence that these targets will be met.

**MR CAIN:** We will be keeping an eye on that, Minister. I am happy to hear from your officer.

**Ms Cheyne:** Thank you.

**Mr Pryce:** Mr Cain, thank you for the question. Chair, I acknowledge that I have read and understood the privilege statement.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Mr Pryce:** Mr Cain, we have two accountability indicators that we were not able to meet last year. One was around the percentage of customers satisfied with Access Canberra. Our target was 90 per cent; we achieved 85 per cent. The one that you are specifically referring to is the percentage of Canberra and community satisfied with the ease of interacting with Access Canberra. Our target there is 95 per cent, which is an extremely high target, but we strive to be the best we can be and to deliver the best services to our community. Last year we received 85 per cent against that target of 95 per cent.

Just to put that into perspective and to build on what the minister said, last year we supported the community by answering more than 99,000 calls through the COVID helpline; we made over 4,500 educational business visits; we completed over 330,000 transactions through our service centres; we answered more than 527,000 customer calls through our contact centre; and we managed almost 30,000 web chats to support our customers. We have made available now around about 700 digital transaction services via digital channels, which processed around about 8.4 million digital transactions in the last financial year. So while the target is 95 per cent—and we do not resile from trying to provide that extremely high quality service—our numbers and transactions keep growing.

It is a target, if you will, that keeps growing on us because of the volume of transactions and the interactions that we have. It is really just that the challenges that we have experienced, over the last year in particular, have been unprecedented. We had a number of them, such as the hailstorm. An event that occurred over just one or two hours took about 10 months of registration, vehicle inspections and everything else to support our community through that. So it is not as if it is a singular event on a day; there is a sustained service impact.

We also do annual customer satisfaction survey results, and the last satisfaction survey results, which we only received in the last couple of months, indicated that customer satisfaction with our digital services has remained high, at 87 per cent. Fifty-one per cent of customers who visited an Access Canberra service centre in—

**MR CAIN:** Chair, could I just raise a point. We are wandering into other territory. I have a question for the minister on the ease of dealing with Access Canberra survey. Minister, are you there?

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes.

**MR CAIN:** Regarding this survey—it is the same one, on page 15 of budget statements B—why isn't the survey disaggregated into different groups; for example, responses from the general public, as well as responses from the business community?

**Ms Cheyne:** Thanks, Mr Cain. That is a good question. I will ask Mr Pryce or officials if they can provide some detail about why it is aggregated in this way.

**MR CAIN:** If you think that is a good question, in the sense that it would be useful data, are you intending to disaggregate the survey so that we get a better reflection of the public sense of satisfaction, compared with the business community sense of satisfaction?

**Ms Cheyne:** Mr Cain, I would need to seek some advice, first, about why we do it in this way, but I am open to it. I will give it some thought.

**MR CAIN:** So is this taken on notice for your reply?

**Ms Cheyne:** It will really depend, Mr Cain. I am not sure it is something that I can take on notice, but it might be something that we give consideration to in the next budget papers. Perhaps it is a recommendation that you might wish to consider making.

**Mr Pryce:** Minister, Executive Branch Manager Josh Rynehart might be able to give a bit more detail.

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes, sure, Mr Pryce. Go ahead, Mr Rynehart.

**Mr Rynehart:** I have read and understood the privilege statement. Mr Cain, there are two different survey processes that are undertaken—one is with businesses and one is with the community more generally. The ease of dealing with Access Canberra relates to an ongoing survey that we undertake with businesses. We also take an annual survey more broadly with the community. I am not sure if that helps—

**MR CAIN:** Just on that, Mr Rynehart, the header to the table says it is for both industry and citizens, so it gives the impression that this is an amalgamated survey outcome.

**Mr Rynehart:** Yes; I am just looking at it at the moment. Thanks for that. Mr Cain, I think we can probably come back with some more detail on how those numbers are arrived at. But there are different survey activities that we undertake each year and there are targeted ones to businesses and there are targeted ones to the community.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Rynehart. Mr Cain, I think we have spent significant time on that; we have to move on. Mr Rynehart, can you clarify: did you take that question on notice?

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes, we will take that on notice.

**THE CHAIR:** My question is around the COVID support grants. Minister, are you

aware of any contact between ACT Treasury and federal Treasury about assisting with the administration of these payments?

