



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2024-2025

**(Reference: [Inquiry into Appropriation Bill 2024-2025 and
Appropriation \(Office of the Legislative Assembly\) Bill 2024-2025](#))**

Members:

**MS N LAWDER (Chair)
MS S ORR (Deputy Chair)
MISS L NUTTALL**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

WEDNESDAY, 24 JULY 2024

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

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

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

APPEARANCES

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate	288
Community Services Directorate.....	271, 305
Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate	248, 288
Transport Canberra and City Services.....	224

Privilege statement

The Assembly has authorised the recording, broadcasting and re-broadcasting of these proceedings.

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 9.00 am.

Appearances:

Cheyne, Ms Tara, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for the Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy, Minister for City Services and Minister for Government Services and Regulatory Reform

Transport Canberra and City Services

Johnson, Ms Lisa, Chief Operating Officer

McHugh, Mr Ben, Deputy Director-General, Business Services

Clement, Ms Sophie, Executive Branch Manager, Infrastructure Delivery

Pryce, Mr David, Director-General

Harding, Ms Peta, Executive Branch Manager, Libraries ACT

Rampton, Mr Tim, Executive Branch Manager, Roads ACT

Fitzgerald, Mr Bruce, Acting Deputy Director-General

THE CHAIR: Good morning and welcome to the public hearings of the Select Committee on Estimates for its inquiry into the Appropriation Bill 2024-2025 and the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2024-2025. The committee will today hear from the Minister for City Services; the Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction; the Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services; the Minister for Climate Action; and the Minister for Community Services, Seniors and Veterans.

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

The proceedings today are being recorded, transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice, it would be useful if witnesses used these words: "I will take that question on notice." This will help the committee and witnesses to confirm questions taken on notice from the transcript.

We welcome Ms Tara Cheyne MLA, Minister for City Services, and officials. We have many witnesses for this session. I remind you of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. Witnesses must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Could you please confirm that you understand the implications of the statement and that you agree to comply with it. We will start down this end. Mr Fitzgerald and Mr Pryce?

Mr Fitzgerald: Yes.

Mr Pryce: Yes, I do.

Ms Cheyne: Yes.

Ms Johnson: Yes, I do.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. We will proceed straight to questions. I would like to start off by asking about RSPCA funding. How much recurrent funding has the RSPCA received for each of the last three years?

Ms Cheyne: I will just welcome officials to the table.

Mr McHugh: Good morning and thanks for the question. The RSPCA are engaged by us under a service funding agreement annually.

THE CHAIR: Sorry; could you also say that you acknowledge the privilege statement.

Mr McHugh: Sorry. I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. I will have to take on notice the exact dollar figures that we have paid over recent years for that, but we have a continuing engagement with them annually to deliver services on our behalf.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Have there been any early design works completed for the new RSPCA facility?

Ms Cheyne: Yes.

THE CHAIR: You have \$387,000 in capital works funding allocated to building a new home for the RSPCA in this year's budget. What will that funding deliver?

Ms Cheyne: Ms Lawder, the funding that is provisioned for the RSPCA facility is \$40 million.

THE CHAIR: So what was the \$387,000 in capital works funding?

Ms Cheyne: What has been undertaken so far—and Sophie will be able to give us some more detail in a second—is that there has been expenditure on preliminary design, as well as some studies on the site, including some ecological constraints. One of the delays in construction getting underway has been the presence of the striped legless lizard on the site. We have been able to adjust the facility location to be further along the road, to the north, while remaining on the same block. I believe the \$387,000 is for the completion of the design work and the submitting of the DA. If I have that wrong, someone is about to correct me.

THE CHAIR: It was moved from last year. Why was it not spent last year? Why was it moved to this year?

Ms Clement: I have read and accept the privilege statement. As Minister Cheyne mentioned, we have been progressing the preliminary planning and design work for the RSPCA facility on the site in Pialligo. As a part of that work, we did find some striped legless lizards, which is a matter of national environmental significance, so we needed to adjust the location of the facility on the site. That has added some delay to the

program, and that meant that we needed to move some money into this financial year to be able to continue the work.

THE CHAIR: Okay; thank you. Minister, you mentioned \$40 million for building the new centre.

Ms Cheyne: Design and construction.

THE CHAIR: Design and construction. When is the expected completion date? Is it 2027, 2026?

Ms Cheyne: Ideally, as soon as possible. We are expecting that preliminary design will be completed with the DA application being approved, and that should be early next year. Then we are expecting—and this is still subject to some further work—that it will be delivered by a design and construct contract. The anticipated duration of that is 2½ to three years.

THE CHAIR: It was a 2020 election commitment to be delivered in this term of government, so obviously you are not going to meet that.

Ms Cheyne: What we have delivered is the provisioning of the funding, so that \$40 million is set and that is a significant investment. It is, I think, either commensurate with or larger than some of the new RSPCA facilities that we have seen across the country. It is just a matter of accessing that provision now. There is a striped legless lizard present on the site and, as Ms Clement mentioned, it is of national significance, so we did need to adjust and that has resulted in the delay. I think the RSPCA and the government are looking forward to getting that underway so that we have a fit-for-purpose facility.

THE CHAIR: Who will own the new facility, the government or the RSPCA?

Mr McHugh: The intention is that the territory will remain the owner of the facility and the site and enter into a long-term lease agreement with the RSPCA to operate and maintain the facility.

THE CHAIR: Will they have to pay rent?

Mr McHugh: That is to be determined in the negotiations.

THE CHAIR: Potentially, I could ask this of another minister. Do you know what the plans for the land in Weston are?

Ms Cheyne: It would be a matter for Minister Steel, as planning minister. I would reflect on the studies that we released last year, as part of the Planning Act reform. Certainly, that is a site where we think further development could occur. Minister Steel could talk to that detail.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

Ms Cheyne: Ms Lawder, to your question before that we took on notice: we did provide

that information to Miss Nuttall last month, in answer to a question on notice from the Assembly. Is it sufficient if we provide you with a link to the detail? I can read it out now. Effectively, over the last five years, funding to the RSPCA has been in the order of \$800,000 each year.

THE CHAIR: Great. Thank you.

MISS NUTTALL: How frequent has the communication been with the RSPCA during the planning of the new facility? What does that look like?

Ms Cheyne: What does what look like?

MISS NUTTALL: The communication with the RSPCA about updates and the time line.

Ms Cheyne: It has been frequent. Certainly, we have shared as much information with them as possible. I personally went out to the site and met with the CEO and members of the board about the facility in late May or mid May. We did speak about the provisioned funding and what the next steps would be, and further meetings have been had since. I think they are very aware of and appreciate that the presence of the striped legless lizard has meant that there has been a delay, but we remain committed to this project. As I said, that funding is provisioned and it is about accessing that provision now.

Mr Pryce: Could I add to that? I spoke with Michelle Robertson just the other day, and I have committed to meet with her in the next couple of weeks to further ensure that communication lines are ongoing as we work towards the new facility.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you. Understanding that right now the facility is quite close to capacity and that it will be a few years before it is completed, are there things that we are doing in the meantime to support the RSPCA to meet capacity?

Ms Cheyne: Yes. It is a multifaceted issue. The RSPCA is not the only rehoming organisation in the ACT. We had a roundtable just this week, on Monday, with animal welfare and care organisations like the Canberra Street Cat Alliance and ACT Rescue and Foster. There are partnerships that we have with DAS and ACT Rescue and Foster which we greatly value in being able to help rehome dogs. You would have seen as well that we have really stepped up our comms and rehoming comms for DAS, with a greater level of sophistication. So we are trying to take some pressure out of the system as well.

Everyone, though—whether it is the RSPCA, the ACT government or any other organisation—is reporting that surrenders year on year are increasing significantly. There are a whole lot of things that we need to do to support that. You would have seen in the budget that there is \$200,000 for our animal care organisations to apply for, and we have released already the grant program for that, which will close mid next month. This is, I think, the first time that the government has provided funding to them. That is in recognition of the huge amount of work that they are undertaking. Secondly, there is \$100,000 in the budget to subsidise desexing. Desexing, in my view, is something that we do need to really step up, particularly for cats but also for dogs, so that we can manage some of these populations.

MISS NUTTALL: When is the funding for the School Crossing Supervisor Program, the Ride or Walk to School Program, It's Your Move Safe Cycle Program and the School Safety Program expected to end?

Ms Cheyne: This is technically with Minister Steel. We probably have some people who can speak to it, but the School Safety Program comes under Minister Steel.

MISS NUTTALL: What is the total budget for path maintenance in 2024-25 and how much of this maintenance funding comes from new projects, previous year funding and base funding?

Mr Rampton: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. Thank you for the question. It is an interesting time at the moment. Historically, over the last few years, we have had a recurrent budget of around \$5 million that would be used for path repair and maintenance within the Roads ACT budget. This year we received additional funding of around \$5.8 million to establish an in-house path maintenance crew. That will give us the ability to repair and replace concrete panels within the path network. The concrete path network makes up about 87 per cent of the paths around Canberra. Historically, we have gone out to repair and replace those panels via external contractors.

We would typically look to package those up to get the most efficient outcome for the territory. By having some in-house capability, that will give us the ability to be more reactive and to address some of those cracked panels that we have identified through the 2021 audit that we have not yet replaced.

THE CHAIR: Is this answering your question about the money?

MISS NUTTALL: Specifically, could we get a breakdown of how much funding comes from the new project, previous year funding and base funding?

Ms Cheyne: This is tricky. Let me see what we have, and I will explain why it is not as straightforward as it seems. It is \$5.5 million annually in baseline funding, and in the 2023-24 budget there was an additional \$5 million for path maintenance—insourcing the path grinding crews so that those immediate trip hazards can be addressed. That increase in path maintenance funding is in addition to the existing network repair budget.

On top of that, as Mr Rampton mentioned, there is \$5.8 million for the panel replacement crew. We hope that this will be more efficient. Instead of having a delay between making an area safe and replacing the concrete panel, that will be quicker. Also, in this budget there is \$3.1 million additionally for the renewal of the Emu Bank path, along the Lake Ginninderra foreshore. We need to reconstruct the retaining wall and we are taking the opportunity to widen it as well. The pavers there have been lifting for some time due to the tree roots and we need to reset that whole area.

On top of that, there are new paths associated with many of our road upgrade projects, as well as some active travel initiatives. With the garden city cycleway, there is over \$10 million in funding. There are the Lake Ginninderra path upgrades, along John Knight Park. There are plenty more. It is not necessarily all in a bucket that I can just

pull out for you, because the funding for new projects is associated with a different stream.

MS CLAY: Minister, how many of your recent budget announcements have been ongoing funding and how many of them have been one-off or fixed term, for paths?

Ms Cheyne: Can you give me a time frame?

MS CLAY: The last six months. With the budget announcements that you have made recently, how many of those are one-off funding and how many are ongoing funding?

Ms Cheyne: I would have to take that on notice.

MS CLAY: That would be great; thank you.

THE CHAIR: I have a question about path maintenance. I can see in budget statements H the target for 2023-24 for the increase in length, kilometres, of community paths, including cycle lanes—60 kilometres, with an estimated outcome of 22. The estimated outcome is considerably shorter. Can you explain why that is the case?

Mr Rampton: That target is made up of not only new paths off-road, but also the on-road cycle lanes. There are a number of things contributing to that. Most of those assets are also gifted to us through developments. There could be a residential development and it includes all of the paths associated with that. We have seen less of those gifted assets coming into our asset base over that year. Also, as part of our projects, we are moving away from the provision of on-road cycle lanes and moving towards those off-road cycle lanes. So there are a couple of factors contributing to that.

THE CHAIR: You have a priority footpath list. Do you have an estimate of how many of the paths on the priority path list you aim to fix or maintain in the year?

Mr Rampton: We are just developing our plans at the moment for the coming year. Those are being developed over the next few weeks. With some of the funding that we have received for active travel infrastructure through the budget, as I said, we are just finalising those plans. Over the coming weeks we will be able to detail which larger sections of paths we intend to repair.

THE CHAIR: I can see from the priority path list from 2021 that 569 footpaths were identified on the 2021 list. In the list from January 2024, 74 per cent of the paths on the 2024 list had previously been on the 2021 list and were still not fixed. If you look at the priority ones, with the highest score, the most recent one had a score about the broad community impacts. For those, there are 109 footpaths, and, of those, 80 have been carried forward from the 2021 priority path list. So 73 per cent were still on the list three years later, even at the highest priority. Why is it that we are not doing better with fixing these priority paths?

Mr Rampton: Through the 2021 audit, there were well over 8,000 defects or issues identified in the network. Around a couple of thousands of those were related to aesthetic cracking or debris—even debris on the paths. They were not necessarily things that we needed to action quickly.

THE CHAIR: But what about the highest priority ones?

Mr Rampton: We have been putting our energy and our focus on those higher priority ones through our grinding or our cold-mix programs. Throughout 2022, with the increased rain, we were starting to see further deflection and defects appearing in the path network because of the water table. We again focused our energy on those higher priority ones, as opposed to the lower ones that were identified in the audit.

As Minister Cheyne mentioned, we are about to embark on insourcing, and we will have that internal capability to undertake grinding. We have established our team, we have our team in place, our equipment is arriving at the moment, and we will be assisting our external contractors to do that grinding work.

THE CHAIR: When we spoke about footpaths in the Assembly recently, Mr Steel spoke on behalf of Minister Cheyne, and he assured us that lower priority paths would be fixed between six and 12 months, I think it was, or even six and 18 months, yet we can see from these figures that there are still some there from three years ago. I had another FOI from a couple of years earlier than that; I lost the will to live while going through this list of hundreds and hundreds.

I am sure there are many that are still on the list from three years prior to that. For example, in Berrell Street, Chisholm, it has been marked up for well in excess of six months, and it still has not been fixed. There are many examples that every member gets, and we expect a bit more action. I understand that you are insourcing a team, but you are replacing an outsourced team with an insourced team, not necessarily ramping up your ability to fix these problems.

Ms Cheyne: I would not agree with that assertion, Ms Lawder, for reasons of efficiency. It may seem like it is a simple replacement of a function, but, as Mr Rampton said, for the efficiency and value for money in our tendering process, when something is outsourced, defects are packaged together and issued for a contractor to respond to, in that tender process. For something that might have been reported six months ago, we may have made it safe with the cold mix, the grinding or whatever it may be, but with the panel replacement it may take six or 12 months until there is an associated package with which to go out to tender.

Insourcing the team means we have the people and the equipment to go and address it quicker than waiting for something to be packaged up in a broader body of works to be undertaken. We are expecting there to be better action on this. Going to your point about the 2021 audit, as you mentioned it is something that has come up in the last six months. The water table that existed across the territory, just like what we saw for roads and potholes, had a very similar effect on many of our footpaths.

As Mr Rampton said, the vast majority of our footpaths are concrete. But because that concrete is done in panels, panels have breaks within them, and water gets in there as well. That can certainly destabilise things. While 2021 was a point in time, higher risk defects have emerged in that time, and that is where the energy has been concentrated.

MS ORR: On the speediness of fixing footpaths, we have heard how insourcing the

crew will allow for a more rapid response. You have just gone over it, so I will not repeat it. How does that work in with the improvements you have also made to Fix My Street and getting a faster response time?

Ms Cheyne: There has been a lot of work done on Fix My Street, especially in the last seven months, including to ensure that the back end of the system is talking to the front end of the system better and more automatically—going to the right areas, and allowing them to undertake that site inspection, make a decision and communicate that back to the customer making the request.

In particular, one of the functions that has come online in the last few weeks is identifying where there are duplicates. It is not that someone has repeatedly requested something; multiple people might have noticed that something needs to be addressed. Rather than the team having to fix something and, a few weeks later, getting a request that came in a little while ago, and going out and realising that it is the same issue, the system is allowing us to see where there is likely to be a similar issue, address it all at once, and get back to everyone all at once. All of that combined assists in speeding up response time frames for people.

MS ORR: If I understand it correctly, with the changes across these different facets of the response, because there are different components, you will now lodge a Fix My Street request if you see a broken footpath; it will come through faster and you will get a quicker response than would previously have been the case. The issue will be addressed faster because you will not have to wait until there are a certain number before it can go out to tender. Is that correct? Have we essentially improved the process? With some of the things that Ms Lawder referred to, I think we would all share those frustrations, yourself included, Minister, based on the many bits of feedback we get over the years. Will there be tangible differences regarding how those are responded to, and will we start to see that really coming through?

Ms Cheyne: That is right; not for everything, because there will be some things that are more complex, particularly where people request new infrastructure. That is often tied up with a broader budget consideration. But where there are defects for which we have traditionally gone out to tender, we should be able to address those much more quickly, and give better information to people more quickly, too.

MS ORR: What was the budget funding associated with that—mostly with the Fix My Street stuff, but other aspects, too?

THE CHAIR: With some of the budget funding for footpaths?

MS ORR: No, mine was for Fix My Street, so it is not unrelated.

Ms Cheyne: With Fix My Street, the improvements that we have been undertaking have been within TCCS's existing budget. We have taken a team of terrific people who are supporting a triage function—working through some of the backlogs that we had and working out where there are ways of improving it. That is how we have been able to deliver those changes.

MS ORR: Apart from identifying duplicate requests, is there any other work that needs

to be done on improving that reporting and response?

Ms Cheyne: A lot has happened in the back end. Really, my focus now is on the comms back to the customer—making sure that that is tailored and gives the information that people want. We would all agree that there is nothing more frustrating than having a case say that it is closed or resolved and there is no information in it; you do not know what happened and so on. We want to be able to explain to people that it might be closed because it is part of our usual maintenance program and it will be addressed in the normal course of business. You might want to say to people that it is closed because we have fixed it or we might want to keep it open and say, “Yes, we’ve noticed this is an issue; it’s going to require further investigation. We will get back to you and we will keep updating you.” That is really where I see the focus for the next six months.

In the last six months it has been about trying to create much quicker real-time information. Our streetlight repairs, for example, are all done through our streetlight contract. There had been a somewhat manual process of providing streetlight outage information. For the first time ever—the streetlight contractor is a big company—they have integrated their system into our system, and now that information is going to them in real time. There are plenty of other changes as well, but you get the picture.

MRS KIKKERT: Is there any money in this recent budget for compensation due to unfair dismissal cases?

THE CHAIR: From this directorate?

MRS KIKKERT: Yes; thank you, Chair.

Mr Pryce: Generally, we manage from within our overall budget, as part of our employment arrangements. Lisa, do you want to add to that?

Ms Johnson: I can provide some more detail.

MRS KIKKERT: Just a yes or a no, Ms Johnson, because I do not have much time.

Ms Johnson: In our recurrent budget, yes.

MRS KIKKERT: For compensation; okay. Has anyone in your directorate, employees or contractor, changed a document that an employee filled out without their knowledge or consent, which led to him being fired?

Ms Johnson: I am not aware of that. We have a number of cases referred to us in relation to integrity matters. Obviously, I cannot talk about the details of individual cases.

MRS KIKKERT: Chair, I have a document here regarding an ex-employee of City Services, Luke. He had a health assessment. In that health assessment, he stated that he did not take any drugs at all; then, days later, he received a phone call and he was fired, because, apparently, the doctor changed his health assessment form to state that he did take drugs when he said that he did not take any drugs at all.

On his form it says that he is unfit permanently for the inherent requirements of the job if an employer does not have zero tolerance for drug use claimed by—

THE CHAIR: Mrs Kikkert, can I suspend the public hearing and talk about this in camera, if it contains personal information?

MRS KIKKERT: I have spoken with Luke and he does not mind me sharing this information, Madam Chair. I can stop now and then ask further questions.

MS ORR: Luke might not have a problem, but I know the public servants have certain provisions that they have to adhere to. We can always publish after the event.

THE CHAIR: We will briefly suspend the public hearing. We need to clear the room, apart from anyone who may be relevant to this particular question. We will let you know when you can come back.

Short suspension.

THE CHAIR: Ms Clay, do you have a substantive question you could start with?

MS CLAY: I do. Thank you, Chair. Minister, I have noticed in your announcements that you are spending \$94 million on active travel infrastructure. We dug into some of the detail on that and we got some information through question on notice 1611 about which projects make up that spend. It looks like the Monaro Highway flyover and a lot of other projects are part of that \$94 million being spent on active travel. The part of the project currently under construction does not contain any infrastructure that you could walk or ride on, so how is that part of the \$94 million spend on active travel?

Ms Cheyne: Through the design.

MS CLAY: What proportion of that \$94 million expenditure is on the design?

Ms Cheyne: Design of the Monaro Highway footpath?

MS CLAY: Design of the active travel components.

Ms Cheyne: I think we will take that on notice. What I would point you to, Ms Clay, is that we now have an active travel map where you can see what the investments are and whether they are in construction, design or feasibility, and where they have been recently completed. When we are in the design stage, that usually means that we are looking at constructing something there, but it can be a future decision for the government.

MS CLAY: Sure. What I am trying to find out is regarding the \$94 million and the \$16 million; is that money being primarily spent on infrastructure that is a road or is that primarily being spent on infrastructure that is a path?

Ms Cheyne: We can take that on notice, but Ms Clement might have the information for you.

MS CLAY: That is not something that can be answered now?

Ms Clement: I can give you a broad answer to that. The \$94 million captures what we are spending on active travel infrastructure in the instances where it is related to a road, such as William Hovell Drive or Athllon Drive. We look at the proportion of that cost that we think will be allocated to the active travel facility. We have a formula for working that out. Until we get into the construction stage or we have costings to support that budget, we do not know exactly what the split will be.

MS CLAY: Is there a standard formula when you build a road? Do you designate a certain proportion of it? What is that formula?

Ms Clement: It is not quite as straightforward as that. At budget time, when we are looking at what the split would be, some other information would go into that around what the active travel provision on that piece of road infrastructure is and what some of the site constraints are. So there are a few other details that might go into working that out for the purposes of understanding how the split might be for active travel infrastructure.

MS CLAY: There was an announcement of \$94 million being spent on active travel. What proportion of \$94 million is actually being spent on paths that people could use?

Ms Clement: That figure is all related to active travel infrastructure, whether it be the design or construction phase or the paths that people could use. It could capture the on-road cycle lanes as well.

MS CLAY: There is \$16 million for the design of the Monaro Highway. What is that \$16 million being spent on?

Ms Clement: I would have to take that question on notice.

MS CLAY: You are making a lot of announcements about this. You have not brought the information?

