



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2023-2024

**(Reference: [Inquiry into Appropriation Bill 2023-2024 and
Appropriation \(Office of the Legislative Assembly\) Bill 2023-2024](#))**

Members:

**MR M PARTON (Chair)
MS J CLAY (Deputy Chair)
MR M PETTERSSON**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

FRIDAY, 21 JULY 2023

**Secretary to the committee:
Ms K de Kleuver (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.

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 9 am.

Appearances:

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

Education Directorate

Haire, Ms Katy, Director-General

Efthymiades, Ms Deb, Deputy Director-General, System Policy and Reform

Moysey, Mr Sean, Executive Branch Manager, Education and Care Regulation and Support

Moore, Dr Nicole, Executive Branch Manager, Strategic Policy

Spence, Ms Angela, Acting Executive Group Manager, Service Design and Delivery

Matthews, Mr David, Executive Group Manager, Business Services Group

McMahon, Ms Kate, Executive Group Manager, Safe at School Taskforce

Nakkan, Mr John, Acting Executive Branch Manager, Infrastructure and Capital Works

Huxley, Mr Mark, Executive Group Manager, School Improvement Division

Community Services Directorate

Summerrell, Mrs Jessica, Executive Branch Manager, Support Services for Children

THE CHAIR: Welcome to the public hearings of the Select Committee on Estimates 2023-2024. I can see that we are all fired up and excited to be here, which is good.

The committee wishes to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land that 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 the 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.

The proceedings are being broadcast live. The proceedings today are also being transcribed and will be published on the Assembly website. If you are taking a question on notice, can you make that really clear by saying, "I will take that as a question on notice," and everyone will be on the same page.

In this first session we will hear from Ms Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Early Childhood Development, and officials. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. Could I get you, as a group, to confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement and that you agree to it? Thank you.

We are not inviting opening statements. We will go to the first question. Minister, I am referring to the cost of early child care. I refer to reports relating to early child

care in the ACT, including the media, and the *Report on government services—RoGS*—data from the Productivity Commission. A recent report in the *Canberra Times* headed “Child care fees increases wipe out family savings from July 10 subsidy increase” states:

... Canberra parents have been told by centres that daily fees will be rising by up to \$30 per day thereby eliminating any savings.

It reports that Canberrans will now be charged up to \$165 per day. The median is now \$643 per week. Victoria is next, at \$583, and that is quite a gap. Tasmania is at \$521. Minister, why is child care more expensive in Canberra than in the rest of the country?

Ms Berry: Thank you, Mr Parton. I will ask Ms Haire to provide a bit more detail on that. It is not necessarily an “apples and apples” comparison when you are comparing with other states and territories. There are a lot of factors involved. The ACT government is doing what it can, with the levers that it has in its power, which involves implementing the Early Childhood Education and Care program with regard to access for three-year-olds. I will ask Ms Haire to provide some more detail on that.

Ms Haire: Mr Parton, as you are aware, early childhood is a shared responsibility between the commonwealth and the states and territories. The states and territories are responsible for preschool, and the commonwealth is, in the main, responsible for the provision of early childhood education and care for younger children. However, the states and territories have the responsibility for regulating that service, and the costs of that service are covered by the commonwealth’s Child Care Subsidy.

I will hand over in a moment to our early childhood regulator, Mr Sean Moysey. A couple of years ago, there was some research done on why, in the ACT, costs of child care are higher. That study found it was driven by the high employment rates, property costs, the relatively small cohort of early childhood workers and our small geographic footprint.

There are some steps being taken by the commonwealth government to address some of the issues that relate to the cost of early childhood through the commonwealth Child Care Subsidy, which is a commonwealth government responsibility. I will hand over to Mr Moysey, who can give more insight into the way the early childhood market works in the ACT.

Mr Moysey: The ACCC has put out its interim report on the costs of early childhood services, which is instructive in relation to the comparison between states and territories, as Ms Haire said. Perhaps the easiest way to think about it is to think about the suburbs within the centre of Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney. If you put a compass around those, that is the bandwidth of costs that you see in the ACT.

The ACCC is monitoring pricing. The Prime Minister has made comment around that. The specifics of the ACT have a very particular bandwidth within the context of the nation, so the comparison is not an exact comparison of the bandwidth, for example, between other states and territories.

THE CHAIR: Minister, irrespective of the reasons that are being given here today, do you think that is a fair thing, particularly for families and single mothers on lower incomes? As is the case with so many things in the ACT, much of which are under the umbrella of your government, they end up having to pay more than everywhere else in the country, and have to suffer the fact that they are not on a public servant's wage and this is their kids. Is that a fair thing?

Ms Berry: In a perfect world, early childhood education would be treated the same as education and be free. That is the case in Scandinavian countries like Finland, where early childhood education is free. That is not the case in Australia, unfortunately. As I said, the ACT government is doing what it can with the levers that it has in its responsibility to provide services in the early childhood space that are accessible and more affordable for families who need it, and particularly targeting those families that are more vulnerable and more disadvantaged than other people in the three-year-old preschool space.

As Ms Haire has pointed out, it is the commonwealth's responsibility, with regard to their own tax settings, around the provision of early childhood education and care. The federal government recently announced the provision of more support for families, to make it more affordable. But I acknowledge that it has become quite expensive. It has become, in some cases, a revenue-raising, for-profit, corporatised service. In my view, it would be better if it was not and that the focus was on the early childhood education aspects. However, we have only very limited levers within our control in the ACT to make a difference in that space, and we are doing what we can.

MR HANSON: The RoGS report also shows that the ACT has the least access to childcare services during non-standard hours of anywhere in the country. For example, in Queensland, three-quarters of services are open before 7 am, whereas in the ACT only 4.6 per cent of services are open before 7 am. What is the difference between us and other jurisdictions that explains that gap?

Ms Berry: I might have to ask whether there is any advice that we can provide on that, although that would be a decision for services. That is not a decision that we could make or implement, to require them to open at particular hours. I will ask Ms Haire whether she has any further information for the committee.

Ms Haire: I will hand over to Mr Moysey in a moment. There is an interesting survey that is done each year of the early childhood workforce which identified some differences between the early childhood system in the ACT and other places. However, it really comes down to, as the minister says, that it is largely a market-based system responding to demand. If it is helpful, I will ask Mr Moysey to set out some of the findings of the early childhood national workforce survey.

Mr Moysey: Mr Hanson, part of the answer to the question is that it is a market-based system, and providers and services make choices as to who they are serving and what the demand is. We would find that there are specific services that are oriented to particular areas of the ACT. Again, the ACT's industry does not have as big a bandwidth as other cities or regional areas. To an extent, the market makes that choice.

As Ms Haire pointed out, the 2021 workforce survey showed that there has been

significant change in the workforce, which COVID did impact. One of the interesting things is the change in the proportion of years. For example, 54 per cent of the ECEC workforce have three years or less experience in the sector compared to 43 per cent nationally. In 2021 we were tracking with a lower number of early childhood teachers—eight per cent, compared to 11 per cent. Of course, we also saw a lot of people leave the sector at that time, and it is a relatively ageing bandwidth as well.

MR HANSON: Have COVID and a big proportion of the Canberra workforce working from home changed the whole sector?

Mr Moysey: It has certainly prompted a change in the composition. If you think about out of school hours care being done predominantly by university students, that was significantly affected. If you think about the age cohorts in the sector, making decisions about what they want to do in the context of COVID and leaving probably earlier than they would—which I think is an experience across many industries and sectors—yes, there is an impact there.

One of the ways to describe COVID is a homogenisation of how everything worked. A lot of the things about how you develop staff and how you do those sorts of things had to be set aside. It was very highly operational because of the limitations of what people do.

MR HANSON: My point goes to a broader point. In the federal public service there is this “you can all work from home” mandate. Across the ACT government and the private sector, if you have people working from home, is there less demand for these services or do people still drop their kids off and then go back and work from home? I am curious as to whether that has been looked at.

Mr Moysey: Traditionally, the choices that people make in terms of the selection, from a practical point of view, of where their children might be, are: close to home, close to work and transport routes. They are the three main drivers. We have seen a shift towards closer to home, and that is reflected in the ACCC interim report, too.

MR HANSON: So the demand has not really changed; it is the location that has changed? Thank you.

MS CLAY: Minister, we were very pleased to see the announcement about free early education and child care for three-year-olds. We have been campaigning on that one for a while, so it is good to see that come out. Can you talk me through what that will look like in the first couple of years?

Ms Berry: Thank you, Ms Clay. The early childhood strategy, and particularly free universal access for three-year-olds, is a program that has been implemented since 2019—well before you came into this place, Ms Clay. Actually, for decades before that, the sector has been campaigning for improvements around early childhood access, noting that young people’s education starts well before they begin formal education within our primary school system.

We had always worked very closely with the sector to understand the pressures, and we have already talked a little bit about that, around the workforce and the challenges

in that space, as well as with regard to capacity and affordability for families to be able to access early childhood education and care services.

Working with the sector and understanding the ability to provide three-year-old preschool go hand in hand with understanding and recognising the workforce and having a strategy around that as well. Also, when we started this program, we made sure that it was targeted at families and young people who were already well behind every other family, with respect to accessing early childhood education—that really important and vital two years of preschool education before they start their formal education.

We started the phased-in targeting of those families with soft referrals, which are relationship referrals, where the Child and Youth Protection Services and other services in the ACT were able to identify families and encourage them to be part of the program. It was about working with early childhood, starting with a phased approach, and working with a smaller number of centres to begin that transition into early childhood education, so that those young people had access. It was also about the opportunity to have wraparound supports for the young people and their families, should they need them, and ensuring that the early childhood centre could transition to providing supports for these young families and young people.

MS CLAY: Over the next four years, on the ground, what can women and parents and families expect to see as a result of this?

Ms Haire: Ms Clay, as the minister said, this is the second phase of bringing in an approach to universal three-year-old preschool. We already have operating two days of free three-year-old preschool for vulnerable children—the program that the minister just described—and from next year we will have one day of free three-year-old preschool for all three-year-olds. That is the \$50 million item in the budget paper at page 141. It is that second one, the most recent announcement, on which we can give you the details.

MS CLAY: Is that the only phase we have planned at the moment?

Ms Haire: We have the first phase already in place, which is the two days.

MS CLAY: Phase 2 is one day?

Ms Haire: The next phase is what is commencing from next year, which is one day free for all three-year-olds, and that will be 300 hours a year for all three-year-olds in participating early childhood education and care services. I will hand over to Dr Moore to take you through the operational detail of how that will be rolled out.

MS CLAY: I do not need the operational detail; I am just trying to get a big picture. Do we have the next phase of that plan or is that as far as we are going?

Ms Haire: There is a commitment in the Set up for Success strategy ultimately to go to two days universal three-year-old preschool, as part of the 10-year strategy.

MS CLAY: Are we tracking the broader economic benefits of this policy? There is a

cost, a \$50 million cost, in providing one day universal free access, but there is also an enormous economic benefit in providing that, in terms of productivity and a lot of other health costs; there are many other costs. Are we measuring what the savings are as a result of this?

Ms Haire: One of the main reasons for investing in early childhood, as the minister said, is that the evidence—some of the most powerful evidence in the social sciences—is that this makes a huge difference for the individual children and for society as a whole. There is a study that shows that the benefits are \$7 for every \$1 spent. That was in the peri-preschool childhood study that was carried out a little while ago.

With the benefits, Ms Clay, you have identified two different bundles of benefits. There are benefits for families in having access to high quality early childhood education, so that parents can work. However, the greater benefit, and the benefit that this program is focusing on, is the benefit for the children. The evidence is that it makes an enormous difference for their social and emotional development, their pre-literacy skills, their oracy skills, and the play-based learning that sets them up for success later in life; hence the name of the strategy. That is the major driver, because those benefits are already well evidenced and recognised increasingly around Australia.

It is probably worth noting that the ACT has been a leader in early childhood from the beginning. Having free four-year-old preschool was a first, here in the ACT, and some jurisdictions are only just catching up on that.

MS CLAY: Yes, it is great. You do not need to convince me of the benefits. It is very impressive to hear that there is a return on investment of \$7 for every \$1 invested in free early childhood education. That is fantastic.

What I am trying to get my head around is: when your next phase comes to Treasury, when you are doing your budget bids and your business cases, how does the Treasurer understand, where does it appear in the budget paper, that the ACT gets back \$7 for every \$1 spent?

To put it in context, I know that recently, for instance, we looked at the benefits of the Drug and Alcohol Court. There was a review that costed those benefits and found that that initiative has now paid for its own operating costs. Are we going to have any kind of review or is there any way to measure that so that we can go back and say, “Here are the savings; here are the actual, tangible financial costs; and here is why we need to keep going”?

Ms Berry: We are doing, as part of the early childhood strategy, and as part of access to early childhood education, free three-year-old preschool, a longitudinal study, because you will not see the outcomes and benefits of this for a number of years—even a decade. Reports in this space have shown that, with those two years in early childhood education, there is much more likelihood that young people are prepared, ready and have the social and emotional development that they need to carry on with their life and ongoing learning.

It also means that, for those families who are most disadvantaged, there is less likelihood of them ending up in the justice system later on, if they have that first positive experience with quality early childhood education. So there is already evidence there. That kind of evidence, obviously, goes towards the development of these kinds of business cases. I can ask Ms Efthymiades to talk a bit about what the longitudinal study is about.

Ms Efthymiades: Ms Clay, I think it is multifaceted. As the minister has talked about, the longitudinal study will track these young people and compare them with those who have not participated, through performance measures once they get to year 3—for example, in NAPLAN. We hope we will also see, in the intervening time—because there is a long time between being three and being eight—impacts on the AEDC and impacts on the kindergarten base assessment. There are a couple of earlier things, then the year 3 assessment and ongoing—ultimately, to their exit outcomes. Really, all of this is about making sure people have a better range of opportunities and outcomes when they exit schooling. But that will be a long way down the track, and I will be long retired.

The other part of this is about evaluating as we go. We have a very strong history in Set up for Success—and in Future of Education, for that matter—of getting a very strong evaluation framework. From the get-go, we have baseline information that we then track over time.

All of that will feed into any subsequent considerations by government of any future directions. It will also be reflected in the Wellbeing Framework, because that is a much richer reporting framework than just hard dollars. All of those elements will be part of going forward.

MS CLAY: Thank you. It is not such a long time between three and eight. My daughter just turned nine.

MR HANSON: In the strategy, does it identify when we go to that next phase, the third phase, the second day of three-year-old—

Ms Berry: No.

MR HANSON: It does not identify that?

Ms Berry: No. It has been quite a complicated process, in working with the sector, particularly around the workforce challenges and identifying spaces within the sector. I think it is important for the committee to know about the process that has been involved in getting to this point right now and what the funding goes towards. It is not just a space in a centre; it also goes to the professional development of staff and other opportunities within the space. There is more to this than just providing free universal access because the absolutely important part of that is the quality, which is the early childhood educators themselves. So investing in them is important.

MR HANSON: So the constraints are in staff and physical facilities, to an extent, in rolling out further elements of this. Is that what you are saying?

Ms Berry: There is a bit of that. It is not the same as our preschool provision in the ACT, which is also a little unique in this country—having a preschool attached to our primary schools. The three-year-old preschool program is different, in that it is being offered in services. It provides funding to support families, with a funding-the-gap fee.

The other part to it is the ability for the service to have three-year-olds in their service. It is about having the physical ability within those services. Very importantly, it is about making sure that it is quality, and that means investing in early childhood educators as well.

MR HANSON: Have you identified which centres will actually be offering this service?

Ms Berry: We started off, as I said, phasing it in with that very targeted approach to families and young people who would not ordinarily get the chance to access any preschool or early childhood education. There were particular centres that were invited to be part of that program at the beginning of the roll out of the strategy. We have now invited all other centres to be part of the program. Dr Moore can provide a bit of background regarding how it started, why we targeted it and why it was phased in.

MR HANSON: I am wondering which centres have taken it up. Are they required to? How many have taken it up? It links into that whole issue of accessibility. If all of the centres in Gungahlin take it up but the ones in Tuggeranong do not, that is an issue. I am wondering how that is playing out.

Ms Berry: Yes. There is a lot of work going into this about providing advice to centres, as well as to families about which centres are opting in, to be part of this program. Dr Moore has some more detail on that.

Dr Moore: Where we are at, in terms of getting the providers on board for the universal access program, is a little bit different to the targeted program. With the targeted program, because those children are children experiencing disadvantage, or vulnerability, we are particularly targeting services that have those wraparound holistic supports for families.

For universal, we want to partner with every service that can partner with us and that is interested in partnering with us. We held some information sessions for the sector just last week. Obviously, we needed the budget announcement; then we had some information sessions where we told services about the program, how we intend to partner with them and when they will be invited to participate.

With the stages that we are working through at the moment, we are developing detailed program guidelines for the sector. We have been testing those with some critical friends within the sector to make sure that they make sense for the sector and that they reflect the needs of the sector. What we are wanting to do—

MR HANSON: When will we actually know which centres are available? When will parents know?

Dr Moore: Those guidelines will be made available to services in August. At that time we will be inviting services to express their interest to participate. In September, we will finalise agreements. By October, we will be able to publish on the directorate website a list of providers who have come on board for the first phase.

MR HANSON: When does the program start? In the new calendar year?

Dr Moore: Yes, in January.

MR PETTERSSON: Can you update us on the expansion of the Child Development Service to provide early intervention therapeutic services, which commenced earlier this year?

Ms Berry: Thank you for that question, Mr Pettersson. There has been significant work in this space, with funding going towards the Child Development Service for the Holder site, as well as for the service itself. I will ask Mrs Summerrell to provide some detail around that.

Mrs Summerrell: As the minister said, there has been significant investment in the Child Development Service. Within this budget there is investment in the areas of the Children and Young People Equipment Loan Scheme and the autism assessment service, as well as funding for the redesign of service delivery within the Child Development Service.

That is in addition to the funding that was provided to expand the service to provide intervention for children aged two to three. That service commenced in February this year and it has been incredibly successful. We have seen 125 children in that service already, and that is to provide that intervention service, as I mentioned. I am happy to take more questions about the specifics of that funding, but that is the overall explanation of the funding.

MR PETTERSSON: What are the workforce constraints that you face in expanding the CDS?

Mrs Summerrell: There is no denying that the allied health workforce is a challenging workforce to recruit to. There are national and international labour shortages for that workforce. However, we have a unique and attractive service in the ACT within the Child Development Service. We provide a multidisciplinary opportunity for clinicians, whereas many allied health clinicians—a speech pathologist, for example—in other areas and other jurisdictions, and even other parts of government, would not necessarily get that opportunity to work as part of a multidisciplinary team. That makes the service very attractive, and the paediatric nature of it is also something that many clinicians do choose to go to.

With that in mind, for the expanded service for the two- to three-year-olds, we were funded for 14 positions, and we have pretty much recruited to all of those positions. We have a very small vacancy rate of around two at this stage. There are challenges, absolutely, but I am really proud of the way that the service has been able to recruit to those positions and get that service up and running. That is testament to the fact that, despite those national workforce challenges, it is an incredibly attractive model that

we run here.

MRS KIKKERT: When you were referring to the two- to three-year-olds, the special services, is that the Best Start?

Mrs Summerrell: That is correct.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, when the Best Start for Canberra's Children was released at the end of last year, you promised 14 additional professionals for treatment and support would be employed at the Child Development Service during 2023, including physiotherapists, occupational therapists and speech pathologists. How many of the 14 are currently in place, and how many do you believe will be in place by the end of 2023?

Ms Berry: We are very much hoping to have the full complement. We have 12. With the two vacancies, what are those positions?

Mrs Summerrell: Speech.

Ms Berry: Speech.

MRS KIKKERT: You have 12 out of 14?

Mrs Summerrell: We have 12 out of the 14 recruited, and there are two vacancies in speech.

MRS KIKKERT: Table 19 on page 19 of the budget statement shows that total hours of services provided at the Child Development Service last financial year dropped 28 per cent below the average of what has been provided since the CDS was first launched in 2016, and that the target for this financial year is even lower. The explanation for this is "staffing vacancies and the implementation of a new management system". Minister, can you explain what vacancies the CDS is struggling with, the problems with the management system and the impacts both have had on Canberra families seeking assistance—for example, the waiting list?

Ms Berry: Thanks, Mrs Kikkert, for that question. Mrs Summerrell can provide some more detail on that for you.

Mrs Summerrell: One of the first points I would make in relation to the figures in the budget papers is that the hours of service do not include the two- to three-year-old initiative, because that initiative was implemented only in February. That refers to what I call "CDS proper", which is the CDS service that existed prior to the establishment of that service. That is one important point to note.

We have seen a range of changes since COVID, in terms of our figures and the behaviour of both clients and clinicians in that time. There are generally four reasons why we believe there is the reduction in face-to-face clinical hours. The first is, as I said, a change of behaviour. We have no tolerance for any illness in terms of children presenting that are unwell, or families or carers presenting that are unwell, but the same goes for our clinicians. Whereas previously a clinician may have come to

work feeling a little bit off and maybe pushed through, and similarly where a child might have presented with the sniffles and we would have seen them, that does not exist anymore. There have been increases in cancellations on both sides and failures to attend because of that.

Similarly, as we recruited to the Best Start service, some of the positions were filled by existing Child Development Service staff, which meant that there have been some vacancies held in CDS proper for those staff who decided to move over to the intervention pathway. There have been some staff vacancies and turnovers in that period as well.

With the client management system that was implemented, as you mentioned, and as is mentioned in the budget papers, as with any client management system or any system that is implemented, there is a period where it does take some time to settle. There was data migration from the old system. As clinicians have had to learn the new system and how it operates, that has inevitably taken some time. We have made some adjustments internally to allow the clinicians to focus more on their clinical time and increase the admin utilisation of that system, to see whether that settles, but those things do take time to work out and to settle post implementation.

The fourth reason is that, as I mentioned, we established and expanded a new service in that time frame as well. It took time and resources to be able to do that. We needed to establish that service, the models of care, the referral pathways, the practices that we would operate within for that group, and the recruitment.

Interestingly, though, I would note that, despite the hours being down, we actually saw more families this year than we did last year. Last year we saw 3,058 families, and this year we saw 3,180 families. There is a caution there in terms of hours being down not necessarily meaning that families are not being seen. It just means that how the families have been seen, for whatever reason, has changed a little bit.

MRS KIKKERT: Thank you; I always love your answers. At every estimates hearing, you give very clear answers.

Ms Berry: Mrs Kikkert, I will add just one thing to Mrs Summerrell's very detailed response. With regard to the two- to three-year-old initiative, which is not included, that is one of the reasons why we have readjusted the target until the program has been in place for 12 months, so that we can understand what it actually looks like and the number of families that are being assisted. We can then adjust the target.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, different funding commitments in both the 2022-23 budget review and in this budget claim to include funding to expand the autism spectrum disorder assessment service. In the past you have stated that it is virtually impossible to employ more psychologists for these assessments, and you have repeatedly ruled out autism assessments for children aged 12 and older. How exactly will this assessment service be expanded?

Ms Berry: As Mrs Summerrell has already talked about, it is a challenging space and there are significant workforce shortages in these areas. However, we are not letting that stand in our way. The ACT is a great place to live and work, so we are able to

recruit these services into our system. The funding in the budget to expand the autism spectrum disorder assessment service of \$1.357 million will allow the Child Development Service to recruit four psychologists to continue the autism assessment services for children up to 12 years. I will ask Mrs Summerrell to give any further updates on that.

Mrs Summerrell: I am potentially naively optimistic around the recruitment of these positions. Four psychology positions into a multidisciplinary team is something that I think will attract that profession. There is a great opportunity to build the psychology services through having four clinicians. That is a great number, and we would be able to provide a great wraparound service for children that come into the service.

It is also indicative of the work that we are doing, in an ongoing sense, with our Education colleagues about how we support children, particularly with an autism diagnosis. There are lots of things happening that make those positions attractive to the workforce. I am looking forward to being able, hopefully, to come back and say that that has been successful.

MRS KIKKERT: Thank you. How many families are currently on a wait list for this service? How long are they waiting, on average? And what is the expected impact of expanded assessments on wait lists and wait times?

Mrs Summerrell: Do you want the figures as at now?

MRS KIKKERT: That is correct—yes.

Mrs Summerrell: As at 20 July, there were 167 families waiting for assessment on the autism assessment wait list, and generally the families are waiting 12 to 13 months for an assessment from the point that they are referred to our wait list. To finish the answer to your question around the impact that recruitment will have on that, it is obviously huge. Being able to recruit those four positions and provide additional services will make an enormous difference to that wait list. There was funding, as well, under the Best Start initiative for increased telehealth services for autism assessments. The combination of the two will really increase our capacity to be able to do assessments.

By their very nature, autism assessments are sometimes a lengthy process. I am not suggesting by any means that it will take 12 to 13 months, but a series of observations need to be made in order to get to the diagnosis point. That will always still exist, as well as the need to be referred to the service. Referral pathways in come through a range of ways and, once that referral comes in, there is the series of observations that need to be made under the diagnostic tool, and then assessment occurs.

MRS KIKKERT: Thank you. One final supp please, Chair. Are there 167 families or 167 children?

Mrs Summerrell: There are 167 families on it.

MRS KIKKERT: Do you mind taking on notice, please, the age of the children who are on the wait list?

Mrs Summerrell: Regarding the age, they are all under 12. I can get a breakdown on that. I know that 75 per cent on there are male, but I can get a breakdown of the specific ages for you.

MRS KIKKERT: That is great. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Let us move on to Mr Hanson for his substantive.

MR HANSON: Thank you, Mr Chair. It was reported recently—I think it was in blogs or something—that only 59.3 per cent of early childhood education staff and care staff in the ACT have a relevant formal qualification compared to 76 per cent nationally. I am wondering why that is and what is being done about it.

Ms Berry: Thank you, Mr Hanson. It is a challenging workspace, and one of the issues is in the wages that early childhood educators are paid. Again, the ACT government has very limited ability to address some of those issues. However, we are working very closely with the sector to understand what the challenges are and how we can support early childhood educators—first, to become educators and get those qualifications, but also to be on a career path, which is part of the work in the Set up for Success early childhood strategy. Mr Moysey can provide some more information on that.

Mr Moysey: Indeed. Thanks, Minister. In 2021, there was a national workforce census. We have published a summary of the ACT result in that workforce census so that the community and the sector can see where everyone is. There is a category of below cert III and not specified. If I do the quick figures, it adds up to about 41 per cent. Generally, in the out-of-school hours care we will find that there is a higher turnover of staff. The figure for below cert III in the workforce census is 64 per cent. It is the case that the national level accepts people who are working towards qualifications. There is a series of national provisions in the early childhood education and care services that accept working towards it. In those realms, like out-of-school hours care where there is high turnover, we see a higher proportion. When a snapshot was taken, particularly in the context of 2021, there was a lot of movement in the workforce going on.

There is an opportunity now for the workforce to rebuild and consolidate. We have seen a remarkable shift in the availability of both vocational and tertiary opportunities for people to study. The Australian government's vocational offerings are very welcome and, of course, the ACT government has made a significantly greater investment in tertiary, as well as the ongoing things that have been going on for tertiary.

MR HANSON: Thanks.

THE CHAIR: Minister, for reference I am at *Budget outlook* page 127, and this is in respect to the additional \$2.67 million to redesign the CDS and for the Child Development Service and Children and Young Person Equipment Loan Scheme. Minister, what specific issues or shortfalls is the funded redesign of CDS and the Children and Young Person Equipment Loan Scheme intended to address?

Ms Berry: Thank you, Mr Parton. I will ask Ms Summerrell to provide some more detail on that initiative.

Mrs Summerrell: Thanks. That funding recognises a number of things. Over the past year, the Child Development Service has changed its service model a little bit to meet the need and feedback that we have received. A number of changes have occurred, like I mentioned. One of those is that we have pushed services that the CDS historically offered only out of the Holder building, into the child and family centres so that families can access those services closer to home.

THE CHAIR: How many centres does that involve?

Mrs Summerrell: That involves the centres in Gungahlin, West Belconnen and Tuggeranong, and we still have services running out of Holder. Historically, CDS used to run a drop-in service within those child and family centres, and that was great, but people would come in and have that initial screening and then they would go to Holder for the future of any services they received. Now, after that screening, if further work or intervention is required with a child, the family is offered an appointment at any of our centres or at Holder, wherever it suits them best. In recognising that and how successful that has been, we also have some pilots happening in some of our schools. We are running a speech assessment clinic out of Evatt Primary School this term as well. We are just trying to be agile in how we deliver those services.

In recognition of that and in recognition of the success of that, we want to actually take some time to properly plan what those services look like into the future. You will note in the budget papers that there is reference to the fact that Holder has an ageing building and we need to be mindful of the fact that, as we look to the future, we need to look at how we best utilise and design those services.

THE CHAIR: That is enough from me.

MRS KIKKERT: I have a follow-up question, please, Chair. The redesign is expected to cost \$2.7 million over two years. What specifically will this money be paid for? Is it outside consultants or something else?

Mrs Summerrell: The funding includes staffing positions to look at the service model and to also look at what infrastructure exists across the territory and how we can look at other parts of infrastructure works that are happening across government and utilise our early intervention services in those plans. There is some funding in there also for change management.

MRS KIKKERT: Change management—interesting. When do you expect the redesign process to be complete and then in place?