**Ms Cheyne:** That question, Ms Castley, is best directed to the Treasurer.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay; so you are not aware?

**Ms Cheyne:** No.

**THE CHAIR:** Can I also ask that question to anybody within your directorate: are they aware of any contact between ACT Treasury or the ATO to assist with the administration?

**Ms Cheyne:** Thanks, Ms Castley. I will ask Ms Arthy to provide more detail.

**Ms Arthy:** The negotiations with the commonwealth predominantly happen via the Treasury stream. I am not aware of the specifics of the contact. I know that, early on, they were talking about whether the commonwealth could assist with the implementation of the support grants. However, as the minister said, that question would be best directed directly to the Treasury contacts who were actually involved with that discussion. Once we got the grant scheme up and running—I will need to confirm it, but this is my recollection—my team talked to the ATO about whether we can get access to some of the information. It is mainly around the ANZSIC codes. However, we did not get very far because it just was not possible to line up what the ATO had with what we had and our processes. I will get my team to send me any notes about any discussions that they directly had, and I can report back.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, please.

**Ms Arthy:** At this point I can assure you that we pursued every option we could, and it just did not work out for us at this particular time. But, as I said, the discussion around broader administration with the commonwealth Treasury is best directed to the Treasurer.

**THE CHAIR:** Will do. I would have thought that having the ATO on board to help with this would have made the scheme simpler. Did you have the opportunity to feed that information in to the Treasury office?

**Ms Arthy:** This all happened very quickly and in those first couple of days we were providing all sorts of advice around how to implement this. However, the scheme that was negotiated was consistent with other states and territories, so we had very limited room to move in terms of what the scope of the program was. When we looked at what was most practical to deliver as quickly as we could in the time that we had and with the resources that we had—of course, it would have been fantastic if the commonwealth had administered it; however, it was not possible—we just proceeded with implementing it in the way we have.

**THE CHAIR:** I have just one more supplementary on the administration with regard to the KPMG contract people, helping out there. Were there no local businesses that we could have gone to? Did they respond to a tender process?



**Ms Arthy:** This was an on-balance decision. We knew that we had to scale up very quickly. At the moment we have about 50 people from KPMG working with us. With the way that procurement works and the need for us to move quickly, we needed to have confidence that the business that we contracted was able to scale up. I think we started with about 20 people and we are now at 50. In the responses to the tender, it was the larger companies that were able to satisfy our requirements to be able to scale up to the extent that we needed.

**THE CHAIR:** And so you went with KPMG for confidence reasons.

**Ms Arthy:** Confidence in terms of being able to scale up.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you know whether there are ACT businesses that have the ability to scale up and to offer that from a local perspective?

**Ms Arthy:** We did go to tender. I do not have the details of who we went to tender for, but, given that we now have, say, 50 assessors, it is highly unlikely that there is a totally ACT based company that could satisfy that ability to scale up in the time frame that we would need to.

**THE CHAIR:** I would be interested to know if you asked. My last supplementary question on this is the cost to the ACT of the 50 KPMG contractors.

**Ms Arthy:** I can ask the team to come to me with that number in the course of this. I may need to come back to you before we finish the session.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Ms Orr, do you have another substantive question?

**MS ORR:** Yes, I do.

**Ms Cheyne:** Ms Castley and Ms Orr, might I jump in? The CEO of the Gambling and Racing Commission has a response to a question taken on notice earlier, if we might be able to jump to that, given that Mr Parton might be waiting on the line to hear it.

**Ms Chan:** Thank you, Chair. It is in response to your question, Mr Parton, about the cost of the subcontracting for the financial counselling aspect of the gambling support services. I advise that under the Government Procurement Act we are not able to disclose the specifics of contract pricing. That is deemed as confidential information and we are not able to provide that; I am sorry.

**MR PARTON:** All right. I am sure we will have some more written questions on that that you can look forward to. Thank you.

**Ms Cheyne:** Thank you.

**MS ORR:** Minister, in budget statements B, on page 60, there is a line item called "Modernising government ICT infrastructure". Can you elaborate on what that expenditure is for?

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes; thank you, Ms Orr. This is, again, another significant item for us in supporting Access Canberra in delivering its services, particularly the IT infrastructure that sits behind it. I will hand over to officials to provide some further detail for you, but it includes funding to support mobility and independence for vulnerable Canberrans, including providing timely driver licence medical assessments and enabling the wheelchair-accessible taxi scheme to meet growing demand.