Ms Clement: I would have to take it on notice to make sure it is accurate.

MS CLAY: Thank you. It would be excellent if you could take it on notice. I would like to know what the \$16 million is being spent on. I would also like to know: of the \$94 million announced for active travel, can you give me a really detailed breakdown of what that money is being spent on—what the design is for; whether it is for a shoulder or whether it is for a path. It looks like really good expenditure on active travel, but, every time we ask a question and it is taken on notice, we get an answer back saying, “This for a road shoulder” or “This is for part of a flyover.” It does not look like active travel to us. Are you able to provide that detail on notice?

Ms Cheyne: We will do it to the extent that we can, Ms Clay—the level of detail that you have asked for and the breakdown. It may depend on the stage of a project. For example, if we have funding for feasibility, the feasibility may not have yet determined what the most appropriate type of active travel treatment should be—whether it is an off-road shared path, a pop-up or whatever it might be. So, to the extent that we can

give you the information that you have asked for, we—

MS CLAY: That is great. You could say, for instance, it is a feasibility study into how we will make cycling and walking infrastructure part of this project. It would be that kind of detail.

Ms Cheyne: Yes.

MS CLAY: On notice, could you also report on the formula that you are using? It sounds like there is a bit of a standard formula. Are you able to provide that formula on record?

Ms Clement: Yes. I can provide you information on what goes into making that calculation.

MS CLAY: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I have another question. I would like to ask about the results of the TCCS staff survey, which I received some information on. There is quite a lot of information redacted, which is unfortunate. I note that there is a huge discrepancy between the results in the operational or frontline service areas compared to the Chief Operating Officer Division, which is so positive. Minister, does that indicate a disconnect between the executive and what is actually happening on the ground? Why is there such a large discrepancy in the last satisfaction survey?

Ms Cheyne: I will ask Ms Johnson to speak to that. That survey was undertaken before I was minister. She may be able to reflect on some of the detail behind that.

Ms Johnson: Thanks for the question, Ms Lawder. There is a distinct difference between those groups. There is also a very distinct working environment between operational staff and our corporate staff. That was a 2023 survey, and there were some pretty significant actions taken following that survey, when the results were received, including a leadership forum that brought together about 200 of our leaders, from our operational teams but also from our corporate teams, to work through those survey results and come up with detailed action plans.

Obviously, we have corporate staff who have access to things like flexible work and have a very different working environment to our operational staff, so we would naturally expect to see different results in different areas across the survey. Those results fluctuate and change. We will have another whole-of-government survey early next year and we look forward to seeing the results of that and where things have changed.

THE CHAIR: I also note that, in many cases, especially in the frontline service delivery areas of TCCS, figures were below the ACTPS average in many areas. Given you are going to have another survey, surely you need to have demonstrated some action and progress on the results of the previous one. What are you doing to improve these areas?

Ms Johnson: As I mentioned, we had a leadership forum, and then every business unit

worked closely with their staff to develop an action plan which was tailored to the results of the survey and what they received in their individual areas, recognising that every one of our business units is very diverse. Those action plans were put in place around 12 to 18 months ago, and they have been built into business planning processes and are checked on annually. As the minister touched on, we have also made improvements in our operational staff around Fix My Street and in supporting some of their points around what they are experiencing on the ground. We would expect to see some improvements in our survey next year in terms of how those action planning processes have panned out.

Ms Cheyne: Ms Lawder, there is a recognition framework that TCCS has developed in addition to what Ms Johnson is talking to. When we say “tailored”, that is about speaking with the business units about how they prefer to be recognised for their work. For example, for some it might be a quarterly barbecue that is hosted by TCCS. For others, it might be a morning tea with some awards given out. All of that has been incorporated. I certainly witnessed that myself on Monday. I was at a morning tea for technical officers, people who manage our volunteer programs and our graffiti programs, lakes and waterways, and Adopt-a-Park. I certainly witnessed a very good spread, as well as some awards being handed out. Mr Pryce was in attendance as well. Just yesterday I was at a breakfast barbecue at the Fyshwick depot.

On a personal level, I have visited every depot at least once, if not several times, as well as all our library sites. I have met with staff who work out of 480 Northbourne Avenue. I have been getting to understand, appreciate and reflect on the work that our frontline staff do across all our services. Then there are our business services like Domestic Animal Services, the Capital Linen Service, cemeteries and the Yarralumla Nursery. I have met all of those staff. You may have seen that we really have put a spotlight on sharing staff stories. Just this morning, I signed a recognition certificate for someone who has worked in the ACT government for 25 years. There is a broad body of work underway to ensure that our very hardworking frontline staff are receiving the recognition that they deserve.

THE CHAIR: I note a variant in the overall ACT public service results. There were 55 answers to questions below the ACTPS average. There were 13 questions above the ACTPS average and 16 were in line. For example, something like 51 per cent of people expected to remain in the same position over the coming year. If that actually took place, that would be a very high turnover rate. I imagine there is information about bullying and harassment, violence and aggression, corruption and discrimination, and sexual harassment, but I have no idea what that is because that has been redacted. That is very interesting because there was a Health FOI late last year where all the negative information was redacted. My colleague, Ms Castley, appealed to the ACT Ombudsman, who overturned that decision. So I am surprised that, perhaps, the government as a whole did not learn from that, in terms of redacting—only releasing positive information and redacting any negative information. Is this something that is discussed between directorates or is it a siloed approach and they just do their own thing?

Mr Pryce: Ms Lawder, perhaps I can answer. It is discussed between directorates generally and through the strategy board. They have these types of discussions because workplace culture is important. As the new Director-General of TCCS, having come in only in the last couple of months, I am aware of the survey results. I am resetting the

performance plans for our executive group, with a focus on a supportive leadership model. Improving organisational culture will be a focus of mine. I have spoken to our executive group about putting people first and ensuring we have positive cultures.

It is a challenging environment because we have such diverse working groups, with probably two-thirds of our workforce in frontline operational roles. But, even in the six or seven weeks, I have certainly been getting out and about to hear directly from our people about what matters. Retention, attraction and development of our people is critical for our success. Even though there are definitely areas for improvement and we need to do better, one thing for sure is that we have a passionate workforce. There are areas for improvement, and that is the focus of the executive group. Lisa, particularly as the chief operating officer, is trying to develop that through her executive. We are looking into our business plans—our action plans that Lisa mentioned—as well as individual plans for our supervisors and managers so that they can take responsibility for their teams and we can shift that dial.

Ms Johnson: I could add to that. About 80 per cent of our TCCS staff responded that TCCS is a truly great place to work. There are some things for us to work on, but that is an indicator we take great pride in. Generally, our people care about the city and making a difference.

THE CHAIR: Although it is partly skewed by the results at the top level. That had very positive results, so congratulations on that. It would be good for it to flow down through the rest of the department.

Ms Cheyne: Ms Lawder, could I just respond to your comment about what has and has not been redacted. Actually, the headline result for ethics and misconduct has not been redacted. For all of TCCS, that information, I have what you have.

THE CHAIR: I was interested in the business unit, to see where the major problems might be.

Ms Cheyne: Yes. My understanding of the FOI law is that that would be redacted because it may have identifying information in it. You can see on the personal demographics, which is not related to the ethics and misconduct, that that has been redacted as well. That is generally the reason why.

THE CHAIR: For example, the results could have been yes percentage or no percentage, even just with the headline figures, but it is completely redacted.

Ms Cheyne: I have what you have.

THE CHAIR: Right.

MISS NUTTALL: With respect to the staff survey, how common have the concerns about understaffing, low staffing levels and staff shortages been as a response, especially in the front-facing areas?

Mr Pryce: Sorry; I just missed the first part of your question.

Ms Cheyne: How common?

MISS NUTTALL: Yes; how common have low levels of staffing been? How common is understaffing?

Ms Cheyne: It is difficult to answer, Miss Nuttall, because it can depend on a particular point in time. Perhaps I could give you the example of libraries. You would know that our libraries have nine branches across the ACT and occasionally a branch has had to be closed for the day due to staffing levels. I am pleased to tell you that that has not occurred since May. That has been through a concerted effort from our executive and management teams in libraries. I believe our merit pools are now open for longer and we are able to draw more people from that. We are working with staff on rostering and what else we might be able to do to ensure that we have staffing levels that keep all of our libraries open within their usual hours. It has been an area of concern and frustration for me, and certainly the executive has taken that very seriously. I hope that the record from May continues.

MISS NUTTALL: Beautiful. Just on that, where understaffing and low staffing levels have been identified, like in libraries—I hope you do not mind me focusing on that example—

Ms Cheyne: Not at all.

MISS NUTTALL: have there been any concrete measures within the budget to actually increase the baseline staffing levels?

Ms Cheyne: I do not believe so, within libraries, but let me just check with the executive branch manager, Ms Harding.

Ms Harding: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. Would you mind re-asking the question for me?

MISS NUTTALL: Have there been any concrete measures within the budget to increase that baseline staffing level?

Ms Harding: We have been taking a look, as Minister Cheyne has said, at the ways that we approach our rostering model, particularly when it comes to public library branches, to see if there are ways that we can get some more efficiency, through the funding that we have available, to increase the likelihood of being able to have some additional positions join the team. We are looking at the way that our staffing model is currently set up, but that is as far as we have got at this point.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you. Good to know.

MS ORR: Can I get a little bit of info on what new programs have been rolled out this year?

Ms Harding: Absolutely. In the last quarter we have run 607 individual programming sessions across our public library branches. This year alone we have extended the Geri-Fit program, which is a light exercise program aimed at our most senior Canberrans,

which is incredibly well received. We have extended that now across four public library branches across the territory.

MS ORR: Which four?

Ms Harding: We run that at Woden, Tuggeranong, Kippax and Belconnen. Most recently we have commenced the launch of a shared reading group program, which is going to be run at our Dickson and Tuggeranong libraries, which is encouraging members of the community to come together as kind of facilitated book club, looking at reducing instances of isolation, providing connection to some of the most vulnerable Canberrans.

Every school holidays we do a new range of programs every year around a different theme, so all of our school holiday programming over the last 12 months has been different every time. We also continue to run with our favourites, such as Giggle & Wiggle, Story Time, Story Dogs; all of those ones. They get a lot of input.

MS ORR: I believe there is an indicator of customer satisfaction for libraries, with the outcomes of the learning programs in particular. Are these the programs you were referring to with the 607 sessions, and what is the feedback that you are getting?

Ms Harding: There is an accountability indicator relating to customer satisfaction; there is also one relating to learning outcomes. Of the customers that have provided feedback through those survey mechanisms, 91 per cent have indicated that they get a learning outcome out of the programs that they attend at our libraries. In terms of feedback overall, there is always a request that we run things at different times or more frequently. Having a conversation around what might physically be possible, in terms of the size of the branches and the number of staff that we have, is always taken into account.

Generally, the feedback that we receive is positive, particularly when we talk to the community about piloting something new. We reiterate the importance of them providing us with feedback and understand what is and what is not working well so that we can make necessary changes, but also so that we can look at expanding our programs to make them available to other members of the community.

THE CHAIR: The programs are there. Are there any other supports that you are putting out to the community at the moment through the libraries? I think people always think of the library as just a place to borrow books. ACT Libraries really take more of the lifelong learning aspect in their approach. Can I just get, beyond the programs you have already mentioned, what the broader support is for the community, particularly given that there are a lot of people who are needing to utilise those public resources.

Ms Cheyne: In the first instance, one of the programs has been a conversation session—I think it is weekly—where we have COTA and Legal Aid ACT. I think Elections ACT has been part of it recently. That is generally held at Belconnen or Dickson. There is a GP that is available, I think weekly, at Belconnen, if not elsewhere. I mean a JP. Goodness me! That would really be expanding the library's functions. There is a JP that is available. Essentially, we are doing what we can to make those free services and advice services available to people.

We have a commitment in the budget that is just being rolled out as we speak for power banks and charging stations at our libraries. We do see that they are very popular for people doing work or study. I am certainly a frequent flyer there on the weekends, and I have personally witnessed that myself. We are looking at the infrastructure that can support people who are wanting a quiet space to do whatever they might be doing on their device and to be able to charge that for free.

We have also waived the fees for printing and photocopying generally, up to 20 pages. That is really reducing a barrier for people, especially if they might have an application form or a resume, for example, that they want to take around physically to someone. There are a few initiatives there. Some fees are being waived at the moment as well, such as if you need a replacement library card or a library bag; those are at no cost.

THE CHAIR: What is the plan for Civic library when the Canberra theatre redevelopment happens?

Ms Cheyne: That has not been determined yet.

THE CHAIR: I have lots more library questions, but I will put them on notice because we have already spent 15 minutes on this.

MS ORR: Minister, can I get a bit of an update on the \$26 million investment in the new recycling facility in Canberra?

Ms Cheyne: I will just invite officials. Mr Fitzgerald can definitely start.

MS ORR: What we are particularly looking for is what we are getting for that money and how it is all shaping up and progressing.

Mr Fitzgerald: We are currently out to market for the procurement of a new facility. That facility will enable us to have a state-of-the-art facility for the next 20 years to take material both from the ACT and from surrounding regions. At this point in time, we are still in the evaluation/procurement phase of that procurement, but we are looking to resolve and finish that as quickly as possible so we can get the facility up and running.

MS ORR: I appreciate if you are not that far through the procurement and the design of it, but are there any features that have already been considered as part of the project to help prevent some of the circumstances that led us to the fire that destroyed the old facility?

Mr Fitzgerald: It is still subject to the final design of the facility and will be subject to the procurement process. We know that batteries continue to be a problem right across Australia. It is an issue that has been raised across the waste industry for many years. Unfortunately, we have seen not only facilities but also trucks and hot loads catch on fire throughout the country. So it is paramount that we deliver a safe facility. A lot of the technologies are still under development, as this is quite an emerging resource in the industry. Some of the unique aspects of the new facility will include segregation of receiver hauls and those types of elements which will mean that damage is limited if in fact there is a fire.

MS ORR: Can I get a bit of an update on what recycled material is still being collected in the ACT and how that is being managed?

Mr Fitzgerald: We have recently signed a new contract with Re.Group, who are our existing material recovery facility provider, to take that material to other MRFs throughout the state. At the moment we still receive approximately 150 tonnes per week of material. That material is then sent to, depending on capacity limitations, to other MRFs. The majority of that material goes to a facility in Enfield at a Re.Group facility, and we will continue to work to make sure that we still, even without an operating MRF, recover as much material as possible.

MS ORR: I appreciate, again, that this might still be coming in some of the design of the tender consideration, but what consideration has been given to new technologies and features? We have this opportunity of building a new MRF. What are we looking at to really push that to be the best it can be?

Mr Fitzgerald: Even before the first, this MRF was about upgrading our ability to get the most resource recovery as possible. What we are seeing in the next generation of MRFs are a much higher level of sensors and of AI learning to be able to separate the product. The more you can separate, say, plastics into different types, the greater the value.

MS ORR: Like a different grade, yes.

Mr Fitzgerald: Correct; different grade and different polymer types. It makes the on-sell of that material so much easier. Where we struggled previously—and what is an issue in some of the recycling programs that have failed—is that the end markets do not exist if there is a contaminated product at the end. It is about lifting the end product to a much higher standard. It also offers the opportunity for us to look at modifying the lines to allow for different materials to come through, subject to market capacity and availability. We are also looking at a national level at harmonisation across kerbside bin collection so that what goes into the yellow bin is consistent right across the country. I think anyone that has been on holiday throughout Australia will know that what goes in that yellow bin differs from place to place, and that creates confusion and contamination in the bin. Getting that harmonisation at the national level will also assist us in making sure that our facilities can handle that material.

MS ORR: With the recycling, you mentioned some of the stuff that is going on nationally. Can you just run us through some of the new and emerging responses that are coming through where it needs that coordination so you have the consistency and the response that can actually manage it?

Mr Fitzgerald: It has been a huge topic of conversation at the national level to get a consistent approach. There is a willingness and desire across jurisdictions to increase particularly product stewardship schemes such as the Container Deposit Scheme, which we have seen has been a great success. It has not only been a great success for recovering the product; we have also seen with monetising the litter, if you like, a dramatic drop in that product now being found in our litter stream, which our city presentation teams now no longer have to encounter.

Along with the expansion of the Container Deposit Scheme, we are also looking at a stronger battery recycling scheme. What we have seen to date has its deficiencies, and there is a need to step up, particularly from the perspective of the producers themselves and improve their responsibility for regaining that product so that they can recycle it.

THE CHAIR: The product stewardship of the batteries?

Mr Fitzgerald: Correct. That extended producer responsibility is key to what we are trying to achieve. Solar panels, again, are an emerging waste stream that we need to do more on. We are right at the start of what we expect to be quite a significant amount of solar panels coming through the system into the future. There is also work happening on tyres. Tyres remain a problem. Tyres are particularly a problem in remote communities and regional communities. So we are looking at developing capacity and capability and expanding the industry itself so that we actually have the capacity to take the tyres.

There are a range of other product stewardship schemes that are in their early development, particularly around e-waste. E-waste is of particular interest because it has aspects of all of our problematic waste streams, in that it can have embedded batteries. What we find is that some of those hot loads in trucks are coming from vapes and other things that have batteries in them that most people do not even think about when they throw them in the bin. Having schemes behind it supported by producers is where we need to go, and mandated schemes that actually allow that to happen is where the commonwealth have now positioned themselves and jurisdictions have supported that approach.

MS CLAY: Mr Fitzgerald, we have been getting updates on the new MRF for some time now, and I am very excited. It still seems to be not yet finished. Will the new MRF be able to recover all standard supermarket packaging? Given that you are designing it right now, can you design it to do that?

Mr Fitzgerald: In particular soft plastics?

MS CLAY: Soft plastics, yes. But MRFs were originally designed to recover everything that comes out of a supermarket. Given that we have this once-in-50-year opportunity to build a new MRF and we are doing that right now, can we design this MRF with all of the right manual and automatic sorting processes so that it can recover soft plastics and all of our standard supermarket waste?

Mr Fitzgerald: It can be done, certainly. I mentioned the range of optical sensors and AI-assisted recovery processes. Combined with that, there are manual sorting elements to it. The issue that is always there is whether there is a willing market to take the commodity at the end. So, is it in fact a recyclable product?

I think the bigger focus for us is around trying to work with, particularly, the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation to actually reduce the levels of packaging that are coming from supermarkets in the first place, because, often with the types of packaging, the polymer types, the ability for us to recycle that material at the end of any capture process is very limited. You spend a lot of time capturing a product that, in all likelihood,

may go to landfill anyway because there is not an offtake arrangement available for it.

MS CLAY: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: On the Container Deposit Scheme, I can see in table 13, accountability indicators for output 2.3, that the container redemption rate has gone down from 74 per cent target to an expected outcome of 62 per cent. Do you know what the reasons are for that?

Mr Fitzgerald: This is predominantly due to the fact that the material is now processed. The recycled material that comes from our yellow bins is now processed interstate. Because of that and because of the complexity of the accounting methodology required, we do not count that towards the redemption rate. In practice, I do not believe that we have seen an actual reduction in the cans that are being recovered; it is now the cans that are actually going through the scheme itself. It is largely because of the location in which the material from the yellow bins is now processed.

THE CHAIR: The target for next year remains at 74 per cent. Is that likely to be achieved? How much longer are we going to be sending our waste interstate?

Mr Fitzgerald: It is going to be difficult for us to achieve that target. We continue to try and stretch and look at opportunities for us to do better when it comes to how we account for the material at the end in the other jurisdiction processing facility. We maintain that that is our desire, but it will be difficult to achieve that target.

THE CHAIR: How many data breaches or attempted data breaches were identified with the Container Deposit Scheme in the last year? I think the last one was in March, and the media reported that tighter security was on the way. What has been done to tighten this?

Mr Fitzgerald: We have done work with the network operator, which is Return-It. They are responsible for their systems, and they are responsible for the reporting of any data breaches. I understand that we have had only the one data breach in the last 12 months. But I will take that on notice to confirm that that is the case. They have put in multiple authentication features that, even once a breach has occurred, stop any potential influence or impact to customers. There are controls that are in place around bank details so that those details are not easily changeable or accessible. They will keep working through with their service provider to make sure that there is as limited an opportunity as possible. We all know cybersecurity is an area of great concern for us all.

MS ORR: Mr Fitzgerald, just picking up on your comment about the difference—and this is my paraphrasing, so correct me if you do not agree with it—between recycling something and the first step of the waste hierarchy, which is reducing the existence of it in the first place, you noted packaging from supermarkets as one of those areas where that is the focus. What are the other areas where you might be focusing on that and forming part of the response?

Mr Fitzgerald: It is certainly one of our biggest areas. It is an area where there is the greatest opportunity for us in how the everyday consumer engages with recycling. So,

for me, that is probably our greatest area of focus. Our Circular Economy Strategy focused on a breadth of areas that have opportunity for us to reuse. In particular, the adaptive reuse of buildings is a great area—being able to use what is already embedded within a building and taking that to a different form and function. Those types of interventions are really where I think we can get great benefit. That is why our Circular Economy Strategy talks to that and opportunities in that space.

MISS NUTTALL: I would like to get an update on some of the other waste contracts—in particular, if I could be cheeky, I will ask for three: the FOGO contract, the household waste collection contract and the transfer station and recycling drop-off centre contract? For each, could you advise (1) where they are up to and (2) whether that information is currently publicly available?

Mr Fitzgerald: I have spent many of these sessions saying that they were imminent. and I am pleased to say that a lot of them have now been completed. The transfer station and recycling drop-off centre was a procurement that consolidated 11 of our waste contracts and has meant that we have significantly improved the capacity for us to manage those contracts. That commenced on 25 March, and information on that contract is publicly available. It should be available on our contract register.

Household collections was the consolidation of four of our contracts. It was signed in April, and that contract, because there is a significant lead time to the acquisition of trucks and associated equipment, will commence early in 2025. That contract is available on the contract register website.

The FOGO trial is continuing with our waste contractor, J.J. Richards. The recent 2024-25 budget announced that we will expand that trial by 1,100 additional properties, which is a terrific opportunity for us to test some more techniques and issues, particularly around communication and engaging with households. The FOGO facility itself is still being procured. We are still going through the environmental clearances for the proposed site in Hume. We would expect procurement to commence early in 2025 for that facility. That is currently where we are up to with that.