Mrs Summerrell: As I mentioned, there are parts of the service that really have changed quite a lot recently. I would say that parts of it are already underway. In the scope of what we want to do in terms of looking at how this fits with a range of other things—the child and family network—there is a range of large pieces of work

underway around early intervention. The positions are funded for 2023-24 and 2024-25, so we would be working within that frame.

MRS KIKKERT: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Let us keep moving. Ms Clay.

MS CLAY: Thank you, Chair. Minister, page 16 of the budget shows that enrolments in ACT public preschools is expected to decline next year compared to our target. Can you tell me why that is and whether that is a long-term trend?

Ms Berry: Yes. We talked a little bit about this this week, but we can provide more information.

Ms Efthymiades: Thanks, Minister. Ms Clay, it comes down to the estimated resident population. I think I mentioned that on Wednesday. It is not a surprise to us because there are 500 fewer young people in the early years cohorts that are currently in preschool and were in preschool last year. There were over 300 fewer in last year's cohort, and there are more this year. In analysing the estimated residential population data by age, we can see that there are two more years where those numbers will be low. They are not likely to drop much more than they are now. There is a small number, but the 2022 data suggest that there is an uptick of about 215. We do not know whether that is just a one-off blip or it will turn back up. It is simply the number of age-eligible children that are having the impact there. That is why we made the decision to adjust the target, because there is no point in having a target if there are not enough age-eligible children.

MS CLAY: About 30 per cent of our kids under five are now living in households where their primary language is not English. How are we catering to those kids?

Ms Efthymiades: In our preschools?

MS CLAY: Yes; in our preschools—the under-fives.

Ms Efthymiades: There is very strong support for English as an additional language or dialect in our system and that is localised to where those families are. That is not my particular area. I will hand to Dr Moore to be a little more specific from our corner of the world.

Dr Moore: We have picked this up in the targeted program—the targeted three-year-old initiative—where a lot more children are from different language backgrounds. What we are doing at the moment is looking at how we translate some of the important information for families into those particular languages. We are trying to be responsive to those needs of that early age group. Part of that is about parents—how do we engage parents and how do we give them the information that they need so that they can be partners in their children's education from that early point?

MS CLAY: It must be very difficult to cover the breadth of language groups that we have in the ACT now. How are we going?

Dr Moore: Yes. It is interesting. The ACT has the highest proportion of different language groups. In these programs we are looking for the highest proportions of languages within these programs, and they tend to be different. They tend to be more of the marginalised community groups and languages. It is different. We are certainly not catering to every language. There are translation services that our preschools and early childhood centres make use of as well. Trying to get information in their first language is really important for some of those families.

MS CLAY: Do we tailor that? In different areas of Canberra, we tend to have different language groups that are more prevalent. Are we tailoring that regionally?

Dr Moore: Not so much. What we are doing is looking at the referrals into the three-year-old initiative and then we are looking at the common language groups.

MS CLAY: Okay. Are you measuring how many people are taking up those translation services and whether they are effective?

Dr Moore: We are just in the process of getting the materials translated into language, so we have not actually provided that yet. It is something we are looking to do. The general translation services should be making use of it but we do not hold that data. That would be something that they would have.

MS CLAY: Sorry—that who would have?

Dr Moore: The early childhood services, when they use the translation services. What we are trying to translate at the moment is our resources.

MS CLAY: Will you be closing the loop? Will you be finding out if the materials that you prepare are in fact being used and whether they are actually meeting the need?

Dr Moore: Absolutely. With that program, those children are referred to us, so we know those children, we know their families and we will be making sure that they get access to that material.

MS CLAY: Thank you.

Mr Pettersson: How does this budget support our early childhood education and care workforce?

Ms Berry: That is an important part of our early childhood Set up for Success strategy. I can ask Dr Moore to provide a little more detail on that, particularly around the opportunities that are available to people who want to work in this sector, but also on how we want to work with the sector to uplift the skills and expertise within the system. Dr Moore.

Dr Moore: Thanks, Minister. One of the commitments under Set up for Success is the development of an ACT-specific workforce strategy, which we are working on at the moment. We held a pretty extensive consultation with the sector last year that is informing that work, and the budget has provided funding for some of the key

components to that. One of the components is a comprehensive workforce survey to look at what the workforce capacities, qualifications and needs are. It will be going a little bit deeper than the national picture, although, as Mr Moysey has said, we do know a lot, but it is really about planning for the future and what that workforce will need into the future.

Then there are some really practical investments around a professional learning and resourcing portal so that our educators across the sector have access to curated, quality professional development resources; and that builds on some of the work that we have already put in place around trauma-informed practice and building trauma networks and other specific focus areas such as that. There is funding for a professional learning network. One of the things that we heard through the consultation is that, for this sector, the ability to come together with other early childhood educators and learn from each other and learn from practice is missing, so we are really excited that we will be able to offer that.

We are also partnering with the sector around a suite of investments into quality and qualifications—a training and qualifications uplift. We have our Early Childhood Degree Scholarships Program, and we are also, through this budget, introducing some specific scholarships for our Koori pre-educators to upskill their qualifications in both diploma and degree qualifications.

There is a whole range of other commitments that we are working on with the sector around the development of educator professional standards, which are about recognising career pathways and planning for career pathways, and increasing coaching and mentoring, which is another thing that we heard strongly through the consultation. Many of the educators do not have the time or capacity to attend external training, but having somebody come in, observe practice and provide shoulder-to-shoulder coaching is really valuable to them, so we are investing in that space. There is a range of other specific training around things like cultural integrity, cultural inclusive practice, and tailoring learning for different learning needs. That kind of thing is what we are investing in.

MR PETTERSSON: That sounds like a lot of great work. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Pettersson. I believe this will be the final substantive in this little session. Mrs Kikkert.

MRS KIKKERT: Thank you. Minister, a new priority in this year's budget statement is to move existing services out of the Child Development Service in Holder before the end of life of the building is reached. What did the study funded in the 2021-22 budget conclude about the life of this building?

Ms Berry: Ms Summerrell can provide some information on that for the committee.

Mrs Summerrell: Thanks, Minister. The Child Development Service, as you mentioned, is situated in Holder, in a 50-year-old building, so, not surprisingly, the cost of maintaining and repairing that building is increasing as it ages. The feasibility study looked at the ongoing viability of remaining in an ageing building or, as I mentioned in the answer to my last question, looking at whether there are other ways

to deliver the service that better meet the community's needs, which is why we are further exploring that option.

MRS KIKKERT: Will you be moving the services from Holder to somewhere else? Can you clarify that, please?

Mrs Summerrell: Yes. The Holder building will ultimately reach the end of its life, so we will move services out of Holder once we do this work around what alternative service delivery models look like. It is the intention that services will move out of Holder.

MRS KIKKERT: Do you know when?

Mrs Summerrell: That goes to the funding in relation to your last question. We need to do that work to look at how we actually stage that process, what infrastructure we need to be able to support that and how we can continue to move on the work that we have already done to provide services within communities and closer to where people best access those services. That funding, as I mentioned, is for the next two years while we do that work, with the view that we will have that all done in time for when the building does reach the end of its life.

MRS KIKKERT: Do you have any idea of what that building will be or what it will continue to function as once the services have been moved elsewhere?

Mrs Summerrell: That is not part of the work that I am involved in.

MRS KIKKERT: Alright. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mrs Kikkert. With that, we are done for early childhood development and we will wrap up that first hour. Thanks to all.

Short suspension.

THE CHAIR: In this second session of these hearings of the Select Committee on Estimates we will hear from Minister Berry, this time as Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, and officials.

Today's proceedings are being broadcast live. They are also being transcribed and will be published on the Assembly website. If you take a question on notice, please be emphatic and say, "I will take that on notice".

I would make the point—and I think this was very well exercised in that last hour—that it would be appreciated if people could try to keep their answers succinct and that, if there is information that does not need to be given, do not give it. I know that sometimes it is a fine line to decide what should be and what should not be said, but we do not have a great deal of time and we just want to get through as much as we possibly can.

I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. As we do have some new

witnesses, could I, on a universal basis, get you to confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement and that you agree to it? Excellent. Thank you. As we are not inviting opening statements, we will proceed with questions.

Minister, this year's budget appears to show a drop in FTE in the department from last year. The FTE actual in 2021-22 was 6,792 but the figure this year is 6,780. I know it is not a big drop but it is a drop. Are you able to explain this apparent drop in budgeted FTEs at a time when the entire sector is crying out for more staff?

Ms Berry: Thank you, Mr Parton. I can ask Mr Matthews to provide some detail for the committee.

Mr Matthews: The budget papers report on the actual budget for FTE and the annual report delivers the information on the outcomes. The budget is generally below the outcomes because we do employ additional staff for things like covering maternity leave, long service leave and the like.

So the variation that you see in the budget papers is the difference between the actual and the outcome. The outcome will be reported in the annual report, which is due for publishing in the next few weeks and will exceed the actual outcome from last year. So actual numbers will be higher than our actual numbers last year.

THE CHAIR: All right. There is something that I—and I am sure some others—do not fully understand. As you have outlined, the actual number will end up being higher. If that is the case, how are they to be paid for, because the budget shows that you will be paying fewer staff. So if you indeed end up paying more staff, where does that money come from?

Mr Matthews: This situation has occurred for many years; it is not a new situation. We have a budgeted FTE that is put in the budget papers, which is based on the allocation of funding to schools and to other parts of the directorate, and then we have central funding that we maintain for things that I have just described, and that is reported in terms of the actual FTE. So the funding is there.

The difference between the budget in 2023-24 is that, in future years, we have actually included the additional FTEs that are centrally funded. So that will be included in the estimate, in the actual budget, in the 2023-24 budget papers, and therefore the gap between the budget and the actuals will be smaller from coming years.

THE CHAIR: All right. That clarifies things for me.

MR HANSON: I was just wondering if you were able to provide a little bit more detail around that—probably on notice, to be frank. I presume when you bolt together your FTE it comprises teachers, support staff, admin staff and so on. So there would be a breakdown of what that actual FTE is.

Mr Matthews: Yes.

MR HANSON: Could you provide a snapshot of that breakdown over the past few years, both in terms of what the FTE was for the budget but also what the actual outcome was? Is that doable?

Mr Matthews: Mr Hanson, all of that information is on the public record. Obviously the budget estimates are included in the budget papers every year.

MR HANSON: I do not think the breakdown is.

Mr Matthews: In the annual report every year we report by classifications. We break that down by administrative staff, by school leaders and by teachers. That is reported in the annual report every year.

MR HANSON: All right. So I just need to trawl through the budget and each annual report over the past years to get that comparative?

Mr Matthews: That information is on the public record in that way, and we will report, of course, again on it in our upcoming annual report.

MR HANSON: Is the variance that is occurring this year consistent with normal years? Is that a standard sort of variance?

Mr Matthews: The variation between the budgeted figure and the actuals?

MR HANSON: Yes.

Mr Matthews: Yes, there is always a variation, for the reasons that I have described, and it is consistent with previous years.

MR HANSON: It is?

Mr Matthews: I can make a general global statement that we have more staff this year than we did last year.

MR HANSON: And you have been moving some people from sort of part-time to full-time. Is that right?

Mr Matthews: Mr Hanson, I think you might be referring to the secure work conversion—if you could clarify that.

When we report in the annual report, we report on the FTE equivalent. So that obviously aggregates part-time staff up into full-time equivalent. We also report on—

MR HANSON: Right. So, if you have three people doing a couple of days a week, that all gets wrapped up to sort of saying that that is one person, does it?

Mr Matthews: The next thing I was going to say, Mr Hanson, is that we also report on head count, which is the actual number of individuals that are employed. Both of those figures are available through the annual report every year.

MR HANSON: Thanks.

MS CLAY: Minister, the budget has a new electronic booking system so that the community can access school facilities. Can you tell me how many schools and which schools will be able to be accessed under that?

Ms Berry: Thank you, Ms Clay. Yes, we have funding within Education to improve community access to facilities. That will go to 12 schools to start with. We have not identified the schools yet.

Obviously this builds on the government's commitment to improve community access within our schools, specifically around school sports facilities, which is a commitment that I made after a number of discussions with Sports but also Education, working across those portfolios, and our schools wanting to bring the community in to use these valuable assets outside of their primary purpose, which is for education.

MS CLAY: Is it just to book sports facilities or is to book halls or other non-sports facilities within the schools?

Ms Berry: I think at this stage it is just sports facilities.

Ms Haire: I might ask Mr Matthews to describe the proposed program for the 12 schools, Ms Clay.

Mr Matthews: Thank you, Ms Haire. We have a general approach around community access to our public schools, and there are local hiring arrangements in place for a whole range of sporting and non-sporting groups. The initiative is really looking at how we can start with 12 schools and augment that through an online booking platform and electronic access system.

Each of the schools has different infrastructure. Some of them have stand-alone gyms, for example, or other facilities like theatres that can be accessed independently of the school environment. So, in order to maximise community access, what we want to do is allow booking to occur—so to make that easier for users but also for the school to manage—and also look at how we can support access through things like timed gates, for example, or other infrastructure that allows swipe card access or key access by community hirers to individual spaces.

But we obviously have to take into account the variety of infrastructure that we have across our different schools, where some of the community facilities are very much integrated into the main school infrastructure and some are more discreet or able to be booked and accessed separately.

MS CLAY: Is this replacing a previous electronic booking system, or was it purely manual?

Mr Matthews: It was a very localised booking system—so, yes, mostly manual and done through the school and through the business managers. So each of them would have their own platform. But we want to have a common platform.

We have obviously been talking to a range of the community users, including some of the sporting groups who access multiple schools. The feedback that they have given the government is that they would like a way of being able to consistently get a line of sight of what facilities are available and to book them in terms of their individual needs. So we are just trying to enhance that.

MS CLAY: Yes, sure. I have heard the same problem reported quite a lot. Will you eventually expand this to all schools? Is this just the pilot run before you expand it to everyone?

Mr Matthews: Obviously, we will look at the success of the platform. But, once you have a platform in place, it is able to be scaled to the other sites. But I want to emphasise that we are not just doing an online booking thing; we are also looking at using these 12 schools as a program to look at how we can enhance access more generally. So we are also looking at their infrastructure and seeing whether they need to have any minor upgrades for line marking of their gyms, for example, or other facilities. So we will be taking a holistic approach to those 12 schools.

MS CLAY: Great. I am pleased that we are coming up with some really simple ways to improve access. It is coming on the back of a longstanding policy to fence off a lot of our schools. We are going through this at Aranda at the moment. Aranda is currently unfenced.

There was a government commitment to consult with the community about whether or not to put up a fence, and the consultation seems to be what colour we will put up on the fence rather than whether we have one or not. We have some really good information about why a fence is needed. I think the community was looking for that. But we have got a few unfenced schools, like Weetangera, and then we have some schools that are being fenced.

It is good that we have got a booking system that might help registered groups, community groups, to access. That sounds very sensible. But then there is the case of casual community users of those facilities. For example, kids who want to kick a ball on the oval and people wanting to walk their dogs suddenly will not be able to do that anymore. How are we going to improve access for those people?

Mr Matthews: You raise two important issues. The first question was about the use of designated facilities. So you have got a basketball court; how do you book that? How do you decide who uses, say, an indoor basketball facility?

The general issue around community access to grounds and facilities in our school environments, including outdoor spaces, is the example that is very relevant to Aranda Primary School—I, myself, have been working specifically on this issue. We have been meeting with a whole bunch of stakeholders, including in the past couple of weeks. I have met with the Residents Association, the P&C and the Why This Fence? group and really talking through with them their issues and what they are looking for.

Obviously there is a range of different views in the Aranda community and amongst the Aranda school community about the issue of a fence. We are just trying to manage that conversation well so that everybody does feel heard and also the safety

considerations for children during school hours are prioritised.

The issue that I have heard directly from the stakeholders about the fence is ultimately about after-hours school access—so when can they access those school facilities when school is not operating? One of the things that we have undertaken to do is to apply the community access policy and also introduce timing on the gates.

So that part of the solution that we will end up proposing to the community, as the outcome of this process, will include timed gates, which allow automatic access to those facilities during daylight hours but when the school is not operating. That is something that the community has received well in the conversations that I have been having with them and addresses the questions of access.

MS CLAY: Great. Thank you.

MR PETTERSSON: There was a lot of interest on community day about inclusion coaches. I was hoping you could detail what this role will be and why you are focusing on more in-school supports?

Ms Berry: Thank you, Mr Pettersson, for that question. I am pleased that there was a conversation during the community day around the government's funding for eight inclusion coaches, a senior inclusion coach, and inclusion transition and careers coaches to work specifically within our Tuggeranong schools to start with. This is about a piloting approach, where we are trying to work on new ways to better support public schools, prior to expanding it across the entire network.

The resourcing goes to a suite of professional learning and resources and a sort of more formalised partnership between specialist schools and local schools. This is about sharing that professional expertise and supporting students with complex needs—maybe doing joint activities and collaborations between students and staff from partnered schools.

It is also about implementing planning with schools to ensure that reforms are implemented in a way that meets the needs of schools and school communities, and working to develop and prepare for a new needs-based funding model for students with a disability.

This is the government's commitment to strengthen inclusive education for students with a disability in ACT public schools, through this phased implementation of inclusion coaches. It means that families, young people, teachers and all school staff will get support from experts around a range of matters, including transitions across different years and how to work with young people and their individual and diverse requirements within our mainstream school system. That specialised and expert advice from our specialist schools will be really helpful within our mainstream schools.

I will ask Dr Moore to provide a bit more information that I may not have included. Thank you, Dr Moore.

Dr Moore: Thanks, Minister. I think you covered that pretty well. But I would just

build on the reason why we are focusing on inclusion coaches in particular and the development of the Inclusive Education Strategy, which is coming to a close at the moment.

There has been extensive community consultation but also research. The research really highlights the importance of these specialised roles being school-based and being part of the school leadership team, and really driving not only the cultural change required to strengthen inclusive education but also the practice change and practice support for staff who are dealing with often very complex, challenging issues on the ground.

So it is that expertise, as the minister has explained, and really moving into that universal design for learning approach where we are really planning to meet the needs of all students and then adapting where we need to make sure that we are getting the right fit for each student.

MR PETTERSSON: That is great. Is this a new idea or is it in place in other jurisdictions?

Dr Moore: It is building on what is in place in other jurisdictions in Australia and internationally. We have looked at a range of what other jurisdictions here in Australia are doing, as well as what jurisdictions internationally are doing. Also, the research tells us about what is effective.

There are some challenges in the research because the definition of “inclusion” is varied. So, often it is like comparing apples and oranges. But the research certainly points to the importance of the expertise being needed at the school level and, as I mentioned, being part of the leadership team, and pitching the positions at the right level.

Building off what we have had in the past or what we have got now around disability education coordinator positions within every school, it is about recognising that you need dedicated time to do this work and to do it well. So this funding will really support that for these schools.

MR PETTERSSON: You have indicated that this is going to be rolled out on the south side first. I assume it is going to be evaluated. Best case scenario, when could I expect to see something like this in Gungahlin?

Ms Berry: They will be decisions for a future government and budgets. I think the reason that we have started in Tuggeranong and to phase this approach in is we need to really work closely with the families, with the disability groups and with our schools to understand what the best approach is, how we can implement this policy and what is going to work and then reviewing the approach. If we get it right the first time, then we are less likely to have to go back and fix things up. So that is the idea with the phased-in approach for this.

MR HANSON: How many of these inclusion coaches, in total, will there be? It is phased; so how many a year?

Ms Berry: I think we are getting eight.

MR HANSON: The total is eight?

Ms Haire: The total is eight. I will hand to Dr Moore to explain the phasing.

Dr Moore: In this first phase, there are eight. There is also a senior inclusion coach within the Education Directorate to support these eight; and there is also the inclusion and transition careers coach, who will work with the colleges specifically around those pathways out of school.

At the moment there is no decision on the time frame for phasing. But we are certainly looking at what can we learn from these eight around the quantity that you need in each school site, based on levels of complexity and levels of need and sizes of schools. Then that will form how many—

MR HANSON: I presume that eight is over the term of the budget, or over the next couple of years, or—

Dr Moore: There are eight positions that will commence from next year, and ongoing.

MR HANSON: You have disability coordinators in schools as well. Is that right?

Dr Moore: Disability education coordinators are a position within a school. It is not a dedicated, funded position. It is a position that a person within the school community takes on to provide that coordinated support for students with disability within a school. They have been longstanding positions, and so—

MR HANSON: What is the sort of interaction between the disability education coordinator and the inclusion coaches? Do they work together?

Dr Moore: We are going to be working with the schools in Tuggeranong over the next few months to design how these inclusion coaches work within the schools. The first step is to look at who the disability education coordinators are within these schools and how we can design this inclusion coach model to work with them. It is certainly not to replace them or to make their position null and void; it is really about how these things support, and one of the key things—

MR HANSON: So it augments rather than replaces?

Dr Moore: To complement; that is right. To support them.

MR HANSON: Does an inclusion coach work to a specific school or do they work across a number of schools in an area?

Dr Moore: That is what we are designing with the schools over this next couple of months. We think it could look differently, depending on the complexity need within each school. There could be schools that require that dedicated position full-time to meet those needs or it could be that one inclusion coach actually works between two schools. But, certainly, we would not want to have one inclusion coach working with

a large number of schools.

MR HANSON: So an inclusion coach is a qualified teacher who then has got those specific skills. Do we know what level they will be paid at, or is that yet to be worked out?

Dr Moore: The positions within the budget are at the school leader C level. As I mentioned, the research talks about the importance of them being part of the leadership team. So they are SLC positions, and an SLB position for the senior inclusion coach.

MR HANSON: Other than the inclusion coaches, are there any measures in this budget that are new initiatives to support inclusion, or the coaches are what is in there?

Ms Haire: The minister went through a range of the other elements that are in addition to the eight inclusion coaches and the senior inclusion coach that you have just been talking to Dr Moore about. There is also the inclusion transition and careers coach.

In addition to that, there is the suite of professional learning resources in key areas, such as universal design for learning, managing complex behaviours and understanding neurodiversity.

The minister also mentioned the support for partnerships between specialist and local schools to enable sharing of professional expertise, support for the implementation planning with schools and also the work on a new needs-based funding model.

MR HANSON: When you put all those initiatives together, can you tell me what that amount is? I am happy for you to take it on notice.

Ms Haire: That is the amount that you can see in the budget papers, Mr Hanson. That includes all of those items.

MR HANSON: Okay. Thanks.

MS CLAY: Dr Moore, I think you said that the qualification for the coaches is a teaching qualification. Is that right?

Dr Moore: That is right; school leader C.

MS CLAY: So they will be qualified teachers. They will not be social workers, psychologists or anything else; they will be teachers?

Dr Moore: They have been pitched at school leader C position, so they understand classrooms and they understand the way teaching works. But we are yet to design the model, which will happen over the next few months.

MS CLAY: Great. This conversation is probably an excellent example of what I am about to say. We heard from some stakeholders about this initiative on Monday, and

I think what we got was positive enthusiasm but a bit of befuddlement, because nobody really knew much about it. Who did you consult with when you were working this program up?

Dr Moore: There has been a really extensive consultation around what schools need and what families and students need. In terms of the term “inclusion coach”, that is something that they would not have heard, because what we did is we took all of what we heard and the research and put this forward into the business case process—which, at that point, we cannot talk to them about it anymore, of course, because it is in confidence.

Certainly, once we have an opportunity to go out and speak with them again—and our next disability education reference group meeting is coming up soon—we will be able to unpack how this actually relates to everything that we heard from them, and that really important message we heard: that strengthening inclusive education cannot be about asking our busy staff to do more, because they are already very busy. It is about the systems that they need to be able to do this well and to build that change over time.

We are confident that these positions respond to what we heard. It is just that we need to be able to unpack and explain that to the stakeholders.

MS CLAY: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I thank the minister and officials for your attendance so far. We look forward, enormously, to hearing more after a 15-minute recess.

Hearing suspended from 10.29 am to 10.46 am.

THE CHAIR: Welcome back to the public hearings of estimates 2023-24. In this session, we will continue speaking with Minister Berry and officials. We will go to Mrs Kikkert for a substantive.

MRS KIKKERT: Thank you very much, Chair. Minister, my question is on the new and expanded school, Strathnairn Primary School, on page 25. You stated on 26 October 2020, that construction on the Strathnairn Primary School would begin in the first half of the government’s term. Has construction started on the school yet?

Ms Berry: Mr Matthews?

Mr Matthews: Where we are up to with the Strathnairn project is we have recently completed the procurement process for a head contractor at that particular project and we are in the process of finalising the contract with that head contractor. So construction will commence shortly onsite.

MRS KIKKERT: Okay. Minister, would you consider that a broken election commitment, because you did not construct the Strathnairn Primary School in the first half of the term?

Ms Berry: There definitely have been challenges across the ACT with regard to

infrastructure that has been impacted by construction supply and construction work. Unfortunately, some of our schools have been impacted by those delays, as have a number of other infrastructure programs. Perhaps it might be helpful to talk through the time frames.

Mr Matthews: In relation to Strathnairn, the government obviously funded that project in a previous budget and announced a commencement date in 2025, and that includes a P to 6 primary school and also an early learning centre.

The site for the school is in the Ginninderry development and is subject to all of the planning approvals that are also required as part of that development—state development planning work, as well as environmental studies. That is the process that we have been working through with those relevant authorities.

In the meantime, we have been working on the master planning for the site and doing the preliminary design work, in order for us to be able to hit the ground running once we are ready both with planning approvals and also the contractual arrangements.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, you committed to build a primary school in Strathnairn. It is not built yet and apparently will not be until December 2024, as stated in the budget. If you have not delivered a complete primary school by the election, how would it not be considered a broken election promise?

Ms Berry: Well, Mrs Kikkert, we committed to build a primary school in Strathnairn by 2025. That is the commitment, and it is our intention to meet that commitment.

MRS KIKKERT: Yet you also failed to commit to what you stated—that the construction of the Strathnairn school would be constructed in the first half of the term. We are only a year away from the election.

Minister, how has the procurement of an all-women site management team with women representation in every trade and subcontractor impacted the delivery time line of this school?

Ms Berry: I do not believe it has impacted. I am not sure if Mr Matthews can provide any more information on the process or any other further updates other than what has been provided already.

Mr Matthews: Just very briefly, Minister. Firstly, as an overarching statement, we continue to meet enrolment requirements for that part of the city. The timing of the school will meet the enrolment requirements for the West Belconnen region.

In relation to the women in construction requirements, what I can say, as the delegate for that procurement process, is that we had a highly competitive tender process and we had compliant bidders that were able to address the requirements of the women's action plan and the women in construction policies.

We are working with the successful head contractor to give effect to those arrangements. Obviously, that involves, in some cases, the head contractor doing some recruitment of additional staff but also redeploying staff from other projects. To

date, we are satisfied that the head contractor can meet the requirements and the inclusion of those requirements has not delayed the delivery of the project.

MRS KIKKERT: Okay. How many responses did the government receive from people who matched exactly the gender requirements when you put out an expression of interest?

Mr Matthews: Mrs Kikkert, you are talking about the detail of a procurement process. Obviously, I will not go into all of the details of a procurement process but what I can say is that we had a number of bidders. The way that we do our procurement is a two-stage procurement process. We do an initial request for expressions of interest. We then narrow down to normally two or three proponents, that we do further design work with.

Through both the expression of interest process and then the ultimate decision to appoint the head contractor, we have had compliant bidders or bidders that have been able to explain to us satisfactorily about how they will address those particular elements.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, you said the cost would be approximately \$45 million. The cost in the budget is estimated to be over \$64 million. That is about 38 per cent more than you promised it would be. How is this gross underestimation not a broken election promise, when you said it would be approximately \$45 million?

Ms Berry: Mrs Kikkert, I have referred previously, and this week, to the extraordinary increase in cost due to the supply of construction material. Our school prices and our school builds are one of the ACT government's areas of infrastructure commitments that have been impacted by those increases in costs.

Mr Matthew: The only thing I would add to that, Minister, is that, over the past three or four years, Mrs Kikkert, obviously we have had the COVID period and that has significantly impacted on the delivery of a number of projects and has also increased the price escalation to do with things like material costs and labour.

I think the key point to always make is that, when we go through a procurement, we are going to the market and we are getting a market price. Obviously, within the interests of the territory, we want to get best value for money, but the market price is the market price. It is what the local industry and head contractors are saying that they can build the school for.

After we get real market information—as in the case of Strathnairn—we go back to the budget to get the necessary funding to build the project. So these are figures that come from the bidders for these projects.

MRS KIKKERT: Okay. Is the location for the school locked in—and it is still block 5 of section 37?

Ms Berry: Yes.

MRS KIKKERT: Thank you.

MR HANSON: There are some other projects that have been delayed as well—Taylor and Whitlam. I am happy for you to give us on notice the original date that it was meant to open, the original cost that was budgeted, when it will open and what the cost will be.

I presume that the delays are for the same sorts of reasons that you have explained. Are they? Is there something different or are they consistent with what is happening across the board? Or are there some unique factors in Taylor and Whitlam?

Mr Matthews: Mr Hanson, I have talked about the COVID context—within which most of these projects originated—but there are also some specific site issues with different projects. Of course, that varies as to whether they are a greenfield location or indeed an urban infill location.

In terms of the actual question that you had, do you have a particular school that you wanted that breakdown for?

MR HANSON: There are a number of projects, I suppose. These things are listed in the budget as works in progress. There are new schools but there are also works in progress: a new school in Throsby, places for students at Gold Creek. I do not know quite where we are at with the Campbell Primary modernisation and the expansion of Margaret Hendry.