It also supports our SmartForm platform. If ever you have done a transaction online through Access Canberra you have probably touched the SmartForm. It could be paying a fine; it could be renewing your licence. There are more than 450 digital forms available, and in just one year Canberrans accessed the SmartForms more than 600,000 times. So ensuring that we have got the licence capability as we have a real focus on increasing our digital offering to Canberrans has been very important.

It is also going to enable Access Canberra to help deliver the binding conciliation scheme. That is led by Minister Rattenbury, but it will be supported through Access Canberra. It is also going to support modernising our ACT rego system. This is the system that does an incredible amount of heavy lifting in terms of recording driver and car registration.

I will ask Mr Pryce and officials to give some more detail on the extent to which this funding is going to really assist Access Canberra to continue to meet the demand that is growing right across the Canberra community.

**Mr Pryce:** Thanks, Minister. I might only add a little bit and then throw to Yu-Lan Chan. The main one is around the Rego ACT system, which is a significant system for the ACT government in providing a whole range of services, as well as receiving revenue. This budget investment is significant for us. It covers a wide range of things to do with supporting vulnerable Canberrans and improving our digital services for support in dealing with Access Canberra, as well as just the services we provide. I might throw to Yu-Lan Chan, our executive branch manager, who oversees these paths.

**Ms Chan:** The Rego ACT system is classified as a government critical system. This system enables delivery of vehicle registration and driver licensing; it does a range of parking permits and also handles more than 98 per cent of the infringements issued by the ACT. It holds the identity details of 361,000 citizens. It collects over \$400 million in revenue each year. It is a complex system. It codifies legislation. There are over 1,600 fee items and 1,900 offence codes. The system codes each line of these into business rules to make sure that we can implement it.

So this is a really key system for government. It is also used not just by ACT government but by the AFP, the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Australian Electoral Commission. They also rely on it as a source of identity. So it is a very robust system, but it was designed in the late 1990s. What that means is that, now that we are this many decades on, it takes a bit longer to make changes. Some examples of prominent changes you might have been aware of are the change from compulsory third-party insurance to the motor accident injury scheme, the introduction of the green and red P-plates for the graduated licensing program, and earlier this year the rego fee waivers for zero-emissions vehicles. Those are some of the more prominent

examples, but there are many other changes. For example, during lockdown, to enable the driver licence photo to have an extended time frame in our system, that needed a coding change. There is a lot of work that goes on behind the scenes to make the system work smoothly.

This funding is going to let us do a number of things basically to modernise the system. What it will mean is that we are able to put change through faster. We will not need to take as much time to do testing as we currently do. Because of the time of its design, in the late 1990s, it is what is known as a monolithic system. So if you make one change you need to test the entire thing to make sure that there are no other adverse impacts on the rest of the system or other functionality.

What we plan to do is a couple of things. One is what is called microservices—introduce those into the system so that we can put changes through more quickly and so that, when there is a legislation or policy change, there will not be such a long lead time for that to happen. What we also hope to do is explore APIs, connectors. At the moment—because, again, it is an old system—it does not connect very easily to other systems. We would like to modernise it so that the interconnections will be much easier and data can be more accessible and useful. So that is what the funding for the Rego ACT will be.

It offers great value for the territory. Because it is a very complex, very big system, to replace something like this would cost hundreds of millions of dollars. So this funding is to modernise the system. This will extend the lifetime of it significantly and enable it to keep working for the Canberra community into the future.

**MR DAVIS:** I have been contacted by a constituent of mine who requires a working with vulnerable people card, as they are an essential worker. They informed me that recently the cost of acquiring a working with vulnerable people card has increased. Would you mind talking us through the fee structure for a working with vulnerable people card?

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes; thank you, Mr Davis. I will hand to officials to go to the detail of that. But this is a scheme that is administered within Access Canberra by the Commissioner for Fair Trading. There are almost one in four Canberrans, interestingly, who are registered under the working with vulnerable people scheme. There were considerable changes to the scheme recently, but in going to the detail of your question regarding the breakdown and the costs, I will hand to Access Canberra.