MS ORR: I noticed that the government has funded the expansion of the FOGO pilot to more residential dwellings. Noting that you have said 2025 is when you want to commence with the facility procurement and that you are working through the environmental clearances, how are all these different parts coming together, because it is quite a big project? How are you intending to implement the expansion of the pilot to more residential dwellings and how does it fit with the bigger picture of the longer-term implementation?

Ms Cheyne: What we experience with waste streams is that multi-unit developments are an area where extra work is required. This can be because they may have a recycling and a general waste chute or you have to take your recycling down or whatever it may be. There is a more transient population as well. So some of the issues that Mr Fitzgerald raised about people being aware of what can and cannot be recycled where there are a lot of people in one space can be problematic.

FOGO, as you know, does cover Belconnen, but not all complexes are signed up to it at this stage. With this rollout we want to get some more information and data and have

more consultation and engagement with multi-unit developments. At this stage, we are looking at the 1,150 households, including some areas of Belconnen. But we are also seeing if we can roll it out to another area of Canberra, just to see if there is any difference with the engagement or what we might learn from those multi-unit developments in another area. That, hopefully, will be decided in the next little while, and then we will be able to get some more information while the pilot continues.

MRS KIKKERT: The Chief Minister announced that \$27 million from the federal government will contribute to the duplication of William Hovell Drive. But, in the budget statements, it says that the commonwealth contribution is \$26.5 million—so it is short of \$500,000. Where is that extra \$500,000?

Ms Cheyne: I will have to take that on notice, Mrs Kikkert. More broadly, that additional funding is related to some cost pressures with the William Hovell Drive duplication. So the overall funding footprint is larger than that.

MRS KIKKERT: Is that new money? Is that new funding from the federal government—the \$26.5 million?

Ms Cheyne: Yes.

MRS KIKKERT: What about in previous budget years? The 2021-2022, 2023-24 budget years also had the commonwealth government contribution of exactly the same amount. I doubt any of that money was spent in the last two years. So is that new money or is that money that the commonwealth government actually committed to the ACT government two years ago and now you are just recycling it?

Ms Cheyne: No; it is additional money. Mr Fitzgerald can speak to that.

Mr Fitzgerald: That is additional money; a matching contribution from the commonwealth of fifty-fifty for the project costs.

MRS KIKKERT: Could you take on notice where the previous \$26.5 million from previous budget statements went to—because William Hovell Drive has not been duplicated? Also, just quickly, when is the William Hovell Drive duplication planned to be constructed—the beginning of it?

Ms Cheyne: As soon as possible. You may be aware, Mrs Kikkert, that the environmental approvals have finally got to a stage where the DA has been renotified. It closes for public comment on 5 August. After that, EPSDD will go through their final approvals process. That DA being approved allows for construction to get underway. So I hope it is imminent. In the meantime, we are working on finalising our construction tender so that we can contract for the work and it can get underway. It has taken much longer than any of us would have liked, but I can say that we are much closer than we have been for the last few years.

MRS KIKKERT: Absolutely. Back in March 2020—from an answer to a question on notice—the construction was said to be completed by late 2023. In March 2021, an answer to a question on notice said that the construction would be completed by mid-2023. In March 2024, Minister Cheyne, in your response to a question about when

the duplication of William Hovell Drive would be completed, you stated that the completion date was 2026.

If I can draw your attention to the budget statement, the forward budget years 2024-25 and 2025-26, the figure is about \$2.2 million and then in the budget years of 2026-27 it is projected with an increase spending of \$15.5 million. I can only assume that the construction of William Hovell Drive duplication is going to cost that much. So I would assume that the 2026-27 estimation, based on your projection of your spending cost, is when the William Hovell Drive duplication construction will actually being.

Ms Cheyne: No.

MRS KIKKERT: Why then is there an increased amount in your estimation, projection, of how much you will be spending in 2026-27 of \$15.5 million and in the next two years it is only a mere \$2.2 million?

Ms Cheyne: Mrs Kikkert, that is how the funding has been profiled. I note that is just a portion of the total cost of the project, and that relates to the new funding. If you have been following along with the project since March 2020—

MRS KIKKERT: I have. In response to the questions on notice, you have stated a number of times that construction will be completed in different years.

Ms Cheyne: Mrs Kikkert, the reason—

MRS KIKKERT: How are we supposed to believe you—

Ms Cheyne: Mrs Kikkert, may I answer?

THE CHAIR: Mrs Kikkert, give the minister the opportunity to answer your question.

MRS KIKKERT: and to understand you that construction will actually begin in 2026?

THE CHAIR: Mrs Kikkert, the minister is answering your original question.

Ms Cheyne: Mrs Kikkert, I am explaining why those dates have changed. Is that what you would like to know?

MRS KIKKERT: I would like to know the date on which the construction of William Hovell Drive will begin and whether you can commit to that. If the detailed design is done and the environmental study has been completed, surely you would have an estimation of when the construction will begin and when it will end. In previous years, the government has estimated a time. Why can't you do that today?

THE CHAIR: Can I just ask, Minister, if you could take that on notice so that we could take a minute or two to give Ms Clay another question?

MS CLAY: I am okay, thank you, Chair.

THE CHAIR: We are out of time. We were meant to break at 10.30. Thank you for

bearing with us for a couple of extra minutes. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank all of our witnesses for their attendance today. If you have taken questions on notice, which I know you have, please provide your answers to the committee secretary within three business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*.

Short suspension.

Appearances:

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

Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate

Rutledge, Mr Geoffrey, Deputy Director-General, Environment, Water and Emissions Reduction

Malouf, Ms Ros, Executive Group Manager, Climate Change, Energy and Water

Ogden, Dr Ralph, Director, Catchment Planning and Water Management

Lloyd, Ms Lara, Executive Branch Manager, Climate Change and Energy Programs

THE CHAIR: We welcome Mr Shane Rattenbury MLA, Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction, and officials. We do have a number of officials for this session. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. Witnesses must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly.

The proceedings today are being recorded, transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice, it would be useful if witnesses used these words: “I will take that question on notice.” This will help the committee and witnesses to confirm questions taken on notice from the transcript.

We will proceed to questions. I will go to the floating wetlands in Lake Tuggeranong, one of my favourite topics. Mr Rattenbury, you recently wrote back to me that one of the platforms has split. However, they are not at risk of breaking apart and repairs are scheduled by early August. Is it that the wetlands are tethered or that the foam balls on the edge of each one are tethered?

Mr Rattenbury: I will ask Dr Ogden to tell you.

Mr Rutledge: I will kick off and then Dr Ogden can join in. Thanks, Ms Lawder. I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. As you know, the floating wetland was a first for the ACT and we are absolutely learning by doing. It has been an interesting project for us, and it is fair to say that we probably do not know the answer to why it keeps moving. We are having another look at it. As outlined in the minister’s letter to you, we are going to do another bit of strengthening, if you will. We are still speculating as to why it is moving. It is certainly doing the water treatment that we expected it to do, but it is moving a lot more than we ever expected. Dr Ogden, do you have anything further on that?

Dr Ogden: I have read the privilege statement and agree to comply with it. It is still anchored and the—

THE CHAIR: Which is still anchored—the balls that were on the edge or the wetlands?

Dr Ogden: The balls are actually signifying where an anchor is, so it is the platform

itself, the foam units, which you would have seen, that are still together. There is still a cable around them, so we are pretty confident that they are going to stay together for now, but we are getting contractors out, hopefully on 1 August, to come back and repair it.

THE CHAIR: I guess they are foam; they look like foam. Can they break apart?

Dr Ogden: If there is a serious flow through there, they could break apart, but our modelling says serious flows do not happen there. We think that the possibility is that wave damage coming from the south is what is damaging it. It is the southern units, modules, that are being damaged. We are putting around it a more solid type of module that interlocks and that will, hopefully, protect it. If that does not work, then we will consider moving it to a quieter place away from the lake.

THE CHAIR: There are several foam platforms tied together. Some of them have sort of doubled over or overturned. Will that be fixed in that same effort on 1 August?

Dr Ogden: That will be fixed, and we will be replanting that. Also, one of the ones where the monitoring cabinet was, and all of the modules that we put in around the outside to help bolster the structure, will all be planted in spring.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. I have lots more, but I will try and make sure everyone gets an opportunity. Ms Orr.

MS ORR: I am actually—

THE CHAIR: I could have kept going.

MS ORR: Yes. I have questions, but we are so busy that I am happy to pass down the line. Mine are not urgently pressing. I might change my mind later.

THE CHAIR: Miss Nuttall?

MISS NUTTALL: Sweet; all right. Are emissions from the ACT government operations declining?

Mr Rattenbury: Thanks, Miss Nuttall. What has happened is that over the last few years the ACT government emissions, since 2016-17, have declined significantly, by nearly two-thirds. That is predominantly a result of our move to 100 per cent renewable electricity. As with the rest of the ACT, what that leaves the ACT government with is emissions coming from gas use and from our transport fleet.

The vast bulk of the ACT government's remaining emissions come from Transport Canberra and City Services—essentially the bus fleet but also our fleet of vehicles. There are a range of strategies in place to cut those emissions. They include our move to electrify our own vehicle fleet, the move to electrify the bus fleet and the program to remove gas assets from ACT government buildings, but we have seen a slight increase in ACT government emissions in the last couple of years and that reflects that growth in transport use predominantly.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you very much. What are the key challenges, then, to meeting the government's emissions target of 33 per cent below 2020 levels by 2025?

Mr Rattenbury: The key things are getting those alternative measures in place, which is about removing gas assets and reducing government use of fossil fuel gas, and also getting our diesel and other buses replaced with electric buses.

MS LEE: Minister, you have already talked about gas and transport, but have you got levels of emissions coming from industrial sources? Have you got that input?

Mr Rattenbury: Yes, there are industrial emissions as part of our greenhouse gas inventory. I am happy to go into the detail, depending on what your interest is.

MS LEE: It is along the lines of how much of it will be captured by the commonwealth's safeguard mechanism. Have you got more information on that?

Mr Rattenbury: No, I do not believe—

MS LEE: You have not looked into it?

Mr Rattenbury: There are 220-odd sites under the commonwealth safeguard mechanism. None of them are in the ACT. We do not have any large, single point emitters, which are the targets of that program. It tends to apply more to things like aluminium smelters, those big sites.

MS LEE: Yes, so none of them have been identified in the ACT.

Mr Rattenbury: No.

MS LEE: Thank you.

MR PARTON: Mr Rattenbury, you and I were at the same forum recently regarding the electrification of apartment buildings in the ACT. I note the evidence that was presented by the representative, whose name escapes me, from Master Plumbers regarding the shift from gas to electric hot water. Concerns were raised by that representative about the differential in weight between electric hot water systems and gas hot water systems. The gas systems, by and large, tend to be on the roofs of apartment buildings, but if they move to electricity the heavier nature of those systems would mean that they likely could not continue to be on the roof and would probably have to be shifted to the basement. The concern was raised by that representative that he is not quite sure where they are going to go, given all the parking down in the basement. Are you concerned, as the minister with responsibility for this transition, that that is a major, major stumbling block to the elimination of gas in the ACT?

Mr Rattenbury: The issue of apartment buildings is a significant one in the transition. They are, within the policy discussions, referred to as complex buildings for exactly some of the reasons you have identified. It is fair to reflect, I think, that there is a real diversity in those building types. The multi-unit buildings range from everything from groups of townhouses through to big towers like you see in Belconnen town centre and Woden town centre.

The age of them impacts on the complexity of the building. That is why, as part of the Integrated Energy Plan, there is a key focus on complex buildings, to start to work with them to identify case studies to develop the technical work, but also to develop the legal work. I think that was another theme of that discussion: issues around decision-making in strata are quite complex as well. That is why you see laid out in the program some quite detailed work. Different buildings will have different technical solutions. I anticipate that some of those will be more readily done. Others will take longer. That is why the transition is set over a 20-year period, to give us time to work those things out.

MR PARTON: Minister, an industry insider, who is actually quite on board with the transition, suggested to me that, when it comes to the hot water systems in apartment buildings, the transition would be almost impossible without a massive spend. He wanted to know who was going to stump up the cash for that. Surely the apartment owners are not going to be left with this massive bill, so who is going to pay for it?

Mr Rattenbury: I do not think you can make those generalisations at this point in time. I think there is a clear acknowledgement, both here in the ACT and across the country, that these are some of the more challenging questions in the transition, and that is why we are planning to work through them over a period of time. I think the smarter way to approach the gas transition is to do what might be referred to as the low-hanging fruit early on. That is what we are getting on with while we continue to do the research work on those other buildings. I do not know if Ms Malouf wants to add any comments.

Ms Malouf: I have read and understood the privilege statement. Great questions, Mr Parton. We have a trial in the next 12 months to answer exactly those questions. There was funding out of the last budget to do some work with a range of different apartments to try and understand. There will not be a fit-for-all outcome, I imagine, in this process. It is about understanding over the next 12 months what that looks like, what the real costs would be, what technologies are available and what the emerging technologies will be, and how far away they are, so that we can understand what that looks like. In 12 months we will have that information, which will give us a pathway for what that looks like in the future.

MR PARTON: All right. Of course, if you lived in WA or New South Wales or the Northern Territory you just would not have to do it at all, would you?

Mr Rattenbury: They are going to have to at some point, Mr Parton. If Australia is to meet its ambitious greenhouse gas reduction targets and tackle climate change, we are going to have to phase out the use of fossil fuel gas.

MR PARTON: We must tell the Prime Minister. Thank you.

Mr Rattenbury: Indeed.

THE CHAIR: What discussions might you have had with owners or occupiers of commercial and other buildings, such as Parliament House, who have very large gas boilers? That is going to be a huge expense and effort for them to replace.

Mr Rattenbury: Through the development of the Integrated Energy Plan, we had

extensive consultation across the community, including—back to Mr Parton’s previous question—representatives of the Owners Corporation Network, for example, a range of industry bodies and groups, and a range of individual businesses.

I think it is fair to reflect—and this is often lost in this conversation—that even gas boilers have a life. They will need to be replaced at some point and there will be a significant capital expense at the point at which they have to be replaced. Really, what we are looking to do is to make sure that, when that moment comes, the technology is available and there is a good industry built around it.

It is one of the reasons the ACT government is leading with the Electrification Of Government Gas Assets Program. What we are doing there is not only acting ourselves to address this issue but also developing the industry capability and expertise and the supply chains to ensure that other parts of our community have that support available to them when it comes to it.

MS CLAY: Minister, as minister for emissions reduction, you have responsibility for reducing our emissions to meet our targets, but a lot of the areas that are generating our emissions lie outside your responsibility. Transport is over 60 per cent and waste is over 10 per cent. That is 70 per cent of our emissions and you do not actually have any responsibility for those portfolios. Do you think the ministers who have responsibility for transport and waste emissions are accountable for the rising emissions in those areas?

Mr Rattenbury: I certainly think those ministers have significant responsibility. As a whole, the ACT government has put in place ambitious legislative emissions reduction targets. The government as a whole needs to meet those targets. The Climate Change Strategy, which is in place till 2025, has different ministers with different responsibilities for parts of it. It went through cabinet, so all of those ministers are responsible for those areas. I think the answer to your question is yes.

MS CLAY: When I asked our transport minister in the past about how we are reducing our emissions, I got answers about government fleet emissions.

Mr Rattenbury: Yes.

MS CLAY: I do not get answers about all of Canberra’s transport emissions. Do you think it is important that we reduce all of Canberra’s emissions? That is part of our legislative targets; right?

Mr Rattenbury: Definitely, if we are to meet those legislated targets. The approach the ACT government has taken has been that the government needs to get its own house in order. I have described already, in response to one of the earlier questions, some of the measures that have been taken. But, yes, it is also our responsibility to enable the rest of the community to reduce their emissions.

MS CLAY: Given that our emissions are going down in a lot of areas—and obviously that is the direction we want to go in—but waste and transport are going up, do you think we have put enough emphasis on this, and budget funding and the right tools in place, to make sure that those emissions actually turn around and start coming down

instead?

Mr Rattenbury: I think we have started with some measures in place. If you look at, for example, the uptake in electric vehicles in the ACT, we are far and away leading the nation, so there are some measures that have been very effective. But clearly there are a range of things we continue to do which are more business as usual, like significant road expansions. I think we are not making adequate investment in, at this point, the improvement of public and active travel. These are the sorts of areas that require a greater emphasis.

MS LEE: I think you mentioned zero emission vehicles. What is the progress? Can you give us an update in relation to the Zero Emissions Vehicles Strategy target of 180 charging stations by 2025? Where are we at?

Mr Rattenbury: We have actually made very significant progress, Ms Lee. As I have said publicly before, if you go back 18 to 24 months, we were a bit behind in the uptake of electric vehicles in the ACT and having enough charging stations, but we have made real progress in recent times. We now have 206 charging bays in the ACT, across 69 sites. Some chargers are capable of charging, for example, two EVs at once. The number of charging bays I think is a more practical metric of charging infrastructure. There are 161 individual public EV chargers across the city. In terms of your question about the 180, I think we are well on track. We have additional sites that have been funded by the ACT government, or supported through a grant process by the ACT government, and they are currently in planning and delivery. I am confident we will meet the target.

MS LEE: Okay. Have you got numbers of those that are currently in the works?

Mr Rattenbury: Potentially.

Mr Rutledge: Thanks, Ms Lee, for that. Regarding the ones that have been publicly subsidised, we have 20 locations across Canberra, 39 charging stations, which have a total of 65 charging bays. There are more coming online every week. Either at the end of this week or early next week we will have additional sites at Calwell shops and also at Jamison shops, so they continue to roll out. Those are the 65 bays that have been supported by the ACT government.

What we continue to see, which makes up the nearly 200 that the minister raised, is private investment. As it turns out, Tesla has not been provided with any ACT government funding and so Tesla has rolled out large charging bays across the city, as have other private businesses, particularly hotels. There is an expectation now, when people come to Canberra and stay in a hotel, that they have charging infrastructure. So we are seeing private industry also invest in that. As the minister said, 12 months ago we were probably behind the curve, but now we seem to be meeting the demand, maybe just in front.

MS LEE: Sorry; I know that you added information to try and clarify, but I am a bit more confused about the numbers now.

Mr Rattenbury: I have the answer to your question now. Do you want me to try, or do

you want to jump in again?

MS LEE: No; if you can.

Mr Rattenbury: On 30 May this year the ACT government announced deeds of grant under the funding that we provided. That was a competitive application process and it provided funding to a further 39 chargers, servicing 78 charging bays. I think that was your question. I am happy to take others.

MS LEE: Yes. Okay. And that is in addition to the current 161—

Mr Rattenbury: Correct.

MS LEE: at 20 locations?

Mr Rattenbury: Yes.

MS LEE: Thank you. The fund guidelines prioritise funding certain sites and exclude certain projects. How does the directorate consider the proximity of a proposed site to other chargers or proposals as part of its evaluation?

Mr Rutledge: When we started this project, we did a study and we made publicly available what we thought the charging outlook for Canberra would look like. We took a 2030 view and then looked across the city. We put heat maps out. Then, when we went to market, providers came back with their proposed sites.

We have issued deeds of grant to try and get good coverage across the city, but not just across the city. We have particularly focused on where there are more multi-unit developments, where we think they are less likely to have at-home charging, so Gungahlin and Belconnen et cetera were probably weighted more heavily than, say, the inner north or the inner south, where a lot of people live in single residential dwellings. So that was part of the thinking.

What we have seen when we have then issued these grants is that it has been quite a long process. The charging company needs to get access to the land, make any land arrangements and then apply to Evoenergy to make sure that there is enough energy on site or to arrange any upgrade if there is not. From start to finish, it is proving to be months in the making, which has seen some of those earlier delays. It has also seen some changes to sites but within the same area.

We have had some good successes. The Deakin site at the Royal Australian Mint remains one of the busiest sites for the company; that is one of their busiest sites. We are learning as we go. There is a new site that we just opened at the ANU, near the Shine Dome, with five or six there. That is getting really heavy use as well. As I said, we will continue to roll them out. For each one of the deed grants, when the tender panel has looked at what has come forward, it has been about getting coverage across the city where we think that demand is. I think we have made good progress.

MS LEE: Do you have visibility of the usage of specific charging sites, even if they are run by other companies? Have you got full visibility of that?

Mr Rutledge: They report back to us. It is not like real-time data, but we regularly keep an eye on those. They have informed our next phase; phase 2A I think we are calling it.

MS LEE: Thank you.

MR PARTON: Calwell Shopping Centre wrote to the ACT government nearly five years ago, seeking assistance to install EV charging at the centre. I am told the centre were quite keen to use a number of car parking spaces that are owned by the ACT government. Although a number of emails were sent, there was very little communication or appetite, according to centre management, from the ACT government to assist. Eventually they decided to go it alone and install chargers on their own land. The centre spent tens of thousands of dollars and installed their chargers last year.

Earlier this month, management noticed works occurring on the other side of the car park and discovered that this was the installation of EV chargers. It is around 50 metres from the chargers that the centre installed themselves last year. As you can imagine, centre management are absolutely ropeable. If they had known that you were going to build EV chargers, they would not have spent the money on the private facility, given its ridiculously close proximity. I would like to go to you, Minister. How could a situation possibly unfold where a private company has bent over backwards, trying to do the right thing by the community, and the government has completely ignored them?

Mr Rutledge: Thanks, Mr Parton. As I said in my earlier answer, private companies have been making their own investments; we have seen that. With the publicly subsidised ones, we look to try and get good coverage across the city. As I also said, getting the land tenure arrangements right has been difficult, both on public land and on private land. It has proven challenging for us because you do need to marry up the demand of consumers and the supply from electrical substations nearby. We have asked that all publicly funded chargers are accessible sites as well, so they are larger sites. When the private companies came to us and we gave them small grants, they also did their own due diligence and came up with those sites. I do not think there is any shortage of demand in the Calwell area.

MR PARTON: I can tell you that the chargers that have been installed at Calwell are very rarely used, despite appearing on the apps. If I could go back to the minister: do you think it is prudent use of taxpayer money to install public chargers so desperately close to private chargers? And why was there was no consultation whatsoever with the centre as to what was going on in this space? This just seems to come straight out of *Utopia*.

Mr Rattenbury: Firstly, Mr Parton, I think it is fair to reflect that the money provided by the ACT government is only a small part of the cost. They are grants that leverage private investment. So we are getting a significant return for the money the government is putting out there to bring private investment to the table. I will pick up on Mr Rutledge's point. I acknowledge the effort by the Calwell centre and I am sorry they feel frustrated. Certainly, in most places, people who put these in find that they are an important investment at their site because they draw in customers. People will go there, plug in and stay for some period of time. So you are seeing businesses in various places

making a sensible investment decision.