So what would be useful to know for all of these capital works is: what was the original budget and date for completion, and now what is the delay and the increase in budget? It might be best to do that on notice, given the constraints of time we have got for this hearing. Are you able to provide that to me?

Mr Matthews: Sure. That is mostly based on public information again, Mr Hanson. Obviously, the commencement dates for projects are announced as part of the budget process, and then the original appropriation is announced in the budget and any subsequent appropriations as well.

So again, I do have some of that information available. If you have got a particular project—

MR HANSON: What I am asking you to provide for all of your capital works at the moment—and I am happy to say a figure—above, let us say, \$10 million is: the original budget, the original completion date, what the project was, a brief explanation for the delay and what the new budget and new completion date is.

You would appreciate that trying to drag through every single budget to find where that is and what the delay might be is a difficult piece of work. If you were able to consolidate that as a question on notice, that would be very useful.

Mr Matthews: We can do that. I can take that on notice, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Thank you.

Mr Matthews: The only other quick comment I would make is that not all projects are either delayed or have additional budget. You mentioned the Throsby school. That was always due to start and commence operations in term 1 in 2022. It had a budget of \$43.9 million, and that is exactly what it cost. So there are different examples.

MR HANSON: Yes, and that is great. The problem is that there is this characterisation of, “There are these universal problems because of COVID,” but it seems to affect some and not others. So it is difficult to unpick that. I do not want to spend what could be an hour of our time doing that right now. But if you could provide that on notice that would be very useful.

Mr Matthews: Yes.

MR HANSON: Thanks.

Mr Matthews: So the scope of that is for those over \$10 million, you want announce date, expected completion date and any revised budget information?

MR HANSON: Revised budget and revised completion date.

Mr Matthews: Okay.

MR HANSON: Thanks. And if there is a particular remark that you can say, like “because of” whatever, then that is useful as well—for example, you found a legless lizard or something.

Mr Matthews: Yes. So that actually was an issue with the East Gungahlin site, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: For sure. I get that. I now have questions on teacher retention and teacher recruitment. We have spoken a lot about this and there have been various studies and reviews that have been done. I was just wondering if you could give me an update on how we are progressing with both the retention and recruitment of teachers.

Ms Berry: Thank you, Mr Hanson. I will start with the enterprise bargaining negotiations that we have just completed. I think Mr Matthews will be able to provide some detail on the process following the successful agreement negotiations for the recruitment and retention of teachers.

This goes a long way to ensuring that teachers seek out ACT public schools to work in and that teachers within our schools are respected and have a range of initiatives through the agreement negotiations to improve their workplace, particularly with regard to workload reduction measures. That includes the implementation of the Teacher Shortage Taskforce, which I think is what you are referring to and the recommendations that came out of that.

We have had a further reduction in the face-to-face teaching hours for new educators. We will be centralising the school building services. That will also mean a reduction for the teaching and the school workforce, but it will also mean that the workers in that space will have improved conditions as well as a career pathway, not just within

the building service area but also within the education space. We can show where that has been successful when we insourced the cleaning services within our education system.

I might ask Mr Matthews to take Mr Hanson through some of the work that has happened with regard to the Teacher Shortage Taskforce.

MR HANSON: That would be great—so not just the work that is happening but also the outcomes and what we are actually seeing in terms of tangible effects in the retention rates—five per cent and trickling to three per cent or whatever it might be—and how many new teachers we have actually recruited.

Mr Matthews: There is so much there, Mr Hanson, that we could talk about. The minister obviously talked briefly about the enterprise agreement. That is a key strategy. I will not dwell on that except to say that we recently had an 83 per cent yes vote. It is currently with the Fair Work Commission for ratification and will take effect very shortly. That will give us nation-leading pay for public school teachers and also a range of other commitments to address workload.

The driver of teacher recruitment is pay and conditions, not surprisingly. That is why, through the work of the Teacher Shortage Taskforce, that is exactly what we are focused on.

In terms of vacancies, as of this week, we have currently 111 vacancies in the system, which equates to approximately 96.5 per cent of all positions filled—so a vacancy rate of around 3.5 per cent. Thirty-three of those are permanent vacancies and 78 are temporary vacancies.

Temporary vacancies are caused by a range of factors. We have a very female oriented workforce. So we have people going on maternity leave, long service leave and the like. That is something that generally pumps up throughout the year. Currently, through our various initiatives, we have filled 251 teaching positions since 1 January through to 3 July within the Education Directorate.

We continue to have very active recruitment campaigns. Our next one commences publicly on 7 August. That is very much going to focus on the benefits that have been recently secured through the enterprise agreement in making the ACT a really attractive place to work.

Some of the next steps with implementation of both the Teacher Shortage Taskforce and also the enterprise agreement are around the establishment of the Sustainable Workload Management Committee, which will be a high-level committee from the union and also principals and the Education Directorate executive.

What we are trying to look at there are the drivers of workload for schools—so, literally, how teachers and school leaders spend their time. We are not going to sort of fiddle at the margins, as such, and just look at marginal workload improvement. We are going to focus very much on what the core roles are of school leaders and also teachers, and to make sure that we can privilege and prioritise their time on teaching and learning activities.

If that means that some of the functions that are currently done by school leaders and teachers are either transferred to some other staff in school environments or to the ESO, then that is the other thing that we will be looking at as well. Underneath the Teacher Shortage Taskforce, there are some 20 recommendations that go to a range of different individual measures.

Suffice to say, just on the separation rates—and, again, we report those in our annual report every year—there has been an increase in separations. There was a depression in the number of separations during the COVID period. I cannot speak for other agencies, but I suspect there is a general effect where people have held onto their jobs often through the COVID period and, after the COVID period, they are either moving to retirement or taking other choices. But we are very conscious about the separation rate.

In our Teacher Attraction and Retention Plan, which was tabled by the minister in the Legislative Assembly early this year—and we are committed to report on it annually—we have set ourselves targets for teacher recruitment. We have also, in that plan, made it very clear that retention is a critical part of that strategy. For every teacher that we retain, of course, we do not have to recruit a new one. There is a whole range of interrelated initiatives that I could go further into if you want me to.

MR HANSON: Are the vacancies across the board or is there a trend? Is it in primary school or is it in language teachers or is it just a bit random?

Mr Matthews: That is a very good question because there is a macro and then a more micro view. Again, just to remind everybody, the issue here is a supply problem in terms of the number of teachers. We would recruit more teachers if we could. The issue is that they are not available in the ACT or, indeed, across the country. Minister Berry has been working with national colleagues about increasing the overall supply.

But, again, underneath that, there are some areas—some specialities like languages, for example, and disability education—where there are additional shortages. We work with every one of our school principals and they identify their individual staffing requirements and what they need, both in terms of individual numbers and specialisation, and we act to meet those through recruitment strategies.

MR HANSON: I have asked the minister about this in question time. There is a letter from an ACT principal who has stated openly that normal classes could not be conducted and high school students are made to spend their time playing boardgames or watching videos.

Is the impact of what you are saying in terms of the teacher shortage playing out like that in other schools? Are we seeing that classes are being amalgamated or classes are basically been told to go away and watch a video and teaching not occurring? How often is that playing out?

Mr Matthews: Before my colleagues talk about the operational elements of that, I would again say that 96.5 per cent of positions are filled and we are a growing system, so we have more staff as well.

Clearly, where there are staff shortages, that does cause challenges for the school. Sometimes they are just very short-term staff availability issues and other times they have made adjustments to the way that they have offered their curriculum or run their timetable, which will reflect their staffing profile. But the day-to-day nature of that is best for my colleagues to—

MR HANSON: Is that data captured in terms of where normal classes have to be modified—either classes combined or classes not actually being taught but being told to go watch a video or that type of thing? Is that data captured across the system or is that managed at a school level?

Ms Haire: Mr Hanson, I will hand you over to Mr Mark Huxley in a moment. But one of the things that we have done since the onset of the pandemic is work extremely closely with our schools, each day at times, in relation to staff availability.

As Mr Matthews pointed out, there is a distinction between overall vacancies and recruitment and the day-to-day issue of staff availability. The overall supply of teachers is, of course, a function of the Australian and international teaching shortage and the issues that are being dealt with at a structural level through the education ministers, through reforms to initial teacher education and a range of other strategies that have been agreed nationally.

The day-to-day issue of staffing availability also relates to some of the issues we discussed earlier in the early childhood session, which is about the impact of seasonal illnesses and also COVID and the increasing focus on people not coming to work if they have any kind of symptoms.

At an operational level, Mr Huxley, as the head of that area, is dealing with both of those issues. We have developed a strategy to support schools to plan for and manage, to ensure that we do have continuity of learning. Our focus at all times has been for children to continue to receive their education even where there is an impact, for example, from seasonal illnesses.

I will pass to Mr Huxley to explain how we work on that if that is where you would like to go.

MR HANSON: No; we have talked about some of that stuff before. I do note that this is a bit of an ongoing issue. There is always going to be seasonal illnesses and other factors and some staff will be away. Let us say the FTE for a school is 50. Has someone actually done a review to say, “There is always going to be a percentage of teachers away. Do we actually have enough FTE in each school to manage that?” Have we gone back and said, “Well, in actual fact, the FTE for a school needs to be increased, because otherwise you are always trying to sort of crisis manage; whereas, if you increased the FTE allocation, you would not have to continually crisis manage those staff absences”? Has there been a review of that sort?

Ms Haire: We have had the Teacher Shortage Taskforce, as we have already discussed, Mr Hanson. That issue that you described was a very specific focus of the task force. We then made subsequent changes to the way we support schools to

manage their budgets for exactly the purpose that you have described.

I will ask Mr Matthews to describe the concept of inbuilt relief, which is one of the recommendations of the Teacher Shortage Taskforce.

Mr Matthews: We do fund schools on the basis of a ratio, from memory, of 13.3 to every student. The RoGS data also reports on the numbers of FTEs in schools. So there is some redundancy built in to the staffing model. It is something that we are watching extremely closely. Obviously, when we have much higher levels of leave than expected, that staffing model definitely comes under stress.

MR HANSON: So it is 13 point?

Mr Matthews: Three. One staff member for every 13.3 students is the ratio, and I believe—I could look in the RoGS data—we are, if not equal, then close to the top of the country on that in terms of ratios. But the pressure is real and it is important we do acknowledge that in terms of all of the pressures coming together that Ms Haire has also talked about.

One of the things that we have tried to do from the school budgeting perspective this year is to encourage schools to have in-built relief, which was a recommendation from the Teacher Shortage Taskforce. So rather than rely on casual staff on the day when there is a staff absence, to actually reward and support schools to over-recruit and to have additional floating staff that can be used to address any unplanned leave requirements.

We are still working through with our schools about the full prevalence of that and working through the budget issues around that. We have agreed that we will fund the shortfall between a casual staff member and a full-time staff member, if a school wants to put on that staff member to do that in-built relief.

These are some of the structural changes to the workforce. Obviously we need to ensure that supply of labour. Many casual teachers do not want to come on staff, as such. We would offer them a job if they were interested in doing so. We do still use casual teachers but, wherever possible, if schools can have that in-built relief model, it is going to help them manage some of those ups and downs.

MR HANSON: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I might supp on that briefly. Mr Hanson would be aware—because I certainly discussed it with his office—that I had heard reports of schools just not having enough staff in the current term to effectively provide for existing students—in line with the suggestion from that principal that Mr Hanson referred to earlier.

Minister, are there or are there not sufficient teachers in the system right now to meet the full formal educational needs for current students? Further to that, can you guarantee as minister, that there will be enough teachers next year and in this budget so that students can return to their normal curriculum next year?

Ms Berry: Do you have anything further to add, Mr Matthews?

Mr Matthews: The only very quick answer I can give to that is that, if you look at the budget papers, the ACT government continues to fully fund our schools above the student resource standards. We do have the best funded public schools in Australia. So there is sufficient budget funding for staff.

The question, as we have talked about, is the supply of staff and also the availability of staff for all of the different factors that are beyond the immediate control of the Education Directorate.

Again, we have lots of mums that work for us with sick kids, and we have said to those mums, “Do not come to work if your kids are sick or you are unwell.” That has increased our level of unplanned leave, and that is the main variable that we continue to work with. But the budget funding is there to fully fund all of our schools.

THE CHAIR: But the short answer would be that you cannot guarantee that?

Ms Berry: I think that is a bit of a hypothetical, given that we do not know what is going to happen next year. But what we are all doing across the country—

THE CHAIR: Ultimately the forward estimates are a hypothetical, though, are they not, really?

Ms Berry: I am talking about the teaching workforce specifically and about the kind of unknown leave that we have been talking about here, particularly with regard to teachers or members of their family becoming unwell and having to take leave.

Certainly what we have done here in the ACT is made sure that we have some nation-leading wages and conditions for teachers so that we have somewhere that people actually want to come to and work, and we have seen a positive response to that already.

I gave a speech at a literacy conference a month or two ago, where I outlined some of the agreement negotiations and the outcomes that we had been able to negotiate with the Australian Education Union for the teaching and school principal workforce in the ACT. The Education Directorate were there with a recruitment table, and I understand that there was positive feedback and a number of people indicated that they were willing to investigate moving to and working in the ACT.

That is just us, but this is a national issue and that is why we are working on it nationally. We are doing what we can. We have done our agreement negotiations. We are working closely with the union and our schools around workload reduction. One of the most important things that teachers have talked with us about is that they need time to plan and deliver classes and to enable that we need to reduce the workload—which I guess has crept up on them through some of the community expectations of what a teacher does now.

We have also taken that conversation to a national level: what are our expectations as a community of teachers and school principals? What are states and territories across the country doing to address that community expectation and return teachers to doing

what they have been trained to do, which is to provide an education to our young people?

That is, I guess, addressed in some of the other budget initiatives that we have put in place. The inclusion coaches is an example of that, where we are trying to reduce the workload or remove that work that has started to creep into a teacher's workload and put it into more specialised areas so that teachers can concentrate on teaching.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Let us move on to the confronting and unfortunate topic of teacher violence. Violence in schools, particularly against teachers and principals is at unacceptable levels.

Ms Berry: Yes; I was going to say violence against teachers.

THE CHAIR: I am not talking about teachers having a punch-on between themselves.

The Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey 2022 data, cited as one of the most comprehensive longitudinal datasets of school leader health and wellbeing in the world, found not only that violence in schools is a problem nationwide but also that the ACT is worse than other jurisdictions, with 75.6 per cent of school leaders having faced threats of violence in the ACT, against a national average of 48.8 per cent; 73.2 per cent having faced actual physical violence in the ACT—and if we balance that against Victoria, for argument's sake, we are sitting at 73.2 per cent and Victoria is at 31; and . 80.5 per cent said the violence was from students.

ACU investigator and former principal, Dr Paul Kidson, said that the ACT was “significantly out of step with the rest of the nation” and a “strong intervention” was needed. He further said:

... in no other environment should we expect these things to be acceptable and we don't and shouldn't expect them to be acceptable within schools. Those who are responsible for the governance of education in the ACT have got some really worrying evidence that they need to take very seriously.

That is very sobering stuff. Minister, what is the current rate of violence in ACT schools? Is there any data that anyone can share with me today?

Ms Berry: Ms McMahon might be able to provide some information about some of the things that we have been working on with the education union around the Safe@School Taskforce and what we are doing to address these very serious and very confronting issues within our school communities.

Again, I go back to the inclusion coaches and some of the other initiatives that we have made in this budget which will go towards addressing some of these issues as well. But I might ask Ms McMahon to provide more information.

Ms McMahon: Thanks, Minister. Certainly, we do experience rates of occupational violence in our schools. Schools are a subset of society, and we have seen an increasing range of stressors in our community post the pandemic and I think we see

that in our schools.

Violence is not acceptable in our schools, and we are working really hard to change some of the cultures that have become apparent in our schools. We have increased our reporting culture, which is a really big determinant for understanding the problem and therefore working out a solution. We have really encouraged our staff members to report any form of violence that they experience, whether that is a parent who could be sending them five emails at 9 o'clock at night or whether it is a small child who has kicked them in the shins or a child who has sworn at them.

Any form of those types of incidents are reported. They are also reported by multiple people for the same incident because more people could have witnessed it. Part of our reporting culture is not just the people who are suffering from that occupational violence but also those who witness occupational violence.

THE CHAIR: Ms McMahon, I appreciate this explanation; I really do. With the greatest of respect, the question was: what is the current rate of violence in ACT schools? Are you able to give me any sense of trends? I take on board the reporting culture and that that explanation is in part, I guess, going to reflect on the numbers. But is there any data that be shared with us today?

Ms Berry: There is some data that can be shared today with the committee, Mr Parton. During the period 1 January 2023 to 27 June 2023, there were 4,797 distinct risk reports submitted by 1,488 individual staff members that have experienced occupational violence or been impacted by student behaviours, which includes the descriptions that Ms McMahon gave around witnesses to that kind of behaviour, student-on-student violence and other issues. There were 4,906 reports triaged and incident reporting officers where students were related was 1,296; 337 were parent or other related; and 192 were individual parents or others. This data is captured by the Occupational Violence—

Ms McMahon: It is from the Occupational and Complex Case Management Team. Minister, I might just explain some of that data as well.

THE CHAIR: I guess the biggest explanation I am looking for is a year-by-year, because on their own it is difficult to get a context on them without a comparison of a year-by-year situation.

Ms Berry: We can probably take that on notice.

THE CHAIR: That might be best. I think the information that you have got is really important, but I am also mindful of just getting through. Minister, I just want to get to the question of why the rate of all violence in schools in the ACT is so much higher than the national average. I am sure you are just going to tell me that it is about the reporting culture, but there has to be more than that.

Ms Berry: I am going to tell you it is an increase and improvement in the reporting culture, because there was a significant jump when we started working with our schools about reporting these incidents. It was quite extraordinary, the jump between previously doing this work with our school communities and reporting and then when

we started improving on this culture of reporting.

We cannot address the issues unless we understand and know about them. They are very serious, and we are committed to working with our schools. That is why we have the Safe@School Taskforce set up to address the issues within our school communities.

But a reporting culture is a significant part of the increase in the number of cases that we know about. The other part to it is, as Ms McMahon said—and we are experiencing this across the board in our community—heightened levels of anxiety due to the long tail of COVID, and that is playing out in our schools as well.

THE CHAIR: A number of students from Calwell High communicate with me on a social media platform which is banned on government devices. So I get a fair bit of feedback from them. I just wanted to ask you, Minister, whether you are able to give any update on the situation at Calwell High.

Ms Berry: In Calwell there has been a great improvement as far as the school culture is concerned. I am actually going out and visiting the school soon. There has been significant work within that school community, both with the school teachers and school principal but also with the parents and young people, to make an improvement in the culture out there.

The feedback that I have been hearing is that there has been a significant improvement in the school culture and the positiveness that people are feeling around that school. There is still work to do, and nobody denies that. I might ask Mr Huxley to provide an update on what has been happening out there.

THE CHAIR: Excellent.

Mr Huxley: Thank you, Minister. As the minister said, we have seen a significant improvement in Calwell High School at the back end of 2022 and in 2023. We have seen a significant reduction in minor and major incidents over that period of time, and the positive events engagement of students is up across the board.

We have had a strong implementation of the Positive Behaviours for Learning Program at Calwell High School. That is having a significant impact on that as one of the drivers. The school has moved to adjust the timetable to really focus on larger blocks of time for learning and engagement and minimising the disruption of movement across the school on a daily basis.

Additional executive staff have been in place at the school. They have established a really strong engagement with student voice. There is a committee driven with students to focus on how the school is going. So there is a real strong engagement on the reforms and the work at the school by school staff and school leaders with students. That is really paying dividends. The students are feeling more engaged in the process and more informing the changes that are happening at the school. There is greater agency engagement and ownership as a result of that by students at the school.

They have also strengthened the range of flexible options for significantly complex

students at the school—so really personalised programs of support, including some on-country time at Birrigai and other community engagements as well. There has been a real focus on what are the needs of the students and actually personalising the response, engaging the students and also obviously looking at the whole-school implementation of the Positive Behaviours for Learning Program.

It is definitely on the right trajectory. As the minister says, there is always further work to do.

MR HANSON: Has the Safe@School Taskforce provided any recommendations to government?

Ms Haire: Mr Hanson, I will pass over to Ms McMahon. As you would know, the Safe@School Taskforce has been extended by a year through the recent budget. Ms McMahon can talk to you about the program of work, which included a rapid review, the results of which have just been finalised. I should mention that the task force is an internal function. So it is part of the directorate; it is not external.

MR HANSON: Does it not have external members on it?

Ms Haire: It has an external advisory body, which comprises partners including the Australian Education Union, but the task force itself is a task force internal to the directorate.

MR HANSON: I presume that, even though it is an internal task force, it would provide recommendations of actions, changes to policy or, you know, “these initiatives are required,” and so on, would it not?

Ms Haire: Yes. Ms McMahon will describe to you the outcomes of the review that we have done with seven recommendations, which the directorate has accepted and the task force is now implementing those recommendations.

Ms McMahon: Seven recommendations came from the rapid review, all of which we have either commenced or are about to commence, and some of them we have completed. The first recommendation was to establish an overarching safety and wellbeing strategy for all of our schools in our directorate which will have the components of safety compliance, leadership and performance.

The second recommendation was to ensure that we had an appropriate service delivery model that is ensuring that we have the structures in place to be able to clearly define those roles and responsibilities for our schools and for the education support office in the services that we will be providing to our schools.

The third recommendation was around risk management. That is the one that we have just about completed. That was to develop a comprehensive WHS risk management framework that included comprehensive and fit-for-purpose policies and procedures, with guidance for schools. We have been working really hard with our schools to ensure that the risk management tools and the understanding of that process around risk management is fully understood and supported with those new policies.

Aligned to that is to make sure that we have appropriate psychosocial risk management. That is about developing a framework for psychosocial safety in our schools and to address any psychosocial hazards. That is a new sort of terminology for some of our schools. The work that they do within that psychosocial safety realm is familiar to them but packaging it up as a framework will be new for them. So that is one of our bigger pieces of work.

Recommendation 5, which we have just about completed as well, was to update our incident management notification and response system. That is about ensuring we have a really clear framework around incident management right through to emergency management. We have been doing lots of work in that space, and I am really pleased with the outcomes for that. We are just about to release some of that work out to our schools.

The sixth recommendation was to improve information, induction and training. We have been working in a range of different ways with that and have done a really big safety culture uplift with our schools. All of our school principals have undertaken due diligence training and all of our business managers have done due diligence and safety culture leadership work. Our principals are about to undertake more safety culture work.

We have trained all of our HSRs, and we have been able to develop up HSR training that is specific to the education context rather than our HSRs going out to broader industry-type training. We have done an in-house version of that with an expert for both five-day training and one-day training. Every HSR—and there are over 100 of them in our system—have had that training.

We know that everybody is really busy at the moment and we know that training is really difficult to do. So we are working on developing up a system of safety culture leadership videos, where we utilise experts in the field on particular topics, along with our principals in our school setting. We do short, sharp, shiny videos that have supporting documentation with them that allow principals and business managers to upskill their knowledge and then share that with their staff in a really consumable way.

The seventh recommendation is about measurement and evaluation and making sure that we have really good lesson framework and that we are able to monitor and track what we have been doing so that we can see the improvements that are happening.

MR HANSON: Is this review publicly available?

Ms McMahon: The recommendations were published last week or the week before. They are up online.

MR HANSON: Okay.

Ms McMahon: Yes. There is more detail in that that you can have a look at online.

MR HANSON: I will track them down. Was there any work done on suspension policies? Is that working the way it should, or was that part of the review?

Ms McMahon: It was not part of the review, no. There was a recommendation to undertake a review into OV, and we are in the process of securing a company to do that at the moment. So that is ongoing work of the task force as well.

MR HANSON: Right. Was there any feedback from schools about the suspension policy in terms of whether it is—

Ms McMahon: No; that has been through different process.

MR HANSON: A different process; okay. Is there a report on the number of times that police have been called to schools?

Ms McMahon: There is not a report on the number of times that police have been called to schools. We have been working really closely with ACT Policing and we are just in the process of signing a memorandum of understanding.

MR HANSON: Do you capture that data, though? You do not have an analysis of—

Ms McMahon: We would capture that data through our incident management system.

MR HANSON: You do?

Ms McMahon: Yes.

MR HANSON: Could you provide on notice how many times in various reporting periods—I do not know how you report it, annually or financial year or annual report on six-monthly—

Ms McMahon: What would you like?

MR HANSON: Could you provide an update on that, please?

Ms McMahon: Yes. We can provide an update, but probably a time frame would be really useful.

MR HANSON: Over the last couple of years would be interesting. I just want to get a sense of it.

Ms McMahon: We have been working really closely with the AFP. ACT Policing have spent a lot of time with our principals in building those relationships between our schools and the local station and the person who is responsible in the local station in a way not only to respond at a most critical time but also to seek advice from ACT Policing and to build our skills in incident and scenario responses. It has been a very productive working relationship that we have been able to establish.

MR HANSON: Thank you.

Ms Berry: I would just add that the Chief Minister and ACT government announced a campaign around violence against public servants.

THE CHAIR: Applicable.

Ms Berry: So, obviously, education will be part of that campaign and will be developing education specific material. There will obviously be advertising throughout our schools and we are working with our schools on what that material will look like, so that it is specific and appropriate for our school communities.

THE CHAIR: Excellent.

MS CLAY: Minister, I just want to have a bit of a check-in on climate change, mitigation and adaptation for our schools. We have just had announcements of zero emissions upgrades for some of our schools. Which schools are getting those?

Ms Berry: Mr Mathews?

Mr Matthews: Ms Clay, I will invite my colleague John Nakkam to see if he has any information to hand. But generally we report on our climate change performance in our annual report. We are required under the annual report directions to report on our emissions, for example.

Obviously, our new school builds are all zero-net emission schools, and we are retrofitting existing infrastructure. In terms of the actual detail you looking for, is that information on that retrofitting work?

MS CLAY: The retrofitting, yes. I know about the new schools.

Mr Matthews: Okay.

MS CLAY: I will tell you my next question, so whoever is going to answer it can start prepping.

Mr Matthews: Okay.

MS CLAY: We had a bit of a chat yesterday with the sports and rec portfolio about adaptation for climate change, and it turned out that there was no centralised adaptation plan.

Ms Berry: Well, there is in the sports strategy. Climate change is referred to in the strategy, because it was one of the issues that was raised by the sector. In our schools, we had funding in previous years to provide shades and extra shade sails, extra plantings of trees to provide shade, and various other initiatives just after the bushfires I think it was, or just before the bush fires, when it was particularly warm.

We are always acting on ensuring that our schools can be adapted as much as they can be, as some of them are quite old structures. But we do that work not just within the Education Directorate but also with the Minister for Environment and the Minister for Climate Change as well and various funding that comes in that space to support schools to adapt.

MS CLAY: I heard different evidence yesterday—though maybe I have misheard. I

heard that the sports and rec portfolio did not have any kind of centrally coordinated climate adaptation—

Ms Berry: It is included in the strategy. It probably was not made clear.

MS CLAY: No, it was not made clear yesterday, so that is greatly reassuring. Can you tell me where the centrally coordinated climate change adaptation strategy is for schools facilities as well?

Mr Matthews: I will hand over to my colleague John Nakkan. We have a sustainability team in our infrastructure and capital works branch. That is very much integrated into our general asset management approach. We have sustainability experts working alongside our other staff that are doing our asset management and new builds. They do a lot of individual engagement with school principals as well, around individual sites—for example, with things like the solar feed-in tariffs, how the profit or the income that is generated through those activities is reinvested into climate activities within schools. That is how we manage it within the directorate, but I will go to Mr Nakkan to add any further detail.

Mr Nakkan: On climate adaptation, adding to what David said, part of our team also works closely with schools about some resilience measures, like greening schools and planting more trees. Part of our roof replacement program is a component of that. Obviously, when we replace a school roof, as well as the structural improvements, we also get a significant thermal improvement. We install shade sails across schools. We have had that program running for the last few years. The basketball courts and the assembly play areas have had a large investment in shade structures across schools.

On the movement away from gas in schools, we have had an electrification program running for the last three years in schools, mainly for the heating systems. We have removed gas boilers at Melba secondary school, Hawker College, Wanniasa Hills and Latham Primary, and we are currently in works at Red Hill Primary and Forrest Primary School.

MS CLAY: You have Weetangera Primary on the list, too, I believe.

Mr Nakkan: Weetangera Primary forms part of the whole-of-government approach to electrification, so that is in the coming program. That is managed at a whole-of-government level, delivered by Major Projects Canberra. Obviously, we are a key stakeholder in that, and we are working with them on the development of that, but it is a program that is external to Education.

MS CLAY: I have just learnt something. Are there two separate programs for electrification and removing gas?

Mr Nakkan: Yes. Education, independently of the new initiative, has been in that space for the last three or so years.

MS CLAY: Where would I find the latest up-to-date information on both programs, so that I can get a sense of how it works together?

Mr Nakkan: The whole-of-government program was only in the current budget, so it is currently ramping up. There will not be a lot of information on that, other than some high-level budget information.

MS CLAY: You are not able to tell me about the whole-of-government program, because it is not your program?

Mr Nakkan: Correct.

Mr Matthews: That is correct. Obviously, we are not responsible for the program, but the Education Directorate, as part of its own climate targets, have been working on this for a number of years. Of course, we are working in coordination with other agencies to make sure that we have supplementary initiatives. This has been an own-initiated activity within the Education Directorate, within the broad climate strategy of the ACT government.