**Mr Rynehart:** Thank you, Minister. The fee for the application, for an employee, for the working with vulnerable people scheme is \$137. For volunteers, it is free. The fee was amended last financial year, I believe, because there were significant and substantial changes that came through to the administration of the scheme, including, most notably for individuals, that previously the registration was three years in length and now it is five years in length. So the fee was amended according to the longer period of time that the registration exists for. It is important to note, though, that for volunteers, the fee remains at zero. Volunteers under the scheme do not pay a fee, and the employee fee, as I mentioned, is in line with the extension of time.

There have also been a range of other amendments that have come through to the scheme that commenced earlier this year which strengthen the protections for vulnerable people, implementing the national disability worker system into the ACT and also strengthening the working with children component. In the ACT that means that an individual only needs to hold one registration for those purposes, whereas, in other jurisdictions, they may need to hold multiple cards. So they may need to hold a working with children card and an NDIS registration in other jurisdictions. In the ACT, that is all wrapped up into a single registration.

As people transition into the longer period, they are deemed registered under the NDIS until such time as they renew. We have undertaken a number of activities over the last 12 months to extend registrations during the pandemic in order to avoid people needing to undertake administrative processes unnecessarily.

**MR DAVIS:** Could I confirm what the cost of a working with vulnerable people card was previously?

**Mr Rynehart:** I may have to take that on notice. It is set each year and it is set through the community services minister. I can come back with some detail on year-on-year changes for the likes of the scheme.

**MR DAVIS:** In the education committee we heard about a teacher shortage task force because we have a shortage of teachers. In the health committee we heard about all the work that essential workers have done through the course of the pandemic in particular. Doesn't it seem like not a good time to be putting up the cost of a working with vulnerable people card, when so many essential workers that we are actually struggling to recruit and retain would need to be paying this?

**Ms Cheyne:** Again, Mr Davis, the fee is set by the community services minister, so that specific question might be best directed to her. But I do acknowledge that, in terms of processing, we really do have a big focus on this, even noting the significant changes that have come about. It might be of interest to members to know that if an employer does have a large number of staff, or even a small number of staff, keen to get a working with vulnerable people card, they can get in touch with Access Canberra to have them processed in more of a mass way, rather than having to wait or stagger them individually if there is an issue there. So that is certainly something that we do have control over, but the fee structure, as I mentioned, is a matter for the community services minister.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, regarding the cost of working with vulnerable people cards, are you considering digitising this whole process, as is done in New South Wales?

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes; thank you, Mr Cain. I will hand to Mr Rynehart to talk through how the working with vulnerable people team works and how the processing works and what consideration we are giving to improving the processes as well.

**Mr Rynehart:** Thank you, Minister. Just on the first point, the fee increased by \$2 this financial year, so from \$135 to \$137. The process to obtain a working with vulnerable people registration is already largely digital, so for a person who already holds a registration, the process of renewing and obtaining the registration is a digital

process. You go online, you put in some details, you either pay the fee or not and then the process runs that way. So people do not need to engage in it any other way than digitally.

**MR CAIN:** Is there a digital version of the card?

**Mr Rynehart:** I was coming to that. At this stage, the registration card is still the output of the process. That is largely to support employers to have confidence and to know that a person is registered under the scheme. Our advice to employers is that if a person holds a registration that is current then that satisfies their requirement to ensure that people performing a regulated activity are registered under the scheme. We continue to look at improvements in the future years. But, at this stage, the card is an important part of ensuring that people can have confidence that people are registered, particularly from the employer or from a client service point of view.

**MR CAIN:** You just put a big dump on going into digital versions of registrations. There are so many digital versions of registrations and records; are you saying that that is a bad thing to do?

**Mr Rynehart:** No, Mr Cain, not at all. What I am saying is that at the moment, under the current system, the registration card, similar to a drivers licence in the ACT, can be considered evidence of registration. We continue to look at improvements, moving forward, but moving to a digital record is a complex piece of work which we continue to look at. The registration card, as I said, at the moment is the registration that is issued to the person.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, I would encourage you, of course, to look at digital solutions which are more efficient and cheaper for the community.

**Ms Cheyne:** Thank you, Mr Cain. We do look at digital solutions, as Mr Rynehart said. Where it becomes a basis of identity and also working with vulnerable people, that is what it is about—vulnerable people and protection. So that is why this is a complex piece of work. I know, Mr Cain, that this is an area of interest to you. Perhaps later or offline we can talk to you about the significant progress Access Canberra has made on e-conveyancing. I understand that Ms Castley wants to move on, so I will hand back to the chair.