MS LEE: In this case they did, and then you guys came along and put one in 50 metres down the track. Did you say they first approached the ACT government five years ago. Fair enough, Mr Rutledge said it was a few months ago, but five years ago is getting beyond a joke, isn't it?

Mr Rattenbury: What do you mean, Ms Lee?

MS LEE: Five years ago, the Calwell centre approached the government to talk about getting the chargers on ACT government land—getting access to the land—and they got no response for five years.

Mr Rattenbury: I do not know that they got no response. I would need to check the records on that.

MS LEE: There was no substantive response for five years. That is surely utterly unacceptable.

MR PARTON: I know that the electrical contractors who have been involved in this work are concerned about available power once we have all of the chargers working. They certainly wanted me to ask questions, such as: will there be sufficient power, given that the amperage to each of the retailers at Calwell was downgraded prior to the government funded chargers coming on board? Is there a problem here?

Mr Rattenbury: I would need to take that on notice to seek some advice on the availability of the electrical supply in Calwell. I do not have that information to hand. I will take that on notice.

MR PARTON: Thank you, Minister. What sort of message does this send to businesses who might want to engage with EPSDD in the future on matters like this? The Calwell centre absolutely wanted to sign up to your dream but got nothing and pushed on on its own.

Mr Rattenbury: If you are talking about five years ago, to be fair, Calwell was well ahead of the curve. I acknowledge that, and I can understand their frustration. We have certainly really improved that coordination in recent years. If that circumstance arose again now, we would find a very different response. We are working hard to coordinate with developers across the city to get this infrastructure right. It is so important. There is strong community demand. We need to make sure we are working as effectively as we can.

MR PARTON: Chair, can I push on with just one final supplementary?

THE CHAIR: One.

MR PARTON: Okay. One of the other aspects that is causing angst for the Calwell centre is that funds have been allocated in previous budgets to reinvigorate the precinct. They have had a number of consultations, but nothing has come of that allocation. They are sitting there at the moment with the belief that it seems almost impossible to squeeze

out government money to make really urgent repairs, and yet, at the drop of a hat, the government is able to spend tens of thousands of dollars on infrastructure, and, if you had bothered to consult, you would have discovered that it was not actually needed exactly where you put it.

Mr Rattenbury: I think you will need to ask the Minister for City Services about the issues of upgrades at the Calwell shops. It is not within my remit. This program to roll out electric vehicle charging infrastructure is a deliberate and important program. The government is putting in some money and is leveraging significant private investment.

Mr Rutledge: Also, sticking with Calwell, when the Calwell Shopping Centre put in their own, they put in slower chargers than the new chargers. There is a different mix of chargers. What I am saying is that they are not in direct competition with each other because they are offering two levels of service. The ones from the ACT government that are about to come online are faster chargers—they are for people who are going to be there for a shorter period of time—than the ones that the Calwell shops installed themselves. EV is the charging company that we are using. When we went out to market generally for the charging grants, we did not go to premises that wanted chargers; we went to charging companies to come to us so that the charging companies would make those negotiations with the landholders. We have seen some of them turn up in shopping centres separately. We have worked with some local clubs as well. I do not believe that there is a change in the electricity at Calwell shops. The minister has asked to take that on notice, and I will get that information. I hear what your constituents raised with you.

Prior to installing the chargers, it is my understanding that EV, the company, contacted all businesses and shops in the area around August last year. That is not five years ago; that was last August. They are offering a different service for different consumers, so I do not think that they are in competition with each other.

THE CHAIR: Could you check whether they did contact Calwell management and what the response was?

Mr Rutledge: That is my understanding, Ms Lawder, but I will triple-check that to make sure.

THE CHAIR: You will take that on notice?

Mr Rutledge: Yes; I will take that on notice. Thanks, Ms Lawder.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Do you have a substantive question, Mr Parton?

MR PARTON: I am done. I would like to hand my substantive to Ms Lee, if that is at all possible, Chair.

THE CHAIR: Ms Lee.

MS LEE: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Mr Parton, for the generosity. Minister, in January this year, you and Mr Barr issued a joint public statement, in your capacity as minister for energy and Mr Barr in his capacity as Minister for Climate Action, stressing that the government would move to protect ACT households from “the brunt of any

significant rises in energy costs". The statement said:

It will be the primary focus for the government's cost-of-living subcommittee that will meet in the lead-up to the ACT Budget.

That is a direct quote from that statement. Electricity prices have, of course, increased significantly this year, with the ICRC determining that prices would rise, on average, by 12.75 per cent, or \$240, this year alone. They said that individual tariffs could rise by up to 14.75 per cent. In this year's budget, aside from the \$50 increase to the concession rebate for electricity prices, what did the government's cost-of-living subcommittee come up with to protect ACT households from the brunt of electricity price increases?

Mr Rattenbury: Thank you, Ms Lee. You are right about the level of electricity price increase in the ACT. In terms of measures the ACT government took, I approved a reasonable cost determination on 22 February this year. That is an annual process where I agree to the amount of funds that are applied under the ACT's large-scale fee and tariff regime. I took a deliberate decision to ensure that over-recovery of costs from previous years were returned to consumers this year. That was particularly a decision I took to ensure that electricity prices were mitigated as much as possible through that mechanism this year. That provided \$7.8 million of downward pressure on ACT electricity prices.

As you note, the government provided an increase in the electricity and gas concessions for eligible households, and, of course, the commonwealth government provided a \$300 concession through this year's federal budget. With those measures combined, whilst the average annual bill increase for a representative household in the ACT will be \$240, the government's \$300 per household energy bill relief will more than offset that, and so most households in the ACT will come out ahead.

MS LEE: You specifically stated that the primary focus of the ACT government's cost-of-living subcommittee in the lead-up to the ACT budget would be on electricity prices, confirming that the only thing that this budget contains to provide relief to ACT households on electricity prices is the additional \$50 on the concession rebate.

Mr Rattenbury: What matters here is the impact for electricity customers. Yes; the budget put that specific measure in place, but, as ministers in that committee and in that process, we looked at all of the things that were available, and, between the use—

MS LEE: Like what?

Mr Rattenbury: With the use of the reasonable cost determination, which I deliberately accelerated, and the commonwealth input, we were able to deliver an outcome.

MS LEE: That was the totality of everything that you looked at?

Mr Rattenbury: They are the key measures. Of course, there is a range of other programs that we have available to help people save energy costs in the ACT, such as interest-free loans to get more energy-efficient devices. These sorts of measures exist

as well.

MS LEE: Yes, but I am talking about this budget.

Mr Rattenbury: Yes—those measures are funded in this budget.

MS LEE: I understand that, but I am talking about any new initiatives in this budget.

Mr Rattenbury: There are measures under the Integrated Energy Plan which also seek to improve energy efficiency for households in a system—

MS LEE: That is not new, though.

Mr Rattenbury: The IEP has just been launched, and it was funded in the ACT budget.

MS LEE: How many households are eligible for the concession rebate?

Mr Rattenbury: I cannot recall a figure off the top of my head.

Mr Rutledge: Forty-three thousand.

MS LEE: How many ACT households are there?

Mr Rutledge: Roughly 160,000 or 180,000.

Mr Rattenbury: It is 180,000 these days, I think. The government actually expanded the eligibility for the concession this year. There is an additional category of people. I will have to check those categories and I will provide them on notice.

MS LEE: Thank you. I confirm you are taking that on notice. You are talking about 43,000 eligible households for the concession rebate out of 180,000.

Mr Rattenbury: Broadly.

MS LEE: It is fair to say that it is less than a quarter.

Mr Rattenbury: About a quarter.

MS LEE: Thank you, Chair.

Mr Rattenbury: Actually, just on Ms Lee's observation around it being a quarter, that is because those are the low income households who are entitled to concessions. If there are 180,000 households, many of those will, of course, have much higher incomes.

THE CHAIR: In response to what you have just said, we heard from community sector organisations on the community day, and community sector organisations are seeing people who are working, with one or two people working, who they have never seen before, because of the cost-of-living pressures.

Mr Rattenbury: Indeed.

THE CHAIR: Is the response sufficient, given that they are not on concessions? They are not people who have traditionally been serviced by community sector organisations, but they are really feeling the pinch from things like electricity price increases.

Mr Rattenbury: Absolutely; and, when it comes to electricity price increases, compared with other jurisdictions in the National Electricity Market, the ACT's regulated standing offer is between one and 38 per cent lower than regulated offers in Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria. The ACT has some of the lowest electricity prices in the country. We regularly offer advice to people that they can save hundreds of dollars a year by seeking out better electricity deals.

I can reflect that, across the border in New South Wales, regulated electricity costs are expected to be around \$470 a year higher than they will be here in the ACT. The ACT government has worked extremely hard to ensure that we keep electricity prices as low as we can. As I noted, in combination with the work done by the federal government, energy bill relief will more than offset the increase in regulated standing offer prices for 2024-25.

MS CLAY: Minister, there are a lot of different ways that we can help people to transition, and there are a lot of different ways we can help people to save money or get better services and better access. As we do this, how important is it for us to look at the whole cost of what people are paying for—that we look at the cost of gas, that we make sure they have efficient appliances and that we look at people in public housing? Is that part of what we are doing at the moment?

Mr Rattenbury: It is a really important point that you make, Ms Clay. Looking at the total cost of ownership, to use a phrase, is an important part of it. The ACT government's analysis shows that, compared to a dual-fuel household with fossil fuel gas, an all-electric household will save Canberrans hundreds of dollars in their energy bills each year. If they have solar panels in addition to that, it can be well over \$1,000.

That is why you see a range of programs in place that are linked to energy efficiency. Interest-free loans are designed to help people get over perhaps not having the capital up-front; they are able to use the savings to pay back that loan over a period of time and continue to harvest the savings themselves. I think that looking at the total cost of ownership is a very important way to consider these questions.

MS CLAY: Do we have measures in this budget to help people reduce their gas costs and increase their efficiency?

Mr Rattenbury: Absolutely; we do, yes. There is a range of programs in place which I can go into, if you like.

MS CLAY: Yes, thank you.

Ms Malouf: We do have some measures, both in this budget and ongoing measures, to support householders, including vulnerable householders. At the moment we have a public housing electrification program. We have already electrified 1,200 public housing properties. That gives them the opportunity to reduce their gas usage to zero

and gives them the opportunity, with efficient electric appliances, to reduce their electricity costs. Those 1,200 households have the opportunity to disconnect or abolish their gas, which is an instant \$300 a year saving off their access bill. We are accelerating that program to get to more of those households going forward, but we have done 1,200 so far.

In the vulnerable household scheme, for private users and renters, we have a range of schemes that are based on education and going back to the building envelope—draught proofing, education on the usage of the appliances that they have and how they heat individual rooms rather than whole houses, if they are not using rooms.

We support about 750 households through St Vincent de Paul each year. That is an in-house assessment by an energy assessor through our contract with St Vincent de Paul. That includes draught proofing, and installing curtains where there are not very thermally efficient curtains in place.

We also have a new measure in the budget of \$5.2 million to be directed to some of our lowest income households that potentially have fallen through the gaps. I think this refers to Ms Lawder's comment before about people who have jobs and are working. That program is a new program and it is in design at the moment. It is designed to roll out over the next two years and it will deliver electrification to 350 householders.

That work is being done with a community partner, Care Financial. Care Financial will do a budget capability. It is not the income of the householder; it is actually what is left at the end. If you have some big medical expenses or expenses that you cannot avoid, an actual financial analysis will be done by Care Financial. It will cater for those householders that potentially do not have a concession card and are working but still need that support.

THE CHAIR: Minster, does the ACT government support the safeguard mechanism, following the Chubb review and the recent changes?

Mr Rattenbury: The safeguard mechanism is a matter for the commonwealth government. They have implemented it. The ACT government has not had a role in signing that off. Further to the answer to Ms Lee's earlier question, with no sites in the ACT, it has not been a focus. We are obviously very heavily engaged in a range of national discussions. I was at the energy ministers meeting last Friday, and we are working with the commonwealth on measures such as consuming energy resources, as well as other issues in the energy transition.

MS LEE: I understand that the safeguard mechanism is a commonwealth government thing; does that mean that the ACT government has not formed a view on it?

Mr Rattenbury: There has not been a formal discussion in government about our view of the safeguard mechanism because it has not been particularly applicable to the ACT. There is not a cabinet position or anything like that.

THE CHAIR: We have already talked a bit about petrol and diesel vehicles and gas combustion. Of the remaining emissions, what are the major areas that the government is working on to reduce emissions?

Mr Rattenbury: In terms of what our emissions profile looks like, a bit over 60 per cent comes from transport, 22-odd per cent from fossil fuel gas burning and around 10 per cent or so from waste. If I quickly do the maths, that is basically 90 per cent of our emissions; so they are the three key areas of focus. I can talk at great length about the various measures—

THE CHAIR: How are we going to reduce the waste emissions?

Mr Rattenbury: The key way to reduce waste emissions is to tackle the issue of organic waste. At the moment organic waste emits methane, which is a high global warming potential gas. The issue, in my view, is to more rapidly roll out a scheme for organic waste in the ACT so that, rather than it simply going into landfill, and breaking down and emitting methane in an uncontrolled way, it is actually processed and becomes part of a circular economy. It is a valuable resource. Our compost is a fantastic resource, and we should be capturing it and using it, rather than just dumping it into landfill, where it does become a source. The ACT, of course, does capture methane at a number of our landfill sites, and that is reasonably effective, but the value of that resource is so much higher. Having a rapidly rolled-out organics scheme would be far more appropriate.

Mr Rutledge: At Mugga Way we are capturing the methane and generating electricity onsite for that. There was some discussion with EPSDD and the proponent out there about whether or not they would move to a gas injection, but I think that the technology is not quite there.

There is a lot of waste at Mugga Way, as we know. There are a lot of emissions coming from that site. At the moment we are working with them as a single site to generate electricity out of that waste. With the preventive measures that the minister talked about, that is capturing what already exists. Getting better waste reduction and handling of our new and coming waste is part of the waste portfolio's efforts, which they are pursuing. For our emissions, as they are now, the best we can do at Mugga Way is to generate electricity.

Ms Malouf: In addition to that, on a smaller scale—but it is growing—we have programs in schools. Every one of our public, private and independent schools has signed up to our Sustainable Schools Program. One of the five key components of that is an organics stream, and schools manage that how they like. If anyone has small people, they will know that they are very good at recycling that organic waste and making sure they have a worm farm or chickens at the school—or whatever it may be.

Our business community has certainly embraced the program. We have 1,200 small businesses that are part of our business program, and part of the accreditation under that program is to have an organic waste collection system. That is a great way of making sure that our businesses are getting the waste out of the waste stream and off to an organic recycler to be recycled and go to the higher level of organic recycling.

MISS NUTTALL: The ACT Legislative Assembly declared a climate emergency back in 2018, but the government continues to fund polluting, business-as-usual projects, including but not limited to road duplications. We have delays to light rail, with it not

expected to get to Woden until 2033, and no dates have even been set after that, as planning has not even begun. We have fewer buses than we had in 1990, and people are not walking or riding any more than they used to. Bearing all of that in mind, do you think that the budget decisions of government adequately reflect the climate emergency that we face?

Mr Rattenbury: Miss Nuttall, no, I do not think so. I think there is more work to be done, and our figures in our greenhouse gas inventory show that. There is a lot of momentum for business-as-usual decisions, and responding to climate change means changing many aspects of decision-making in our lives.

We see today that the European Copernicus satellite data has just recorded the hottest day on record. I think this underlines the urgency of climate action. There is little doubt that, across the globe, including here in the ACT, we need to accelerate our efforts. The carbon budget is being used up rapidly. There is only so much carbon that we can put into the atmosphere, and the more we emit, the less time we have to make the transition.

Certainly, here in the ACT, we need to continue to do our part. We are a leading jurisdiction, yet we have more to do. There is no doubt about that.

MS CLAY: Minister, we have been a leader on climate change in Australia—not in the world, but in Australia we are doing pretty well. We have achieved quite a lot, but the news globally is not good and the news locally is not good on emissions and in terms of the feedback loops we are entering. What do you think we need to focus on next so that we are moving further and faster and we are actually getting the job done in the way we need to?

Mr Rattenbury: It is fair to reflect and, picking up on the observations I was just making in response to Miss Nuttall, because globally nations have not moved as fast as they need to, to cut emissions and to stay within our global carbon budget, it is time for both nations and subnational jurisdictions to revise our emissions reduction targets to reflect the latest climate science. That carbon budget is being rapidly used up. That means we need to go faster.

Certainly, I have been having discussions with the ACT Climate Change Council, and they have put a view that we should accelerate the ACT's emission reduction targets, so our legislated targets could be revised and brought forward. Accelerating our delivery of efficient and effective light rail and buses will go a long way to cutting transport emissions. Increased investment in walking and cycling infrastructure will also give Canberrans the ability to make the choice to use emissions-free transport options.

There is that spectrum right from the highest levels of setting our legislated targets through to the very practical measures that enable people, in their day-to-day lives, to still get on with their lives but cut their emissions impact.

MS CLAY: We are meeting our legislated targets at the moment, and they were great targets when they were set. Do you think maybe there is scope for increasing the ambition of those targets and also doing the work to make sure we continue to meet them?

Mr Rattenbury: We met our 2020 target. The 2025 target, I have always said, will be the most challenging, in the sense that we are right at that technological transition point where things like EVs are starting to really take off, and we will see the genuine impact of that probably on the 2030 target. I think we will get very close to the 2025 target. We will either just make it or we will be close; one way or the other.

It is probably too late to change the 2025 target, because we are so close, but the 2030, 2035 and 2040 targets potentially could be brought forward. There would be time to make adjustments and to put new measures in place, but it would require ambition on the part of whoever the government is after the October election to have the willingness to spend the money and take the community with us on that increased ambition.

MS CLAY: There is another piece of work which is helping people to adapt to what has already happened. We are particularly conscious here in the ACT that the biggest impacts will be felt by those who have the least money, by those who are renting and have the least control over their living situations. We have a few measures in there, but do you think that needs to be a piece of work with more focus and more ambitious targets going forward?

Mr Rattenbury: The Minister for Climate Action is responsible for adaptation, so I suspect he will talk more about this. I think the science is clear: there is so much embedded climate change already in the system that we can no longer just focus on mitigation. We must also do adaptation. So your central point is absolutely correct.

The other point in your question is that we need to focus on a just transition. I have spoken about this in various committees before. It is the idea that we need to look after those who are least able to afford both the transition and adaptation. I think government has a very particular responsibility in that place. It cannot be left to the market. A focus of future governments will need to be ensuring that we look after those at the lower end of the income scale the most.

MS LEE: Minister, is the government considering using carbon offsets to meet targets?

Mr Rattenbury: No. At this point the government has a policy to not use carbon offsets.

MS LEE: In terms of the utilities rebate, Minister, can you confirm how much that is in this year's budget?

Mr Rattenbury: I am hesitating because I do not want to give you the wrong number. Let me check that and come back to you.

THE CHAIR: You have taken that on notice?

Mr Rattenbury: I will be able to do it within the session.

MS LEE: I can see Mr Rutledge madly typing away, so I am assuming he is bringing that up. I want to confirm also how that compares to last year—the last couple of years.

Mr Rattenbury: That is why I am hesitating. I am trying to make sure that I have the

right numbers for the right years.

MS LEE: If I explain what I think it is, can you confirm it, maybe? I think the reason there is confusion is that it has been \$750, but there have been one-off announcements of \$50 additional.

Mr Rattenbury: It actually sits in the Treasurer's portfolio, which is also why I am hesitating.

MS LEE: Is that right, Mr Rutledge?

Mr Rutledge: That is correct. Of the 43,000, there were another 1,200 people that were made eligible this year than there were last year.

MS LEE: In terms of the actual rebate itself, can we confirm that it has been \$750 and we have had a couple of one-off \$50 increases. That has happened for how many years in a row now, Mr Rutledge?

Mr Rutledge: I will take that on notice, Ms Lee. Going to the minister's earlier point, I think the utilities rebate in its various forms has always been considered by the government amongst other activities. Certainly, last year and this year, the commonwealth government provided direct involvement to all consumers. Last year the ACT government matched that \$350, on top of the \$800. We also run a hardship program with our energy providers for them to identify clients that are facing hardship. Previously, it has been around \$100,000 for ActewAGL, to help them with their hardship program. This year, it is \$300,000; so there is that as well.

When people are in real hardship and they get into deep debt, they often go to ACAT, and that often sees a waiving of debt. Again that expense comes to government. There are a number of measures in place. The ACT is unique compared to other jurisdictions in that we provide it via the electricity, or based on electricity, because that means tenants get it. We provide the whole amount, and this year it has been renamed for energy, water and gas. But you receive the full rebate, whether or not you are electricity-only. In other jurisdictions they might have a gas concession and an electricity concession. We have one concession, which is more generous than in other jurisdictions because of that, and it is about making it more accessible to renters, particularly.

Mr Rattenbury: I have found the right part of my notes now. The concession is \$800 this year. The budget included expanding the utilities concession eligibility criteria to include anyone with a commonwealth Health Care Card. That was actually 12,000 more households. Mr Rutledge said 1,200, but it is actually 12,000. It includes an additional payment of \$50 in 2023-24; that was the one-off. I think I have covered your questions, hopefully.

MS LEE: In terms of the rate without the one-off \$50 increases, \$750, in what year was it first set at \$750? How long has it been at \$750?

Mr Rattenbury: I will have to check that one. I will take that on notice; or you might ask the Treasurer in the subsequent session.

MS LEE: Obviously, the rebate is important, but it has not moved significantly, except for the one-off \$50, for quite a number of years now. In fact, if you take into account inflation, it is actually a cut in real terms, in terms of the rebate.

Mr Rattenbury: Yes, but there have been the other one-off supplements that have been provided in the last two budgets, as Mr Rutledge touched on.

MS LEE: Yes, but they are the same, so it has not taken—

Mr Rattenbury: No, I mean the other ones. The commonwealth one is \$300. In the previous year, there was a matched one between the ACT and the commonwealth.

MS LEE: Yes; they were one-offs. In terms of the hardship fund, Mr Rutledge, you said that \$300,000 this year has been budgeted for. Have you taken into consideration how many households that will provide assistance for?