MS CLAY: Have the Climate Council, the commissioner for the environment or anybody reviewed our adaptation measures? It is not so much about mitigation or reducing our emissions; we are progressing quite well on that front. It is about our adaptation measures regarding increasing heat and smoke events and less water—adaptation to a changing environment. Has anyone who is not in the schools portfolio reviewed that recently?

Mr Matthews: We definitely take expert advice, but I can take the question on notice, if you want to know.

MS CLAY: I do not have a question on notice. I am interested in whether somebody who is an expert in the field has taken a look at what you are doing and said, “Yes, you are progressing in the right way,” or “No, this is too slow, we’re going to get into trouble here”?

Mr Nakkan: The short answer to that is no, we have not had an external review of those programs. I note that we do have experts in-house and we do engage industry experts and consultants to assist us with our delivery.

MS CLAY: Minister, I know it is a different session and a different portfolio, but I would encourage you to review yesterday’s evidence. If we were misinformed, we would love to get something on notice about that, because I have certainly taken away a very different recollection of that session than you have.

Ms Berry: I will have a look at the strategy right now. I can correct the record if I have misled the committee.

MS CLAY: It might be best for you to look at the transcript and come back to us if we have heard something incorrectly.

THE CHAIR: I think we will keep moving if we can, Minister, because I know that Mr Pettersson is champing at the bit to hit us with a substantive.

MR PETERSSON: I am glad my enthusiasm is evident! Minister, why does

Gungahlin need a second college?

Ms Berry: Because there are more students, Mr Pettersson. That is the very short answer. Gungahlin College is experiencing an increase in the number of students attending there. The school is working well and we have good and positive feedback from students and young people who attend that college. It provides really great opportunities for the young people who work there, but we are running out of room; so we need to build another college. Mr Matthews can provide some information about the process for a new college in Gungahlin.

Mr Matthews: Obviously, our general demand analysis around enrolment projections determines where we make those investments. In particular, with Gungahlin College, Mr Pettersson, we have been monitoring enrolments at that school very closely, for the last five or six years in particular. We have continued to be able to enrol all students in their local college that wish to attend that college. We have been continuing to work with the principal of the school. The minister and I recently made a visit to the school and met with the principal and the P & C to make sure that there is adequate infrastructure available at that college whilst the second college is constructed.

Most of the other regions of Canberra have two colleges, with the exception of Belconnen, which I believe has three. The second college in Gungahlin will provide that general secondary school infrastructure. The fact that it will be located at Nicholls will give it a different priority enrolment area that draws students from Gold Creek senior school and from schools in that part of the Gungahlin region. We have done the initial work around the site selection and we have identified that it will neighbour the secondary school at Gold Creek. We are obviously well progressed with the initial master planning work and will be working towards delivering that college by the end of the decade.

MR PETTERSSON: Can someone speak to the enrolment pressures that Gungahlin College might experience whilst we wait for the construction of the new second college?

Mr Matthews: The enrolment pressures at Gungahlin College are pretty much the same that they have experienced for the past few years. They are essentially full or close to full. Every year, depending on the student cohort and their particular curriculum preferences, we check that we have sufficient classroom and other spaces for the college to operate effectively. We have been advised by the school principal, and we are confident, that there is sufficient infrastructure in place for the 2023 school year.

We have also made a decision to introduce some additional demountables and relocatable learning spaces in the college for next year, which we believe will buffer the college against any increases in enrolment over the next couple of years. We are also taking the opportunity to repurpose some of the other learning spaces in the college as well as doing some refurbishments around the college library that abuts the public library in Gungahlin.

In summary, we are continuing to work very closely with the Gungahlin College

community and school leadership to make sure that they can continue to meet enrolment demand until the second college comes online.

MR PETTERSSON: I do not expect you to be too specific, but what are the broad time lines for design and construction for the second college?

Mr Matthews: Those time lines will be finalised after we have completed the planning and design work and gone through the procurement process. The announcement in the budget papers is that it will be by the end of the decade. Of course, that time line will be firmed up once we have reached the stage of actually undertaking the procurement, and we will be able to give the construction program which will link to an opening date for that college.

MR PETTERSSON: What facilities would you hope to deliver in a new college?

Mr Matthews: It will be an amazing new college in Gungahlin. It will have a whole range of facilities which are designed to make it an attractive destination for students in that part of the city. Obviously, we want to make sure that the full range of curriculum offering for both tertiary and non-tertiary packages is facilitated. We also want to make sure that the school can be designed in an inclusive and accessible way so that all students can attend that college, including students with mobility issues.

We are very confident that we are going to apply the learnings that we have undertaken from not only our recent primary school constructions but the recent construction at east Gungahlin. It is our first high school that we have built with our EDIS, our Education Directorate infrastructure specifications. We will be applying those specifications to the second college for the first time, which is why we need a good amount of time to finish that design work and roll that out in terms of a construction program. We are very confident that the second Gungahlin college will provide the most modern and attractive school infrastructure that we will have built until that time.

MR PETTERSSON: Thank you. It is very exciting.

Ms Berry: It will, of course, be a net zero emissions school, as are all of our new schools. On the question, Ms Clay, that you asked about the CBR Next Move strategy and climate adaptation, it is referred to on page 12 of the strategy.

MR HANSON: My questions are in the area of educational outcomes, in particular literacy. There have been a couple of reports out lately, the Equity Economics report that was released, that you may be aware of, and some of the reports and work done by the ACT Alliance for Evidence-Based Education. I will go to some of that. That report shows 30 per cent of 15-year-old students in the ACT fall below the Australian proficiency benchmark for reading in PISA testing. Literacy levels in the ACT have fallen over the past 20 years and the percentage of low performers has increased while the percentage of high performers has decreased; and last year one in five year 9 students in the ACT were at or below the NAPLAN national minimum standard for reading, which means that they are operating at year 6 level. I notice that NAPLAN results are listed as being in “abeyance”. Can you explain what that means?

Ms Berry: I can. Is that the question?

MR HANSON: There are a series of questions. I can wait for a little while and you can consolidate your response, if you want.

Ms Berry: It would be helpful if you could ask the question first.

MR HANSON: I want to know what “abeyance” means and why it is in abeyance.

Ms Berry: Yes, we can explain that.

MR HANSON: Why literacy has fallen—

Ms Berry: Can we start with the first one?

MR HANSON: Yes.

Ms Berry: It would be helpful if I can direct the questions to the—

MR HANSON: The first question I have is: why is NAPLAN in abeyance and what does that mean?

Ms Berry: Yes, we can explain that. I will start with Ms Haire.

Ms Haire: I will pass to Ms Efthymiades to explain the abeyance of some of our performance measures.

Ms Efthymiades: Mr Hanson, the ministers collectively, nationally, made an agreement to change to a new NAPLAN scale as of 2023. In fact every jurisdiction in Australia uses NAPLAN. We all use it in different ways in terms of our public accountability. But every jurisdiction uses NAPLAN; therefore everyone is in abeyance because that new scale resets. Now that everyone is online, it is a different kind of scale. I heard the head of ACARA describe it as moving from a ruler that measures in inches to a laser measurement tool that can measure in millimetres.

Now that we are online, students are presented with items and, depending on how they respond to the first set of items, they either get harder items next time, similar items next time or easier items. The test can steer them to where their level of achievement is, which means we get a much more accurate measure of their achievement from the test. It is not accounting for the fact that not every student engages with the test as strongly as each other, but we do overall get more accurate measures.

MR HANSON: When does that new testing regime roll out?

Ms Efthymiades: The scale is in the process of being finalised based on the tests that occurred earlier this year. 2023 was the year of the new scale commitment and it is in the process of being finalised now.

MR HANSON: Will it still measure the same year levels?

Ms Efthymiades: Yes. The year levels are still the same. All the test domains are still the same. What is different is the scale and the standards. You may have seen some recent media which made families aware that the reporting scale that will be in individual student reports this year—and those reports are about to go out—will be different. Before we only had a national minimum standard. That is all we have had since the late 90s. Now we have a set of standards that are called proficiency standards, and there are four.

The core message is that this scale actually sets higher standards that we can then hold ourselves to rather than focusing on lower standards. This is a national phenomenon, to be honest. Performance of the top kids is less evident, and that can wane because people are focusing on the minimum standards. This suite of standards, which have been nationally agreed but are just being finalised, will really strengthen that and give us greater insights into higher levels of achievement and we will be able to report on those.

What it means, though—and it is a pretty hard conversation, and ministers talked about this a lot—is that everyone has to change. With the cut-over between 2022 and 2023, there is no comparability. It is a totally new set of standards and scale. Everyone has to reset, and that is why the indicators are in abeyance.

The good news is that you will remember, with the intensity of the pandemic in 2020, that NAPLAN did not proceed, so we had no NAPLAN data whatsoever. That impacted us then. It has some impact on our measures this year because the students who sat NAPLAN in 2022 did not have a base in 2020, so we have not been able to report again this year. This is not like that, though. The new scale simply means we will have a new baseline from 2023; but, for 2023, we will be able to report an equity measure. We just have to be able to reset it once the scale has been completely finalised.

MR HANSON: What about the decline in PISA? What is happening there?

Ms Efthymiades: There seems to be some conflation between what is a minimum standard and what is a proficient standard. The 70 per cent that you referred to, I am almost certain, is about the national proficiency standard in PISA, which is actually a challenging but reasonable level. It is not a minimum.

Nationally, in PISA 2018, 59 per cent of students met that standard of challenging but reasonable. Seventy per cent in the ACT met it. We are considerably higher in that regard. Also, the ACT was the only jurisdiction to buck a national trend of PISA 2018 being lower than the previous assessment in 2015. Our achievement went up.

In some of the communication, including some of the media around that, there has been a conflation between what is a minimum basic functioning standard like the national minimum standard versus a proficiency standard which is much higher.

MR HANSON: The ACT Alliance for Evidence-Based Education, who you would be aware of—I do not know whether you have met with them, Minister.

Ms Berry: Yes.

MR HANSON: They talk quite a bit about phonics. They made the point that the latest version of the Australian curriculum emphasises early reading instruction based on phonic knowledge and removes references to predictable text and the three-cueing system which, to be implemented effectively, requires the use of decodable readers. The question is: will the Education Directorate and our schools be compliant with implementing those changes to the curriculum from the first day of 2024? Is that happening?

Ms Berry: Yes.

MR HANSON: It is? Brilliant.

Ms Berry: We are required to do that. Every state and territory is.

MR HANSON: You are required to do that and that is happening; great. Another issue that they raised is that of phonics checks, the year 1 phonics check. Is that something that happens now or are we planning on doing it? If not, why not?

Ms Berry: We currently conduct an assessment. Teachers assess every day in different kinds of ways across year levels. Particularly in our kindergarten years, we have an assessment which provides information to teachers to support young people which is called BASE.

BASE is a very simple assessment that is conducted in the first and fourth term of the school year, and you can easily see where a young person's learning might need additional supports by doing that BASE. We think that doing that in kindergarten is the place where it needs to happen, so that you can capture any issues that might be arising with that young person's learning or additional supports that educators might need in that space.

In addition to that, it comes back to the early childhood strategy. Implementing that early childhood strategy starting at three will also bring an assessment of our children's learning at a much earlier stage, as they do the two years of preschool coming into kindergarten. On the phonics test, the report was referring to the year 1 test.

Ms Efthymiades: I might add a little bit more about BASE and then we can hand over.

THE CHAIR: We might have to wrap this line up after that.

Ms Efthymiades: With BASE, essentially, year 1 is too late, from our perspective, for our children and young people; kindergarten is preferable. I want to put on the record that the specific areas of BASE include phonological awareness. The report that schools get has scale scores for each child in reading, mathematics and phonological awareness. It is absolutely explicit in BASE, and that is a year earlier than the year 1 phonics test would be applied.

THE CHAIR: I want to refer to the visit on Monday, on community day, by Angela Burroughs, from the Australian Education Union. She said on Monday that there was a significant backlog in capital works and maintenance. She went on to say that “a handful of schools” have adequate infrastructure. She said:

Yes, we are talking just a handful of schools that can operate sufficiently.

She went on to say:

... in terms of how you want to present a quality public education system, there are considerable improvements that we would like to see in terms of infrastructure and capital works programs and maintenance, including greater transparency of that capital works program.”

Minister, would you agree with the Australian Education Union that there are only a handful of schools with adequate infrastructure?

Ms Berry: I have not spoken with Ms Burroughs about the concerns that she has raised here.

THE CHAIR: It is a fairly simple quote, though. She said that only a handful of schools have adequate infrastructure.

Ms Berry: It is a very general question that I could not answer without understanding the detail and the context, and having a conversation around that.

THE CHAIR: Do you find it a concerning statement?

Ms Berry: I am always concerned about issues around education, particularly within our public schools, when they are raised with me. I seek to resolve those, as does the Education Directorate. We are always striving to make sure that our system is an excellent system.

THE CHAIR: How many schools are assessed as needing infrastructure and capital works programs? Certainly, based on Ms Burroughs’ evidence, it would be most of them.

Ms Berry: All schools would need some kind of upgrades or issues that might be identified that have occurred that need to be resolved.

THE CHAIR: But we are talking about getting the school to a level of basic adequacy. We are talking about the delivery of simply adequate infrastructure.

Ms Berry: I cannot say that I agree or disagree with Ms Burroughs, because I am not sure of the context or what schools she is identifying that, in her view, are not adequate. We have a significant building and infrastructure program within Education. We have talked a little bit about that regarding climate change adaptation, roof replacements, shade sails and the like. We work with our schools to understand the priorities for areas that need to be addressed, and we have had a number of those addressed recently in funding that was provided in the previous year’s budget, which included bathroom upgrades, bicycle racks and things like that.

Mr Matthews might have some details on some of those upgrades. We are always happy to work with the Education Union and their members about the kinds of things that they are identifying.

Mr Matthews: In a general statement, we would say that all of our schools are safe and fit for purpose. Of course, local school communities want to improve their school infrastructure and actively contribute to that in many ways themselves through doing some fundraising. Part of our annual process for doing capital upgrades and repairs and maintenance is to consult with every school principal. We consult with every principal and they consult generally with their P&Cs and boards about what the infrastructure priorities are in each of their schools. We try to make sure that we can meet the priority areas for each of our schools within the available budget.

The government has committed to a \$99 million school infrastructure upgrade program over the term of this government. In addition it funds things such as roof replacements and the like. Literally hundreds of millions of dollars are going into maintaining existing infrastructure, on top of the school builds that we often talk about in the budgets.

In the annual report, we give quite a detailed breakdown of individual programs—bathroom upgrades, front office upgrades and learning unit upgrades. We are literally undertaking dozens and dozens of projects every year to generally improve the amenities of our schools and the way that they function for local communities.

MR HANSON: With principals putting forward their requests for capital works and then what you are able to deliver, what is the delta between that consolidated list when principals are coming to the directorate and saying, “This is our wish list,” and what actually gets done?

Mr Matthews: I do not have that information in front of me, Mr Hanson, but I am sure you would not be surprised to hear that principals put forward a very expansive list of the things that they would like to have done, and they are representing the interests of their local community.

MR HANSON: But the union is saying that only a handful of schools can operate sufficiently—that only a handful of schools have adequate infrastructure. It seems that some of that wish list that is not getting met contains pretty significant items or necessary items. Do you have a quantifiable figure for what that delta is? You would probably have to take it on notice.

Ms Berry: I do not know if that detail would—

Mr Matthews: That is right.

Ms Berry: be possible to gather together. I can commit to meet with the Education Union to understand the concerns that they have raised during the community day. However, the ACT government did make a significant commitment to funding our schools, with those infrastructure upgrades of \$99 million, in addition to the \$15 million for the removal of hazardous materials, as well as ongoing larger budget

requests for things like roof replacements, which we are doing in a couple of schools—Melba senior secondary high school and college, as well as Dickson College—which are outside the \$99 million. These are things that we go through, as I said, with the school communities to understand what the priorities are.

MR HANSON: Sure, but there seems to be a delta between what you are expressing here and what the union, representing its teachers and principals, is experiencing down on the ground. I would imagine this committee will have finished up by the time you have that meeting. If you are able to provide some analysis of that meeting that you have with the union by bringing it back to the Assembly or something like that, it would be useful, so that members can understand why the union is saying one thing and you are saying another.

Ms Berry: I do not know that I would normally report back on that kind of issue, other than—

MR HANSON: The problem is that you are not providing the answer as to why—

Ms Berry: I have committed that I will meet with them.

MR HANSON: That is right; we do not know what the answer is as to why they are saying one thing and you are saying another. The problem is that is not giving us the answer to that question. Why are they saying that there is not enough transparency, that only a handful of schools are meeting adequate standards, but you are saying something somewhat different?

Ms Berry: We are saying that there is significant funding going into that process and there is a program in place. Schools identify those priorities, and we work with schools to understand those. I have not read the transcript of the Education Union's presentation on Monday, but I will commit to meeting with them to understand the issues that they have raised, so that we can work through those together.

MR HANSON: I am asking, if you do get that understanding, whether you are able to provide that to this committee, noting that this committee may not be here. That is the point.

Ms Berry: I will take it on notice and talk with—

MR HANSON: But it could be difficult.

THE CHAIR: Mr Hanson points out that it is quite possible that this committee may have disbanded, as much as we are getting along fine at the moment. We might be done by then.

MR HANSON: Because the committee will not be around, what I am saying is that—

Ms Berry: We will report it in some other way.

MR HANSON: Maybe it can be a recommendation in the report.

Ms Berry: The reason I am taking it on notice is that I probably want to talk with the Education Union about that as well.

MR HANSON: Sure; that is fine. I might lobby for that to be a recommendation in the report.

Ms Haire: May I add one point, Mr Hanson, which might simplify the request? Mr Matthews has identified that we do provide in our annual report a full listing of all of the infrastructure upgrades.

MR HANSON: The issue I am trying to understand, though, is why the minister and you guys are saying one thing, and the union is experiencing something different, based on their evidence. The minister is saying that she will try to clarify that, which is useful for her, but not so much for us. What we might do is put a recommendation in the report, if the committee agrees, requesting an answer to that question.

Ms Berry: You can do that.

MR HANSON: You have just said that you will go away and find out, but what is our method of finding out what the answer to that is?

Ms Berry: Okay.

Ms Haire: I am just proposing, Mr Hanson, a factual input to that; we do report on all of those upgrades in our annual report each year. We think that our annual report is very interesting, but perhaps it is not as widely read as we had hoped.

MR HANSON: I will read it.

Mr Matthews: For completeness, it may be worthwhile pointing out that the education and social inclusion standing committee have previously done an inquiry into school infrastructure, and have another one ongoing at the moment, so this area is being appropriately scrutinised by the Assembly. Obviously, the Education Directorate is fully engaging in that. There will be other opportunities in the near future to provide further evidence on some of these matters as well.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Hanson, Mr Matthews, and all and sundry. We will move on to Ms Clay.

MS CLAY: Thank you, Chair. Dare I mention evidence from Monday's community day? We also spoke to Nutrition Australia, who were very keen to ensure that we are adequately funding good nutrition in school canteens and for children as a building block for health. They had a few concerns. I did see that we are supporting healthy nutrition in public schools with a canteen menu assessment. We had an initiative on that. Can you tell me which schools will be assessed on that?

Ms Haire: Ms Clay, that is for all ACT public schools. I will hand over to Ms Spence to describe to you how that program will work.

Ms Spence: This particular budget commitment is to work with Nutrition Australia to

conduct, in all of our schools, annual canteen health assessments, looking at the menus to ensure that the school canteen menus comply with our food and drinks policy. They deliver that function and also support our canteen operators in schools by providing relevant information, if they are not meeting that policy obligation, to help them to become compliant with that particular policy.

MS CLAY: The initiative says that it will cost \$418,000, and that will be offset completely. What does that mean? What is it being offset against?

Ms Spence: It means that it is being internally funded within the Education Directorate to ensure that we have that service available in terms of meeting our obligations regarding that food policy.

MS CLAY: Does that \$418,000 comprise a few FTEs? Have you found some FTEs who can work on this?

Ms Spence: That would be wonderful, wouldn't it, just to find people? No, it is actually working with Nutrition Australia to deliver that particular function.

MS CLAY: So you have outsourced it and you have found \$418,000 in the budget that you would use for that?

Ms Spence: Yes.

MS CLAY: Are there any schools that do not have canteens at the moment?

Ms Haire: There are schools that do not have canteens. We do not have a list with us at the moment, Ms Clay.

MS CLAY: Could we get that on notice?

Ms Haire: Yes.

MS CLAY: This assessment is to assess canteen menus. What are we doing for the schools that do not have canteens, and what are we doing for the kids that are not eating in canteens, regarding Healthy Schools?

Ms Haire: There are a number of parts to that question, so I might try to separate it out. In terms of healthy eating and nutrition, that is an element of the curriculum, and I can ask Ms Spence to talk about that. The other aspect in terms of—

MS CLAY: I probably do not need that spoken to. I have a nine-year-old; she tells me what they learn; thank you.

Ms Haire: It is an important part of the health and PE curriculum. The other element is that we are commencing the rollout of meals in schools, in five schools, which is also an aspect of healthy eating. That is in schools that already have canteens.

MS CLAY: How much money are we putting in to fund those elements? I guess it is just part of the ordinary curriculum?

Ms Haire: In terms of the curriculum, yes, it is part of the base funding that goes to the schools. As you would know from your own experience, it is one of the areas that children are particularly interested in, if it involves food.

MS CLAY: Certainly. Is government providing any assistance to schools to run their canteens or is it entirely up to P&Cs to run canteens?

Ms Haire: No, it is P&C. I do not think we have too many P&C-run canteens anymore. A lot of them are outsourced to various organisations. We could probably get a list of who does what. I do not think we have it with us today, but if that is of interest to the committee, we can provide that on notice.

MS CLAY: When you say outsourced, is that commercially, so that it pays for itself, or it is funded by government?

Mr Matthews: Ms Clay, they engage an external provider. In days gone by, parents might have run the canteen themselves through the P&C. Most schools would probably engage an external provider to provide the canteen service now, perhaps with the support of parents. In some schools it is still parent-run, and some of them are full time and some of them are part time, so it is quite a mixed model.

MS CLAY: I am interested in the government-funded support to the school canteens. Is that information that you can provide or is that information that I can readily find somewhere?

Mr Matthews: I am trying to make sure that I understand that question, Ms Clay. There is not a particular budget line item that I am aware of—I can ask colleagues—where we say, “This is for canteen delivery.” Obviously, it is a joint responsibility, mostly between the school leadership and the P&C in terms of the delivery of it. Generally, it operates on a cost-recovery basis.

MS CLAY: That is what I am getting to. Is it paying for itself? When you refer to an outsourced canteen, do you mean a commercially outsourced canteen that makes as much money as it needs to make in order to recover the cost of outsourcing?

Mr Matthews: There would be different models, so I do not want to mislead you about the range of different things that are in place. Some would be delivered by local small businesses; others would be delivered by larger companies. It really depends on the actual decision at the school level about how their canteen service is delivered. Also, one of the things is the demand for that, and the demand does vary amongst the different student populations. Some have quite high use of their canteens and others have low use, so it does vary.

MS CLAY: This is quite a complicated system for you to conduct a review of, isn't it? If you have multiple different providers and multiple different business models, this is not straightforward.

Mr Matthews: It is a local decision, Ms Clay, around the way that that is done.

MS CLAY: Schools autonomy; I understand. I genuinely had no idea that there was so much variation regarding how it was done.

THE CHAIR: This has been an exceptional session—one of my favourites for the week so far. We will now draw this to a close. Thank you, minister and officials. If witnesses have taken questions on notice, could you please provide answers to the committee secretary within five working days of receipt of the uncorrected proof transcript? The committee will reconvene at 1.15.

Hearing suspended from 12.14 to 1.15 pm.

Appearances:

Burch, Ms Joy, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly

Office of the Legislative Assembly

Duncan, Mr Tom, Clerk

Monk, Dr David, Acting Deputy Clerk, Parliamentary Support Branch

Turner, Ms Rachel, Executive Manager, Business Support Branch

Skinner, Mr David, Senior Director, Office of the Clerk

Shashika, Mr Don, Chief Financial Officer, Business Support Branch

THE CHAIR: Welcome back to this public hearing for estimates 2023-24. In the first of our afternoon sessions, we will hear from the Office of the Legislative Assembly, OLA. We welcome Madam Speaker and officials from the Office of the Legislative Assembly. The proceedings are being broadcast live. The proceedings today are also being transcribed and they will be published on the Assembly's website. If you are taking a question on notice, be quite emphatic about it and say the words, "I will take that on notice," so we can all be on the same page. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw attention to the privilege statement. We can do this universally in the room. Could I get you to verbally confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement? Excellent. We are not inviting opening statements. We will proceed to questions.

I might start. I note, Madam Speaker, in the 2022-23 *Budget statements A*, on page 39, there was money allocated until 2025-26 to implement restructure of committee support for Assembly committees. I could not find a reference to this in the 2023-24 budget. I am wondering if you could advise how this restructure has progressed and whether the original funding model has continued. I am referring to the 2022-23 *Budget statements A*. In the 2022-23 budget, we had money allocated until 2025-26, but I could not find reference to it in the 2023-24 budget, the current budget, and I am wondering if you can advise how this restructure has progressed and whether the original funding model has continued.

Ms Burch: We might go to Don, the CFO, on the money trail and then go to the committee office itself.

THE CHAIR: Excellent.

Mr Shashika: In the 2022-23 budget, we received funding for the restructure of committee support function and that was ongoing funding that we received for those additional positions that were requested. The officials will be able to explain the progress on that, but, because we got ongoing funding from the last budget, there is no reference to that in—

THE CHAIR: That ongoing funding appears on what line? Where does it appear, then, in the most current budget?

Mr Shashika: What happens is that, in appropriations tables, that is built in because it

is ongoing funding. In the base budget it is included.

THE CHAIR: That is fair enough.

Ms Burch: Do you want to take him to a page number so he can look at it?

Mr Shashika: There will not be a breakdown, Madam Speaker, but on page 47, on changes to the appropriation, it is the first line in the 2022-23 budget.

THE CHAIR: In terms of—

Ms Burch: How the committee office has changed over that?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Burch: We will go to either the Clerk or Mr Monk.

Mr Duncan: I might start, Mr Chair. You will recall that Rosemary Laing, the former Clerk of the Senate, did a review and made several recommendations. The key recommendation was that 15 staff be allocated—and that is the funding figure that you have been just discussing with the CFO. We have been funded for 15 positions. Unfortunately, we have not yet got the 15 positions employed. The skills shortage is affecting all of Canberra, but we are still actively trying to fill those positions. Most of those recommendations have been implemented. There are some still outstanding. We are awaiting the arrival of a permanent deputy clerk, which will happen next month, and one of his tasks when he arrives is to consider that report and implement it.

We have made substantial progress on a committee manual. We enlisted the services of Max Kiermaier, a former deputy clerk, and he has assisted us. We are at the stage where we hope to have that finalised in the next month. That will assist all committee staff. After that, we want to do a statement of expectations, because that was one of the recommendations, so that members know exactly what they can expect from committee staff and there is an understanding of what services can be provided. That is the next cab off the rank when the deputy clerk arrives, I think in August.

Ms Burch: One of the key changes was the flexibility around committee secretaries. Those that were in the last Assembly or very early in this Assembly would have had a secretary to one committee, but, to adjust for the ebbs and flows of the busyness of various committees at different times, plus different skill sets, there is a more flexible arrangement. I do not know if you want Dr Monk to talk about that.

THE CHAIR: No—I do not think that is required at this stage. Is Mr Kiermaier not a classic example of someone who has finished up but has become such a continuing asset in the time since he has, in theory, retired. I think it is wonderful that we utilise people like that.

Mr Duncan: We have a temporary employment register, so it is not just Mr Kiermaier. He is a classic example, but there are other staff. Jo Cullen is another example who is also on the temporary employment register. We did have Anne Shannon for a while. We do try to utilise the talents of people that have left the

organisation but still want to do some part-time work.

THE CHAIR: Good.

Ms Burch: It is that whole attitude: retirement just means you get busier.

THE CHAIR: That is right. That is it for me on that line.

MS CLAY: Can I supplement on that very briefly? My personal experience of this restructure is that it has been massively helpful on the busy committees at the busy times.

Ms Burch: That is good feedback.

MS CLAY: Have you had feedback from other committees?

Ms Burch: I would have to go to the committee secretary or the Clerk.

Mr Duncan: In the recent meeting of committee chairs, you expressed that same sentiment. There was a lot of nodding around the table from other committee chairs, indicating that they are quite happy with the new structure, where a committee is supported not just by one person but by several persons. Today is a classic example in that we have two people here. If anyone goes away or goes on leave, there is always someone there to help advise the chair or members of the committee to make sure the committee operations continue to operate smoothly.

MS CLAY: Speaker, we had a 2013 review into the size of the Legislative Assembly and that review recommended the Assembly should expand to 35 members in 2020 or 2024, which we obviously have not done and we are not about to do. Our population is actually growing faster than it was when that review was conducted, so what are the implications for politics and the people of Canberra in remaining at 25 members?

Ms Burch: There is nothing in front of me that would initiate a review of that. Whilst it was part of the recommendation, I think it was 25, 27, 29 and then into the 30s over a period of time. Since we have done the physical reconstruction and the changes within this building, other than your question, people seem to be happy with the way it is. If we were to go to 35, this chamber and this building would not accommodate it, in short. I cannot comment on the policy about how we reflect population growth.