**MR PARTON:** What exactly is the role played by Access Canberra in administering building disputes—in other words, disputes between, say, a homebuyer and their builder? In the interests of time, I can cut straight to the chase and give a specific example. What does Access Canberra do where individuals provide strong or irrefutable evidence that a builder has accepted their payments but then fallen well behind in construction? I know that you and I are dealing with a number of these at the moment, and I just want to know what powers Access Canberra actually has in resolving disputes of that nature.

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes, thank you, Mr Parton. I think we can hand directly to the Construction Occupation Registrar, Mr Lhuede, who is on the line.

**Mr Lhuede:** Thank you, Mr Parton, for that question. As the building regulator there

are limited actions I can undertake in relation to contractual issues. If there are significant building defects or the work is not being completed within the allowable time within a building approval, then there are regulatory actions that I can undertake, as the building regulator. But in terms of contractual issues between a builder and a buyer, that is more of a legal matter. We can and we do refer often such matters to ACAT for consideration. But, also, there are other options for around dispute resolution.

**MR PARTON:** So, Minister, do you feel that Access Canberra has the appropriate regulatory and enforcement powers to help Canberrans who believe that they have been victims of unfair practices, shoddy work or just failure to perform what has been agreed to in the contract?

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes, thanks, Mr Parton. Look, it depends in some instances. But Access Canberra does have broad-ranging powers, as Mr Lhuede just detailed, and does engage very strongly with the building community. If you have particular suggestions that you think perhaps I, together with the policy minister, Minister Vassarotti, and perhaps the Attorney-General, should be pursuing, I am very happy to discuss that further. The powers currently are quite considerable, but if there are suggestions on where you think we should strengthen them, I am happy to have a chat.

**MR PARTON:** Just in closing on this line of questioning, because I know we are getting to the end of the session, can I ask: what is your complaint resolution rate? By that I mean instances where you have stepped in and enforced some sort of resolution for the community member making the complaint in this sort of area. It might be hard to quantify that.

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes, I think it is going to be hard for us to quantify a rate, Mr Parton. But perhaps we can see what detail we can give you. I suspect it will not be a rate, but we will look at the level of detail that we can give you and try to give you as much as possible.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, just regarding the new Fix My Street system, firstly, how much did the system upgrade cost?

**Ms Cheyne:** Thank you, Mr Cain. The Fix My Street system upgrade is an ongoing project. As you know, there was an Access Canberra website migration which occurred earlier this year that resulted in Fix My Street being linked to the ACT government digital account, which was a really important change for us, particularly as we look to provide more ongoing responses to people's concerns or issues that they raise through Fix My Street.

I might hand over to Mr Pryce and perhaps Yu-Lan Chan, again in her non-CEO capacity, to provide some detail of what the costs have been so far. But, Mr Cain, this is a set of rolling upgrades to this project, so we may not have a definitive figure for you at this stage, but we will see what we can give you.

**MR CAIN:** And time for final delivery, too, would be important to know.

**Ms Cheyne:** Sure.

**Ms Chan:** Thank you, Minister. I am not sure if we are able, again, under the Government Procurement Act to provide the figure for the external contractor. However, this has been a collaborative work between Transport Canberra and City Services, Access Canberra and ACT Digital to make a number of improvements.

As the minister mentioned, we have moved it from the previous provider to the new platform. There is very much a focus on having customer and citizen input into what improvements they would like. We had planned with TCCS, prior to the lockdown, to consult with a number of customers—very rich, in-depth research—to find out why they use the system, what they would like out of it, but also what would make it easier for them to use.

That is really the first piece of a major, major redesign process to understand how we could redesign the system. In the background we are continuing to make improvements all the time. So we will continually be rolling out improvements and releases, similar to what is done with apps, but in order to inform any further redesign work we really need to have that customer input. That has been put on hold because of the lockdown. We will work out with the rest of government when that engagement with community is able to recommence.