Mr Rutledge: No, we do that post-fact. That one is administered, as I said, by ActewAGL Retail, as part of their hardship programs. We, post-fact, get a report back from Actew, and that also goes into the discussions of government about what the utility concession would look like in each budget cycle.

MS LEE: It was \$100,000 in last year's budget?

Mr Rattenbury: Yes. We increased it.

MS LEE: Do you have the numbers for how many households that went to?

Mr Rutledge: I will take that one on notice.

MS LEE: Thank you. Also, can you tell me about the eligibility criteria to get the hardship—

Mr Rutledge: I will include that in that answer. As I say, it is by the retailer, and they self-identify. People come to ActewAGL Retail and say, "We're struggling with our bills." Retailers are fairly good. ActewAGL are probably better than most. That is not me just liking that company; that is benchmarked by the AER, about how—

MS LEE: Just to clarify!

Mr Rutledge: Just to clarify. They look at payment plans, they make sure that they have their concessions up to date; they make sure all of that is done. Sometimes they refer them to other agencies like Care Financial. Ms Malouf mentioned that we are working with them on vulnerable households. They help them and, if they are eligible to gain assistance from that hardship fund, they are provided with that.

THE CHAIR: Just for a surprise, I have a water question, Dr Ogden. I am pretty sure you would be involved in this. In April 2024, there was a letter called, "Healthy waterways flow from healthy homes and gardens" sent to your residents. Can you tell me how many households received this letter?

Dr Ogden: I will have to take that on notice.

THE CHAIR: Whereabouts was it letterboxed, or was it sent in the mail? Which suburbs did it go to?

Dr Ogden: Again, I will have to take that on notice.

THE CHAIR: As a result of the letter, how many calls did the Healthy Waterways team make to people? It said in the letter, just to refresh your memory: “To join in, be part of making a difference, get your free garden advice and resources, simply chat to the Healthy Waterways team when they telephone you.” How many phone calls did the team make?

Dr Ogden: Again, I will have to take that on notice. This is part of a program that we are developing around reducing fertiliser use in residences.

THE CHAIR: I understand that, but I am asking for some more detail. The second point in that is: “Call”—and then there is the 08 number—“to book your free garden consultation and products.” How many residents called that number?

Dr Ogden: Again, I will have to take that on notice.

THE CHAIR: Related to my previous point about, “chat to the Healthy Waterways team when they telephone you,” I asked previously how many calls the team made. My next question then is: how many residents agreed to talk and engaged in that process?

Dr Ogden: Unfortunately, I do not have those figures with me. I will have to take it on notice.

THE CHAIR: Is that Healthy Waterways team that people are encouraged to chat to, ACT public service employees or is this contracted out?

Dr Ogden: It was contracted out.

THE CHAIR: What was the value of the contract?

Dr Ogden: I will have to take that on notice.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr Rutledge: We will get you a comprehensive briefing as part of these questions on notice to talk about this. But if I go back to the first principle of what we were trying to do, we are doing what we can with infrastructure and we are looking at infrastructure in our waterways. We were looking at the sporting fields where we thought there were large users of—

THE CHAIR: Mr Rutledge, I understand that. And, if I did not understand that, it is clearly outlined in the letter. So I do not need you to mansplain it to me. I am just interested in the matrix relating to—

Mr Rutledge: Apologies, Ms Lawder, if I came across like that. What I was getting to is we teamed up with Griffith University and social researchers. We were contracting them to help us to inform future behaviour change, and that was the purpose of the research. So it was not Ralph and his team making these calls; we had social researchers onboarded to do that. We will provide a full answer to all of your questions.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. I think my last one was: how many garden consultations were booked as a result? How long is this program for? If someone rings in two years time, will that still be in place?

Dr Ogden: That one I can answer. That part of the program is finished. That finished in June. They will be going back out in spring to see how well people remember what they learnt. So they will be evaluating the program this spring.

THE CHAIR: Great.

MISS NUTTALL: We know that scope 3, embodied emissions, are a large portion of our emissions and that they fall outside our emissions targets. What do you think should be done to reduce our scope 3 emissions in particular, and should they be publicly reported on?

Mr Rattenbury: I think it is a really interesting area of work. The ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and Environment did their 2020-21 report on scope 3 emissions. They found they make up an estimated 94 per cent of ACT emissions. Of course, we are only obliged to report against scope 1 and scope 2 emissions. So this is really thinking about how we take the next level of effort. These scope 3 emissions are, of course, counted somewhere else in somebody else's scope 1 and scope 2 emissions—so wherever the product has been produced. But we can have an impact on that as consumers and, particularly as a relatively wealthy city, we do have a high scope through our emissions profile. So I think it is important that we tackle it. It is important that we measure it, because if you are not measuring it you cannot work out how to tackle it.

The commissioner's report recommended that the government implement a methodology report on scope 3 emissions across the territory every three years. The government agreed in principle to that recommendation, and work is now underway to think about how to do that. There are certainly a range of measures we can adopt to reduce scope 3 emissions. That comes through things like procurement and identifying things like the use of low-carbon concrete in government projects. There is work underway on a range of those fronts as well.

MS CLAY: Minister, we have done some work in the ACT government about divesting our shareholdings from fossil fuels. That is really great to see. A next step to make sure that ACT government money is not supporting the fossil fuel industry could be looking at climate-friendly banking and it could be choosing a bank that is more climate friendly. That is a huge point of focus at the moment for organisations like Market Forces, as well as for a lot of our activist climate warriors. Is that something that the ACT government is looking at at the moment?

Mr Rattenbury: Yes, it is again a way that the ACT government can use its financial clout to have a broader-reaching impact. I know a lot of individual consumers have

done it, because there are banks that offer that for individuals. Certainly for the ACT government, this is something I have raised with the Chief Minister. The advice I received was that there are currently no climate-friendly banking providers that are suitable for providing the scale of services required by the ACT government. That was a point-in-time piece of information. I think it is fair to reflect that this is a fast-moving space. Whether some of the smaller banking providers are capable of stepping up and providing those services for the ACT government or whether some of the existing big four banks are able to—I believe they should be divesting themselves and whether they will become suitable for the future—I certainly think the ACT government indicating a preference for that is also a powerful market force and can play a positive role.

MS CLAY: Have we indicated that preference? Have we contacted our banking provider? I think it is Westpac at the moment.

Mr Rattenbury: That would have to be a question to the Treasurer. I am not sure if that has been done. Certainly, I have raised it internally. Whether that has been externally communicated, I am not sure.

MS CLAY: I am slightly surprised to hear it, too. I know that a lot of businesses and some governments have announced that they are going to move to a climate-friendly banking provider. So I am surprised to hear the response that there is not one that could handle the ACT government's services.

Mr Rattenbury: As I say, that is the advice that was received. It would be probably 12 months since I asked that question, give or take. As I said, this is a rapidly evolving space, and I would like to think it should be possible, and we certainly should keep exploring it.

MS CLAY: Interesting; thank you.

MS ORR: Minister, when they said they were not able to handle the banking needs, was any information given as to what that would be? I think it is fair to say that, for a territory with quite extensive banking needs, it is not just a case of making deposits; there are a few more considerations in there.

Mr Rattenbury: Yes; it is not just a savings account.

MS ORR: Yes. We are not sitting here on our Dollarmite account. Can you just run me through what the reasons were and the complexities that might need to be taken into account in choosing a banking provider and how those might be playing into who is and is not suitable?

Mr Rattenbury: I would have to take that on notice and check whether the Chief Minister gave me that advice or whether we would have to ask Treasury and that part of government for the more detailed reasons. In broad terms, the advice I have heard back is that it is a question of scale. As you say, it is not just a couple of savings accounts here or there; it is a range of services.

MS ORR: It is pay remittances and security profiles and all sorts of things. I can see it is complex.

Mr Rattenbury: Yes. It goes to the capability of a banking institution to provide that spectrum of services. That, at its most simple, is the problem. I am happy to provide what further information I can.

MS ORR: Yes, I am happy for you to pass it back.

Mr Rattenbury: Again, for the sake of protocol, we will take that on notice and provide what we can.

THE CHAIR: Thanks.

MS CLAY: I would love to ask for an update on the Belconnen wetland, which might mean Dr Ogden needs to come back.

Dr Ogden: The Belconnen wetlands is nearing completion. I do not know the last time you have been there, but, in my mind, it is looking really, really good. I suppose we will complete construction and get off site in probably weeks, not months.

MS CLAY: Brilliant. So that will be finished in a couple of months?

Dr Ogden: Yes.

Mr Rattenbury: A lot of the plants have already gone in. Some plants will go in in the spring season once we get through the frosts of winter. So there is a bit more planning still to be done.

MS CLAY: Great; thank you.

THE CHAIR: A good news story to finish on.

Mr Rattenbury: Indeed.

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank all of our witnesses for your attendance today—even Mr Rutledge. Sorry to give you a hard time. If you have taken any questions on notice, which you have, please provide your answers to the committee secretary within three business days of receiving the uncorrected proof. Thank you again.

Hearing suspended from 11.59 am to 1.00 pm.

Appearances:

Vassarotti, Ms Rebecca, Minister for the Environment, Parks and Land Management, Minister for Heritage, Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services and Minister for Sustainable Building and Construction

Community Services Directorate

Rule, Ms Catherine, Director-General

West, Ms Kate, Executive Branch Manager, Client Services

Borwick, Ms Ailsa, Executive Branch Manager, Housing Assistance

Balaretnaraja, Mr Ash, Executive Branch Manager, Housing and Homelessness Policy Programs, Housing Assistance

Callaghan, Ms Lauren, Chief Finance Officer, Finance and Budget branch, Corporate Services Division

THE CHAIR: Welcome back to the public hearings for the committee’s inquiry into Appropriation Bill 2024-2025 and Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2024-2025. The proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice, it would be useful if witnesses used these words: “I will take that question on notice.” This will help the committee and witnesses to confirm questions taken on notice from the transcript.

We welcome Ms Rebecca Vassarotti MLA, Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services, and officials. We have a number of witnesses for this session. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. Witnesses must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Could you please confirm that you understand the implications of the statement and that you agree to comply with it?

Ms West: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement.

Ms Rule: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement.

Ms Vassarotti: I have read and acknowledge the statement.

Ms Borwick: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement.

Mr Balaretnaraja: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. We will proceed directly to questions, although we did receive a statement from you, which will be put into evidence for the committee. Talking about priorities, why is the \$16.636 million for frontline services listed as a new initiative when the same initiative was in the 2023-24 budget?

Ms Vassarotti: Thank you for the question.

MR PARTON: This will be budget paper G, page 47.

Ms Vassarotti: Thank you.

MR PARTON: That's what I reckon. I am just surmising.

Ms Vassarotti: For sure. Thanks very much for the question. Obviously, the work that we have been doing in providing additional support and funding into the housing and homelessness area, particularly in relation to supporting specialist services, is work that we have been doing over a number of years and we continue to provide ongoing support.

In terms of the presentation of those figures, I might look to officials as to how we have presented that information. But, certainly in terms of this year's budget, we have once again put significant additional investment into the specialist homelessness sector. What we have seen over the last four years is us really lifting the base of services and really recognising the additional cost base. That is something that we commenced a couple of years ago, but we have continued to ensure that that increased indexation flows through to all of the services.

We have also continued to provide additional services. We have seen a number of new services that have been stood up—notably the services that were stood up through the COVID period and we have continued to support. In this budget we see an additional service, particularly through the youth foyer, which I am happy to talk about. But, in terms of the presentation of that information, I may look to—

THE CHAIR: Can I just restate: \$16.636 million as a new initiative, but there was the same amount for the same initiative in the last year's budget.

Ms Callaghan: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. This is an error. There is an error on page 47 of budget statement G around the \$16.636 million. This is due to a human error where the numbers from last year have accidentally been transcribed. We have detected this error. Unfortunately, it was not prior to printing. We have undertaken a thorough review of budget statement G to make sure there are no other errors and that the tables of appropriation and the budget statements themselves are correct. So we are confident that there are no further errors within the statement. We are currently reviewing our quality and assurance processes and the clearance processes internally to ensure that this does not happen again. The minister additionally has informed the chair of Joint Pathways regarding this error. The correct number is \$6.515 million, as is disclosed in the *Budget Outlook* under the initiative description.

THE CHAIR: Have you issued a corrigendum or does the online version of the budget have the new correct figures?

Ms Callaghan: It does not yet. A corrigendum has been prepared and will be tabled in the Assembly, as I understand, in a sitting period in late August. Upon the corrigendum being tabled, the online version will be updated.

MR PARTON: So the \$6.515 million is what should be in this line. Does that mean that the \$16.636 million was extended in the previous 12 months, or is that a carryover of this?

Ms Callaghan: The \$16.636 million was the total additional funding appropriated in

the 2023-24 budget. A component of that will have been expended in 2023-24, and that will have been approximately \$5.12 million, with the remainder of the \$16.636 million being expended over 2024-25 and the forward estimates.

MR PARTON: So the figure that will appear in the amended budget, of \$6.515 million, is the carryover of that previous amount?

Ms Callaghan: No, it is additional new funding—in addition to the \$16.636 million.

MR PARTON: This is a bit cheeky. My staff want to know how many people proof-checked the document before printing—and it is probably a fair question.

Ms Rule: It is a question for Treasury, though; sorry. They hold the pen on the budget documents.

MR PARTON: Just in closing on that line of questioning, when we talk about, in theory, \$16.636 million for frontline services in the previous budget that was spent, are you able to, in two sentences, suggest to me what the bulk of that money has gone to?

Mr Balaretnaraja: I would be happy to give that a go in two sentences.

MR PARTON: Excellent. I am glad that you are here.

Mr Balaretnaraja: At that stage, we had around 52 different projects and programs that relate to housing and homelessness. Programs, which you would be familiar with, like Street to Home, Axial Samaritan House et cetera were all funded through that overarching funding envelope.

MR PARTON: Good answer. You have done well.

MISS NUTTALL: As of 1 July 2024, there are 3,152 applications on the public housing waitlist. The average waiting time for the highest need category, I understand—priority—is almost 200 days. These are individuals and families who Housing ACT has identified as having urgent housing needs, with likely no other options that would provide safe and secure housing. I have heard of constituents such as women fleeing from domestic violence with children who have no community connections because they moved here from another country and their partner has isolated them. How is the government working to bring down these wait times for these members of the community?

Ms Vassarotti: Thank you, Miss Nuttall, for the question. As you have noticed, we do have a very high waiting list. It is a waiting list that has grown over recent years. One positive story is that it has stabilised and actually reduced slightly over the last 12 months, which is a really positive story. That is primarily because we have seen more public housing come online. But we certainly do need more public housing. There is, from my perspective, no doubt about that.

There is actually a really positive story, particularly with new properties coming online, in terms of the work that has been going on within Housing ACT, and particularly around the allocation process, to ensure that we get more people who desperately need

homes into those more quickly. I will look to the team in terms of providing a little bit more information in relation to that. There has been some significant investment, particularly in the allocations team, to ensure that we are working to get people into homes as quickly as possible. There has been a significant increase in the number of people working in that area. I think the amount of people working in that area has doubled. That is really positive.

There is also a bit of work that has been happening, particularly around utilising short-term transition stays. That is really important. Particularly with the priority waiting list, probably 12 to 18 months ago, we were looking at the priority waiting list being at about 200. I looked at the waiting list figures today, and we are down to 78. That is a significant reduction.

I might ask the team to go into a little bit more detail in terms of the work that is being done, particularly in responding directly to the question, Miss Nuttall, in terms of what we are doing to get that waiting list down.

Ms Borwick: Miss Nuttall, we do a range of activities. We ensure that we do everything we can to increase the supply. This year we have had a lot of focus on returning our vacants and keeping those numbers low. After the last 18 months, it now takes probably close to half the time to return those vacants to being online and to be able to get people into those properties.

We have done work around the review of those waitlists. It is a priority waitlist approach rather than a linear model. We are constantly checking in with people and understanding what their needs are, to ensure that people at the highest priority get into those houses first and foremost. It is about knowing those properties really well, before they have actually come back online. Our allocation team have played a much more proactive role in going out and looking at properties, particularly new properties, so that they can get the right solution and property offers to people as they are coming in off the waitlist.

It is really important for us to make sure that we are matching, to make sure it meets the needs of families, people with a disability and, as you mentioned, people escaping family and domestic violence, and making sure that they have the right modifications in those houses to feel safe and secure.

We also work with community service providers. It is a bridge across not just public housing but also the homelessness funding that we have and the supports that we have there. We have been doing a lot more work with some of the other service providers to understand what we might need to do to free up people who may be in a refuge or crisis accommodation and get them into secure housing, to allow those emergency services to have the capacity that they have as well. We allocate some of our houses through the housing assistance program to ensure that the spread of people to provide those services is available.

MISS NUTTALL: How many public homes would need to be built next year to clear the highest need category?

Ms Vassarotti: There are about 2,100 people sitting on the high needs list. That is

actually the bulk of our housing waitlist. They are people that have been assessed as having significant needs. They are not in the priority category, but they certainly have a range of risk factors. In terms of being able to provide support for those people, we are looking at a deficit of around 2,000.

MISS NUTTALL: Has ACTCOSS told you what might need to be done to clear this waiting list?

Ms Vassarotti: Certainly, the sector as a whole—ACTCOSS, St Vinnies and others—have talked about a figure of around 3½ thousand. I think that is a figure in the advocacy work they have done. While it is exciting that we are seeing more housing come on, certainly, in terms of per capita, and with a growing city, in terms of the proportion of public housing that we find, it is not matching up, in terms of demand and need. The reality is that we are in a housing affordability crisis. We know that there is a lot of significant need within our community.

THE CHAIR: You started off talking about the number of people on the waiting list stabilising, I think you said. Do you mean it is no longer growing, do you mean it is remaining steady or do you mean it is declining?

Ms Vassarotti: Over the last 12 months we have seen it decrease slightly. The challenge is that, while we are seeing a lot more movement within the waitlists, there is still a significant demand and there are many more applications that come in. With the wording that I have used in terms of stabilisation, we are not seeing it growing. Over the last few years, we have seen it growing significantly, and we are not seeing that level, but we are still seeing a significant level of demand.

MR PARTON: I know you cannot really measure this, but is there any evidence to suggest that the stabilisation of that list is in part due to the length of wait which is currently in place, which is disincentivising people from even applying?

Ms Vassarotti: It might be worth talking with the team, in that there is ongoing review, absolutely, of the waiting list. The question is going to whether a lot of people are dropping out because they are just—

MR PARTON: For the lowest level of application—when I say the lowest level, I mean the lowest priority level—what is the current wait time?

Ms Vassarotti: It is significant. It is about five years?

Ms Borwick: It is five years, yes.

Ms Vassarotti: It is a significant period of time for the standard waiting list. You would assume that people that are—

MR PARTON: Three years, four years?

Ms Vassarotti: No, I think it is around the five-year mark. That would be people who are probably coming onto the waiting list primarily around affordability. They are obviously eligible, in terms of their income, their asset status and that sort of thing. You

would think that affordability is a significant driver. It is when people have other complexities—domestic violence or other complexities—that they would potentially be assessed on high needs or the priority list.

MR PARTON: That is, I think, a sufficient answer. I would just reflect that no-one in this room really knows what we will be doing five years from now. It must be tough, if that is the waitlist, because—

Ms Vassarotti: There is no doubt about that, Mr Parton.

Ms Borwick: The point is that we do review that waitlist. We do have a look at people's circumstances or changing needs. It is not static. If you are on the standard, it does not mean that you sit on standard forever. As your needs change and perhaps you have a higher need or more of a priority because circumstances have changed, you will move through as well. I did not want to leave you with the impression that it is static.

MR PARTON: I do not envy your task of managing that list.

Ms Vassarotti: It is really interesting, too. As you would know, because you see a lot of correspondence as well, people's lives change and there is a different household composition that happens. People have different challenges that they might face. It is a very dynamic process in terms of assessing the waitlist. Looking at allocation, it is quite a bespoke process in terms of identifying, at that point in time, with the properties that are available, who are the people that are the best match.

Ms Rule: Sometimes those circumstances change for the positive, too.

MR PARTON: Yes.

Ms Rule: It is not always that people's needs get higher or more acute; sometimes their circumstances improve greatly.

MR PARTON: Yes. It is just that those people do not come running to me. There is a reflection in budget paper G about the evaluation and review of homelessness services as a part of the commissioning for outcomes initiative. When will that evaluation and review of homelessness services be completed? Is there anyone who can shed any light on that?

Ms Vassarotti: It is a good question. We have gone through a really significant process, in terms of the commissioning process. I would reflect that commissioning is a journey. All parties are working out what commissioning means, and we are trying to move away from standard contract management to a much more dynamic process in terms of working with services around needs that change—emerging needs.

Getting to the end of that commissioning process is a really important step. We are still not quite there. We are still looking at the commissioning of complex clients and the central intake service. As we have moved to the development of new service agreements with services, we are trying to identify what outcomes and outputs sit within those contracts, those service agreements. That is a really important element of commencing that evaluation process.

I would reflect that the evaluation process will probably never be finished because it is a dynamic and evolving process. One of the things that we are doing, in terms of service improvement, and it is attached to the work we are doing around the centralised intake service, is looking at those service improvements. One of the big ones will be moving towards a common assessment tool, so that we have commonality across our services. Some of those things will be important elements of the evaluation framework.

Mr Balaretnaraja: I will provide a little bit more clarity around the word “evaluation” and how that has been used. Our broader mix of programs have been evaluated. In amongst each of those programs, there have been circumstances where there is further evaluation. The central intake is a perfect example of that. There has been an independent evaluation of the central intake service, with recommendations provided to government. We are working to shift that program so that it aligns with the recommendations, as well as the work that has been done with the sector in terms of co-design and workshops.

That will lead to a decision being made around procuring and finding a new service provider. At the end of that, through the commissioning process, there is also a period of evaluation thereafter, which looks back and reflects on the commissioning process that has been put in place and whether there needs to be adjustments made to that. Evaluations are being used here in a couple of different terms.

MR PARTON: I think you have already answered this: my assessment of what you have said is that this evaluation and review of homelessness services, as a part of the commissioning for outcomes initiative, will be an internal process. We are not going to arrive at a situation where there is a public tabling of any evaluation review on this; or are we?