MS CLAY: Are there any downsides, risks or disadvantages for Canberra in remaining at 25? That review must have had a reason to recommend that we expand to 35.

Ms Burch: I would have to go back to the review, but the same would apply for federal representation as well, I would argue. Having not read that report since it was produced way back then, I would have to go back and refresh on some of the logic behind it.

THE CHAIR: Surely you could accommodate 35 in this chamber, if not in this building, just looking at the way other parliaments work. You have been to New

South Wales. Maybe the call is that it is suboptimal.

Ms Burch: Yes.

Mr Duncan: I did raise this matter in my submission to the review of standing orders. That is currently before the administration and procedure committee. I did remind the committee that the committee that looked at the size of the Assembly recommended 25 initially, but at either 2020 or 2024 it should be 35. But, if it is not 35, they did recommend 27—that is, three electorates of nine. Twenty-seven is a lot more palatable in terms of selling an increase in size.

There are other parliaments looking at increasing in size. The Queensland parliament increased in size about four years ago. The Western Australian Legislative Council increased in size. The House of Representatives is currently looking at whether they need to increase in size. Of course, the Senate is looking at whether there should be more territory senators. So parliaments do look at this issue from time to time, but it is a big decision to make, to increase in size, with lots of implications.

I agree with Mr Parton. I think 27 would be easy in this chamber. I think 35 might be a stretch. When we looked at the 25-member model, we looked at having electorate offices and trying to fit people in here. We looked at kicking the ministers out and just giving them an office for sitting days, so those ministerial suites, instead of being one office, might be two or three offices. There is scope to fit people within the one precinct. We relocated other staff across the other side. There are some parliaments that have members not in the actual building. New Zealand parliament is an example where they have to walk across a road to get there. They are not ideal solutions, but anything is possible if the legislature chooses to increase the size.

THE CHAIR: We are always looking for ways to kick ministers out!

Ms Burch: I was not going to make a comment on that.

MS CLAY: I note Tasmania is expanding to 35.

Mr Duncan: Yes, that is another one.

MS CLAY: It is interesting. Certainly, 25 to 27 sounds like a much more reasonable next step. Having said that, it requires the electorates to be redrawn, which sounds—

Mr Duncan: No. We would just go to the federal electorates.

MS CLAY: Yes. Sorry—it requires the ACT—

Mr Duncan: We would have three electorates of nine and would use the federal electorate boundaries.

MS CLAY: Whereas, for 35, you would have—

Ms Burch: That is an option to keep it easy.

MS CLAY: For 35, you would stick with your existing—

Mr Duncan: Thirty-five is a different story.

MS CLAY: five, and just have more members.

Mr Duncan: Yes.

MS CLAY: But there are budget decisions and there are building decisions. There is quite a lot that goes into that. There are representation decisions.

Ms Burch: There is a lot. We have provided to various estimates committees the reports when the decision was made to go from 17 to 25 and the options that the Assembly and the then Speaker looked at for that.

MR CAIN: There was also some discussion about electoral offices. Has that progressed in any particular direction?

Ms Burch: No progression whatsoever. As part of that decision-making process, electorate offices were excluded. All of us would have what we call a mobile office or a community stall that is effectively standing near a well-frequented public area to promote our goods.

MR CAIN: Thank you.

MR PETTERSSON: Can the committee get an update on the upgrades to the front entrance? How is that progressing?

Ms Burch: For this one, I might go to Rachel. We have money in this budget for final design. Ms Turner?

Ms Turner: Thank you for your question. As Madam Speaker referred to, we received funding in the current budget to fully develop the concept design and fully cost in order to go back with a full budget bid next financial year, with the view to commencing construction the year after.

MR PETTERSSON: What was the feedback received from that little stall that was set up in the reception area?

Ms Turner: The feedback was overwhelmingly positive. There were some minor cosmetic suggestions around colour choice, and some about egress and how you access the building. We will work with the architect in this process to take on board some of that feedback where it is useful to do so.

MR PETTERSSON: It sounds like very minor changes?

Ms Turner: Very minor changes, yes.

MR PETTERSSON: Thank you.

MR CAIN: I would like to speak a little bit about the digital transformation. One of the four priorities of budget statements A for 2023-24 is progressing OLA's digital transformation agenda, as it was in previous budgets spanning back to 2018-19, I believe. Page 47 of budget statements A indicates there is an increased contribution of \$0.714 million for 2023-24, with more funds forward allocated to 2026-27. There is an interesting citation around resources being received free of charge from Digital, Data and Technology Solutions as the contribution source. Could you kindly clarify what that means?

Mr Shashika: If you are referring to page 47, changes to appropriations and 2023-24 budget policy decisions, that was a whole-of-government initiative.

MR CAIN: Sorry, could you speak up a bit?

Mr Shashika: That was a whole-of-government initiative to directly appropriate Digital, Data and Technology Solutions, the Shared Services entity, rather than provide that appropriation to the directorates or the agencies. Under that initiative, what were relevant payments to Shared Services ICT were directly allocated to the Shared Services centre. That is the funding from 2023-24 to future years for that component.

MR CAIN: What portion of the office's budget is allocated towards progressing the digital transformation agenda?

Mr Duncan: We would have to take that on notice, Mr Cain.

MR CAIN: Okay. Thank you. I have just a couple of other questions. How significant do you expect the Digital Transformation Strategy will be to the restructure of the committee system? Is it designed to digitise roles currently undertaken by staff, or to what degree?

Dr Monk: The committee modules and other systems that are being set up are designed to streamline our current processes. They are not designed to replace any staff, so we are not expecting any staff changes as a result of that.

MR CAIN: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I am sure you will recall last year's budget estimates were a little controversial due to an order from the WHS Commissioner which delayed the commencement of hearings and threatened the separation of powers. Firstly, Madam Speaker, could I ask if you were relieved that this year's budget estimates hearings have proceeded in the manner that they have?

Ms Burch: First up, yes.

MR CAIN: So far.

Ms Burch: I have not heard of any shenanigans so far, so that is good.

THE CHAIR: What steps did you take to ensure that last year's situation was not

replicated this time around? I understand that external factors have changed dramatically, but, given the extreme circumstance of last year, what steps did you take to ensure that last year's situation was not replicated this time around?

Ms Burch: I think that the world has moved on from COVID. The building itself is now an open building, whereas it was more restrictive this time last year. We have been very clear in working with the Chief Minister's office about the amendments to the WHS Act to recognise, firstly, staff safety, so that is beyond doubt, but, as I have said many a time, the pigeon pair to that is to make sure that parliamentary privilege is recognised and understood. Plus there was the recommendation of a number of committees to enter into a MOU, or for the WHS Commissioner to start the process of an MOU. I wrote to the commissioner, offering them to provide a draft MOU. The response was, basically, "We do not have anything that talks about parliamentary privilege in our line of work," so we have provided a draft and Mr Skinner is working with reps of the WHS Commissioner as we speak to finalise that MOU and progress it. Public commentary and internal conversations have highlighted to various stakeholders that no one law can override another. They can sit in harmony and be respectful of each other.

THE CHAIR: We certainly learnt some things in that whole process, though, did we not?

Ms Burch: We did.

THE CHAIR: It certainly was extraordinary to watch. Even though I was not involved with the committee, it was fascinating to watch.

Ms Burch: Do you want to make a quick comment on progress of the MOU?

Mr Skinner: It is just worth noting that both Ms Turner and I have met with officials in WorkSafe to commence preliminary discussions around the development of an MOU. They have been very productive and very cordial, and I look forward to moving that through with drafts that will ultimately need to be approved by the Speaker and the commissioner. We are very encouraged that we can satisfy those dual requirements of ensuring that we have got appropriate WHS arrangements and compliance while respecting the powers, privileges and immunities of the Assembly. It is fair to say the office is pretty encouraged about how that is progressing.

Ms Burch: We stayed on a steady course and understood the roles of parliamentary privilege. It was just about maintaining a level head and working through it.

THE CHAIR: Excellent.

MS CLAY: Thank you, Chair. What plans does the Legislative Assembly have for going to zero emissions?

Ms Burch: I know that over the various years we have had a lighting upgrade and the new heating and cooling system. Where we can, with the age of the building and infrastructure that keeps it ticking over—and I do not know whether I am looking to the Clerk or the CFO or whether we take it on notice and give you a range of some of

the things that we have done in the building.

MS CLAY: Are you on gas still?

Ms Burch: I think there is gas in the building. It goes to when we can. The heating and cooling system was replaced, I think three years ago, so it will be some time before an opportunity comes to replace that, and when it does, between Rachel and others—

Ms Turner: To get to zero emissions would require a significant investment because this is a very old building. There are challenges with heating and cooling and there are challenges with the glass. There are certainly initiatives that we can undertake, such as reduce paper consumption. We have introduced—I cannot think of the word, but you swipe the card rather than just do automatic printing, so there is more conscious—

Mr Skinner: Print on demand.

Ms Turner: There is more conscious use of paper. We certainly, as part of all that planning, think about how we can improve.

MS CLAY: Just to clarify, our electricity is at zero emissions already, so, when you say that it is a challenge for an old building to get to zero emissions, do you mean actually replacing gas is not feasible?

Ms Burch: It the electric use. A number of years ago, we went through and changed our lighting systems so that they were more efficient. We have double-glazed our windows so the heating effort, so to speak, is more efficient. I am happy to take it on notice. I know a consistent theme has been: “Do different agencies have a climate management plan?” Perhaps Rachel could talk to that straightaway or we could bring back what it is.

MS CLAY: Maybe take it on notice.

Ms Burch: I am happy to take it on notice.

MS CLAY: The really useful question to take on notice is: in your asset management plan, are you going to make sure that, when you are replacing the gas, you are replacing it with electricity. That might be a very useful question to take on notice.

Ms Burch: It would be because of the age of the building and the cost of the changes. When the program for upgrades comes, what steps do we have in place to accommodate that?

MS CLAY: I am aware of that. Most of Canberra is in the same situation.

Ms Burch: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Mr Cain.

MR CAIN: I have a supp on that. If gas were replaced, how significant would the

modifications be that are required for this building? Would it have to be demolished?

Ms Burch: Mr Cain, I am not going down that rabbit hole. Let us come back with what we can and see what that unveils.

MR PETTERSSON: I note the recent passage of the Financial Management Amendment Bill 2021 (No 2). What is the current thinking in the Assembly about the provision of cleaning?

Ms Burch: Provision of cleaning is currently under contract. The FMA sets it out. The bill directs to a disallowable instrument and an assessment, which is still in construction, for want of a better word. What that looks like will determine what is captured by the arrangements and what OLA will look at. With the removal of the direction of the Chief Minister, it effectively puts that decision-making back with Office of the Legislative Assembly. My understanding is that, of the contracts that we purchase, it is only the cleaning contracts. I am on public record and private record saying, “Yes, we have contract arrangements, but, if a building very nearby had in-house cleaning, we would be very interested to see if that was a good alternative”.

MR PETTERSSON: Thank you.

MR CAIN: This is related to Mr Parton’s earlier comments, so forgive me if you feel you have already answered some of this. Your letter to the Work Health and Safety Commissioner, Ms Agius, highlighted that, even though the estimates committee had not met the terms of the prohibition notice, you “reserve the right to pursue legal action in relation to the issuing of the prohibition notice”. I think you have answered this bit, but please forgive me for asking again: are you content with how the situation has resolved itself? Are you still considering legal action?

Ms Burch: There is no active legal consideration at the moment. We believe we have worked through it. We have maintained our stance and position around parliamentary privilege. The fact that it was accommodated through the recent amendments to the WHS Act shows that everyone in this place recognises there are two important elements to it. I think the conclusion of the MOU will provide very clear guidance about how matters of WHS will be progressed. It was the absence of that guidance for an external agency that has not worked with a group such as this, with such significant importance, including parliamentary privilege. I think it was just unaware lack of awareness. Are you happy with that, Mr Cain?

MR CAIN: Yes. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Cain. I have no further questions. Ms Clay, do you?

MS CLAY: I do not. Thank you, Chair.

THE CHAIR: Mr Pettersson? No. It looks as though you are off the hook for another year.

Ms Burch: Wonderful. Thank you. We have just that one thing to come back with. Just before we close, I again thank all the staff from OLA. They do a tremendous job,

not only in keeping us all civil and providing us advice during the sitting week but also offline and through committees. Thanks, Chair.

THE CHAIR: The members of the committee would share those views. Thanks to Madam Speaker and officials. Did you take anything on notice? I am not sure.

Ms Burch: Just the one. Ms Turner will come back to you.

THE CHAIR: You know how it works. Please provide answers to the committee secretary within five working days of receipt of the uncorrected proof transcript.

Hearing suspended from 1.43 to 2 pm.

Appearances:

Rattenbury, Mr Shane, Attorney-General, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Gaming and Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction

Justice and Community Safety Directorate

Glenn, Mr Richard, Director-General

Marjan, Ms Nadia, Senior Director, Civil Law, Legislation, Policy and Programs Division

Ceramidas, Mr Joshua, Senior Director, Civil Law, Legislation, Policy and Programs Division

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

Pryce, Mr David, Deputy Director-General, Access Canberra

Chan, Ms Yu-Lan, Chief Executive Officer, ACT Gambling and Racing Commission, Access Canberra

Rynehart, Mr Josh, Executive Branch Manager, Fair Trading and Compliance, Access Canberra

Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate

Wright, Ms Fiona, Executive Group Manager, Climate Change and Energy

Malouf, Ms Ros, Executive Branch Manager—Climate Change and Energy Programs, Environment, Water and Emissions Reduction

THE CHAIR: Welcome back to this public hearing for estimates 2023-24. In this session, we will hear from Mr Shane Rattenbury MLA, Minister for Consumer Affairs, and officials. Proceedings are being broadcast live. The proceedings today are also being transcribed and will be published on the Assembly website. If you do take a question on notice, be quite emphatic about it, saying, “I will take that on notice,” so that everyone is on the same page. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw attention to the privilege statement. We are going to do this just once, universally, right at the start, so could you confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement and that you agree to it? Excellent. We are not inviting opening statements, so we will now proceed to questions.

Minister, the recently elected government in New South Wales committed to the introduction of mandatory facial recognition to enhance their poker machine self-exclusion scheme. This approach is already in operation in South Australia and it is also scheduled for introduction in Queensland. Facial recognition, according to those jurisdictions, is enhancing the operation of self-exclusion schemes and benefiting harm minimisation outcomes. I understand that the club industry in the ACT has been seeking a joint trial in conjunction with the GRC in the ACT for over two years. What is the current status of this proposed trial in the ACT?

Mr Rattenbury: Thanks for the question, Mr Parton. I will come to your specific question. There is an interesting policy question around the role of facial recognition technology. I think there is agreement in the ACT that the current self-exclusion regime is problematic in the sense that it essentially relies on venues having a photo of

excluded members. The venues approach it in different ways. Some have a folder, but basically it relies on staff recognising people, so it is not a foolproof system in the way that we would like to see.

In terms of the best way to enhance that, through the Ministerial Advisory Council there has been a self-exclusion working group with the GRC, with industry representatives and with harm minimisation advocates, looking at ways to improve self-exclusion. It is fair to say there are some different thoughts on that. We are, of course, looking at a range of issues around cashless gaming as well, and there is some thinking that a cashless gaming model may in fact be the most optimal way to approach self-exclusion in clubs. The ACT has a proposed trial.

I will defer to Ms Chan for a detailed answer on the negotiations between ClubsACT and the GRC on how to proceed with this, but I think it is fair to say the policy approach is being considered. In New South Wales, for example, there is a consideration that it is also quite important from a monitoring of organised crime perspective. They have a different emphasis on why they are using facial recognition technology. On the specifics—

THE CHAIR: I am sorry—I want to go to Ms Chan. The other question that I have, and it is quite specific, is: how many ACT residents are currently registered for self-exclusion in the ACT?

Ms Chan: Thank you for the question. With regard to the proposed trial, to be able to do that we need information about how the participants or proposed participants would be given information about how their data would be used. Currently, if you sign up for exclusion, it is on the understanding that your data would not be used apart from by the commission staff and the club venue staff at the venues at which you choose to self-exclude. It does not give permission for anybody else to look at that data.

The facial recognition trial involved a third party. That is a software provider. That becomes a third party. In order to provide access for a third party to view the data, have access to the data and be able to use it, we asked ClubsACT to do some work about how they would work with proposed participants to make sure they fully understood how that data would be used. That was quite some time ago. We have had a bit of correspondence in that space, but we have not heard from ClubsACT for a little while on that.

THE CHAIR: You are saying the ball is in ClubsACT's court on that one?

Ms Chan: We have written back saying that we needed full assurance that the proposed participants would be given full transparency about how that data would be used, how it would be stored and what protections would be given to them. ClubsACT did provide a response. We did not feel that was strong enough to actually provide that assurance to the excluded and vulnerable people, so we have been liaising since. That is where it is up to.

THE CHAIR: Are you able to tell me how many ACT residents are currently registered for self-exclusion in this territory?

Ms Chan: Yes, Mr Parton. As at 30 June 2023, there were 501 active self-exclusions.

THE CHAIR: What demographic or other data on the self-exclusion scheme in the ACT is—no, I am not going to ask that one. I am going to go with this one. Am I able to ask: what is the average age profile of those on the self-exclusion scheme in the ACT? Is it possible for you to answer that, even, if not today, on notice?

Ms Chan: I will see if I can find that for you.

THE CHAIR: I am mindful of time.

Mr Rattenbury: We might be able to come back to that. We will either come back to it or we will take it on notice. We will see how we go.

THE CHAIR: Alright. Dr Paterson.

DR PATERSON: I am also really concerned that we are dropping the ball on self-exclusion. The data that I have received through questions on notice shows the number of self-exclusions is dropping. Year on year, fewer people are accessing it. I am interested to know why we have waited two years for this trial of facial recognition. We should be on top of this. What proactive steps are we taking to improve self-exclusion in the ACT?

Mr Rattenbury: We have established a working group with the industry through the Ministerial Advisory Council to specifically examine these matters. That group has sought to bring in people with lived experience to help give feedback, because that is the most valid way to think about how to improve the scheme. Those with lived experience will obviously give particularly valuable feedback. As I indicated earlier, the work we are doing is aside from the group in the broader harm minimisation agenda that the government has identified and is working on. We are looking at the potential for cashless gaming and the account based system. That strikes me as potentially the most effective way to deal with it.

DR PATERSON: Yes. But, also, we cannot drop the ball now—

Mr Rattenbury: We are not dropping the ball now.

DR PATERSON: Okay. I asked this question before and received data on the gender breakdown of self-exclusion. I think it was in a recommendation of one of the other inquiries that, of those who exclude, about 75 per cent are male and about 25 per cent are female. I am interested if any work has progressed on understanding why there is such a substantial gender difference in self-excluders in the ACT.

Ms Chan: Self-exclusion is one of a number of tools that are available to individuals experiencing gambling harm. The latest data showed that young men were the primary group who were experiencing gambling harm. They have been quite a key focus in a number of our awareness campaigns. Having said that, we are also very conscious to work with family members and friends. The public health approach is that not just the individual who is gambling can suffer harm; there are also other

people who suffer harm. We take that into account in terms of our education and our awareness programs.

We have been looking at the stats. Eighty per cent were men as at 30 June and about 19 per cent were women, and for one per cent the gender was not recorded. We work with a number of community sector organisations to understand what their needs are and to see what they are seeing—who their clientele is and what information, communication and referral information would be useful for them. So, while the higher percentage of excludees are men, there are a number of other tools in place that we are working on with other target audiences.

DR PATERSON: The research in other jurisdictions suggests that it is a 50-50 split, so again I am concerned that we have such a low number of females self-excluding here, but, also, the number of exclusions revoked is pretty substantial. I am wondering: are we looking into why people are revoking their exclusions and why self-exclusion is not working for them?

Ms Chan: Revocations can be done for a number of purposes. Sometimes it might be that they have a family event or work event in a venue. If that is a gambling venue—for example, a club—they might be in a restaurant or a functions room. Regarding the way the clubs implement the self-exclusion program, rather than excluding the person from the gambling room only, in some cases they exclude them from the entire venue. In those cases, if a person wanted to attend a wedding reception or something like that, they would need to consider whether to self-exclude. That would count for some of them.

DR PATERSON: Do you not think that is why we need facial recognition or other technology pretty urgently in venues, so that people do have to revoke their self-exclusion to go to a venue?

Ms Chan: There are also a number of concerns that we have received about how facial recognition could potentially be used. There is a range of pros and cons that need to be looked into. As the minister has said, there are also a number of other tools and mechanisms that other jurisdictions look at, such as cashless. There is a range of options that are being looked at.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Dr Paterson. Ms Clay.

MS CLAY: Thank you, Chair. Five-dollar bet limits and \$100 load-up limits were a really cool part of the Greens' platform at the last election and they are part of the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement. Can you tell me how we are progressing on that?

Mr Rattenbury: Yes. Thanks, Ms Clay. We have been working again for the Ministerial Advisory Council. In particular, you may recall that in April or May last year we released a discussion paper. That reflected the research the government had done at that point, including having an external provider give us advice on the best way to proceed with the implementation of that. Out of the back of that, we ran a public consultation process and we established a technical working group in partnership with the sector. That included a range of venues here in the ACT but also

external technical advice. That working group is continuing to develop both costings and technical information on the best way to implement a centralised monitoring system and, linked to that, how one puts in place the bet and load limits.

The government is now pulling all that information together and we expect to have a revised proposal in the near future on how to proceed with that. The intent is to work towards a procurement process to implement the technology to put those commitments in place.

MS CLAY: Excellent. In the budget papers, we have a commitment that we are reducing our electronic gaming machines to 3,500 by July 2025. Are we on track to meet that?

Mr Rattenbury: Yes. Through the course of this term, we have already reduced a number of gaming machine authorisations. I will ask Mr Ceramidas to give you the exact numbers in a moment.

MS CLAY: That would be great.

Mr Rattenbury: Through the pandemic period, the government offered a voluntary buyback scheme and a number of venues took that up because they saw it as a way of maintaining cashflow. They saw it as financially advantageous to them. Following a request from the industry, we extended that program. We retired quite a number of licences through that process and then, in this budget, we see funding of \$5.145 million to further that program. The government has implemented a two-tier program where venues can retire their licences and receive \$15,000 in return for them, or, if the venue decides to go entirely pokie-free, they will receive \$20,000 for a licence. In terms of that number—

Mr Ceramidas: Ms Clay, as of 1 April 2023, there were 3,793 gaming machine authorisations. There are 293 that need to be surrendered in order to reach the 3,500 target by 1 July 2025.

MS CLAY: That is great. How many did we have before this program, when we started?

Mr Ceramidas: It was about 4,000, and then, through the successive initiatives, we have brought that down to the current number.

MS CLAY: From 4,000 down to 3,793?

Mr Ceramidas: That is correct.

MS CLAY: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Following on from Ms Clay, at page 100 of budget statements *B*, covering the Gambling and Racing Commission, it says:

The Commission will seek to build on the Government's changes to gaming legislation to develop, implement and evaluate stronger interventions to reduce

harm caused by gambling.

I am assuming that we are talking, in part, about the reduction to 3,500 EGMs, but are you able to outline what additional interventions are planned to achieve further reductions in gambling harms and how much has been aside in the budget for these?

Ms Chan: One example is looking at some of the preventative measures we can take. For example, we are working on developing some school curriculum that targets secondary school students because we know that is a particularly susceptible age group, where they are starting to look at gaming and are potentially moving to gambling. That is one age group we are looking at. For example, where we develop some school curriculum, it will have teacher training, teacher professional development, to support them to deliver the curriculum. That is one intervention.

Another thing we are doing is liaising with the Gambling Harm Prevention Community of Practice. We now have 22 organisations who meet with us regularly. We discuss matters such as what training would be useful for the community sector. They have discussed screening, they have shared information about what services are currently available, and they have had input into awareness campaigns that have gone out across the community. Those are some of the examples that we have of preventative work that we do.

THE CHAIR: Excellent. Thank you. Dr Paterson.

DR PATERSON: Minister, you said that the government will be moving towards procurement of the central monitoring system shortly.

Mr Rattenbury: Yes.

DR PATERSON: Given that there is all the discussion about cashless gaming technology, is it appropriate, before having gone down the path of fully looking at cashless gaming, to procure another whole system?

Mr Rattenbury: The policy approach that we are taking is that we see a centralised monitoring system as providing the trunk infrastructure that will future-proof the ACTs EGM technology environment. The ACT is the only jurisdiction without a centralised monitoring system. The advice we have received is that that CMS and the linking of the machines will facilitate a range of harm minimisation issues down the line, as well as provide a range of efficiencies for venues.

DR PATERSON: With establishing cashless gaming in the ACT, would it not be best to just go to where the technology is now, at the forefront, rather than implement a centralised monitoring system?

Mr Rattenbury: You are making some technological assumptions that are not consistent with the advice that I have received. My understanding is that, no matter what you do, having a CMS as the underlying infrastructure is essential. I have been very clear with the venues in particular that I want to make sure that any move we make is as cost-effective as possible. What I do not want to do is have a two-step process where we do something now and, in two or three years, we say, “We have to

spend whole lot more money doing the next thing,” which I think is at the heart of your question.

DR PATERSON: Yes.

MR RATTENBURY: That is partly why we have taken a little bit longer to get to the procurement point, because we are trying to establish how we take one significant step rather than a couple of steps that are probably more expensive. In essence, I agree with you and we are just trying to get advice on the best way to do that.

DR PATERSON: Are you able to release the advice? Some of the advice that I have is that you can implement cashless gaming without a central monitoring system. That is from the club sector. Is it possible to release the advice you have received so that this discussion can be had more broadly?

Mr Rattenbury: I do not know that I have a single piece of advice that I can release. But the government will put out an approach, very clearly and transparently, when it is finalised or when we reach a point of taking the next step.

DR PATERSON: Will that be a decision step, though? So there will be no question that we will be moving towards a central monitoring system?

Mr Rattenbury: Is your question that we should not have a centralised monitoring system? Is that your view?

DR PATERSON: Yes—possibly; that we should be looking at implementing cashless gaming right now.

Mr Rattenbury: Without CMS?

DR PATERSON: Yes.

Mr Rattenbury: Why do you think that we do not want a CMS in that context? I am just trying to understand the question.

DR PATERSON: Well, because the advice that I have received is that you can implement cashless gaming without a central monitoring system and, if the costs of the central monitoring system could be invested in cashless gaming, that may be a better spend of that money.

Mr Rattenbury: Okay. They are the questions we are asking. That is the detail we are trying to work through.

MR PETTERSSON: The government is currently undertaking an investigation into a retirement village ombudsman here in the ACT. Can the committee get an update on how that work is progressing?

Mr Rattenbury: Yes. As you will recall, Mr Pettersson, there was a motion passed and the government agreed to do it. That work is underway and there is consultation happening.

Actually, we might have to come back to that. That is actually being led by JACS in my role as Attorney-General, and I am not sure the relevant officials are here today.

THE CHAIR: Mr Pettersson, if you want to duck to another question or even if you want to shunt one to your colleague behind you, feel free.

MR PETTERSSON: I am just questioning—

Mr Rattenbury: No; he is going to have an admin arrangements discussion with me now.

MR PETTERSSON: Yes, a little bit, regarding the policy relating to retirement villages.

Mr Rattenbury: I just do not think the right JACS official is here.

Ms Marjan: I am happy to take that. Thank you for your question. In relation to that body of work, we are currently giving some consideration to some of those options, but we are also giving some consideration to that amongst the other current options or arrangements that are currently in that space.

I want to mention was some of the options available to residents for retirement villages. There are internal disputes committees. There is an ACT Human Rights Commission pathway as well. There is the ACAT dispute resolution pathway. We are giving some consideration to how those options fit amongst the current issues raised by the petition and, in light of that, we are doing some scoping in that space.

MR PETTERSSON: That is great. Can I ask how broadly you are consulting?

Ms Marjan: We are at the very preliminary stages of just scoping that exercise at the moment. So it is very early on.

MR PETTERSSON: What further support can the government provide to residents of retirement villages to further advocate for their own rights?

Mr Rattenbury: The government has already put in place a range of measures. Mr Rynehart will be able to add to this, but certainly we have run a series of information campaigns. As has been noted in the Assembly discussions about this, we implemented a pathway through the Human Rights Commission, which is free for retirement village residents.

Clearly, there are residents who are not attracted to that pathway, which is why they are advocating for a different approach. But the Human Rights Commission is both very experienced and I think highly accomplished at undertaking conciliations in a way that does not need to involve lawyers, which is extremely low cost for the parties and which is focused on recognising that there is an ongoing relationship between the parties. So a straight-out litigation is not always the best pathway and more of a reconciliation can be a powerful way to bring the parties together. Mr Rynehart, can perhaps provide the details of what we have been doing.

Mr Rynehart: Mr Pettersson, between November 2022 and February this year, Access Canberra undertook a retirement village engagement program and we met with both the providers and the residents at various points. During that, we provided general information to residents and villages about the retirement villages elements as well as more general consumer protection.

We handed out *The Little Black Book of Scams*, to make people more aware of scams and their risks relating to that and how they can protect themselves from it. We received a number of questions from residents, which were quite broad ranging. They took up the opportunity to ask us a number of questions outside of specifically the retirement villages. Those questions included parking, waste collection, solar panels, graffiti, liquor and food licensing. So there was quite an interesting conversation.