We anticipate that that will take a couple of weeks, as in we had allowed about a six-week process and it depends on how long it takes to recruit willing customers who actually want to spend the time in interviews with us. Off the back of that, we will have some rich customer journeys and some identification of the pain points, and that will inform what further work needs to be undertaken. Depending on what comes out of the discovery process, that will inform the time frame for the project. But it is being done collaboratively between TCCS, Access Canberra and ACT Digital as an ongoing continual improvement process.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, Ms Chan mentioned she was not sure whether she could disclose the cost. Is that something you could take on notice, whether you can disclose the current cost and estimated cost of this new system?

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes, I will take it on notice and seek some advice, Mr Cain, and we will respond in the way that we can, depending on that advice.

**MR CAIN:** Finally, how many reports and queries lodged through Fix My Street prior to migration to the new system have been actioned post migration?

**Ms Chan:** All the submissions that were put through prior to migration have continued to be actioned by the teams. I do not have that figure because the Fix My Street system collects the information and sends that through to the relevant team and business system, whether it is streetlights, potholes, trees, all of which are within TCCS. So TCCS will have those figures, potentially.

But in terms of overall submissions, in the last financial year 47,500 submissions were made. In the time since the migration, nearly 39,000 people have signed up for the digital account and linked it to the Access Canberra services. About 81 per cent of Fix My Street submissions are reported online, so through Fix My Street rather than

through the phone.

**MR CAIN:** Could you take on notice then, Minister, how many reports and queries lodged in Fix My Street have been migrated and have been actioned?

**Ms Cheyne:** Mr Cain, I can't. As Ms Chan just said, that is a matter for TCCS. So that might be something you might wish to submit on notice to them.

Chair, Ms Arthy has a response to your KPMG question that we took on notice, if you would like to go there quickly.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes; thank you.

**Ms Arthy:** Great. Thank you. As at 8 October, the KPMG fees were \$494,000, including GST.

**THE CHAIR:** My substantive question goes to delivery time frames and the government's competence to deliver schemes rather than just announcing them. We want to make sure that the task forces and the schemes that the government are announcing actually get delivered. With the BRT discovery phase 1 report, when will that be delivered?

**Ms Cheyne:** Thank you, Ms Castley. As I have mentioned and as Mr Engele and Dr Clapham have mentioned, there is more work to be done there. We want to make sure that we really have captured as many issues as possible. There is a technical or a research methodology called snowballing, which is when you keep digging until the themes are so consistent that you are finding exactly what the nubs of the issues are. And I do believe we are really starting to get to that phase. But I might just hand over to officials for their best estimates of timing.

**Mr Engele:** Thanks, Minister. Initially, the consideration was to undertake the discovery phase as a sort of discrete piece of work and that would then create a series of subsequent in-depth reviews. As we have been going along there have been some areas where we have been able to action or we believe we can undertake the work in parallel. We are starting a big piece of work, as the minister mentioned previously, on procurement, with a focus on SMEs. Those pieces are actually underway at the moment.

We expect that we will have finished the first part of the discovery phase as we originally considered it by this year. We have been periodically reporting back the results to the government. I would just hazard to say that throughout the next two years—it was considered to be a three-year total rolling program—we will continue to be engaging with business. I would not want to give the impression that we will stop talking to business and then just sort of bury ourselves in legislation and regulation.

**THE CHAIR:** My question is about when. Minister, do you understand that business cannot have a snowball situation? If something is promised to them that is going to help them, as the BRT has promised to do, they need to know that you are there with and behind them. They do not have time. And, as we have heard, businesses do not last sometimes longer than two years. So already there will be a whole host of



businesses that have not been reached out to by the BRT. I would like to know when. Could you give me a date—there must be some KPIs—when the discovery phase 1 report will be delivered?

**Ms Cheyne:** Mr Engele just went into detail about this. So there are—

**THE CHAIR:** But I am asking you, Minister.

**Ms Cheyne:** Can I have a chance, please? As he went into detail on—and I will repeat it because I think it is worth repeating—there are already issues that we have identified that we are actioning in parallel while we are in the discovery phase. So it is not necessarily that we need to chunk the work, as Mr Engele said, and then go bury ourselves in doing things. We absolutely are getting on with actioning the issues and the themes that have emerged that are very obvious to us.