Ms Vassarotti: It is a process rather than a document; that is what I would say. When you look at the commissioning process, monitoring and evaluation are part of that commissioning process. It will not be a document that we put in. It is a part of the commissioning process.

MR PARTON: As such, I am sure it is not really possible to apportion a cost to the evaluation and review, because, from the way you have described it, it is just a part of the beast.

Ms Vassarotti: Yes.

Mr Balaretnaraja: With the central intake service, the evaluation is also publicly available. Those documents are publicly available.

MR PARTON: Excellent; thank you.

MS CLAY: Minister, we hear about the challenging circumstances of living in public housing complexes. What is Housing ACT doing to build social cohesion?

Ms Vassarotti: Thanks, Ms Clay, for the question. It is a really important one. It is one on which we get visibility in terms of our offices, in terms of some of the challenges

around neighbourhoods. We have reflected before that it is not something that is isolated to living in close proximity to public housing. Certainly, in terms of some of the complex areas, there are enhanced challenges at times. A lot of work has been put in, particularly over recent years, in terms of how we build social cohesion and ensure that people have a really good understanding of the complaints process.

With some of the specific work that has been done, there has been quite a lot of work in terms of enhancing and improving our work with the police. Often some of the issues sit outside the remit of the Residential Tenancies Act and we need to work closely with police. We have a memorandum of understanding and that work has been really positive.

We have been working in particular areas to build a much stronger relationship not just between public housing residents and Housing ACT but with a lot of the support services that we rely on. We have supported a number of projects in some of our larger multi-unit complexes, such as barbecues, which Mr Parton has attended. That was a really exciting one because that was actually tenant-led. That is something that the community has taken ownership of, and it has been a fantastic way to get not just Housing but a whole range of other services to engage.

There was a really positive thing that came out of the legitimate concerns of local communities in the Watson area. Housing took a bit of a lead in terms of bringing services together and working together with police. There has been similar work done in the city area. We have been working closely with communities in other areas, such as Oaks Estate.

Ms Borwick: There are a number of initiatives that we do. The minister has reflected on some of the stand-outs. We have our housing managers; also, for those multi-unit complexes, we see more of the housing practitioners, the more specialised supports. We know there are people in those complexes who are looking for supports. We follow up on any issues that people have raised with us, either through our client service visits or more directly.

One of the great things about the engagement with tenants is that we have our tenants consultative group, which includes representation from some of those multi-unit properties in particular. We will follow up and talk with the services and invite those services to come and attend those places where we know that is of assistance. CAHMA in particular is one that provides drug and alcohol support and health supports in those places, as well as working with our sector providers, who can come in and bolster those and really build up the service offering that happens from a public housing aspect, from a social landlord, with those services that our tenants want to connect to.

Another example is what we are seeing in some of our newer complexes where we are establishing new communities. We are spending a lot more time matching the people in those communities and thinking about what we want that community to be. In one of our newer complexes, we have matched the different types of people, so that we have a really strong mix of people in those communities. Also, they had some things in common, based on the facilities. We took them across and showed them some of the local amenities—where the local Centrelink and the local GP are located. Those sorts of things help to land people really well in some of those complexes.

MS CLAY: That is interesting. That sounds really promising. What is the government's role in some of those more social things? It sounds a bit like the Mingle program. What is the role of government in those tenant-led barbecues?

Ms Borwick: Cooking sausages!

Ms Vassarotti: It is a really fabulous thing. Again, this is completely tenant-led. The tenants have established this. We have a monthly barbecue. They have negotiated an arrangement where the local Woolies or Coles provide the food. Program comes out and cooks the barbecue. We attend. What has been really interesting with that process is that at each barbecue different services attend. We have had the police there. We have had mental health services there. We had the official visitor for homelessness there last time. We have had other members of parliament there.

One of the most interesting things is that it is actually building an ongoing relationship. It is not just, "Hi, how are you?" All of us have to front up, after we have heard, a month before, of a particular individual challenge and be accountable for what has happened and what has not happened. One of the other really interesting things is that different residents have attended as well. You see much more relaxed engagement in terms of someone who might be having an issue; they are able to engage with their housing manager as well.

MS CLAY: Does that include invites to public housing tenants who live in the area, is it a mix or is it just for public housing tenants right now?

Ms Borwick: It is tenant-led. In this particular instance, the person who leads most of that will engage with tenants from other complexes. It has been really interesting. It has brought other people into that complex.

Some of it is about debunking some of the myths about public housing tenants. Again, there is often an open invitation. The Watson day was a good example of a real mix of the community turning up and being part of that. It was not a public housing event. Again, we are seeing a little bit more about working in the community.

THE CHAIR: I will move on. In budget statements G, on page 48, one of your identified priorities is:

. enhancing digital service delivery channels to ensure public housing tenants and other members of the community are able to access essential housing and homelessness services 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

What digital services were delivered in the 2023-24 year, and what are you expecting to deliver in this year's budget?

Ms Vassarotti: Thanks for the question, Ms Lawder. It is again a really important one. It is an area in which significant work has been done in relation to improving digital services. The key achievement this year has been the provision of a digital application. It is delivered through a portal process. That is a very significant first deliverable. I will look to Ms West to talk about the details of this fairly significant project that is rolling out.

Ms West: Thank you for the question. It is a great opportunity to show that the new digital form is live on the ACT government website. The website is where anyone can apply for public housing. There is an eligibility checker where you can check whether you are eligible for public housing before you complete the full application. There was a soft launch earlier this year, and there has been quite an uptake from people using the online services, which we are really excited about.

Ms Vassarotti: It might be useful to point to where that project is going as well.

Ms West: There are a number of things on the cards for this year in that re-imagining gateway area. We need to do a rollout of that digital form more broadly. Then we are looking at increasing the technology in our services, our tenancy visits and things like that as well this year.

THE CHAIR: How much are you expecting to spend in the 2024-25 year on your digital service list?

Ms Rule: We do not have a specific budget figure allocated to digital services. It comes within the broad remit of the hired services work that we do within Housing. We do not have a specific line item on digital services.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Miss Nuttall.

MISS NUTTALL: People experiencing homelessness may have to repeat their story multiple times when seeking housing support. They might have to repeat it to OneLink, the emergency housing provider, and then Housing ACT for their long-term housing application. How is the government working to make this process easier and less burdensome for people who are already going through some pretty difficult times?

Ms Vassarotti: Thanks for the question, Miss Nuttall. Once again, it is a really important question because we do know there is a real challenge in having to tell stories multiple times and there is re-traumatisation in that process. I touched briefly on the work that we are doing, particularly around the common assessment tool. This will be a core way in which we really reduce the need for people to tell their story multiple times. I am particularly excited and passionate about this project. Again, I might look to Ash to provide a little bit more detail on where we are up to in relation to the project. We are working very closely with Joint Pathways, which is the mechanism that brings all the specialist homelessness services together around that project. We have in place an organisation that is assisting us. This is something that happens in other areas, but actually finding a tool that really meets different needs, in terms of the complexity of people's lives, is something that takes a little bit of time. Ash, can you talk a little bit more about where we are up to with the project?

Mr Balaretnaraja: Absolutely. The question asked aligns with the feedback that we have received through the working groups, the co-design workshops and also the OneLink evaluation. We do not want clients to have to retell their stories and re-traumatise themselves et cetera. As the minister said, we have the common assessment tool that we are working on at the moment. We have engaged Flinders University to support the delivery of that. They will be working across the sector and also with

government, service providers and the incoming service providers at the central intake service to land a common assessment tool that everyone agrees on. That will not be an easy task, but it is going to be very useful once it is stood up. That will be a common assessment tool that is used across the breadth of the sector, not just for OneLink.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: A supplementary?

MISS NUTTALL: No supplementaries.

THE CHAIR: Mr Parton.

MR PARTON: Thank you, Chair. This question is with regard to client service visits. I have asked this question before. COVID restrictions are pretty much finished, so can you explain, please, how it is that a private landlord has property inspections twice a year, but housing, as a social landlord, cannot complete at least one per property per year? I do not fully understand how that is. The budgeted inspections are set at almost 1,000 properties fewer than you have.

Ms Vassarotti: I will ask the team to speak to client visits. Private landlords do undertake six-monthly inspections, often due to landlord expectations. As a social landlord, we are trying to create an environment where people live in a home, rather than managing an asset where someone is looking at holding its value. The drivers of the private market, in terms of client visits compared to what a social landlord might do, are quite different. It is important to have client visits. We see that as really important, not just in terms of ensuring that there is appropriate asset management but also in terms of checking in with people on how they are travelling, particularly in terms of their connection to their tenancy.

MR PARTON: That is wonderful, but, Minister, you are still managing the assets, irrespective of the—

Ms Vassarotti: I totally agree with that. I am just questioning using the private marker of a six-monthly inspection. It often has significant impacts on tenants in terms of their experience of living in a home. I just question that equivalence. I would push back on the fact that Housing ACT is failing based on that measure. But I am really happy for us to talk about how we do measure client service visits and how we are tracking in relation to that.

Ms Borwick: That is our published target. That is what we have been working to and that is what we have delivered. The nature of those visits can be a combination of annual inspections, two-week visits and 90-day inspections, but there are also visits from our specialist service providers for those with more intensive needs. As well, I would reflect that some of our tenants will have been with us for 20, 30 or 40-plus years, versus some people who are relatively new. The intensity of the engagement with Housing ACT will vary across that spectrum.

MR PARTON: Are all the client service visits that are included in this document physical visits or do some involve only communication with a tenant without a physical

inspection of the property? Every time there is a client service visit, does it mean that, necessarily, there will be an inspection? Based on your answer, Ms Borwick, does this also mean that there are some tenancies that might have four client service visits a year and others that might not have one for a number of years?

Ms Borwick: I do not have the information around the timing of them, but there will definitely be people who will have more physical visits—for instance, where we might have a complaint around antisocial behaviour or those sorts of things and we might need to speak with the person or make an appointment to do that. We will do that in response to information that we have received. The visits that we are talking about, as far as I understand, are definitely the field visits that we are doing, but I will look to Ms West to see if she has any additional information. These are physical visits. It does not mean that other contacts do not go on with housing managers and practitioners as people need them. As you can imagine, people will engage with us through a number of different mechanisms.

Ms Vassarotti: I also want to reflect on the actual great work that Housing ACT staff do in terms of these client services. Sometimes it is really challenging.

MR PARTON: I can imagine.

Ms Vassarotti: Sometimes there is a need to go back a few times and reschedule visits. Unfortunately, sometimes, because of people's circumstances or some real challenges, we actually need the support of the tribunal to undertake those client service visits. Again, I reflect that it is a very different environment to what might be happening in a private rental circumstance.

MR PARTON: Minister, what I am trying to get a handle on here is that, irrespective of those complexities and irrespective of the worthwhile things that you have said about allowing people to live their lives in their homes, you are managing assets that are owned by all of Canberra.

Ms Vassarotti: Yes; absolutely.

MR PARTON: I am wondering if the lack of inspections, as it were, pretty much sends a signal that Housing ACT does not have high expectations of tenant responsibility.

Ms Vassarotti: I would completely push back on that. I would completely push back on the suggestion that it would be good use of Housing ACT's resources to do a six-monthly visit to a single older woman who has held a tenancy for 30 years and has actually demonstrated, in every engagement they have had, that they meet incredibly high standards in terms of pride in their home. I am sure you have been into public housing properties as well. These are people's homes, and they manage them with pride. Whether someone owns their own home, or they are in a private rental, there will be circumstances where there are challenges.

In terms of the processes that Housing ACT undertakes, particularly around client visits and engaging with housing practitioners, for instance, as opposed to housing managers, in terms of managing complexity, there is actually a holistic approach. I think the very blunt tool of turning up every six months is actually very poor use of taxpayers' money.

I absolutely disagree with the suggestion that we do not have high expectations. Of course we do.

MR PARTON: Would you suggest, then, that the private sector should perhaps wind back their level of inspections, given that their clientele would be much less complex?

Ms Rule: They have a different purpose. When you are in the private market, a rental inspection is about: are you meeting the terms of your tenancy agreement—that is, is the place clean and tidy; have you cleaned the flies out of the light fittings, and all that stuff. Ours are about that, but they are also about client wellbeing. Are there other services that our clients need some help with to maintain a successful tenancy? They are about making sure that we are meeting our obligations as a landlord, sometimes with vulnerable people who are not as good at navigating systems as people might be in the private rental market. Are there things in the household that reasonably need attention that we can help them with? There is a whole range of things that we do in client service visits that are not the same as what you would do in the private rental market. Our tenants are in a different set of circumstances to people in the private rental market, so I do not think you could draw assumptions about the number of visits we do or the number that private landlords do, because I do not think they are the same.

MR PARTON: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Ms Clay.

MS CLAY: Minister, by how much has funding for homelessness services increased?

Ms Vassarotti: That is a very good question, and one we were talking about. There has been a significant increase in homelessness services over the last four years. People would be well aware of the \$80 million that we committed through the parliamentary and governing agreement. We have seen a significant additional increase even to that figure.

If we start from the basis of 2019-20 and \$24,441,000, we are now looking at 2024-25. Funding for homelessness services is sitting at \$36,645,000, and there have been significant increases over the four-year period. Most notably, we saw in 2021-22 an increase from almost \$27 million in the previous year to \$33.3 million. We are seeing significant increases.

As I have talked about before, we have lifted the base, in terms of the indexation of specialist services. We have also funded a range of additional services. I spouted some numbers there.

MS CLAY: In broad terms, we have gone from \$24 million at the start of the term to \$36 million per annum now, which is a great uplift. Why are we still seeing so many rough sleepers and people in crisis?

Ms Vassarotti: It is a really important question. The issue is that we are living in the middle of a housing affordability crisis. I am on the record as saying that we will not solve homelessness through the homelessness services sector. We are treating a symptom, when we have people who are experiencing homelessness, and we absolutely

have to respond to that. When we have people that are experiencing homelessness, we need to provide services. We have significantly increased the number of services, but we are seeing ongoing homelessness because we are in a housing affordability crisis. We need more affordable homes in order to solve that issue, and certainly more public homes.

MS CLAY: I understand that. I think we need to apply the bandaids, but they are not the solution to the problem. I would say—and you will have the data—that this is probably now a Canberra-wide problem. In the Belconnen Community Council, people are asking, “Why do we have so many rough sleepers in Belconnen?” It used to be something that was more noticeable in Civic. Do you think this is now an all-of-Canberra geographic issue?

Ms Vassarotti: Yes. That is a really fair reflection. We have done quite a lot of work, particularly through the rough sleeping working group, in terms of getting a handle on the numbers of people who are rough sleeping. We were reflecting on these figures today, in that we have around 60 people who are rough sleeping. We have seen an uptick in those numbers, and that has been sustained over the last six months.

We can reassure people, particularly around visible rough sleeping, that there is a high level of assurance that those people have been contacted and have been engaged by services. One of the challenges, particularly around rough sleeping, is that there are often significant breakdowns in institutional trust. It is not just a matter of identifying a rough sleeper and saying, “Okay, we’ve got a solution for you; come with us.” Often it takes a number of engagements and the building of trust with organisations and institutions over a long period of time.

Certainly, with some of the services, particularly Street to Home and the Early Morning Centre, and food services like Blue Door and the like, it means we are pretty confident that there is engagement with services. We are working with individuals to get them to a point where they are comfortable with engaging with services, including long-term accommodation.

We have seen, particularly around programs like the Axial program, some really good work with some of those people with chronic homelessness. But we recognise that this is a journey for individuals, and it takes them some time to build the trust to be able to engage with services in a meaningful way.

MS CLAY: People like MLAs are out a lot; we see people and we get asked for help, and just as regular human beings. Some of my constituents say, “What can I do?” If somebody asks to help, what is the best suggestion? Is it OneLink, or is there something else?

Ms Vassarotti: Certainly, OneLink is a really important service, and that is a central intake service. We have provided enhanced funding to ensure that there is greater access to OneLink, and that is really the place to go, particularly for people who need accommodation support.

We would also encourage people to engage with services such as Street to Home, which is an assertive outreach program that works on the street. That is a St Vincent de Paul

program. They also provide additional services that sit alongside that, such as the night van that provides food.

The Early Morning Centre is another really important service that provides essential services such as food, showers, a post box and that kind of thing. That is now a seven-day service, because of funding we have provided over the last couple of years. There are some really practical things that can be done, and we encourage people to connect with a service, because it actually connects them with that support system, which will lead to longer term outcomes, as well as material aid.

MR PARTON: Can I ask about squatters? Given the increase in vacant properties across Canberra for various reasons, there appears to be an increase in squatters. How does Housing ACT handle squatters? What do you do?

Ms Vassarotti: Thanks for the question. It is an important question, and I will hand over to Ms Borwick.

Ms Borwick: We have a couple of different hats that we wear in relation to that. Our housing managers go out, and they might see something in our unoccupied properties, potentially. This happens sometimes in some of our larger complexes that are our hard-to-lets. We might have to take action to secure that. We are the same as any other landlord. We might have to call in the police because people are unlawfully residing in our properties. Also, we have examples where we speak to people and find out what is going on for them, and sometimes we get a housing outcome because the property might be hard for us to let, but they are happy to live there. We actually bring them back. If they are eligible for public housing, sometimes we broker those outcomes for those people.

Where we have had damaged properties, we work with our insurer and others to ensure that we secure those. We might put fencing, plywood or those sorts of things in place for that. Again, we have that gamut in being able to connect people to services, and potentially achieving a housing outcome. Where people are unlawfully in our properties, we need to take action in relation to that as well.

MR PARTON: Surely, you do not have an average time line for the removal of squatters?

Ms Borwick: No.

MR PARTON: I am hesitant to even ask the question, because it makes sense that, if you have someone squatting and, very clearly, they have nowhere else to live, they would be homeless if you pushed them out. It makes sense that you are connecting them with services; then, in theory, you are getting them into housing. I am sure that there would be some people sitting on that long waiting list who would say, "Hang on a second, what about me? I haven't broken the law. I haven't gone into that vacant property, and I'm still sitting on the list."

Ms Rule: I do not think it necessarily follows that squatters are on the waiting list or that they would be homeless if we evicted them. Everyone's circumstances are different. There are a whole range of reasons why people choose to squat in vacant properties.

Some of those people choose not to be on the waiting list for a whole range of reasons. I do not think you can automatically assume that.

I want to challenge one other assumption that you have made, which is that there is an increase in vacant properties. Actually, there is not. Therefore, I do not think you can suppose that there is an increase in squatting activity. In fact, a lot of work has gone into reducing the turnaround time on vacant properties and getting properties that are vacant back into circulation for legitimate tenants on the waitlist. Whilst the circumstances you portray may be true for some people who squat in public housing, in empty, vacant properties, it is probably not true for all.

MR PARTON: Ms Rule, I am glad you are here. Thank you.

Ms Rule: Thank you, Mr Parton; likewise.

MISS NUTTALL: Are you finding that more, the same or fewer people are identifying that they have become homeless or are experiencing housing insecurity, and that they are coming from being under rental duress? Is that data that you capture?

Ms Vassarotti: It is probably not data that we have. Certainly, the reasons why people are coming onto the waiting list are really varied. Certainly, when I speak to people in the homelessness sector, one of the things that, almost universally, they reflect on is that the complexity of people who are coming into services has increased.

Particularly when you get to the really pointy end of homelessness, rental duress is not something that has been expressed to me as a specific issue, but it is potentially one of the 25 things that are piled on individuals' lives. It certainly would not be helping at all. But in a very competitive environment where costs are increasing, and if you are managing some complexities around a mental health issue, insecure work or intermittent work, that issue will not be helpful at all. We know that we are sitting in a climate of extreme housing unaffordability. That will obviously be a backdrop that almost everyone coming into homelessness services has experienced.

MR PARTON: I want to talk about evictions and notice to remedy. When tenants breach the tenancies act, and it is identified from complaints or for other reasons, and it is accepted by Housing ACT that the tenants have breached the tenancies act, at what point is a notice to vacate issued?

Ms Vassarotti: Thank you for the question. It is important to reflect that Housing ACT is subject to the Residential Tenancies Act, and it is important that we meet our obligations under that act. There are also significant obligations on tenants around the Residential Tenancies Act. The process that Housing ACT goes through in terms of a notice to vacate often comes at the end of other mechanisms that have been used, including notices to remedy et cetera. In terms of that vacating process, I will look to members of the team, as there is quite a structured review process to ensure that we are meeting obligations.

Ms West: There is an extensive process, and it is focused on the clients, so it is about their needs as well. While they are investigating that complaint and whether they have breached the Residential Tenancies Act, there is work done with the client to make sure

that they are aware of their responsibilities as a tenant and to support them to remedy before we would ever take anything to ACAT. A very small number go to ACAT, comparatively, and even smaller numbers actually go through to eviction.

MR PARTON: Am I able to find out this afternoon how many notices to vacate have been issued in the previous 12 months?

Ms West: I can take that question on notice and find out.

MR PARTON: Thank you.

MS CLAY: I was interested in the point made before about vacancy rates not being as high as they are perceived to be. Can you take on notice the average vacancy rates? Is there any data that you record? Obviously, we understand about privacy; we are not asking about individuals. Is there any data that you can share on that?

Ms Rule: The occupancy rate is currently at 94 per cent. That moves around slightly. At 30 April, that equated to 587 properties that were untenanted; 143 of those were available for allocation to tenants and 329 were not available at that time because they were undergoing maintenance. We were looking at them for future needs or they were in the final stage of development. And we were preparing 115 for sale or development.

MS CLAY: In that first category, for how long are they vacant? That sounds like the only truly vacant category, frankly.

Ms Rule: It varies from property to property, depending on what work we might have to do. For example, before we put a tenant in, we might paint the place or put carpets in, and there is a need to match the right tenant to the right property. It varies from property to property. Over the last three quarters, the return rate on vacant properties has exceeded our forecasts, almost to the point of being double, because we have put a big emphasis on pushing those vacant properties back out into the stock that can be tenanted as quickly as possible.

THE CHAIR: Our time is at an end. On behalf of the committee, I thank all of our witnesses for your attendance today. If you have taken any questions on notice, please provide your answers to the committee secretary within three business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*.