During that, we distributed 1,260 copies of *The Little Black Book of Scams* and about 400 copies of the Optus data breach factsheet to the operators so they could pass on to their residents.

Our program was designed to engage, as I said, both with the operators as well as with the residents. From the operator's perspective, to engage with them on the legislative requirements and from the resident's perspective, it was more on the more general consumer protection side.

Mr Rattenbury: Mr Parton, just before you go on, we have now got an answer to your earlier question.

Ms Chan: This was about the average age of excluded people. As at 30 June, the average age for women was 45 and for men it was 37.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MS CLAY: Minister, on Monday, we heard from the ACT Retirement Villages Association. They are a newly formed group. You may not—

Mr Rattenbury: No; they have actually been around for a long time. I have been engaging with them for at least seven years. They have a new president.

THE CHAIR: Yes; a new president.

MS CLAY: Yes. They told us that the government and Access Canberra do not have a centrally coordinated list of the retirement villages in Canberra, which struck me as odd. I wondered if there is a centrally coordinated list, because it occurs to me that with district planning but also with policy planning you would probably want to know what they are and where they are.

Mr Rynehart: As I understand it, there is not a register per se; however, we did reach out to 20 operators across 39 villages during our program. I may have to come back on whether there is actually a register of retirement villages itself.

MS CLAY: Yes; could you take that on notice for me as to whether the government

has any kind of central register?

Mr Rynehart: Yes, will do.

MS CLAY: Thank you.

MR CAIN: Minister, I would like to ask you about a matter we discussed previously regarding the failure of the Commissioner for Fair Trading to declare a conflict of interest in a timely manner. Minister, when were you or anyone in your office first made aware of an allegation that the Commissioner for Fair Trading had a potential conflict of interest?

Mr Rattenbury: I would have to take that on notice, Mr Cain. Do you want a specific date?

MR CAIN: Yes.

Mr Rattenbury: Sure. As you recall, I wrote to you on 9 February this year and provided a significant amount of detail on the dates on which the Commissioner for Fair Trading Commissioner declared the conflict of interest, the appointment of an alternate Commissioner for Fair Trading for when those conflict matters arose and the details of how that particular conflict that you are concerned about was identified and acted upon.

MR CAIN: I will say that my re-exploring of this is fuelled by some significant documentation received recently under an FOI request.

Mr Rattenbury: There have been a number of FOIs on this matter.

MR CAIN: My question is: when did you first become aware of this conflict of interest?

Mr Rattenbury: Of the concern of a conflict of interest?

MR CAIN: Of the conflict of interest, yes.

Mr Rattenbury: As I said, I will have to take that on notice.

MR CAIN: Thank you. One of the documents in this recently received pack contains an email you sent to the Head of Service and the Public Sector Standards Commissioner on 29 November 2022 seeking advice regarding the appropriateness of Access Canberra's handling of the conflict-of-interest issue. You received advice back from the Head of Service on 6 February. Were you satisfied with the advice you received from the Head of Service?

Mr Rattenbury: Satisfied in what regard—did I accept her analysis?

MR CAIN: Yes, did you accept her review of that situation?

Mr Rattenbury: Yes. As I said to you in our letter, I felt that the Head of Service had

looked at that matter. She came back to me and said she felt that it had been dealt with appropriately, and I accepted the Head of Service's advice on that matter.

MR CAIN: In particular, she says, "The commissioner's attendance at the meeting on 6 July 2021 was appropriate." That is the quote.

So, just to make it clear, my understanding of this matter is that the minister received advice from the Head of Service that it was acceptable for the Commissioner for Fair Trading to attend a legal meeting on 6 July regarding the conduct of the former Commissioner for Fair Trading with whom the then Commissioner for Fair Trading had a close personal and spousal relationship and who led the investigation that was the subject of that meeting.

Mr Rattenbury: Sorry, what was the question?

MR CAIN: The question is: is it acceptable at a legal meeting for her to manage a complaint against the former Commissioner for Fair Trading with whom she was in a spousal relationship?

Mr Rattenbury: As you are aware, Mr Cain, I sought advice from the Head of Service in order to ensure that the public service members involved in this matter had fulfilled their obligations under their employment requirements. That is what I sought to establish as minister—that the staff within the agencies have conducted themselves as per the expectations of the public service.

MR CAIN: As you are aware, the then Commissioner for Fair Trading made a declaration in November later that year—

Mr Rattenbury: Yes.

MR CAIN: even though she was dealing with a legal complaint in July that involved her then spouse. What triggered this declaration in November 2021?

Mr Rattenbury: As I think my letter to you indicates, there was a filing of proceedings on 22 November and the conflict-of-interest disclosure under the directorate conflict-of-interest policy was made on 24 November in response to the lodging of those proceedings.

MR CAIN: So why declare that conflict then and not a lot earlier?

Mr Rattenbury: I do not know. I was not party to that process, Mr Cain.

MR CAIN: So, Minister, it would seem to be that your acceptance of the Head of Service's advice boils down to this: an ACT public service employee need not declare a conflict of interest even of a spousal relationship in a matter they are involved in unless it escalates into a proceeding before a tribunal or court.

Mr Rattenbury: I think you are asking me to interpret the Head of Service's advice, Mr Cain. I would recommend that, if you want to understand why the Head of Service drew that conclusion, you should ask her.

MR CAIN: What is your conclusion, Minister? Do you believe it is appropriate for an ACT public servant employee not to declare, for example, a spousal relationship on a matter they are directly involved in unless it hits a tribunal or court?

Mr Rattenbury: I think it is appropriate to consider each of these matters on the circumstances of the case.

MR CAIN: We have a particular matter.

Mr Rattenbury: Yes, and I have indicated to you that I, in my role as minister, have sought advice and Ms Leigh has advised me in the terms with which you are familiar.

MR CAIN: So you are confirming that you are satisfied, Minister, that on 6 July 2021 it was appropriate for the Commissioner for Fair Trading to deal with a dispute involving the former Commissioner for Fair Trading, her husband?

Mr Rattenbury: What I have said to you, Mr Cain, is that I asked the Head of Service to look at this matter for me and she has given me the advice that I have shared with you in a perfectly transparent way.

MR CAIN: And you are satisfied that it was appropriate for the Commissioner for Fair Trading to manage a dispute involving her husband, in his capacity as a former Commissioner for Fair Trading?

Mr Rattenbury: I have answered your question, and I intend to answer it the same way, no matter how many times you ask me.

MR CAIN: But are you satisfied, Minister? Are you satisfied?

Mr Rattenbury: I have fulfilled my duties as minister, I believe.

THE CHAIR: Mr Cain, we are going to move on.

DR PATERSON: Minister, just going back to gambling again and the gambling incident register. We have discussed this multiple times in hearings. What concerns me the most is the lack of transparency on the data collection here. It is not reported in any annual reports or anything.

I have put questions on notice—and I appreciate the data that I have received. But, for a couple of years now, when I ask the government for a description of what the incidents are, I receive a response saying that it is unreasonably diverting resources to undertake this manual processing.

When I have asked this before, the response has been, “We are improving the systems.” There was supposed to be a new system coming on board last year that was supposedly going to allow us to see all this data. I have spoken to the clubs about this and they can hand me the data in a matter of minutes, basically. They generate it very, very easily. So why does it go in very easily and clearly but I cannot get it out?

Ms Chan: Dr Paterson, is the information you are after about what can cause a breach. Is that the sort of information you are after, or what response is taken—

DR PATERSON: No; just the description of the incidents and an overview of what incidents are recorded, as per the legislation.

Ms Chan: The types of incidents that can be recorded will be things like the signs of gambling harm. For example, if a person gambles for a large number of hours, if they gamble through breaks, if they appear to be furtive about their activity, if they appear to be borrowing money, if they are playing obsessively on one machine or if they feel possessive or obsessive about a particular machine, these are the types of signs of gambling harm that we do training for gambling contact officers on.

Those are examples of the types of signs that they would record in the incident register. They would use that as information sharing amongst their team. For example, at end of shift, if there is a particular patron they are concerned about, they can use the register to share that information across shifts and across staff members, so somebody can go and contact them.

DR PATERSON: Yes, but they are also legislated to report it to government. I am wondering why government cannot provide any transparency on what is reported to you.

Ms Chan: We do have that information. Clearly, we are looking at it. I would need to see what information you asked for specifically. But, in some cases, it would involve us manually processing what particular information was recorded. For example, if we just gave you a printout of everything that would probably not be helpful for you.

DR PATERSON: Why can the clubs manage to provide number breakdowns on the types of incidents that they are inputting? It is pretty clear in their databases what the problems are and the signs of harm that are coming up in their venues. Why can we not see that clearly?

Ms Chan: I believe we did provide you with information about the number of instances and the number of venues. If you are after a specific—

DR PATERSON: I am specifically after a breakdown of descriptions of incidents in whatever way that looks like, what the most common incidents recorded are, and an overview of the actions that were recorded to be taken to resolve those issues.

Ms Chan: I can let you know right now and we will see what we can provide in that space. The most common action that is recorded is “other”. “Other” means that the staff member who has observed the behaviour has referred it to the gambling contact officer on site at that venue. That is the most common recorded response. The staff member has seen something, they had reported it to the GCO and they have recorded it quite correctly in the incident register. That is the largest category of responses. We will provide that other information for you on notice.

DR PATERSON: Okay; that would be great. Again, I just question the data and have done now for a couple of years. We are seeing the incidents reported in the top four

venues range from 6,000 to nearly 2,000 incidents per year. In the other venues, it is a maximum of 500 and they all go down to like three or six incidents. So we have got a clear discrepancy between one club group that records incidents in one way, or they record everything, and the rest of the venues.

We have discussed this and we understand why there is that difference, but I am asking: why has that not changed over time? Clearly, either the other clubs are not recording incidents correctly or that one club group can change the way they practise if they are over-recording.

Ms Chan: In the GCO training that we deliver, we talk about the appropriate use of the incident register and what should be reported. Again, we give education on the signs of harm. We do explain that those are the types of signs of harm that should be included in the incident register.

As you point out, there is one particular club group that is using it in a slightly different way and that is what the figures are showing.

DR PATERSON: There is a huge amount of value in this data, and we are doing nothing with it. We are not using it. The whole point of collecting this data is for harm minimisation purposes. I am not clear on why we legislate that clubs input this data, if we do not do anything with it and we cannot digest it or analyse it.

Ms Chan: Part of it is to ensure that, within their own teams and within their own staff, they are looking out for their patrons. Getting them to record the signs of gambling harm and to act on it and to record what action they have taken is the first step in ensuring that they are taking action in that space, and it gives us a little bit of visibility. We are building our data capability to improve the analysis in that space.

DR PATERSON: Thanks.

THE CHAIR: Minister, my question is regarding the gaming revenue and tax data from the ACT club industry. Prior to the outbreak of COVID, I understand that the GGMR figures for the club industry were published monthly and that, since COVID, those figures have only been made available on an annual basis. Why are those GGMR figures no longer made publicly available monthly?

Ms Chan: Originally, that was linked to the community contributions. The community contributions requirements changed in 2019. Now the clubs will publish their own community contributions and their own revenue figures in their annual report on their own websites. However, as of last month, we have started publishing on a quarterly basis the aggregate tax and revenue data on our website.

THE CHAIR: I guess what I am trying to ascertain is: when will those figures, as they were presented before, become more publicly available than is currently the case?

Ms Chan: Currently they are on our website. They are shown by monthly figures, and that is what we will continue to report on a quarterly basis. But it shows each month.

THE CHAIR: Okay. I wonder—

Mr Rattenbury: If I recall correctly, Mr Parton, there was a period where they were not being published. But, as Ms Chan has just indicated, they are now being published again.

THE CHAIR: When did that recommence?

Ms Chan: Quite recently. We now have the figures for last financial year and the first quarter of this current financial year on our website.

THE CHAIR: Excellent.

MS CLAY: Minister, we heard from Asthma Australia on Monday that one in eight Canberrans have asthma, which is actually higher than the national figures. I am hearing quite a lot of data and statistics about the dangers of methane gas cookers in homes. Do you think we should have a consumer warning on methane gas cooking?

Mr Rattenbury: I think this is a really interesting emerging question, Ms Clay. Recent research that is coming out, that has been published in Australia—really in the last 12 months and for the first time—has indicated the in-home impacts of methane burning in the household, particularly for children and particularly in the way it impacts on asthma.

There is now a class action being started in the United States looking at these matters. That is something we are currently looking at more closely. I have recently received information about the situation in the US. The class action suggests that there should be warnings and we are considering that circumstance in the US and whether that gives us cause for thought and whether we need to regulate further in this space.

MS CLAY: That is interesting and quite concerning. Do you think this danger is well known to the people of Canberra?

Mr Rattenbury: No; I think it is not well known at all. The recent research, I think, has brought it to some people's attention, but I do not believe it is widely understood. It is a relatively new scientific revelation, if you like, in the sense of the understanding and the reports that have been published. So I do not believe it is well known at this point in time.

MS CLAY: If you did stray further down that regulatory track, do you think it might have implications on things like using the term "natural gas"?

Mr Rattenbury: That is a whole other question, I think. Whether it is regulation or an educative approach, I think we have got work to do to highlight this issue for the community. I think it is one of the drivers where we are seeing people in the ACT moving away from the use of gas in their homes. I think those who are aware of it are very concerned by the scientific findings, because of the impact on children, particularly, and their vulnerability.

On the issue of the labelling of gas, as has been publicly reported, I recently raised

this at an energy minister's meeting. I think the labelling of methane gas as "natural gas" in Australia is a marketing exercise that is designed to give the product a more positive perception in people's minds.

The Australian energy system is currently looking at how we incorporate hydrogen gases and bio-gases into the National Gas Law. It is my view that, as part of that process and part of recalibrating the definitions, we should remove the term "natural gas" and describe it as either methane gas or fossil gas, so that it more accurately reflects what it is.

MS CLAY: Thank you.

DR PATERSON: My question is with respect to poker machine licences and the casino. I asked this last year when the new operator came on board. Has there been any application for or discussion around poker machines in the Canberra Casino?

Mr Rattenbury: Dr Paterson, as you know, the legislation very clearly sets out the parameters for how the casino can obtain poker machine licences. The current legislation says that they must have a poker machine with a maximum \$2 spin. The casino has indicated that they have been unable to purchase machines. Nobody makes machines in Australia that meet that requirement. So the casino has made representations to the government that we consider amending that limit in the legislation to put them on par with other venues in the ACT.

DR PATERSON: If the casino were to acquire licences for machines would that impact the number of machines? Those licenses would have to come from clubs; is that correct?

Mr Rattenbury: That is correct. Under the legislation, they are required to purchase them from other venues, and there is a higher retirement rate. So, for every three machines they purchase, they have to retire one licence.

DR PATERSON: How advanced are these discussions with the casino on this?

Mr Rattenbury: I think the casino has been raising this point for a number of years.

DR PATERSON: But in terms of the government's discussions about whether the government will legislate to increase that number?

Mr Rattenbury: These are not advanced.

DR PATERSON: Okay. Thanks.

MR CAIN: Minister, the advice that you received from the Head of Service seemed to boil down to this: an ACT public service employee need not declare a spousal conflict of interest unless the matter enters a tribunal or court. Is that your view of the Head of Service's advice?

Mr Rattenbury: That is your interpretation of the Head—

MR CAIN: I am asking your view.

Mr Rattenbury: I will answer the question in terms I choose to, Mr Cain.

THE CHAIR: Mr Cain, I am just asking whether this is a new question or it is one you have actually asked in the hearings thus far.

MR CAIN: I have some follow-ups.

THE CHAIR: If I could get you to get to the follow-ups, that would make me more comfortable.

MR CAIN: Sure. As Minister for Consumer Affairs, there are public servants that report to you, through your officials here.

Mr Rattenbury: Yes.

MR CAIN: If one of those public servants was dealing with a complaint against another public servant, would you expect that public servant to declare a conflict of interest if they were in a spousal relationship with that public servant?

Mr Rattenbury: It is a hypothetical question, Mr Cain, and, under the standing orders, you know that hypothetical questions are not permitted. What I would say is this: I expect ACT public servants to operate at the highest level of integrity. I expect ACT public servants to be fully aware of the requirements under their employment conditions to deal with conflicts of interest.

As minister, I take that very seriously, which is why in this matter, in light of the information that was provided to me by a member of the public, I sought advice from the Head of Service. Serious allegations were raised with me and, as the minister, it is my job to follow through and ensure that those matters are looked at.

MR CAIN: Minister, it is my understanding that all ACT public servants, including statutory officeholders, must be very proactive—and this was certainly my understanding, as a 20-year career public servant in the ACT—in identifying and declaring any actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest as soon as they become aware of it.

Mr Rattenbury: Yes.

MR CAIN: So you are saying to this committee that the spouse of a public servant could possibly act on a matter involving that public servant without declaring the conflict of interest?

Mr Rattenbury: I am not saying that, Mr Cain. What I am saying is that the requirements are very clear. But, clearly, each matter will need to be examined on the circumstances.

MR CAIN: So, if there was a matter that appeared in front of you when you got back to your workplace of a public servant investigating a complaint against one of your

other public servants and those two public servants were spouses, what would your opinion be of that?

Mr Rattenbury: Mr Cain, my opinion is less relevant to what I would actually do. What you do in life is what matters. I would refer that to either the director-general or the Head of Service to immediately investigate that matter, which is what I did in this circumstance.

MR CAIN: With respect, Minister, why would you need to refer it? The answer is blatantly obvious—that that public servant should not act on a complaint against someone with whom he or she is in a spousal relationship.

Mr Rattenbury: I believe that was a statement, Mr Cain, and I will leave it to you to make your statement.

MR CAIN: I am astounded that you do not follow that approach. I am astounded.

THE CHAIR: Do you have a further question, Mr Cain?

MR CAIN: I think I am too astounded to ask a further question at the moment, Chair.

THE CHAIR: All right. Let us move to Dr Paterson.

DR PATERSON: I want to go back to harm minimisation and public awareness campaigns. I know we have Gambling Harm Awareness Week, but I am concerned that is not a broad enough campaign. I am interested to know what campaigns will be run or are planned over the next year to reach the community broadly.

Ms Chan: Last year we commenced an “Always On” campaign. It was launched in Gambling Harm Awareness Week in October last year and it has run over a series of bursts over the last 12 months.

The campaign was called, Every Story Matters and it drew on lived experience to put it into, I guess, ways that would resonate with the general public and particularly with the various primary audiences. That campaign involved social media, hard copy materials and digital materials that venues could display around their venues. These were shared with not only the gambling venues but also the community sector partners, and they all helped to promote it.

We are running it in particular bursts over particular months. Last year there were 26 social media posts. This led to 301 unique visits to the Gambling Help landing page on the GRC website. That was quite a lot more than the previous year’s campaign. It resulted in 160 unique visits to the Gambling Help Online website. Again, that was a significant increase on the previous year’s campaign. The number of calls to the national helpline has also increased from the previous campaign.

Over the 12 months there have been 3,527 unique visits to the GRC Gambling Help landing page; 225 local calls to the national helpline; and 92 views of the personal story video. The personal story has a particular focus on a lived experience story to make it real and relatable for the general public. It is also based on advice from the

gambling harm prevention community and of practice that stigma and self-stigma is still a key issue.

Being able to hear directly from somebody that their experience has been quite effective. Making sure that we have it as a message of hope and positivity—not focused too much on the harm but also focusing on the help-seeking behaviours—is, we believe, what has led to the uptake over the last year.

This year in Gambling Harm Awareness Week we will again have the Always On campaign. Rather than launching it on the first this year we plan to actually have it always on but with particular peaks around, for example, Melbourne Cup Day racing season, around tax return time and around Christmas. These are times when people are particularly more vulnerable or might be feeling that they want to perhaps put their money into gambling. So there will be those particular bursts. We will see how this year's campaign goes compared to last years.

We are also working with the community of practice for other ideas and other means of spreading the message. All of them are our partners in getting the message out there under the public health approach.

DR PATERSON: What about a focus on online gambling? We know that is where a lot of young people are ending up at the moment. They are not necessarily going to venues or to help services, so will not necessarily see that type of media.

Ms Chan: To build the evidence base on that to inform our activity, we have two research projects underway at the moment. One is actually in the field right now. It is on young people and online gambling in the ACT. It is seeking to understand what the gambling behaviours of young people are and what their help seeking might be. We have already found that gambling is not a word that resonates with them; they are “having a bet” or “having a punt” So already we are learning about what language to break through with. That will continue over this year, and we will be looking to do a report on that in the first half of next year.

There is other research underway which is about understanding gambling harms in the digital age. That has a broader category than just young people. That is looking at, through a various number of target groups, what their understanding of gambling is and what their understanding of gambling harm is—again, to inform our campaigns and help seeking information provision.

DR PATERSON: Just on the research side, is there planning for the next Prevalence Survey?

Ms Chan: Yes. That will happen in 2024. Planning has been underway for some time now. It should be in the market in the coming months.

DR PATERSON: Okay. Great. Thank you.

Mr Rattenbury: That was actually funded in this year's budget.

DR PATERSON: Fantastic.

THE CHAIR: Given that the government objective is to encourage clubs to diversify their operations away from gaming machine revenues, how important do you see the role of planning and development by clubs in this process?

Mr Rattenbury: This is a really important question, Mr Parton. Certainly, the clubs have been giving us really clear feedback, as recently as yesterday, that they want to see the planning system make it easier for them to think about how they might use their land, particularly, differently.

THE CHAIR: They probably have the same conversations with me. In part, you will see where I am going. I want to know—and I know, obviously, that we stray way outside your portfolio space here—why the district strategies do not provide longer term information about changed use that is relevant specifically to club diversification efforts? For example, where there is a known future build-up of density along major corridors and around local centres, should that not be clear from the documents, so that clubs can make informed decisions on their future?

Mr Rattenbury: Firstly—and it is a bit outside my portfolio area—wearing my general minister hat, it is fair to say that the district strategies have been out for consultation. There has been a range of feedback. I know ClubsACT gave some really strong feedback on behalf of their members. Those district strategies have not yet been finalised, so the government is weighing up all of that feedback. Those issues potentially will be dealt with as part of the final version.

THE CHAIR: Okay. Again, this is a little outside your portfolio space, but it is partly in it as well: has there been any consideration given by government to altering the definition of “club” in planning instruments to better recognise opportunities for development that are consistent with the diversification agenda that you very clearly indicated is the way forward? Again, my question is: has the government considered altering the definitions of “clubs” in planning instruments to better recognise those opportunities so as to fulfil the diversification agenda?

Mr Rattenbury: That is an interesting question. I do not recall reading—and if I have missed it, I will apologise to the clubs for missing it—about anyone suggesting a specific different definition that would facilitate that. The feedback I have had has been much more about needing to speed up the process and needing to have better appreciation from the planning directorate of what the clubs are trying to achieve, and a bit more of a sense of enabling it. The frustration that I hear from the venues is that it takes a long time to get through the planning system, and they will make the case that time is money.

THE CHAIR: And it does. Finally, I talked about altering the definition. Has there been any consideration given, are you aware of any discussion or have you led the charge on discussions, regarding potential changes to the uses permitted on club land to encourage residential uses and other genuine diversification?

Mr Rattenbury: Certainly, in terms of leading the charge, I have raised this with Minister Gentleman around making sure that clubs can get good advice. We had a concierge service, so that they had a single point of contact in government to try and

make it easier for them. Through the loss of an individual, that fell away. Minister Gentleman has recently met with the clubs to consider reinvigorating that. I think that is an important approach. As I say, most of the feedback has been about finding the process opaque and not getting the feedback that they need.

THE CHAIR: Thank you; I think that is most sensible. Ms Clay?

MS CLAY: Minister, I have been interested in “right to repair,” as part of the circular economy. Do we have any updates on that area?

Mr Rattenbury: I do not have a substantial update for you, Ms Clay, probably since last estimates. You will recall that the Productivity Commission did a report. I thought it was a very valuable report, and it was really the beginning of that policy development in Australia.

The former federal government did not respond to that report prior to the end of their term, and the current federal government thus far has not made a formal response to that report either. From a policy point of view, it is a little stalled, from a federal government point of view, and therefore for the states and territories to work with the federal government on that.

MS CLAY: It is disappointing to hear that. What is the process, when we have a change of federal government, with an outstanding Productivity Commission report like that?

Mr Rattenbury: I might look to my colleagues. I am not sure. Let me take that on notice and check for you.

MS CLAY: Sure.

Mr Rattenbury: My belief is that they just carry over.

MS CLAY: Okay. Because we have had a change of federal government, we had high hopes, but a lot of this national policy in the circular economy space is not progressing very quickly, in our product design phase and our right to repair phase. It is not really moving.

Mr Rattenbury: No, I do not think so. I have not detected enthusiasm for it, which I think is a shame, because the Productivity Commission report was not only an excellent piece of policy work; it actually reflected an interesting coalition of stakeholders who want to see action in this space, ranging from those who work on recycling issues and IT issues, and probably coming at it more from a consumer perspective, right through to farmers who have problems with farm machinery. It is a really broad perspective of views regarding those who are looking for action in this space, and there is probably a degree of community frustration at this point that we have not seen more action arising out of that report from the Productivity Commission.

MS CLAY: I think that is right. We have a lot more community toolboxes and repair cafes, and I am having more and more conversations with people about why we do not have better protections that enable repairs and extension of life. Is it something

that can be actioned locally or do we need our federal government to lead on it?

Mr Rattenbury: It is very difficult to action locally. The sort of actions we can take locally are to do things like support some of the community groups who are setting up repair cafes and the like. But right to repair seeks to go right back up the product chain to the point of design. My considered view on this—and it is partly why we took up the matter nationally—is that the ACT is far too small to look to regulate in that space in our own right.

When you think about the consumer goods that come into the ACT, it is not practical for us to seek to regulate that. We need to do it nationally. Certainly, the development of the work in the United States and Europe starts to create a production environment. The regulation that we are seeing, in Europe particularly, is creating the groundwork for that. Australia does not have to reinvent the wheel, but we certainly need to work together to bring it to Australia.

MS CLAY: We are seeing an increasing number of countries now who are making, for instance, import bans at a national level on materials that they cannot recycle. I am hearing about more and more countries jumping onto this. Are we seeing the same kind of movement in terms of national regulation overseas with the right to repair? Are there countries that are taking stronger regulatory steps to make sure that products that cannot be repaired do not come into their countries? Is that starting to become a global movement?

Mr Rattenbury: I have not seen that sort of import restriction anywhere, but I might have missed it. What I have seen more of is regulation at that design end—requirements regarding the way products are designed so that they are able to be taken apart, the intellectual property is available to do the repair work, spare parts are available and the tools are available. You see people with proprietary tools so that only one type of tool can open a product. They are the sort of things that they are seeking to regulate overseas that I am familiar with.

MS CLAY: We can go further, with some countries in Europe, for instance, requiring that devices all fit the same cable.

Mr Rattenbury: Fantastic.

MS CLAY: Yes. During COVID we had a lot more people interested in repairing their own goods. They were exploring a lot of new ways to do things themselves at home. Have we seen more energy from consumers to consume less and to repair more as a result of COVID?

Mr Rattenbury: Your linkage to COVID is interesting. People had more time at home and they took the opportunity perhaps to work on some of those things. Your observation around the flourishing of repair cafes and groups like that in the ACT probably is a hangover—it seems a derogatory term; it is not what I mean—or a continuation of that enthusiasm.

DR PATERSON: With respect to the Community Clubs Ministerial Advisory Council, I am wondering how that is going and how often it meets. Do you think that

it is meeting its objectives?

Mr Rattenbury: Yes, the ministerial advisory council has proved to be a beneficial grouping in the way that it brings harm minimisation representatives and community representatives to the same table as industry representatives. That has been a really important initiative. I was very keen to establish it. Frankly, rather than the government having one group come along and lobby us, and then a different view come along and lobby us, there is real value in having the two perspectives on the argument, if you like, hearing each other and speaking with each other more frequently. I think that is valuable.

In terms of the specifics of your question, the meetings are generally held every six to eight weeks. The last meeting was held yesterday, in fact. There was a bit of a hiatus there. There was a meeting that was scheduled; I had to attend a national ministerial meeting, and we were unable to find a replacement date. We did have a bit of a gap between the last two meetings, but generally it has been every six to eight weeks.

DR PATERSON: What would you say are some of the outcomes that have been achieved through the establishment of that council?

Mr Rattenbury: There have been a number. As I touched on earlier, we had the self-exclusion working group. We have a technical working group. There is now the establishment of a diversification working group. One of the outcomes, again, is a range of independent-from-government representatives working together to provide advice back to government, which I think is valuable.

There is increased dialogue. There is a forum for people to raise a range of ideas. We have seen presentations on initiatives that have been proposed by the clubs. We have had harm minimisation delegates bring papers to the meeting and raise concerns or highlight research to the group that others had not seen. I think that dialogue is the primary outcome and, as we move through the implementation of a number of specific measures under the parliamentary agreement, that group will play a very specific role in giving government feedback on the development of those ideas and policies.

DR PATERSON: How many members of the council are there?

Mr Rattenbury: There are 14 members.

MR CAIN: Minister, I make reference again to the email that you sent to the Head of Service and the Public Sector Standards Commissioner on 29 November last year. Did you receive a response or any communication from the Public Sector Standards Commissioner?

Mr Rattenbury: I have not yet, no.

MR CAIN: Are you expecting to receive some sort of advice or response?