In question time just the other week you asked the Chief Minister about procurement specifically. This is something that is a real focus for us that we are starting work on now, while we are still in the discovery phase. So if you are looking for—

**THE CHAIR:** But it is already six months late.

**Ms Cheyne:** Excuse me?

**THE CHAIR:** It is already six months late. I understood that it was due in June.

**Ms Cheyne:** That is not six months to me, Ms Castley.

**THE CHAIR:** Oh, three months. But it is late. It is a long time for businesses.

**Ms Cheyne:** But, Ms Castley, I would encourage you to look back on what we have been talking about over these two hours about the Better Regulation Taskforce and the way that it is operating, in that, where we are identifying issues, we are responding to them. Some have very quick fixes that we have been able to address for businesses. I believe that goes to the heart of what you are actually asking and—

**THE CHAIR:** So on time frames then, can I ask you about the hardship scheme? We are nearly at the end of October. How is that scheme going and when are we expecting to see any help for business out of that scheme?

**Ms Cheyne:** Ms Castley, the hardship scheme is under the purview of the Minister for Economic Development. He is appearing next Monday. That is where questions are best directed.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you have no idea when you will be explaining to businesses that contact you when the hardship scheme will be up and running?

**Ms Cheyne:** Ms Castley, we have provided advice online about expected time frames. Look, we are working incredibly hard on it. The business support grants have necessarily been the focus and were picked up at a real rate of knots there. But with the hardship scheme, we are working, as I understand it, to ensure that it is the most

effective and targeted for businesses, to assist them. I am sure you will agree that it is very important to get these things right so that they provide the best benefit to businesses, and the team has been working on that. But, as I mentioned, these questions are best directed to the Treasurer.

**THE CHAIR:** The first order of business for BRT was to learn how to talk to business. How do you feel that is going, and are the workshops enough?

**Ms Cheyne:** Thank you, Ms Castley. Overall, in talking to business, we are constantly talking to businesses. I am in direct contact with businesses all day, every day, as a minister. In terms of the Better Regulation Taskforce, as we flagged before, there are workshops where we have brought together like-minded businesses where there have been common issues or it is a common sector. That has been useful in working out what are perhaps common issues for those areas. But, equally, the task force has met one on one with businesses or trader association chairpersons as well. So there have been plenty of conversations directly with businesses and, yes, I do think it is going well.

**MS ORR:** Minister, can you provide an update or more information on the modernisation of the Belconnen Access Canberra service centre?

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes. And we will be brief, noting the time. Thank you, Ms Orr. As members may be aware, we have five service centres around the ACT, all of which have gone through a process of modernising and upgrading to provide the best customer experience for those who are required to attend a service centre. Belconnen is the last cab off the rank, so to speak, and it will be in a very similar location. It is progressing reasonably well. It did need to stop, due to construction being paused for a short period there during lockdown. I will hand over to Mr Pryce, and perhaps Ms Verden, who can just give a bit more detail about how it is going.

**Mr Pryce:** Just noting the time, Ms Orr, the service centre opening has been delayed, just with COVID impacts. We are still hopeful that we might be able to have it open before the end of the year. But, again, there are some variables there that can affect that time frame.

Belconnen service centre is our busiest single service centre. The new service centre will enhance its look, feel and the ability for customers to interact with us. It will also be 75 square metres larger. With the lessons we have learnt through COVID we have factored them into design elements, so it certainly assists us in managing clients as we come out of lockdown and with our COVID recovery. Executive Branch Manager Jo Verden leads this work, so she might want to just add a few more points.

**Ms Verden:** Thank you, David. I have read and I acknowledge the privilege statement. I think the minister and David have covered off the project in terms of where it is at quite well in their comments. I would just like to reiterate that we did commence construction on 10 August, two days prior to going into lockdown. Once we did go into lockdown we of course had to cease construction work, but then that resumed on 13 September. There have not been any substantial or significant delays in relation to construction. At this stage, we foresee the project to be complete in mid-December.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. We are out of time today.

**Ms Cheyne:** Ms Castley, I have an answer on the Fix My Street question we took on notice, if that assists members.

**Ms Chan:** Thank you, Chair. Fix My Street is just one part of the CRM—customer relationship management—program, which is the platform that hosts the Access Canberra website. The contract costs for this one are publicly available, so the costs for the migration process were \$1.039 million.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you so much. Any other questions need to be taken on notice. On behalf of the committee, I thank Minister Cheyne and all of the officials who have attended today. For those witnesses that have taken questions on notice, as I mentioned earlier, we require those answers to be provided to the committee secretary within five working days. This hearing is now adjourned.

**The committee adjourned at 11.01 am.**