Appearances:

Barr, Mr Andrew, Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Trade, Investment and Economic Development and Minister for Tourism

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate
Blount, Ms Wilhelmina, Acting Coordinator General, Office for Climate Action
Edwards, Ms Megan, Executive Branch Manager, Office for Climate Action
Osborne, Mr Chris, Acting Branch Manager, Program Delivery

Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate
Lloyd, Ms Lara, Acting Executive Branch Manager, Program Delivery

THE CHAIR: We welcome Mr Barr in his capacity as Minister for Climate Action, and officials. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. Witnesses must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Could you please confirm that you understand the implications of the statement on the pink sheet in front of you and that you agree to comply with it.

Mr Osborne: I confirm that I am happy to comply.

Ms Blount: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement.

Ms Lloyd: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement.

Ms Edwards: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. We do not have opening statements, so we will proceed directly to questions. I will start by talking about the Big Canberra Battery. Chief Minister, you have said the Big Canberra Battery will be delivered through an innovative revenue-sharing arrangement with Eku Energy, a Macquarie Bank entity. From the time the contract with Eku was signed, they were a start-up which had yet to deliver any projects, even with partners, and even today they have not actually completed any projects themselves. Chief Minister, did your directorate raise any concerns about whether this was appropriate or are you aware of any other occasions where the government entrusted a project—for example, in this instance, a \$400 million project—to a party with no track record?

Mr Barr: A tender process was conducted. The various applicants, as part of that process, were assessed against the criteria. This may be one of the first projects of this particular division of Macquarie Bank that you refer to, but Macquarie Bank itself has a long track record in infrastructure delivery. But, obviously, I am not privy to the procurement process. We determined that we would proceed with the Big Canberra Battery project. That is a network of integrated batteries, from utility scale to institutional scale, and we have been rolling out that project over this term of government. Under a previous policy framework, we have the example of a successful procurement with Neoen, which is another company that is delivering a utility-scale

battery, and a number of other batteries have been delivered and are operational within the territory under previous ACT government procurement methodology. I will ask officials whether there is anything further to add.

Mr Osborne: I might be able to assist. Eku was spun out of Macquarie. I cannot recall the details, as it was a while ago, but the division of Macquarie Bank had experience and had various projects in various stages of delivery, including projects that had been commissioned prior to the decision to award them the contract. Eku was spun out at the same time as this contract was awarded, so they did not have time to have a track record. Certainly, the individuals concerned had a strong track record of successful development and commissioning of similar assets.

THE CHAIR: Ms Orr has a supplementary.

MS ORR: Could I get an update on how the delivery of the Big Canberra Battery project is going and where it is up to?

Mr Barr: They have development approval—that was announced this week—and a site, and, obviously, considerable access to finance, given their parent company. That is all proceeding according to the schedule of the contract.

THE CHAIR: Ms Lee.

MS LEE: Thank you, Chair. Mr Osborne, you mentioned in your answer to the chair that individuals have experience. Are you able to outline who those individuals are?

Mr Osborne: I know some of the individuals, but I do not know that it would be appropriate for me to call them out by name. I am happy to take that away and let you know.

MS LEE: You will take that on notice?

Mr Osborne: Yes.

MS LEE: In relation to the tender—and I understand Mr Barr has already raised that, obviously, he was not privy to the procurement process—are you able to update the committee on how many companies put their hand up and take us through some of those details?

Mr Osborne: I wonder whether you could clarify the question.

Mr Barr: Do you mean: how many companies tendered?

MS LEE: Yes—tendered.

Mr Osborne: I do not think it would be in the government's interest or territory's interest to disclose details around the procurement.

MS LEE: You do not think, or you are not going to disclose?

Mr Barr: We will take it on notice and see what information we can provide.

THE CHAIR: You will take it on notice; you are not trying to claim confidentiality?

Mr Barr: We will need to consider the matter, but I will take it on notice with a view to providing as much information as we can that would not prejudice either further procurements or, indeed, the current one.

THE CHAIR: Do you know when you may come back with your decision about whether you are going to provide it on notice or whether you are going to claim confidentiality?

Mr Barr: Within the time frame of the committee's hearings.

MS LEE: As in before 3 o'clock?

Mr Barr: No; not before 3 o'clock today. As in, before the totality—

MS LEE: Okay.

Mr Barr: Before the committee has wound up its hearings for these budget estimates, so in the next 10 days.

Ms Lloyd: If it is helpful, I can provide some detail on the procurement process itself.

MS ORR: That is actually what I was going to ask about. Could we run through what you did, noting that there is commercial-in-confidence and business consideration.

Ms Blount: Yes. The ANU Battery Storage and Grid Integration Program was engaged to, firstly, facilitate market sounding with industry on the procurement. This provided recommendations that shaped the procurement, including that the procurement would be best divided by scale of batteries, as batteries of all scales are beneficial to futureproof a renewables-driven grid. For a large utility-scale battery, having industry risks and benefits shared with government is preferred over co-ownership with government. A two-stage procurement process for the utility scale was designed and an EOI was followed by an invited request for tender.

It was a complex procurement with an estimated value over \$100 million, so it went through the Procurement Board, and it received support through the Procurement Board. Expert energy modelling and advice for the duration of the process was procured from Baringa Partners. Expert energy market commercial advice for the duration of the process was procured, and expert energy market legal advice for the duration of the process was procured. Through the first stage, we sought a high-level proposal, and, through the invited request for tender, we had officials from across government, the Treasury, EPSDD and OCA represented on the selection panel. Detailed proposals were sought through that process. It took 28 months. We had three staff working on that over that period of time. I can also tell you a little bit about the contract itself, if that is helpful.

MS ORR: Sure.

Ms Blount: The up-front capital investment will be funded by Eku, and it is estimated to cost between \$300 million and \$400 million. The ACT has entered into a revenue-share agreement with Eku that will provide a fixed revenue source for the project, enabling Eku to attract the lowest possible cost of capital. The territory will pay quarterly availability payments during the operating period. Those payments are commercial-in-confidence, so we cannot share those, subject to the terms of the contract. In return, the territory will receive 50 per cent of the net revenue over the life of the agreement. The contract is balanced. We have set it up that way. It is balanced to share the financial and development risks between the government and the vendor. Our modelling demonstrates that the investment will deliver a positive return over the life of the agreement.

MS ORR: Following up on that, I am going to ask about the process you undertook. It sounds like it is a quite lengthy consideration with a lot of specifics within it. Could I get a better understanding of why you took the approach you took in the tender?

Ms Lloyd: When the PAG commitment was announced, we sought advice from industry, across government and with other stakeholders as to what the best approach would be. That is what Ms Blount referred to as our market sounding, or our consultation with industry, which involved the ANU and also our commercial partners, Baringa Partners, and technical consultants looked at the findings from that. We got some really valuable information from industry and other stakeholders. But what really determined our approach, which was a two-stage procurement process—an EOI followed by a request for proposals—was the advice from Procurement ACT and the Government Procurement Board. We had a close working relationship with Procurement ACT and really valued their advice in terms of working out which procurement process we should follow to get the best outcomes for government. That was mostly through Procurement ACT, which provided advice on the particular process to follow.

THE CHAIR: According to the project agreement, the ACT government will not own or operate the battery or have the right to direct the battery to supply power during an outage. The battery operator is contractually obligated to maximise its revenue. You may recall that, once upon a time, there was an American entity called Enron which intentionally withheld electricity from the Californian power market during shortages to drive up the price and maximise profits. Is that this battery's true purpose—to exploit the intermittency of renewable generation to make profits and trade in power markets, rather than protect Canberrans during a blackout or brownout?

Mr Barr: No. The battery has to operate within the rules of the Australian Energy Market Operator and the national energy market.

THE CHAIR: So you are quite convinced that—

Mr Barr: They are the national rules for any energy distributor to operate within. It is nationally regulated, Ms Lawder.

MS LEE: As a follow-up on that, what are the penalties or consequences if they do not?

Mr Barr: I will need to take that on notice. They are obviously significant, but they are nationally managed. The Australian Energy Market Operator operates the market. The clue is in the title of the organisation.

MS LEE: I have a supplementary. While we are on the contract itself—and I know that we have sort of skirted around it—could we be a bit more up-front. It has been described as an innovative revenue-sharing arrangement. What does that mean?

Mr Barr: That means that there is a sharing of revenue from arbitrage, from market trading. In the broadest possible terms, the battery stores power when generation is cheap and there is surplus energy. Often from renewable sources, that will mean at almost zero cost in the middle of the day. It is then able to, as one generator within the national electricity market, sell to the grid when demand is high and prices are higher. The battery has multiple purposes, but one of them is energy arbitrage.

MS LEE: To confirm, that is half-half? Is that right? The ACT government—

Mr Osborne: The revenue share is half-half—yes. Net revenue generated by the battery is shared fifty-fifty between the territory and the proponent.

MS LEE: As I understand it from reading the contract, it is minus the support charge?

Mr Osborne: They are separate payments. The territory is obligated to make the support charge, irrespective of the circumstances, and is obligated to share the revenue fifty-fifty, irrespective of the circumstances.

MS LEE: How often is the support charge paid?

Mr Osborne: Quarterly, I believe.

MS LEE: And, as you said, it is irrespective of what happens in terms of revenue. I could not find it in the contract—maybe I have missed it—but it seems that the contract does not outline what the support charge is. Is that confidential?

Mr Osborne: That is commercially confidential.

MS LEE: This is ACT taxpayer money going to a company under contract and it is confidential?

Mr Osborne: Yes; absolutely. It is probably the single most sensitive piece of information attached to this enterprise.

MS LEE: Going through the contract, there are also other terms that are confidential and we do not have access to them. I point to the project milestones. Why are they confidential?

Mr Osborne: Lara, you might be able to colour this in, but I think it was in response to a request from the counterpart.

Ms Lloyd: That is right. We went through the normal process. Eku Energy had the

opportunity to look through the content and identify issues or clauses that they would like redacted. There was, again, support from Procurement ACT to look at the clauses that they suggested and weigh them up against the conditions in the act, in terms of what we are allowed to redact and what we need to disclose. There was a level of assessment as to whether it should be redacted. There was consultation on whether it needed to be disclosed or whether it could be redacted. What has been redacted in the project agreement is considered commercial-in-confidence information on Eku's side.

MS LEE: Including a project milestone in a contract that is specifically with the ACT government?

Ms Lloyd: Broadly speaking, there are some milestones that we can absolutely talk about today. There might be some very specific milestones in the contract which might have been redacted. I cannot recall exactly why, but Eku Energy have needed to negotiate lots of construction contracts and other contracts with various subcontractors and parties since signing the project agreement, and, potentially, if granular detail or milestones are available, that might compromise their bargaining position with those subcontractors. That could be one reason they have indicated that particular milestones would be redacted.

MS LEE: Can I take you to page 33 of the agreement, where it sets out the project milestones in clause 3.2. You talked about the granular level.

Ms Lloyd: Yes.

MS LEE: We are talking about six milestones, if you like, in this contract. I do not know how granular they have to be, but the six milestones seem pretty broad and every single one of them has got confidential text in terms of time frame. Is that the norm?

Ms Lloyd: I do not actually have that contract in front of me, so I cannot see what milestones are redacted.

MS LEE: All right. I will go through them:

- (1) Obtaining, in respect of the project, a development approval pursuant to the Planning Act and, if required, approval pursuant to the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cwlth), each in accordance with clause 13.1.
- (2) Obtaining an offer from the relevant network service provider to connect the facility to the network at the connection point.
- (3) Execution of the construction contracts.
- (4) Execution of a contract for the provision of long-term operation and maintenance services to the facility with an experienced and qualified third-party contractor.
- (5) BCB—

which is what the party is—

obtaining all material approvals, excluding approvals in item 1 above, are required to develop and commence construction of the project.

(6) Achievement of financial close.

Are they the kinds of granular milestones that Eku would need to keep confidential?

Mr Osborne: One of them is in the past; the development application has been approved. That was the first milestone I think you mentioned.

MS LEE: That is not the point, though. My point is that it was kept confidential.

Mr Osborne: Sorry; I was just mentioning that for completeness. The particularly sensitive milestones in there, from the perspective mentioned earlier, would be 3, 4 and 6. I do not think there would necessarily be any reason why we could not colour in the other ones, but we would need to obviously consult with the counterparty.

THE CHAIR: Are you continuing with those six milestones?

MS LEE: I just wanted to just close that off—

THE CHAIR: Okay. You may as well finish that before I move on.

MS LEE: Are there any other government contracts where project milestones have been kept confidential—every single aspect?

Mr Barr: There could well be. I do not have them immediately at hand. I am not about to authorise a search of 100,000 contracts. What advice we can provide, in relation to precedent, we will. But if the thrust of the questions is that the government cannot engage in commercial and sensitive negotiations then we are going to have a great deal of difficulty procuring a whole range of goods and services.

MS LEE: Please do not presume what my thrust is. My thrust is that this is a big project. This is millions of taxpayer dollars and seemingly there are lots of clauses that are confidential, including what one would assume would be in the public interest: project milestones. I am just trying to get to why that might be the case. I understand that Eku requested it, but why did the ACT agree to it?

Mr Barr: I will seek information in relation to our legal position on this matter and come back to the committee.

MS LEE: Thank you. There has been a lot of reference to the Procurement Board having looked at it and given advice. Are you able to table that advice for the committee?

Mr Barr: I will again take legal advice on that matter. If it does not prejudice this or any future procurement, then I will be happy to share that. But if it does, then I will not be in a position to do so.

MS LEE: But you will let the committee know?

Mr Barr: Indeed; yes.

MS LEE: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Another area of the contract appears to be empty. Schedule 3 of the project agreement talks about the social licence commitments associated with the battery, but the schedule is blank. Either there are no social licence commitments or you have allowed Macquarie to keep this secret. What is the justification for keeping this part about social licence commitments confidential? How can there be any accountability to the public for the \$400 million of this project when the proponents' obligations are secret, even their social licence commitments?

Mr Barr: To be clear, it is not \$400 million of taxpayer money; it is \$400 million of Eku's money. Let's not falsely describe the project in the question.

MS LEE: We do not know, really, because the support charge is confidential.

Mr Barr: I will ask officials.

Ms Lloyd: I can probably provide some information on the social licence commitments. Under the agreement there is a requirement for Eku Energy to commit to engaging with the community. Also, there is a financial commitment in terms of the contribution that they make towards community projects or community initiatives. There are a range of things that Eku Energy can choose to put that money towards. Those social licence commitments have not been committed to as yet.

As part of the contract, they are required to provide us with a social licence plan, which sets out their thinking and what they are intending to do, and a plan for engaging in social licence commitments. We have received that plan, under the contract requirements. In terms of their financial contribution and how they put that towards projects in the community, that work is still underway. The territory has regular meetings with Eku Energy. They provide updates across the whole project, periodically, on what work they have done to progress their social licence commitments. Would you like me to go into the sorts of things that they have done to date on this project in terms of community engagement?

MS LEE: No, but—

MS CLAY: Chair, will we get any questions down this end this session?

THE CHAIR: Yes. I was just going to say that we have about two minutes left on this and then we will have to move on. Perhaps you could provide that to the committee on notice.

MS LEE: I have no doubt that they provided all the information that you need. But my question is: why was it confidential in the first place? You have just confirmed that they were required to provide a plan. Obviously, the contract was entered into without having that plan showing what they were going to deliver under the social licence part of it. Why was it kept confidential?

Ms Lloyd: I would have to refer back to which parts of the contract were redacted and the reasons for the redaction. Off the top of my head, I do not know which parts were redacted, so I cannot comment.

MS LEE: I am talking specifically about schedule 3 of the project agreement, which lists social licence commitments. So that part—

Mr Barr: In the interests of time, we will take that on notice.

MS LEE: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. We have to move on. The next question goes to Ms Orr.

MS ORR: Sorry; I was so distracted by that very long line of questioning. We have had quite a bit of discussion about the Integrated Energy Plan. That is in this session, isn't? I think it has been recently released. There was a lot of talk in other sessions and people making reference to it. Can I get a bit of an overview of the Integrated Energy Plan and where it is going to direct us? In particular, how is it making sure that lower and middle income Canberrans and families are going to be supported throughout the transition to electricity?

Mr Barr: Sure. I guess the key points to make are that the plan outlines the first steps of a longer term journey to net zero by 2045 and the role that the energy sector transition will play in achieving that. Some of the highlights are the commitment to electrify all feasible public housing by fiscal 2030-31; the continuation of the Sustainable Household Scheme; a pilot program for the electrification of appliances in low-income households; a commitment to interest-free loans for multi-unit buildings to become EV ready; and a new program to help multi-unit buildings to develop a plan to electrify.

Those last two are part of a particular piece of work around more complex buildings, particularly those built in the last century, where the transition will be most challenging for the next 20 years. A further element within the Integrated Energy Plan is a look at the regulatory side of the equation as to whether there are any further regulatory moves that could support electrification.

The journey to get to net zero is a pathway of electrifying Canberra. It needs to be undertaken in a measured way because our existing electricity infrastructure could not support a transition off gas tomorrow, or indeed any time in the next decade, so that is why there is a 2045 target. That is feasible but will require pretty significant change, really from about 2035 to 2045. Some of that change will reflect an anticipated emergence of some new technologies.

There is a dual challenge around demand minimisation and load spreading over the course of a day and then there are supply side questions of increased renewable electricity generation and storage, which is why we are also pursuing projects like the Big Canberra Battery. Every Australian state and territory are progressing down this path, some at a faster pace than others, but if we are to meet our 2030 national targets then jurisdictions like the ACT will need to be well advanced.

We also need to balance that with the reality that we do need to continue to heat space and water, using gas, for some time because there is not a viable pathway to complete electrification before 2045. What the plan is endeavouring to manage is the point we are at now: that we are not adding new gas into the city and that we are starting to see a phase-down and many households utilising the Sustainable Household Scheme to go all electric. Others are moving initially, with perhaps their biggest source of gas consumption being space heating. We are also working outside of the household sector, with business, for example, in making that transition to a more electric future.

There are then the elements I touched upon that relate to the transportation sector. Part of that is that we are pleased to see that the ACT is the nation-leading jurisdiction in the switch to electric vehicles—three times faster, I understand, than the national average and well ahead of other jurisdictions. The emphasis in the transportation space now is shifting more towards the enabling infrastructure. The discussion I think may have already been had in relation to the public EV charging network. The Integrated Energy Plan also focuses on those multi-unit and more complex building changes and includes an element of assisting those buildings to become EV ready.

Again, to set some realistic expectations in this space, not every single car parking space in every single multi-unit development in Canberra will have an EV charger. The energy network and the electrical systems within some of the older buildings simply will not sustain that, so there does need to be a combination of public and private charging. In thinking about the location of our public EV chargers, we have to be cognisant of their proximity to multi-unit developments. It will not be possible to simultaneously have hundreds of EV charging bays in apartment basements.

I guess an analogy to draw here is internal combustion engine vehicles. There is not a petrol bowser in every single car park in the ACT; nor will there be an EV charger in every single car park in the ACT. Through the combination of public charging facilities that are distributed well across our city and the opportunity to look at models that can work sustainably within the electrical systems of multi-unit developments, we think we will be in a position over the transition period to support a significant further uplift in the number of electric vehicles that are operating.

MS ORR: Just picking up on some of that very comprehensive answer, Chief Minister, you said 2035-45 will be the most significant change. What are some of the things that will make that significant?

Mr Barr: I think we will have seen by that point that most of the early adaptors will have shifted and most of the easier projects will have been implemented. My assumption there is that certainly this period of federal government will have seen investment in infrastructure and network augmentation that will make that next phase more realistic. If there is an expectation that Canberra will be all electrified by 2035, that is not realistic, based on available technologies, the time necessary to make changes and the fact that there is a section of the community that is fiercely resistant to this change.

We had an earlier discussion on social licence. The exercise over the next 20 years is one of shepherding the early adopters through the process, which I think is going quite well, just looking at the take-up of the Sustainable Household Scheme. There are some

institutional-level decisions that the government is currently taking around its own owned assets and what I would describe as communal infrastructure that supports the entire community. And then, through the natural process of life and death, there will be sections of the community whose views will change and there will be people who are born into a world that is all electric. There are people who will depart this worldly life who have been used to a gas solution for certain things.

What we are not suggesting here is that every single person and every single household will make that transition immediately. It does need to be phased and staged, reflecting questions of social licence, but also, frankly, questions of capacity within the electricity network. It could not support the level of demand that there would be if everything was electrified tomorrow. These two processes have to run in parallel.

MS ORR: Regarding the Sustainable Household Scheme, which you have made reference to a number of times, and what you have classified as the early adapters jumping on that program, what sorts of uptake and outcomes are we already seeing from it?

Mr Barr: We have done a calculation and we think that, so far, the scheme has saved Canberrans nearly \$47 million. We are looking at the household take-up and where those savings have occurred in the city. Tuggeranong is the area of Canberra that has benefited the most, with \$12.3 million in savings, closely followed by Belconnen at \$12.2 million, then your own electorate, Ms Orr, in Gungahlin with \$10.1 million. In some of the smaller, by population, regions, central Canberra is \$3.4 million, Weston Creek is \$3.1 million, Woden is \$3.1 million and Molonglo is \$2.3 million, reflecting the size of that community at this point. The balance of the ACT is about \$0.3 million.

Across the program we are looking at, in totality, across battery, cooktop, electric car, electric motorbike, EV charger, heating and cooling, hot water heat pump, hydronic heat pump, insulation, solar and solar and battery arrangements across the different regions of Canberra, just under 20,000 households who have participated. There are 200,000 households in Canberra, so that is one in ten who have used the scheme inside the first four years of the scheme. That certainly reflects those early adapters, once you are at 10 per cent. Obviously, some people moved even before the existence of the scheme, but it does indicate that there is a degree of momentum now towards this change. Ten per cent of households have participated over essentially a four-year period, so you can see that it is going to take more time to complete this work.

MS ORR: Which products are you seeing are the most utilised?

Mr Barr: Certainly, rooftop solar has been—

MS ORR: Most frequently.

Mr Barr: Yes, it certainly is, but heating and cooling is next, then batteries and then electric vehicles. Insulation is now particularly popular. Perhaps cooking is trailing—getting people off gas cooking.

MS ORR: That is a cultural change.

Mr Barr: It certainly is. To put some context around that, across the entire city there have been 184 cooktop transitions funded by the Sustainable Household Scheme, whereas solar is over 10,000.

MS ORR: People really like their gas cooktops. How has the program changed over the life of it? You mentioned that insulation is now starting to show a bit of a surge.

Mr Barr: Yes.

MS ORR: People have already got their solar and they are now moving to the next thing. How is the program going to continue to adapt?