Mr Rattenbury: There has been follow-up from my office to the public service commissioner asking when that advice would be provided. I am keen to receive that

advice. They have indicated to my office, in response to those requests, that they will provide it when they can.

MR CAIN: You have had some correspondence subsequent to your email of 29 November?

Mr Rattenbury: Yes. My office contacted the public service commissioner and asked when we might expect to receive that advice, and we have not received a definitive answer to that question.

MR CAIN: It would seem that correspondence has not been provided in this exhaustive—

Mr Rattenbury: I believe it was a phone all.

MR CAIN: A phone call?

Mr Rattenbury: Yes. I will take it on notice and check, Mr Cain.

Mr CAIN: Okay. Are you able to provide any records of that phone call to this committee as well?

Mr Rattenbury: I will take that on notice.

MR CAIN: Thank you. As the minister responsible for I do not know how many hundreds of public servants, are you saying that they do not have to declare a spousal relationship, if they are in one, until a matter proceeds to a tribunal or court?

Mr Rattenbury: Mr Cain, that is not what I have said, and you know that.

MR CAIN: I am asking whether that is what you believe.

Mr Rattenbury: No. I have made it very clear that the ACT public service has detailed rules around the declaration of conflicts of interest, and I expect ACT public servants to follow that. You have made a number of assertions today which I think are untrue. You have, for example, referenced public servants investigating their own spouses. That is not happening.

MR CAIN: A complaint against a spouse.

Mr Rattenbury: This is why I am struggling to answer your questions—

MR CAIN: That is not what I said.

Mr Rattenbury: because I believe, Mr Cain, you are interpreting things in a way that suits your narrative, and that is why I am being careful in my answers, because I believe you are making assertions that are not necessarily accurate.

MR CAIN: Obviously, the subject matter is an investigation of a complaint against another public servant with whom they were in a spousal relationship. That was the

actual context, of course, and you know that.

Mr Rattenbury: You have made a number of different interpretations of that through the course of this hearing, and that is why I am seeking to be careful in my answers. As you are also aware, these matters are the subject of ongoing litigation, which restrains me in how I am able to comment.

THE CHAIR: Mr Cain, we might be done. If you have any further questions on this matter, put them on notice, please. Mine are pretty much questions that can be placed on notice.

MR CAIN: I have a question for Mr Pryce. Mr Pryce, what led you to change the conflict declaration from “low” to “medium”, add the risk of “potential”, not just “perceived”, and remove the commissioner from this issue altogether?

Mr Pryce: As well as being the head of Access Canberra, I am the Acting Commissioner for Fair Trading. On receipt of a conflict of interest form and assessing the information that I had available to me, regarding the parts of the form that I changed, those changes were warranted. I do not have the form in front of me now; from memory, regarding those changes that you have just outlined, what you said, I think, was accurate. As a result of that, I upgraded the potential conflict of interest; I think that relates to the changes I made. I put in a standard operating procedure, as part of our conflict of interest processes, to remove the commissioner from any further decision-making around that matter. I do not think I can add anything more.

MR CAIN: Did you explain why you upgraded the original declaration?

Mr Pryce: As I said before, Mr Cain, upon my assessment of the information available to me when reading the conflict of interest and considering the matter, I felt that it warranted further controls being in place.

MR CAIN: Did you communicate your view to the then commissioner as to why you were upgrading your perception of the conflict?

Mr Pryce: Yes, I spoke to the commissioner, in saying that these were the changes that I had made to the form, as well as outlining the steps that I was taking in response.

MR CAIN: Mr Pryce, given that you sought to remove the commissioner from this matter and implement a new standard operating procedure when the conflict was declared, how are you satisfied that these serious control measures were not required from an earlier point in time?

Mr Pryce: I can only talk about the information that was before me. Based on the conflict of interest that was being declared at that time, those were the steps that I took.

MR CAIN: Minister, were you aware that Mr Pryce had updated the commissioner’s own assessment of the level of conflict of interest to make it more serious than she herself had volunteered, and then had removed her from this issue?

Mr Rattenbury: I am aware of the decisions that Mr Pryce took, yes.

MR CAIN: When were you aware of that?

Mr Rattenbury: I would have to take that on notice, Mr Cain.

MR CAIN: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Minister, and all of the officials, for your attendance. If you have taken questions on notice, please provide answers to the committee secretary within five working days of receipt of the uncorrected proof transcript.

Hearing suspended from 3.14 to 3.30 pm.

Appearances:

Davidson, Ms Emma, Assistant Minister for Families and Community Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Justice Health, Minister for Mental Health and Minister for Veterans and Seniors

ACT Health Directorate

Rule, Ms Catherine, Acting Director-General

Lopa, Ms Liz, Acting Deputy Director-General, Infrastructure and Engagement

Moore, Dr Elizabeth, Coordinator-General, Office for Mental Health and Wellbeing

Garrett, Ms Cheryl, Executive Branch Manager, Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Division

Canberra Health Services

Peffer, Mr Dave, Chief Executive Officer

McKenzie, Ms Katie, Executive Director, Mental Health, Justice Health and Alcohol and Drug Services

THE CHAIR: In this final session today, we will hear from Ms Emma Davidson MLA, Minister for Justice Health and Minister for Mental Health, and officials. We welcome you all.

The proceedings are being broadcast live. The proceedings today are also being transcribed and will be published on the Assembly website. If you take a question on notice, please be quite emphatic about it and say, "I will take that question on notice," so that we are all on the same page.

I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. We will do this universally: could you please confirm verbally for the record that you acknowledge the privilege implications of the statement and that you understand it? Excellent.

We are not inviting opening statements, so we will go straight to questions. I will start, Minister. I do not know whether this is a question that is better directed to you or to someone else; it could be to Dr Moore. Let us start with you and you can direct it as you choose.

The previous federal government committed \$13½ million over three years in support funding for the establishment of a new residential treatment centre for eating disorders in Canberra. The first funding instalment for this was provided to the ACT in the 2021-22 financial year. In last year's estimates we asked why so much money, \$8.15 million, had been rolled over from the financial years 2021-22 and 2022-23 into 2023-24. At that stage estimated completion was due in December this year.

In the current budget statements, in table 17 on page 17, changes to appropriation, controlled recurrent payments, the figures are \$1.749 million budgeted for 2023-24 and \$5.171 million estimated for 2024-25, with a new building completion date of June 2024 being advertised on the ACT Health website.

The previous federal government committed \$13½ million for the establishment of this new residential treatment centre for eating disorders in the ACT; but, since then, looking at each set of budget papers, funding appears to be being pushed forward. The question—and potentially this can be taken on notice—is: what is the current total spend per year from 2021-22 to this financial year for establishing the eating disorder residential treatment centre? I am looking for a breakdown. I am not supremely confident that I can get it here in this room, but maybe I can.

Ms Davidson: You are looking for a breakdown of what we have spent in past years and a bit of a recap of the time line for when money will be expended on that project, which we have actually covered in quite a lot of detail in previous hearings and in question time. I will pass that to Catherine Rule, who can pass that on to the right person to answer in detail, about what has already been spent and the reasons why. Some of that will be related to when we received money from the commonwealth government, which was not necessarily on the time line we had initially expected. Sometimes there are a few delays in the commonwealth passing on funding to the ACT, and then going through the process of doing the design work.

Ms Rule: I am the Director-General of the Health Directorate for a period of five weeks while Rebecca Cross is on leave. I will pass to my colleagues Ms Garrett and Ms Lopa to give you some more insight into that expenditure.

Ms Lopa: I will take on notice the year-by-year breakdown. I can tell you that, at the beginning of the project, the focus was on getting information from the community and consulting on a model of care for the centre. We have not had a residential eating disorder centre before in Canberra, and they are not very common around the country. I believe there is one in Queensland which is run by the Butterfly Foundation.

We had a reference group that we relied on and worked with to develop a model of care for the centre. That model of care leads into being able to do the infrastructure planning. That model of care and that reference group helped us to work up how many beds would be needed and what the configuration needed to look like—double rooms, single rooms, bathrooms and those sorts of things. We then started doing the infrastructure planning. The DA has now been approved. The site has now been approved by government and we have entered into a contract with a construction firm. That infrastructure project is underway. You are right, Mr Parton; we are expecting it to be open mid-next year.

THE CHAIR: In regard to the figures taken on notice, I would like to see a breakdown between commonwealth funding and territory funding. Obviously, as a part of that, I want to know what the total territory expenditure on the establishment of that centre is. If that can be included in that question on notice, that would be exceptional.

Ms Davidson: I think you will find that there is quite a bit of information already on the public record through annual reports about what has already been expended. It is also worth knowing that the commonwealth provided the funding to construct the centre. In this year's budget we have set aside funding to provide the services at the centre. Once it is open, we have \$17.3 million over four years in this year's budget to

provide the services at our first residential eating disorder treatment centre, and that will be provided by Canberra Health Services.

MR COCKS: There have been statements made on a number of occasions during this year that construction of the eating disorder centre is underway. This is in my electorate and constituents have told me that they are not seeing much happening. On what date did construction break ground and what is the status as of today?

Ms Davidson: Liz will be able to talk in more detail about where the construction project is up to, but the construction project has actually started. We have engaged the construction company and they have started their process. As you know, with a project like this, there is quite a bit of work that has to be gone through in making sure that you have all the right approvals and things like that before you can actually start building.

MR COCKS: I understand. My question is specifically about construction, not the overall project, because the comments have been about construction. When did it break ground?

Ms Davidson: Liz will be able to talk some more about where exactly the project is up to.

Ms Lopa: My information is that we did turn the first sod on the construction site about a month ago, so that officially starts on-the-ground construction. We had engaged the construction company prior to that. I will have to check the date that we actually entered into the contract with them. If you want that date, I will take that on notice.

MR COCKS: The actual date that you broke ground is what I have asked for. Can you take on notice and give me the actual date?

Ms Lopa: I believe that was about a month ago, but I will get you the exact date that the turning of the sod started. I will get you the date, too, if you would like, Mr Cocks, for when we entered into the contract.

MR COCKS: Yes, please.

Ms Davidson: You will find, too, Mr Cocks, that that is already on the public record; there was some media around that event happening.

MR COCKS: There was certainly media around the intention to start. I reviewed that media closely. I am keen to find out the actual date that construction started. Could you also provide that update on where construction is up to as of today?

Ms Lopa: I am happy to do that, Mr Cocks.

MR COCKS: It looks like there have been further delays in this project. The date that you provided in response to questions on notice from last year was that the centre would be operational in early 2024; however, the budget papers and that operational funding that you were talking about make it look like there are only about

three months worth of operational funding for that financial year. Has it been further delayed, with the opening, and exactly when do we expect it to be open?

Ms Davidson: I believe we have already talked about when we are expecting it to be open and start taking patients. Mr Parton referenced that earlier.

MR COCKS: Yes. It looks like that is delayed, having regard to our discussion last year and the information I was provided then. Are there reasons for a further delay?

Ms Davidson: Liz talked a little earlier about the steps that we have gone through in order to get to the stage where we are commencing construction—the processes for getting DAs approved, getting the transfer of the land title, engaging a construction company and engaging in design consultation with the community.

MR COCKS: Has that taken longer than expected?

Ms Davidson: I can ask Liz to talk in some more detail about what processes we have undertaken—

MR COCKS: That would be great.

Ms Davidson: and why it takes as long as it takes.

Ms Rule: Can I confirm also that, regarding the question you asked about the breaking of the ground, it was on 9 June.

MR COCKS: Thank you very much.

Ms Lopa: Mr Cocks, I recall saying at last estimates—I might be wrong—that, usually, when I get asked about when something will be open and operational, we have a time line that we are working to, but it really depends on when we go out to tender and we get a construction company on board, and they come back with their program; that is when we are really sure about when something will open. Before that period, we are doing our detailed planning. Obviously, we know how long these things take to build. When we go out to tender and say to a construction company, “Come back to us with a program,” it is then that we know what the program is that they are working to.

At the moment we are looking at mid-next year, with the firm that we are working to. We have had conversations with them, though, about our keenness to get this open as soon as possible. They are very aware of it. They are doing site establishment at the moment and putting some electrical works in as part of the beginning of construction. They are also aware of how much we want to get this open as soon as we can and are working to that. At the moment their program is mid-next year.

MR COCKS: Excellent. In terms of the operational funding in the budget, is there a reason that that was not previously budgeted?

Ms Davidson: Getting the funding for the operation of the centre is not actually necessary until you are getting closer to opening and starting to take patients. While

you are planning for construction, you are looking at budgeting for how you are going to build the facility. Seeing as we are talking about opening a facility towards the end of this financial year, it is appropriate for us to be getting the funds in this year's budget for employing staff who will be working in that centre.

MS CLAY: Minister, we have funding in the budget for community-based mental health services. How much money is in there for community-based mental health services in total?

Ms Davidson: We have about \$28 million in additional funding over the next four years for programs in mental health, and almost all of that funding is going to programs delivered in the community, rather than acute in-hospital services. The reason we are doing that is because we want to be able to provide more services to people at an earlier stage in their mental health condition so that they do not end up needing to go to hospital in order to get treatment. The more that we can do out in the community, the better chance we have of being able to get someone into a recovery state sooner and being able to keep them there. There is quite a range of programs that we have out in the community that will be doing that work.

MS CLAY: What sorts of programs?

Ms Davidson: I will pass to Catherine, who may want Dr Moore to talk in more detail about these programs. It includes some work on looking at community-based residential accommodation for people with mental health needs, looking at specific services for children and young people, getting the second Safe Haven open on the Canberra Hospital campus, which will help people to avoid having to go to emergency—this is based on the success of the Belconnen Safe Haven—and an extension of the second PACER team to see people out in the community who are experiencing crisis, as well as making sure that we are continuing the WOKE and Stepping Stones program. Dr Moore might be able to talk in more detail about the programs we are delivering in the community.

Dr Moore: The minister has outlined quite a few of the services. The other ones that we are very keen to continue in the budget are the continuation of MindMap, which is the online navigation portal, the continuation of Youth Aware of Mental Health, which is the mental health promotion and early intervention program in schools, and a network of children and young people's services alliance. This is to build networking across various health services and psychosocial services.

There is also money in the budget for a similar alliance between drug and alcohol and mental health services, because the one thing that we hear most often is that people are unaware of services and there is a lack of coordination. This is an opportunity to build that coordination.

MS CLAY: Can we get an update on the Dhulwa mental health service?

Ms Davidson: Yes. Things have actually changed quite a bit in Dhulwa over the last 12 months since we started that process for an independently chaired inquiry. I am very happy to say that things are quite different inside that service now.

Since I came back on 7 February to the chamber to table a government response that said it was agreeing to all of the recommendations of that independent inquiry's report, we have already made some progress on completing some of those recommendations. The independent oversight board met on 19 April, and they tabled a report about that on 9 May. They met again about a week ago, so there will be quarterly reports provided to me from the independent oversight board, looking at progress.

I can pass to Dave Peffer, who can talk a bit more about the progress on the recommendations so far and how different things are in Dhulwa today.

MS CLAY: That would be great. Will you be tabling all of those quarterly reports?

Ms Davidson: I absolutely will be. It is really important that we have accountable and transparent processes on how we are making sure that we are improving workplace culture and safety, and making sure that we are providing the best possible healthcare experience for people who are in Dhulwa.

Mr Peffer: It is safe to say that this is a part of our service offering where we are quite proud of what has been achieved. Over recent months, the feedback from both consumers and the workforce that works onsite has been markedly different in recent weeks and months compared to what it would have been 12 months ago.

I have had the opportunity to spend some time with the team as well as the consumers, and I can speak firsthand that the experience of turning up to a facility like that and seeing a nursing team in a game of soccer with our consumers speaks to the turnaround that we have seen in terms of commitment and some great outcomes.

I will hand over to Ms McKenzie, who, in no small amount, deserves some of the credit for the turnaround that we have seen in that facility.

Ms McKenzie: Probably the most objective measure we have about the change at Dhulwa is the decrease in incidents of occupational violence. In the previous financial year, 2021-22, Dhulwa recorded 101 incidents of occupational violence. In the financial year that has just finished, Dhulwa recorded 14 incidents of occupational violence. The change is remarkable. The feeling is significantly different.

With regard to the independent oversight board, it met this week. CHS has had 53 recommendations in total—25 recommendations and 28 subrecommendations. We have closed off 22 to date, and there have been active pieces of work to close off the others.

MS CLAY: Thank you. That is a reassuring update, particularly on the reduction in the incidents.

MR COCKS: I want to go back to the announcement that you made. Thank you for listing off a number of those investments. You have said that the funding going into things like the community-based mental health accommodation is additional funding. From my research through the budget, firstly, it is fully offset, but also it appears to be the continuation of a 2018-19 measure. Is that incorrect?

Ms Davidson: Some of that funding will go towards the continuation of the discharge accommodation program, which was a pilot, a trial. It will go towards learning about how we can best continue that discharge accommodation program and get an evaluation done so that we can look at, if we want to make this permanent, what is the best way in which to run this.

There is also some funding in there to undertake planning and design for a community-based residential rehabilitative mental healthcare service. There is ongoing funding for the Step Up, Step Down at home program, which is a particularly helpful program for people who are stepping down from inpatient care to being back in their own home. We want to make sure that they are able to continue their engagement with treatment and stay on that recovery track. I can pass to Catherine Rule, who can talk more about that or pass on to the right person to give you more detail.

Ms Rule: Mr Cocks, in order to help answer your question, how the budget statements are constructed is clearly a question for our colleagues in Treasury. Your question is quite broad. I am wondering if there is a specific announcement or measure that you are interested in that we can help answer your question on.

MR COCKS: I am looking at the \$6.4 million.

Ms Rule: Sorry; which \$6.4 million?

MR COCKS: Over four years for community-based residential accommodation for people with mental health needs.

Ms Rule: Okay.

MR COCKS: That particular line appears to be a continuation of a 2018-19 measure, and I am wondering why it is being presented as new.

Ms Davidson: There is some funding in there to do planning and design, and for a community-based residential rehabilitative mental healthcare service. I might pass to Dr Elizabeth Moore to talk in more detail about what that work is for and how it is going to help the community.

Dr Moore: Thank you, Minister. Part of it is an underspend, part of it is a rollover and part of it is new money. The minister is talking about a program that we have been looking at, the discharge accommodation program. We need to evaluate that to see if it meets the community's requirement and what we need to do, going forward.

MR COCKS: Okay. But it is only partially new money?

Dr Moore: That is correct. Some of it is underspend. As Ms Rule has said, how the cabinet papers or how the Treasury papers are presented—

MR COCKS: I guess my concern is with the branding of funding which is clearly not new money, within that total of \$28 million that you are claiming to be additional. Is that the usual approach?

Ms Davidson: The discharge accommodation program that you are talking about there that is continuing—

MR COCKS: No; sorry. Of that \$28 million that you have mentioned—although in the budget it talks about \$30 million—how much is actually new?

Ms Davidson: The discharge accommodation program that you are talking about is a continuation of what was already happening. We tried a pilot of the discharge accommodation program. We now want to do an evaluation and do some planning work for—

MR COCKS: I can appreciate that, and you have gone to that. What I am interested in is, in dollar terms, out of that \$28 million, how much is new?

Ms Davidson: Doing something like evaluation and planning for what should be a permanent service is new, compared to what we had previously funded as a pilot program. It is not the same thing.

MR COCKS: I am very happy if you would like to take the detail of it on notice.

Ms Davidson: I think we have a difference of opinion about what is new. Define that a bit better for us.

MR COCKS: I am happy for you to come back and—

Ms Rule: I think, Mr Cocks, the budget papers reflect the amount of funding that is allocated in this budget to these measures.

MR COCKS: Yes.

Ms Rule: So that is the amount of money that is allocated to the measures in this financial year.

MR COCKS: Yes. And I am interested in how much is new money.

THE CHAIR: Is it possible, on notice, to get a breakdown of what has been rolled over from previous years, as compared to new announcements? That is what you are looking for, isn't it?

MR COCKS: New money. Yes, that is what I am after.

THE CHAIR: Is it possible to get that on notice?

Ms Rule: We can take that on notice. As I said, that is largely a question for Treasury about how the dollars in the budget papers are accounted for, but we can work with our colleagues in Treasury to try to provide that information.

MR COCKS: Thank you. I appreciate that.

MR PETTERSSON: How is work progressing on developing the first action plan for the Mental Health Workforce Strategy?

Ms Davidson: Some really good work has been happening on that strategy, particularly on how we incorporate the peer workforce into our future workforce plans. I might pass to Catherine, who can direct that to the right person to talk in detail about where the strategy is up to. I know that there has been some significant consultation and work ongoing for that piece of work. The Mental Health Community Coalition have also been engaged as part of that planning.

Ms Rule: Apologies. At the end of week 2 I am still working out who is responsible for what, but I believe that is a question for Dr Moore.

Dr Moore: Thank you, Ms Rule. The workforce strategy action plan is nearing completion. We are receiving our final comments—by tomorrow—and the action plan will then go forth from that. It has been a very collaborative approach across non-government and government agencies, clinical services and lived experience. We have collaboratively put out expressions of interest for two peer worker directors, lived experience director positions, one at Canberra Health Services, and one in the Office for Mental Health and Wellbeing, to drive the lived experienced workforce.

There are four priority areas in the Mental Health Workforce Strategy. We have been working through the consultation process to get the actions that will have the most impact. We of course have a Health Workforce Strategy, and we are tying in very closely with the Health Workforce Strategy in terms of governance, because mental health goes across both the health workforce and the specialised mental health workforce. We are awaiting the National Mental Health Workforce Strategy, which has been, we understand, completed, but not yet announced. We know, however, that our plan will closely resemble that plan.

MR PETTERSSON: That is great. You said it was close to being finalised. When do you think it is going to be publicly released?

Dr Moore: We are receiving the last consultation comments at the end of this week. We will then present that to the minister for her thoughts about when it should be released.

MR PETTERSSON: Okay. And this is a first action plan?

Dr Moore: Yes.

MR PETTERSSON: How long is this action plan meant to be in place before we are talking about a second action plan?

Dr Moore: We hope the strategy will go over 10 years. This action plan will be for the first three years. The reason for that is that things do change quite rapidly, so we do not want to lock ourselves into a longer action plan in case there are new sources of funding.

Ms Davidson: I think it is worth noting, too, that once I receive the action plan to

have a read through, it will still need to go through some cabinet processes to discuss any potential financial implications or interactions with other pieces of policy work.

MR PETTERSSON: I look forward to reading it.

THE CHAIR: As we all do.

MR COCKS: I am really glad that you raised this. This was lower on my list than some other things, so I am glad we can get to it. Last year, when we spoke about this, the response on our time lines was that we could expect something to be with the minister by April this year. That was in the context of a discussion where I pointed out that we had been waiting for the strategy since 2018 and there had been a six-month delay last year in delivering that strategy. Now we have an action plan which is already significantly overdue. From last year, why are we seeing another delay in getting something substantive and meaningful out there?

Ms Davidson: I think if you were listening to what Dr Moore was saying earlier—

MR COCKS: I certainly was.

Ms Davidson: she was talking about also making sure that we are aligned with the National Mental Health Workforce Strategy, which is due to be released soon. Work is being done behind the scenes to make sure that we are aligned with something that is also yet to be released. We are making sure that we are consulting with the community sector during a time that has been really difficult for everyone, with the amount of consultation that has been going on, while also dealing with a really serious public health situation with the pandemic.

MR COCKS: As I said, I completely appreciate what has been happening. My concern is that we are delayed again. This has been the story for a long time. As I said, we have been waiting for substantive action since 2018, and it is starting to feel a bit like *deja vu*. Last year you indicated that the National Mental Health Workforce Strategy was a problem, and as has been alluded to. That strategy still does not appear to be publicly available under the current federal government. There are some indications online that it was endorsed by health ministers last year—I do not know if that includes you or the Minister for Health—and that it should have been released by now. When was the ACT last consulted on this strategy and when will we know what the impact is for the ACT?

Ms Davidson: I might pass back Dr Moore, who can talk about when we were last consulted and what the interactions are for the ACT.

Dr Moore: Thank you, Minister. Cheryl Garrett is our representative on that committee, so I will pass to Cheryl.

Ms Garrett: Thank you. We do have a national mental health workforce working group. I will confirm on which date it last met. There was an update provided by the commonwealth at that meeting. The advice provided by the commonwealth was that the strategy will be released imminently. Significant consultation over a long period of time happened nationally, which the commonwealth led, but the most recent update

from the commonwealth is that it will be released imminently.

MR COCKS: But you will provide the date of that last meeting on notice?

Ms Garrett: Yes.

MR COCKS: Thank you. For a significant change of pace and subject matter, I want to go the issue of trauma-informed care in mental health. Organisations like AIHW and Phoenix Australia point out the real importance and impact of trauma. It can contribute to the development of all sorts of different mental health conditions and it has direct impacts on the appropriate way to treat and care for people with a trauma background, including impacting clinical approaches and individual responses. Does ACT Health have trauma-informed care policies in place? If so, is there any work currently underway or upcoming to ensure that the ACT's mental health services are delivered in a trauma-informed manner? Is there any consideration of trauma-informed design in our mental health services?

Ms Davidson: That is a really good question. I am very glad that you asked about trauma-informed care. We have been particularly focused on trauma-informed care for children and young people in the ACT. There was funding in the bilateral agreement that was signed last year for exactly this kind of service. We have been working on a position statement for the ACT around trauma-informed care for children and young people, which is progressing through all the relevant stages of consultation and working across different directorates to make sure that it is ready to then go to the stage of being endorsed. I might pass to Dr Moore, who can talk in more detail about that youth at risk trauma service and how it is developing, starting with the position statement.

Dr Moore: Thank you, Minister. There is a project currently called Youth at Risk of Severe Mental Illness, commonly known as Youth at Risk. There are two deliverables under it. One is coordination in a trauma-informed way for services and the other is the development of a specific service. We have concentrated on looking at a coordinated position statement around trauma-informed practice. The consultation that we have had across government and non-government services shows that there is a real appetite to adopt this as part of our ongoing way of working. The team have been working very hard on the consultation. The position statement is working its way through the government processes. I am really pleased that this piece of work has been able to be done.

MR COCKS: Fantastic. Importantly, trauma does not just affect young people. Is it being built in across mental health services?

Ms Davidson: There are some other pieces of work that are going on around how we deal with complex cases and that sort of thing. There is a particular focus at the moment on youth mental health and trauma for children and young people, due to not just the work that is going on within mental health itself but also related areas like raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility and what kinds of alternative services might be needed for some of those families who are dealing with really complex situations, including trauma. There are a number of reasons why we are talking about the youth at risk trauma service, but that does not mean that we are not

also trying to progress pieces of work that lead to better trauma-informed care for people across a whole range of health and social services.

MR COCKS: That is good. The reason I bring this up is that I recently met a person who has a significant trauma background, including being a victim of sexual assault when they were a child. They are now an adult. They shared their experience with me about what happened in the Adult Mental Health Unit. I cannot share full details of their experience because they have lost trust in the system and they do not want their information shared. But, as an example, they told me about having to use bathrooms and showers with transparent windows and no curtains or window coverings. They showed me photos of the view from that window that show a direct line of sight to the car park. They told me about how they felt fully exposed, powerless and demeaned. Can you explain to me how and why a person who has experienced significant sexual assault would be subject to that sort of re-traumatisation within ACT government facilities?

Ms Davidson: It sounds like you have got some very specific questions about the model of care and the way in which services are provided at AMU. I might pass to Katie McKenzie, who can talk about why services are provided in that particular way at that particular service. It is also worth noting that there are a whole range of different mental health services, both in the community and inpatient services and rehabilitation residential services for people. The model of care is going to be different in each service, based on what the clinical needs are of the person who might be referred in to receive treatment in that specific service. What happens in one service is not necessarily reflective of what happens in all services.

MR COCKS: That is fine, but I would like to understand what has happened here.

Ms Davidson: In AMU in particular, yes: why services are delivered in that particular way there.

Ms McKenzie: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Mr Cocks. I am sorry to hear of the experience of the person that you talked to. I will start more broadly on our approach to ensuring that our staff practise in a trauma-informed way. A standalone, entire day can be set aside for trauma-informed care education as part of our mental health core skills training. That program is aimed at new starters, giving them developmental practice in the mental health setting. An entire day is set aside for those staff so that they are aware of the need to practise in a trauma-informed way in mental health settings.

I will come back to AMU, but I also want to acknowledge that you are absolutely right: trauma-informed practice is not just aimed at adolescents. We also targeted our custodial mental health team in AMC earlier this year and have given them a three-day workshop. Every member of the custodial mental health team attended a three-day workshop. That was focused on very advanced skills development in this area. We have the specific approach to trauma-informed care training at Dhulwa and the adolescent unit, and that is to complement our approach to core skills.

Specifically for AMU, I am not aware of a line of sight between a bathroom and a car park. If you would like me to, I can take that on notice and look at that. Regarding the

reference to the ability to see into a bathroom and having no curtains, unfortunately that is about safety. But we are committed to ensuring that safety occurs in a trauma-informed way.

MR COCKS: Thank you. I would be interested to understand how you offset that—at least offsetting the perceived line of sight, even if someone in the car park cannot directly see in. For a person in this situation to feel that exposed has a significant re-traumatisation impact.

DR PATERSON: My question is on the MyHome project. Minister, I have been following up on this at every estimates and annual reports hearing, and through questions on notice. I am not able to get a clear picture of how things are progressing and what the time frames are. It is part of our PAGA agreement to have this delivered. I am interested to know what steps have been taken. What are the time frames? How are we progressing with this project?

Ms Davidson: Before I pass to Catherine Rule to talk in more detail about where it is up to at the moment, this particular project has required quite a lot of work between the MyHome board and the Office for Disability, and getting advice from other organisations that are providing support to people with similar conditions in the ACT, to help them reach a point where they can present a model for that project that everyone feels is going to be viable, work really well, meet people's needs and work well for the MyHome group as well. Things have progressed quite a lot over the course of the last two years. We are at a point now where we can start to have some more conversations about what need to be the next steps in getting construction moving, where the funding comes from exactly, and who is going to be taking responsibility for that. I will pass to Catherine Rule, who can talk about where exactly that piece of work sits at the moment.

Ms Rule: I will just make a quick comment and pass to Dr Moore, and there may be some follow-up with our Treasury colleagues. Part of this work is being led by the Coordinator-General for Housing, because it is up to the point now of having to look at the different financing models that are available and what kind of housing solution would be offered. There have been lots of discussions. I know this because of my responsibility in my day job for Housing ACT.

The coordinator-general is the best placed person to look at the broad range of housing options that may be best suited to this model. I know that he was anticipating undertaking some discussions with the various stakeholders. Mr Miners may be able to assist. I am not sure when they are appearing. Sometime next week, he may be able to provide a bit more detail on what he has been up to. Dr Moore may also be able to reflect on that.

Dr Moore: Yes. Thank you, Ms Rule. Mental health policy and strategy undertook a review of the model. As Ms Rule has said, we then passed it to the Coordinator-General for Housing so that there could be a coordinated view of what was available.

DR PATERSON: So the next step will be that the coordinator-general will determine a funding model for that?

Ms Rule: There are two components. There are the bricks and mortar of the place and then there is the service delivery. We are at the point now of determining what is the best model for the bricks and mortar, who pays for it, how does it get funded, who owns the asset once it has actually been developed and what are the best solutions around that. That is a reasonably complex discussion to be had. We are at that stage.

Then there is a second discussion about, once we have resolved the bricks and mortar issues, how the services get delivered from within that facility. There has been work, as Dr Moore reflected, to evaluate the proposed model of service delivery and to establish that it is a viable model of service delivery. Now it is about looking to bring the two together to find the place and then to have the discussion about the service model. It is certainly under active discussion, but a number of complex elements need to come together.

DR PATERSON: Thank you. The response that I received said that the ACT Health Directorate had not been involved in or progressed any formal negotiations with Woden Valley Uniting Church, or any other community services in respect to the MyHome project. How come, nearly three years into the term, the Health Directorate has not progressed any of these discussions with the land holder?

Ms Davidson: There is a big difference between formally negotiating what you do with a block of land and having ongoing conversations with an organisation about how we can support them to come up with a good model for how they deliver the services, how it all fits together and what the options are for how things get funded. There have been quite a lot of discussions between the Office for Disability, mental health policy within ACT Health, and the MyHome board members. That has got us to the point now where the Coordinator General for Housing is able to pick up this piece of work and say, “What are the options, then, for how we get the bricks and mortar part of this done?”

DR PATERSON: Once those options are presented to cabinet, will they then be presented to Woden Valley Uniting Church. Is that how it will work?

Ms Rule: I am not sure that it is quite that sequential. There is a discussion with Woden Valley now about what models they would be interested in pursuing. We need them to help inform the options that might go to cabinet.

DR PATERSON: Is that not a formal negotiation, though?

Ms Rule: No, because there is no commitment being made to a particular thing. We are just looking at what are the best and most viable options that would work for the ACT government, but also work for them. That is the discussion that the coordinator-general is leading and that will go into informing advice to government.

DR PATERSON: Do you think that next year’s budget should see some funding to progress this project in the community?

Ms Davidson: What we really need is to see how the conversations go between Woden Valley Uniting Church, the MyHome board and the coordinator-general about

what are the possibilities and the options. They need to be allowed to have those conversations about what all the options are, before we start talking about what we are committing to, how much and when, under what model and who is going to own the asset.

DR PATERSON: I think they are pretty keen to have those conversations.

Ms Davidson: Yes. I am too.

DR PATERSON: Yes. Okay.

MR COCKS: This has been part of the governing agreement since 2016. In 2016 the governing agreement said that it would be delivered and built in that term. We have another governing agreement for 2020, which essentially says the same thing. But it sounds like there is no way this will be completed by the end of this term of government. Would that not be a breach of that governing agreement?

Ms Davidson: You are talking about a particularly complex project where one organisation owns the block of land and another organisation wants to provide a service on that land. A lot of discussions and learning and development have taken place with that organisation over a period of years about the ways in which those services can be provided that are sustainable and will work for everyone long term. There have also been ongoing changes to things like what is happening in the NDIS, and what is happening in other parts of public and social housing and in community housing.

Quite a lot of things have changed between 2016 and 2023. To judge where we are at in 2023 on 2016 standards I think does a disservice to the amount of work that has gone into this from the MyHome board, from the church and from the directorates, as well as engaging some other organisations who have been providing services to people with long-term mental health conditions who are at risk of homelessness, to learn from what has happened in other places and to look at how we make sure that we avoid ending up in a situation where things are more difficult than people expected.

MR COCKS: Let me say that, from my discussions with a number of the stakeholders involved that you have mentioned, they do not feel well consulted. Perhaps you could provide, on notice, a list of all the occasions that that group of stakeholders—the church and the board—in the last 12 months have been consulted about this project.

Ms Davidson: I can certainly provide a list of dates on which there have been consultation meetings between the board, the Office for Disability and ACT Health officials to talk through what has been happening. I can tell you that if I go down to the local shops and run into people, I am still going to get asked questions about it, and some of those will be members of that organisation. We continue to discuss where things are up to and what we can do about it and how to progress it.

MR COCKS: It sounds like you have taken that on notice. Could you also advise when consultation will take place with residents in Curtin and the wider Woden Valley community, and when you expect construction to start.

Ms Rule: I do not think we can do that. We have just described a process that is still underway and that needs to go to government for decision about the next steps. There is still some work to do to inform that advice to government. Until those decisions have been taken, I do not think we are in a position to tell you when things may happen in the future.

MR COCKS: Okay. I understand.

THE CHAIR: Ms Rule, my understanding is that you have some information pertaining to a previous question that was taken.

Ms Rule: Yes. Thank you very much, Chair. On the earlier question to Ms Garrett about when there was a meeting, we have that date now that Ms Garrett can put on the record.

Ms Garrett: Yes. The last meeting was on 30 June, and the next is in August.

THE CHAIR: Excellent. So, we are with you, Mrs Kikkert.

MRS KIKKERT: Thank you. Budget statements C talks about improving Canberra's health infrastructure and expanding health centres across the city. I note that Minister Gentleman said in a ministerial statement that works on the Hume Health Centre to refurbish and expand capacity have been completed. Is this the same expansion as the one in 2019?

Ms Davidson: I am not entirely sure what would have been in his mind when he was answering that question. I do know that works to improve the Hume Health Centre and Winnunga were completed in March 2022, to make the space more fit for purpose, in line with the review's recommendation. That included things like repurposing a room to provide Winnunga with a fit for purpose treatment space. There was repurposing of another room to provide greater treatment and allied health space, and repurposing of an office into a third waiting room to increase throughput through the waiting rooms and provide more options to manage separate security classifications. That really went to: "How can we get more people through for appointments on any given day?" An entry way was altered to create better flow between the reception and that new waiting room, which improved staff security. There was also the construction of a new administration building. That may be the work that you are talking about; I am not sure.

MRS KIKKERT: Okay. I suppose so. I am asking you about expansion of the Hume Health Centre. The Inspector of Correctional Services said that the centre was designed for 250 clients, yet it services closer to 400 detainees. Eighty-four per cent of detainees reported that it was difficult to get general medical services. That number increases to 88 per cent for specialist services. Do you believe that this expansion and refurbishment addresses the need for detainees seeking general medical treatment?

Ms Davidson: Potentially, there may be other things that we can do at the Hume Health Centre to improve the space there and make sure that it is working as well as it possibly can. Some of the conversations that have been had to progress the Justice

Health strategy work—the detainee health and wellbeing strategy—between corrections, Justice Health and Winnunga have been really helpful in establishing the kind of communication that we are going to need to work collectively on how we make sure that the Hume Health Centre is as efficient and as effective as it can be.

I am looking forward to having more conversations with Minister Gentleman about what else we might need to do in future. I might pass to Katie McKenzie, who can talk in more detail about the kinds of things that we have learned through those conversations recently on the detainee health and wellbeing strategy work, and what has happened about the Hume Health Centre—how we can make better use of it and what else it might need.

MRS KIKKERT: That is okay. I am very mindful of the time. If she could take that on notice, please, that would be wonderful. The Inspector of Correctional Services said that there was an expansion plan for 2019. Was that completed?

Ms Davidson: Just on the thing that you would like me to take on notice, what is it that you would like me to take on notice? We talked about quite a few things there.

MRS KIKKERT: What you have just said: what you are currently working on to address the need for detainees who seek medical treatment.

Ms Davidson: We have a detainee health and wellbeing strategy that will be made public fairly soon. Some of the conversations that we have had in the course of that have been really helpful in helping us to understand what else might be needed in future. All of those would be subject to some conversations that I am still looking forward to having with Minister Gentleman, so I do not think there is anything I can particularly take on notice.

MRS KIKKERT: Okay. Thank you. Could you please address the question about the expansion of the Hume Health Centre back in 2019. Was that completed or was it delayed?

Ms Davidson: I might pass to Katie McKenzie, who can talk about that. They may well be the changes that I just talked about that were completed in March 2022. That was about meeting some recommendations in the previous Healthy Prison Review, I believe.

MRS KIKKERT: Yes. Is that the same one that you mentioned? Could you please clarify?

Ms Davidson: As far as I am aware, that is what I was talking about.

MRS KIKKERT: Okay. The Inspector of Correctional Services said that he understood that there was expansion and refurbishment. However, he noted that it still is not fit for purpose because it does not address the need for additional space. Minister, what are you currently doing to ensure that the Hume Health Centre becomes fit for purpose?

Ms Davidson: That goes to what I was just saying about the fact that we have been

working on a detainee health and wellbeing strategy. In the course of that conversation, as well as the most recent Healthy Prison Review, there have been things that we have learned since the previous Healthy Prison Review. I am looking forward to continuing to discuss that with Minister Gentleman.

MRS KIKKERT: Why the delay?

Ms Davidson: That will need to be a joint conversation between corrections and Justice Health.

MRS KIKKERT: I understand that, but back in 2019 it was drawn to your attention that detainees there were not seen on time and that the centre was not fit for purpose. Why, four years later, are we still talking about the expansion of the Hume Health Centre, when currently it is not fit for purpose? It is fit for purpose for 250 detainees. However, they are currently seeing 400 detainees.

Ms Davidson: There were recommendations in the 2019 Healthy Prison Review, and I talked about some construction work that was completed in March 2022 that addressed the recommendations of the 2019 review. There has since been a 2022 Healthy Prison Review, with recommendations. There will need to be some conversations between me and Minister Gentleman about the future of the Hume Health Centre. I think that will be quite an interesting conversation. That will also be informed by what we have learned in the process of developing the detainee health and wellbeing strategy.

MRS KIKKERT: Thank you.

MR COCKS: Looking at lived experience peer work, in the annual reports hearing last year I asked about people wanting to attain a certificate in mental health peer work. Since then I have continued to hear from organisations and individuals about the lack of access to training, the difficulty of finding individuals with this qualification and the inability to have their staff trained as peer workers. More than one organisation told me that they found it easier to move staff interstate to get qualified. Where should people wanting work in lived experience peer work get their qualifications?

Ms Davidson: That is a really good question. I am very glad that you asked. CIT does currently have a certificate IV in mental health that will help people get qualified for that kind of peer work. You can undertake that fee free. I am really thankful to Minister Steel for his ongoing work in making sure that we have as many of those positions available as possible. There are also some things that we can look at in developing that workforce through the director with lived experience that Dr Moore talked about earlier. That will also help. There are some really good things happening in that space. Certainly, the number of work opportunities for people who are qualified as peer workers continues to increase in the ACT. That will also help in building a workforce that can network together and talk about best practice, what they are learning and what the different models of care are in different services.

MR COCKS: Peer work is a very specific role and it is grounded in advocacy and peer support. What is the peer work job description within ACT Health, in general

terms, and are there any identified peer workers who are required to undertake functions other than peer work?

Ms Davidson: Yes. I am really glad that you are asking about this, because this is a really exciting area of work for people to go into that they find really meaningful. The peer workers that I have talked to in Step Up, Step Down services and Safe Haven have talked about combining that work with other work that they do—combining different kinds of work so that they are able to experience a diversity of things and really make full use of all of their skills. I will pass to Dr Moore, who can talk more about that peer workforce.

MR COCKS: Thank you.

Dr Moore: Thank you, Minister. It is of course one of the pillars of the Mental Health Workforce Strategy, and it is one that we want the director of lived experience to help drive, together with the director of lived experience at Canberra Health Services. There are peer workers in the government and non-government services, and we are keen, as part of that lived experience director role, to have a pipeline for lived experience, and also to have a community of practice. One of the things that we know is that peer work can be challenging. It can be challenging to stay within your role, and people need support. I am looking forward, when that lived experienced director position comes on board, to presenting a more detailed program for you.

MR COCKS: That is good to hear. Currently, some of the stories I am hearing are from people in touch with that community of peer workers who tell me that some peer workers are required to undertake things that do not fit that job description. Can you reassure me that peer workers are only doing peer work in those identified roles?

Ms Davidson: I think, actually, you will find that, because we have such a diverse mental health services landscape in the ACT, it would be pretty much impossible for anyone to be able to really speak in detail as to what is happening in any unknown service. We have got some services that are delivered by Canberra Health Services—

MR COCKS: I am sorry—this is specially about ACT government services.

Ms Davidson: Yes, which service?

MR COCKS: ACT government services.

Ms Davidson: Which ACT government services? Are you talking about something that has been commissioned and is delivered by a community sector organisation? Are you talking about something that is delivered by Canberra Health Services?

MR COCKS: So what I said was “within ACT Health,” anything which is operated by the government.

Ms Davidson: Operated by the government. That would be Canberra Health Services, so I could possibly pass to Katie McKenzie, who can possibly talk about what peer workers do within Canberra Health Services delivered services—

MR COCKS: Yes, that would be great. That is what I am after.

Ms Davidson: which is going to be potentially different to what peer workers are doing in, say, services that might be commissioned by ACT Health but are actually delivered by other organisations in the community.

Ms McKenzie: Thank you, minister. We have a very small peer workforce at the moment. That consists of two people who are both employed against a position called a “consumer and carer consultant,” and with confidence I can say that both work to the duties outlined in that statement.

MR COCKS: Just two people?

Ms McKenzie: Two people.

MR COCKS: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Cocks. We move to Ms Clay.

MS CLAY: Minister, I am really pleased to see Safe Haven up and running in Belconnen. Is that service operating at capacity?

Ms Davidson: Yes. That Safe Haven service in Belconnen is actually a great example of peer workers who are working in a service that was commissioned by ACT Health—co-commissioned, in fact, I think, with Capital Health Network—and is delivering services to people in the community with peer workers who are qualified and supported and able to work to make the best use of their lived experience and their professional skills at the same time.

Some of the people that have talked to me about the experience they have had in using that Safe Haven in Belconnen include uni students, people who are in the workforce but need somewhere they can go after hours where they can talk to someone when they are in distress, as well as people who have ongoing conditions or recurring conditions, when things start to sort of slip for them and they realise they need a bit more help. There is somewhere they can walk in and see someone while they are in distress, without having to make an appointment, without needing to work out, “Is this something that I need a Medicare card for or something that I need a NDIS plan for.” So it takes some of the complexity out of that at a time when someone is really feeling not well and does not need to be dealing with that kind of complexity.

I can pass to Cheryl Garrett, who can talk some more about that Safe Haven, because I believe that, since the last time I presented in the Assembly about it, we have got some more information about how things are going at the service in Belconnen.

MS CLAY: Yes, great. I would love to know how many people it sees, whether it is operating at capacity and how it is going with its service.

Ms Garrett: The latest performance report for the period from January to June this year is due on 31 July, so I can provide data for the period from July to December last year. Alternatively, we do have some informal data from Stride, the operator, for the

last two months, so from May to June.

MS CLAY: Formal data would be great, thank you.

Ms Garrett: From May to June, during that period there were 239 face-to-face visits, 583 hours of care delivery and an average of 2.4 hours per visit. There were 221 follow-up phone calls made to 40 unique guests, totalling 58 hours.

MS CLAY: That is great. So there are probably quite a lot of ER and hospital avoidance visits in that, I would imagine. Are you able to measure that?

Ms Garrett: No, we are not measuring that.

MS CLAY: Yes, sure. We have got funding in the budget for another Safe Haven at the hospital itself. What is the time line on that? When will we see that running?

Ms Davidson: The time line for the second Safe Haven on the Canberra Hospital campus is very much affected by the sheer amount of construction going on there at the moment.

MS CLAY: Sure.

Ms Davidson: But making sure that we have got that funding there allows us to stay true to the co-design process for the Safe Havens in the first place, which indicated that when we start running Safe Havens in Canberra, we should start with two: one in the community, which is that Safe Haven Belconnen; and the other one is a Safe Haven on the Canberra Hospital campus, which will probably work a little bit differently, because you will see different levels of acuity and different experiences that people might be coming in with. I can pass to Dave Peffer, who can talk a bit more about the Safe Haven at Canberra Hospital and what that might hold for us in future.

Mr Peffer: I might have to take on notice the specific dates around it, but it is impacted by the significant level of construction activity we have got going on. You would be aware that we have the Canberra Hospital expansion in flight at the moment, so the new building 5. It is a bit of a Tetris situation in the future in terms of decanting certain services into the new hospital that is being erected. That is due to come on line around the middle of next year, with patients being treated in that new facility. Once that is the case, it then does free up capacity in existing buildings. That is the capacity that will be used for the Safe Haven. So, we cannot actually commence any sort of work on that at this point in time. It will be going into a space that is currently used—I think it is building 12—used for treating patients. We are at a bit of standstill in terms of refurbishment and getting that set up, until building 5 does come on line.

MS CLAY: And by having that co-location, is that important to have it co-located with the hospital? Does that help people and also help the hospital's efficiency?

Mr Peffer: I might pass to Ms McKenzie.

Ms McKenzie: Thank you, Mr Peffer. I think co-location is an important principle

across a lot of mental health service deliveries. An emergency department will do something different than a Safe Haven, but it does offer the consumer a different option, which is an important option for them to have in case they feel the emergency department is not the right place for them at that time.

MS CLAY: Sure. I am also thinking of capacity: if the Safe Haven Belconnen is able to see a couple of hundred people face to face and a couple of hundred people by phone, which is quite significant in terms of people not needing acute services somewhere else. Are you noticing differences there from Belconnen? Obviously not from the hospital one yet—it is not up and running.

Ms Davidson: Part of the thinking, too, about why we opened the one in Belconnen where we did, was also looking at what the data was from PACER at the time and where they were seeing the most people. It was clear that Belconnen would be a good place to start with the first community one.

You might actually find that the people who present for service at a Safe Haven on a hospital campus are slightly different to the people who might present for service in a community Safe Haven.

MS CLAY: Sure.

Ms Davidson: For that reason, we are also thinking, “Would there be a need for a third Safe Haven at some point in the future, perhaps further south or on the south side somewhere?” Because it will be a little bit different to what you might find in terms of people getting access to a Safe Haven—whether they want to go on to the hospital campus or whether they want to go to one like Belconnen that happens to be next door to a walk-in clinic and maybe has a different feel to it.

MS CLAY: And also right near the bus interchange. It is very convenient. It is a great location.

Ms Davidson: It is. Public transport access is a really key part of this. Uni students and people from the south side of Canberra that have been accessing the Safe Haven in Belconnen have talked to me about how important that is for them.

DR PATERSON: Though, it does seem like having the service located at Canberra Hospital is actually changing the model slightly. The people that will go to the hospital, as you said, are different people, likely, and Canberra Hospital is not necessarily the best place to get public transport to and from.

Ms Davidson: Yes, but it is a place that a lot of people who are experiencing a mental health crisis might think of as a place to go when they are in that situation. If they can have the option—“Do you want to go to emergency or, actually, do you feel like the Safe Haven might be better place for you to seek help at the moment?”—it is good to give people that choice.

It is also really important, when we go through all the work we did to co-design what a Safe Haven would look like in Canberra with people with lived experience as well as with community advocates and clinical experts, that when they come back to us

and give us advice, to say: “Actually, let’s try two things. Let’s try one in the community like the Belconnen Safe Haven that has already been open and let’s also try one on a Canberra Hospital campus.” We stay true to that co-design process and deliver both of those and look at what we can learn from those two slightly different models.

DR PATERSON: A couple of days ago I was asking questions around accessibility to ADHD and autism assessments, and the answer that I received is that they are currently located at the Canberra Hospital—that service—but it is not actually working there, and, as part of the planning, the directorate was looking at outsourcing that service to the community somewhere.

So, I am interested in the thinking around—if someone is making a decision to go to emergency or to go to the Safe Haven, you would think having it in the community would better define their direction, whereas if they turn up at the hospital and both services are there, I think you are going skew the lines between where people will go.

Ms Davidson: I am sorry—what is the similarity between a mental health crisis service and an autism assessment service?

DR PATERSON: Just that the view was that it was more accessible in the community and that having services located at the hospital site was not necessarily making them more accessible to the community.

Ms Davidson: The co-design process for Safe Haven included people with lived experience, as well as community advocates and clinical experts. When they went through that process, one of the things they talked about was people with recurring or ongoing mental health conditions who might be unsure whether what they really need is the emergency department or whether the right place is somewhere that is more like a Safe Haven in the community.

To have something that is on the hospital campus is actually helpful for people who are in that situation where they are not quite sure. One of the things that comes up again and again across all sorts of mental health services is the difficulty for people in navigating all the different services that are out there and knowing where the right place to go is, and it is particularly difficult when you are not feeling well to try and work that out. It is hard enough when you are trying to help someone else and you are actually quite well yourself, but for someone who themselves is not feeling well to work it out is quite difficult. So, having something that is on the Canberra Hospital campus does provide an alternative for them that does not have all the bright lights of the emergency department and is a comfortable space to go.

One of the things that we have learned from the Safe Haven in Belconnen—and that I have also heard is a learning they have had at similar places in Tasmania, and Adelaide that I have seen recently, and even in Melbourne as well—is that there are people who will go back to the Safe Haven more than once, because they will find it has helped them the first time, so the next time they are in that situation they know where they can go back to and what kind of help they can get there. That is much better than someone ending up in a situation where they do not want to ask for help because they do not feel comfortable going to that place, and they know that it is

going to be a difficult experience. It is much better that there is a place they can go to where they feel comfortable and where they will get help sooner, and then they will not end up, hopefully, needing hospital inpatient treatment.

DR PATERSON: My question is with respect to the southside Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service. In a question on notice response that I received in March, the advice was that the proposed relocation was happening by December, subject to completion of construction work. I am wanting to have an update on that, please.

Ms Davidson: I will pass to Dave Peffer, who can let you where we are up to on that lease and construction.

Mr Peffer: Thank you. I think what you are talking about is the movement of the workforce that is currently at Callam; is that correct?

DR PATERSON: Yes.

Mr Peffer: We have been in negotiations with a landlord to take out some space in Phillip—sorry, Woden—to relocate that service, and construction has commenced on the fit-out. I must admit, I was there myself about a week ago and could see the team getting on with that refurb.

In terms of the lease, I believe we signed that a matter of days ago. It has been a protracted process to be able to settle the terms of that lease with the landlord, but we are very pleased that we have seen pen on paper now. We are committed. The view is that we will still push ahead to try and land that as quickly as possible. I think we had intended to have that service move this year. Given some of the delays in getting pen to paper on the contract, I would have to take on notice whether we are still able to do that, but that is certainly what we are driving towards.

DR PATERSON: Great, thank you.

MR COCKS: Going back to the list of commitments in that \$30 million package—if I can put it that way. Within that list you have a number of commitments that are for a single year only, including, most obviously, the funding for youth mental health programs. I understand that for two of those you have stepped in because the federal Labor government has chosen not to extend them, but for some of those other ones I was a bit surprised to see just one year of funding—in particular, the online youth navigation portal, as well as the Youth Aware of Mental Health program. Was there a reason for the decision to make it only one year across those two groups of programs—the federal ones and the ACT?

Ms Davidson: I am really glad you are asking about this, because this really highlights the complexities of our health system, where some things are funded by the commonwealth, some things are funded by the ACT, and then there are some services that are delivered on a user-pays basis by the private sector entirely, as well as NGOs that are delivering things based on philanthropic funding.

For these services in particular, MindMap and Youth Aware of Mental Health were originally funded through commonwealth funding. That funding is reaching its end

date, so the ACT government is looking at how we can continue those programs while we continue to talk to the commonwealth about what is possible and how we make the right decisions about what should be funded long term and how that should be funded.

With WOKE and Stepping Stones, in particular, that was very challenging because we did not have a lot of notice that those programs were reaching the end of their funding and that the commonwealth was not going to continue that on, so that was particularly difficult. There are some really interesting conversations we need to have with the commonwealth about how we make sure that we have a better integrated health system, and how we make sure that we are getting funding for the right things in an ongoing way. Part of that sometimes means that you need to fund things for a relatively short period of time while you are having those negotiations or while you are getting evaluations done.

MR COCKS: What you are talking about is largely that integration subject that was the subject of the fifth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan. There was years of work around that. I recall speaking to one of the people who was behind that, and what they warned of was the “spakfilla” approach, or “Selleys” approach, where you go in and you just keep on plugging little gaps and eventually the whole house is made of spakfilla. Isn’t there a risk that the ACT government keeps stepping in and funding for one year the gaps that the federal government has left, and we end up with a system full of short-term, ad hoc, “just because we needed it right now” programs?

Ms Davidson: Yes, we are absolutely keen to have a conversation with the commonwealth about how we ensure that we have good long-term funding. You are talking about the potential to fix some gaps that previous federal Liberal governments have left behind, and we are really keen to find better ways of delivering services long term than what we had previously seen.

MR COCKS: I will disagree with your categorisation of the last Liberal government, having seen that and worked deeply on that fifth plan. Where are we at with integrating with the current federal government and the ACT government now?

Ms Davidson: I might pass to Dr Moore, who can talk about how we engage with commonwealth officials for future planning for services long term.

Dr Moore: I think it is important to know that we signed a bilateral agreement with the commonwealth, so we did come to an agreement—

MR COCKS: That was the previous government, wasn’t it?

Dr Moore: Correct.

MR COCKS: Thank you.

Dr Moore: We can have a discussion about the money in the forward budget.

MR COCKS: Yes, that is great.

Dr Moore: To add to the minister's comments around the programs, we have a commissioning program currently going on, and so we need to know whether or not WOKE and Stepping Stones will fit into our commissioning cycle—if that is what we want to purchase. We also have evaluations going on of Youth Aware of Mental Health and MindMap; again, to make evidence-informed decisions for the government.

In terms of our relationship with the commonwealth in ongoing planning, we generally do this through the Capital Health Network, which is, of course, the local PHN that is funded by the commonwealth, and we have a good relationship with them in terms of forward planning.

My colleague Cheryl Garrett is also on some of the mental health and suicide prevention senior officer groups, and that is another way that we have our commonwealth colleagues involved in our planning. The one program that I mentioned before, youth at risk—we have a commonwealth member on the steering group for that.

MR COCKS: I have two more questions. When will those evaluations you mentioned report back, and will the organisations have adequate time to plan for what happens at the end of that? And in amongst your planning, are you using the National Mental Health Service Planning Framework?

Dr Moore: You asked that question last time, and we said “yes”, we were cognisant of it, but it does have difficulties in small jurisdictions. The evaluations that I referred to are about two programs, not organisations, and so the two programs, Youth Aware of Mental Health and the MindMap, are, basically, the ones that we are evaluating.

MR COCKS: Will they be done with adequate time for next year's budget is the question.

Dr Moore: Yes. Currently, the Youth Aware of Mental Health evaluation is under consideration, but the MindMap is nearing conclusion.

MR COCKS: When do you expect it to be complete?

Dr Moore: The report is being written as we speak, and so I am expecting that within the next couple of months.

MR COCKS: Thank you very much.

THE CHAIR: I am going to ask committee members if there is something quickly that they want to get out. Ms Clay?

MS CLAY: I have something I could ask, but I do not necessarily need to, if somebody has a—

THE CHAIR: Ms Clay, if you want to ask, ask away. If you want to put it on notice, put it on notice.

MS CLAY: Is that the alternative?

THE CHAIR: I think so.

MS CLAY: I will put it on notice.

THE CHAIR: That is it. Thank you, Minister, and thank you, officials. If you have taken questions on notice, if you could get those answers to the committee support office, committee secretary within five working days of the receipt of the uncorrected proof.

The committee's hearing for today is now adjourned. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank the ministers, statutory officers and officials who have appeared throughout the day. We appreciate your work in the lead-up to and after these hearings.

Members, if you want to lodge questions on notice, please get those to the committee support office, committee secretary via the portal within five working days of the hearing. Ladies and gentlemen, we will be back to do it all again next week, and we look forward to that.

The committee adjourned at 4.58 pm.