Mr Barr: There is certainly an element of that. Funding for insulation is now at 262 homes, so already more people have gone with insulation than have transitioned from gas to electric cooking and more people have done insulation than have installed an EV charger, for example.

We note the huge popularity of solar under the scheme. It is understandable, because the payback period from that technology is now very short. One of the challenges that the Australian Energy Market Operator, and indeed the NEM, is experiencing is that at certain times of the day, particularly the middle of the day, there is in fact so much renewable energy in the system that what we really need now is a line of storage. That was the very clear message out of the energy and change ministers' meeting last Friday that Minister Rattenbury and I attended in Melbourne. We need to be particularly focused on more battery installation. The most efficient form is the large-scale utility level. I note the level of interest in the Big Canberra Battery. I appreciate that. We will need more, and that is certainly a focus for me in this portfolio.

MS CLAY: You mentioned the pathway to electrification. To summarise, it will take time and it is difficult, but it is important. Is that, broadly speaking, where we are at?

Mr Barr: Yes. I think we have made some pretty good progress, but I acknowledge that it is with that section of the community that are our early adaptors.

MS CLAY: Do you think it is important that we phase out fossil fuel gas?

Mr Barr: Yes. We certainly need to by 2045. That is the territory target.

MS CLAY: How does that match up with federal Labor's approach of starting new gas extraction and production facilities that will last for 20 or 30 years, most of which is for export? Do you see a problem with those two?

Mr Barr: For our jurisdiction, we do not undertake any gas mining or exporting, so it is not really a relevant question for us. For other parts of the country, the transition to a fully electric economy will take longer than 2045. The national target is 2050. That is ambitious, for some parts of the country. Again, as Minister Rattenbury can attest, the discussion with energy ministers on Friday was around the need for gas to play a transitional role. Even in this jurisdiction, gas will play a transition role for another 20 years.

MS CLAY: Sure, but most of that gas that has been extracted is not for Australia's transition, is it? The vast majority, over 90 per cent of it, will be exported, so it will not actually help us in our transition. The reason I ask locally is that witnesses in parliamentary committee hearings—we have one at the moment—are telling us that they are upset, disappointed and anxious about Australia's climate progress. They often pinpoint and distinguish between ACT and federal, so I am wondering whether you hear the same thing. Are people really worried when they see federal Labor doing this mass new gas, whilst here locally we say, "Now it's time to phase out gas and here's how we do it"? Do you hear that those two different messages are really hard for people to process?

Mr Barr: If they have a deep understanding of the Australian energy market, yes; and if they have a deep understanding of the role that Australian gas exports might play in the transition in other jurisdictions. At a simplistic level, yes, it would be easy to mount that argument. I tend to focus mostly on the views of people who are serious about managing the energy transition in a way that both supports our net zero emission targets in the medium term and does not try to alarm or scare people; or, indeed, allow counter scare campaigns to be run. Clearly, there is one being run around nuclear energy at the moment. There is one being run around renewable energy at the moment.

It is not for me to offer you political advice, Ms Clay, but for those of us who are interested in actually getting there, the process now is around the hard work of making the transition accessible for individual households. That is what we are focused on here in the ACT. The commentary on federal or, indeed, international energy policy is certainly a debate that will be had in the community, and I respect that. In the end, if today's exercise is to try and score a political point about what we are doing here versus what is happening in other states and territories, we do not have time for that.

MISS NUTTALL: There is currently no requirement in place for greenhouse gas emissions projects to be considered during the budget process; that is my understanding. Obviously, transport and waste emissions are rising. We have delayed FOGO, and we are not really funding buses or delivering light rail as fast as perhaps we should be. How do you plan to ensure that, in future, the emissions impacts of projects are considered as part of the budget process?

Mr Barr: We certainly look at our annual results in terms of measured greenhouse gas emissions. We know the direction of travel that we need to head in, in relation to electrification. In any budget process, we have to manage a variety of competing demands from a limited resource that is the territory's available revenue stream.

I would observe that those sitting on that side of the table in an estimates process get a little bit of a sense of what putting a budget together is like. You have it for two weeks. I have it for 11 months a year at the sort of intensity that you experience in this fortnight, around all of the issues that are presented, all of the different competing demands and the variety of different views from stakeholders. It is a very challenging task.

We endeavour to make progress every year towards our objectives. Sometimes we cannot move as fast, not for reasons of financial constraint but for reasons of labour or material shortages. At other times there are clearly financial and resource constraints that the territory has to manage.

I would summarise it in this way: our revenue over this four-year period averages somewhere between \$8 billion and up to about \$10 billion. We have spending requests that are often three to four times that. If we were to agree to every acceleration of a particular project, we would have to confront not only the reality of there not being the workforce to deliver them but also financial constraints.

I do not expect my political opponents to have a huge amount of sympathy for that challenge. Ultimately, someone has to be the Treasurer and someone has to lead a process that endeavours to manage all of those challenges. I can say it is clear that you cannot please everyone all of the time, but I would like to think that, in each budget, we are making progress towards some very important outcomes for our community. Not everyone will be happy with the pace of change. That is life.

MISS NUTTALL: Understanding that and understanding the competing priorities, is climate action and emissions reduction something we can afford to not make a top priority in the budget?

Mr Barr: We certainly have accorded it a very high priority, and I think that is demonstrated in the level of spending across multiple areas of government, and not just specifically in the climate action or emission reduction areas that Minister Rattenbury and I have responsibility for. You see it across the totality of ACT government programs. But we have to balance that with the need to invest in health, education, community services and housing.

It is important to acknowledge that there is a climate lens placed over those investments, so new infrastructure that is being built is more sustainable than the infrastructure it replaces; its emissions profile is lower. We are making progress, and we will continue to do so.

MS CLAY: We have heard about this climate lens, but there is no actual mechanism to do that, is there, in the budget decisions?

Mr Barr: No. We had this discussion last year. In the interests of time, I will not go over all of that again.

MS CLAY: There is no mechanism in there to do it; it is just a thing that—

Mr Barr: Obviously, the primary measure in the budget involves finances. We do not do an emissions budget, but we are cognisant in our decision-making, which has an overlay of our wellbeing indicators, that the decisions we make are working towards our ultimate goal of net zero emission by 2045.

MS CLAY: Climate Change Strategy action 5.5 is to ensure climate change adaptation outcomes are considered in all government budget decisions. How are we doing that for adaptation?

Ms Blount: I have some information on that. We thought a lot about this, because this question on adaptation has come up a few times in estimates. It is fair to say that it is embedded in all of the decisions that we make. Going to the Chief Minister's point

about those decisions, when we make those decisions, we are considering emissions reduction and we are considering adaptation.

I want to draw the committee's attention to some examples of where we have done that over the last five years in some of the strategies that we have developed. In the ACT Climate Change Strategy, one of the actions was to plan for a compact and efficient city. If you are thinking about some changes that we made, recent reforms to the planning system will encourage greater density and less urban sprawl. That is an adaptation measure. On smarter use of roads, there is the phasing in of emissions-based registration from July 2024.

MS CLAY: How is that an adaptation measure, and not a mitigation measure?

Ms Blount: We are adapting to climate change. We need to make a more compact and efficient city so that we can move people and goods around and we are creating fewer emissions, so we are adapting.

MS CLAY: Can you tell me what you mean by adaptation as opposed to climate mitigation? When we are talking about climate adaptation, what is it that you think we are—

Ms Blount: Adapting to the changing environment.

MS CLAY: Yes. I am just checking, because it sounded like this was about reducing emissions. It is more about adapting to an environment with more heat, flood and that kind of thing.

Ms Blount: Yes.

MS CLAY: Do you think that the planning system is doing that for us?

Ms Blount: Yes, I do, and I think planning systems all over need to help us adapt to the environment.

MS CLAY: Please proceed.

Ms Blount: A few other actions in that plan included climate-wise rental homes. We have regulated for minimum energy efficiency standards for ceiling insulation in rental homes. Another is climate-wise zero-emission homes. The Sustainable Household Scheme, which we have talked about a lot, is one there. Another is a climate-wise built environment. Again, new planning rules to improve electrification, climate adaptation and resilient outcomes were implanted as part of the 2023 Territory Plan.

If we go to the Integrated Energy Plan, electrification and insulation of all feasible public and community housing not only improves energy efficiency, which I know is a separate thing, but also improves the thermal comfort for people living in these households and allows them to better adapt to our changing climate. There are also some of the other things that the Chief Minister has mentioned as part of the Integrated Energy Plan—interest-free loans to support multi-unit buildings to become electric vehicle ready, and delivery of retrofit readiness programs for apartment and unit owners

to develop a plan to electrify their buildings. It is all about adaptation.

There are some specific projects that are going on at the moment that are specifically about adaptation. There is the development and piloting of a climate change risk management plan and adaptation planning toolkit. Given the critical role of community sector organisations in supporting community resilience, the government is working with the ACT Council of Social Service and CSOs to co-design a climate change risk management adaptation planning toolkit, and that toolkit will enable CSOs to better understand their climate risks and associated impacts for their operations, clients, staff, volunteers and assets, and to develop climate change and adaptation action plans to mitigate those impacts. There are a few other examples there.

MS CLAY: That last one was good. I am a little disturbed to hear EVs again put up as a measure for adaptation. Driving one car or another car will change your emissions, but it will not do anything about adaptation. It probably comes back to the original question. If our Climate Change Strategy action is to ensure every single budget decision is considering adaptation, what is the mechanism? It is obviously quite a complicated field, when we are given examples that are not actually adaptation. How do we know that all of our directorates and all of the people putting up budget bids are actually doing that? How do they understand adaptation in order to consider that in every budget decision?

MS ORR: Jo, when you say “adaptation”, what definition are you using, so that we are all on the same page?

MS CLAY: Typically, “mitigation” means reducing emissions, so driving an EV reduces emissions, if you change from a petrol car; but “adaptation” means adapting to the changes that have already been locked in, like heat and flood. Driving an EV instead of a petrol car does not do anything about adaptation. Adaptation is more about adapting to the changed climate. Given that we want to have our budget decisions include adaptation, I am wondering what mechanism we are using to do that.

Mr Barr: One could mount an argument that reducing reliance on foreign oil is indeed an adaptation measure, but let us not get pedantic.

MS CLAY: Let us not. Is there any mechanism that we are using in all of our budget decisions and budget bids to make sure that we are considering adaptation as set out in the Climate Change Strategy?

Mr Barr: There is obviously a particular emphasis in infrastructure renewal, maintenance and development of replacement infrastructure and new infrastructure that is in accordance with the most recent climate modelling impacts, as you mentioned, of floods, bushfires and other extreme weather events. There has been substantive change in relation to location of housing, and the types of extra requirements around resilience in particular areas that will be more bushfire prone. That is one example.

As we look at the robustness of our energy networks, to bring the conversation back to where it started, another advantage of some of the large-scale utility-level battery storage in our city now is its capacity to be deployed in a local context. It is more resilient, and it is also reflecting the need to have more localised storage as part of our

change in energy network, which needs to change to adapt to the changed climate.

There are some very good infrastructure examples. Implicit in the context of the question is that every budget decision would need to have an adaptation oversight. I can certainly see, across the thousand budget decisions that are made, some that are driven entirely by adaptation, and others where I would struggle to see whether there was an actual value add in the information before the ERC and the cabinet around that decision being made or not in an adaptation sense.

THE CHAIR: That brings us to a very good closing point. Thank you, Mr Barr. We will suspend the proceedings for afternoon tea.

Hearing suspended from 3.01 to 3.15 pm

Appearances:

Davidson, Ms Emma, Minister for Community Services, Seniors and Veterans, Minister for Corrections and Justice Health, Minister for Mental Health and Minister for Population Health

Community Services Directorate

Rule, Ms Catherine, Director-General

Bogiatzis, Ms Vasiliki, Acting Executive Group Manager, Inclusion Division

Evans, Ms Jacinta, Executive Group Manager, Strategic Policy

Stathis, Mr Nick, Executive Branch Manager, Strategic Policy

Dolan, Ms Fiona, Executive Branch Manager, Strategic Policy

Wood, Ms Jo, Deputy Director-General Children, Families and Strategic Reform

THE CHAIR: We welcome Ms Emma Davidson, MLA, Minister for Community Services, Seniors and Veterans, and officials. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations that are provided by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. Witnesses must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Please confirm that you understand the implications of the statement and that you agree to comply with it.

Ms Rule: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement.

Ms Wood: I have read and understand the privilege statement.

Mr Stathis: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement.

Ms Dolan: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. We will proceed directly to questions. I have some questions relating to page 25 of budget statement G, “Revised Funding Profile—Community support and inclusion—Investing in programs to support older Canberrans”. Could you tell me why that was reprofiled from last year to this year, what it is going to be spent on and why it was not spent last year?

Ms Davidson: As we have talked about many times, sometimes the reprofiling is because the piece of work has just crossed over the financial year and has been invoiced in a new financial year. But Mr Stathis will be able to talk more to that specific reprofiling.

Mr Stathis: Last financial year, we received \$260,000 in the budget to undertake piloting of the Seniors Art Festival. The money you referred to in the budget there is for the first year of that art festival. We are currently finalising the contract with the preferred supplier. That art festival will run in 2025. We had not quite finished the procurement process for that arts festival. So we have reprofiled it to this year, with the view to running it next year, in 2025.

THE CHAIR: Was it originally intended to be run this year, in 2024?

Mr Stathis: No; the \$260,000 was over two years, last financial year and this financial year, to be run next financial year.

Ms Davidson: Because this is something that we have not done before, it is worth taking a bit of time to plan it properly before we get started.

THE CHAIR: Why was it not done last year?

Mr Stathis: With the budget, we had a number of items that came through for seniors, all that required contract negotiations, and we have just been working through those. We got the other two signed off in the first part of last financial year, and we were working through this last one. This was a larger procurement, \$260,000, and it was an open tender process as well. So it took a much longer time, and we went through Procurement ACT to help us with that as well.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MS ORR: Still on page 25, there is “Revised Funding Profile—Community support and connectedness—Community Sector Indexation”. Can you explain to me what the reprofiling of that is? Is that based on delays to the sector sustainability process?

Ms Davidson: Sorry, can you just confirm which page that is?

MS ORR: It is on page 25, “Revised Funding Profile—Community support and connectedness—Community Sector Indexation”.

Ms Dolan: I can talk to indexation. Each year, indexation is set at a particular rate under the Community Sector Indexation rate. That is actually outlined in the *Budget Outlook*—and I will find the page number for you. The funding line in the Community Services Directorate pages then allocates that funding to allow us to then apply the indexation rate to contracts.

MS ORR: Yes, but this one has got it as negative on the 2023-24 and then the same amount now positive on the 2024-25. Just taking a cursory read of that, it would suggest no indexation was applied in the previous financial year and it has all been brought into this one.

Ms Dolan: I might have to take it on notice as to why it appears like that in the papers. But I can confirm that indexation was applied last year and is being applied accordingly this year to the—

Ms Rule: I think it is probably a partial reprofiling. As Ms Dolan said, it is subject to contract negotiations. So, if those contract negotiations were not finished within the financial year, then the money will be reprofiled until we end this contract.

MS ORR: Okay. So it might not be indexation across the board; it might be some contracts that were not finalised.

Ms Rule: Indexation attached to those contract negotiations.

MS ORR: Okay. We have had a lot of community groups come before the committee talking about the Sector Sustainability Program and the commissioning project. While they are supportive of both projects—there is no doubt about that sentiment—there is, I think, a growing level of concern that those projects are taking a little bit longer than had been hoped. Can I get an initial update on where those two projects are up to and when we might start to see those finalised?

Ms Davidson: Yes. I want to start by acknowledging that our community sector organisations are feeling quite a lot of financial pressure at the moment, and it is not just the growing population and the greater complexity of needs that they are dealing with. People in the sector are telling me that they are still dealing with some of those older funding contracts that have not yet been through the Commissioning for Outcomes process and that they are really not feeling like their relationship, as a sector, with the ACT government as partners is where it should be. There is definitely some work that we need to do there as government in partnering with the sector to make all of that work better. With the Sector Sustainability—

MS ORR: Sorry; can I just pick on something? When you say they are telling you that the relationship is not quite where it is meant to be and you need to do some work, what does that actually mean?

Ms Davidson: Our community sector partners are telling us that they are feeling as though they have really been left on their own to deal with a lot of risk, they are dealing with a lot of increased demand for services and some of them are on funding contracts that really do not reflect what they are actually dealing with now, because they are contracts that started a very long time ago when needs were quite different—not just the volume of demand, but the complexity.

MS ORR: Okay; so it is the same conversation and it has fed into the actual project that is now underway for Sector Sustainability Program. When you say that there is a bit of work to be done, what is that work?

Ms Davidson: There are two things that are happening. There is a piece of work that is continuing on the Sector Sustainability Project. The final report and the recommendations for that 18-month first phase of the Sector Sustainability Project is due to be provided to the government at the end of this calendar year, by December 2024. That work is still underway right now. The government is absolutely committed to that ongoing work on sector sustainability, but there will need to be additional phases after this first phase that respond to that report beyond December. We need that report to be able to underpin the funding for the second phase of the project, which is why it is not in this year's budget—because the report has not been delivered yet.

MS ORR: So the first phase is to do the report by December this calendar year?

Ms Davidson: Yes.

MS ORR: What are the next phases?

Ms Davidson: We also need to continue progressing the reforms in the Commissioning for Outcomes work and providing longer-term funding contracts. Some organisations have already been through that process and now have longer-term contracts with a more reliable funding environment. But I think there is still quite a lot of work to be done to support an adequately resourced, sustainable and thriving community sector. I do not want to speak for the next term of government, given where we are right now, but what I can say is that the finalisation of that first phase of the Sector Sustainability Project should position the government to understand the resources needed in a quantitative way and the areas that we need to focus on in subsequent phases of the project, and there should be no excuse for not progressing the work to fund those gaps.

MS ORR: Again, that is quite high level. What is actually meant by some of those very high-level statements that you have just made? You said “a good understanding of what needs to be done”. What does that mean?

Ms Davidson: What it means is to be able to work through with the community what exactly it is that is needed to respond in a nuanced way to the pressures and the financial sustainability pressures that they are dealing with, because it is not evenly distributed across the entire sector. Different organisations are delivering different services in different ways. That means that they are feeling the pressures in slightly different ways across the sector. That is why this is such a big piece of work.

MS ORR: Just for clarity, can I get an overview of what exactly the Sector Sustainability Project is looking at?

Ms Rule: The Sector Sustainability Project has its genesis in the *Counting the costs* report. There were six recommendations made in the report. The government considered that report, and the government agreed in principle to recommendations 1 to 5 and fully agreed to recommendation 6. Recommendation 1 is a revised approach to indexation. That has been covered off. Recommendation 2 is about reviewing funding streams to ensure full cost coverage. I will come back to what we are doing about some of these. Recommendation 3 is about encouraging efficiencies to reduce cost pressures. Recommendation 4 is building sector capacity to accurately cost services. Recommendation 5 is a boost of funding for areas of unmet need and recommendation 6 is to prioritise early intervention and prevention.

The response to those recommendations has been to establish the Sector Sustainability Project, which we are working on both with government and NGO sector leaders. It is an 18-month project. We are really, I guess, in the start-up phase. We have made some good progress on co-design around changes to policy and procedures, which go to some of the content in recommendations 2, 3 and 4. We are trying to do things more efficiently—for example, trying to collect information once and use it multiple times and all of that sort of stuff that the sector tells us.

As I said, we have already actioned the indexation rate. We have the University of Western Australia contracted to develop tools and resources around an accurate costing of work, which the sector has welcomed, and we are looking at early intervention and prevention in a whole range of our work, including reforms to the Children and Young People Act and some of the work we are doing on family and domestic violence, which goes to recommendation 6 about prioritising early intervention.

MS ORR: I am just trying to understand where the sector sustainability and the commissioning process is at, because commissioning processes are for specific things but you need to know what you are commissioning for.

Ms Rule: They are different, but related pieces of work. The commissioning process was underway prior to the work on the sector sustainability. So we are already a few years in to what is intended to be a 10-year reform around Commissioning for Outcomes. I think it is fair to say that work has been slower to gain momentum than we would have liked. COVID and other things have meant that both government and the sector have not had the capacity to engage in that work as deeply and as quickly as we may have liked. We are trying to pick up the pace, but the sector is also telling us, “Hang on; we have only got so much capacity.” So we are trying to work through that with the sector. We have a commissioning roadmap that has been co-designed with the sector. We have a number of funding processes that have been through the first iteration of the commissioning process, particularly in the homelessness space, and we are continuing to roll that out to more and more funding opportunities. It is sort of “try, test, learn”—we learn as we go on that stuff with the sector.

MS ORR: Is it fair to say then that, while not unrelated, one is not necessarily dependent on the other in these two projects?

Ms Davidson: They are two distinct pieces of work. For example, the work that UWA is doing on tools for being able to accurately cost things is absolutely helpful when you are going through a commissioning process, but the commissioning process itself includes a design stage that helps to actually map what is the level of unmet need. They are two separate things, but—

MS ORR: I guess the bit I am now trying to get my head around, if we can just go back to the sector sustainability, is that the first report is due in December but, based on the discussion we have had so far, the indexation has been addressed. There have already been measures taken towards efficiency and some of these other bits and pieces. Is the report saying what needs to be done? It sounds like the things that need to be done are already being done. How is this process fitting together? It does not seem entirely sequential.

Ms Rule: It is not entirely sequential. We are trying to action more than one thing at a time and, again, moving at the pace that the sector wants us to. I am not quite sure which report we are referring to when we say it is going to be delivered in December.

Ms Dolan: I think by the end of December will be the end of the contracted term that we have with Capital Region to support that work. We had \$245,000 allocated through the 2022-23 midyear budget process that we used to put towards a grant with Capital Region Community Services to be our partner with the community sector to lead this work and to develop a program in co-design with the community sector, alongside the development of a governance structure—which is I think seven members from the community sector; three members from government—to drive the work and the priority work under the Sector Sustainability Project. That group together and through consultation and co-design with that group has led to the development of the contract for the UWA to develop the costing tools. It was agreed that that was a priority that

would help drive this work forward and would be the best use of the finances that we had to deliver the best results for the community sector, which has led to that piece of work.

Alongside the next leg of priorities, that governance structure decides on where those priorities will go. We are looking at that in terms of what will come next. We are looking forward to that next report out of the co-lead from the community sector to drive that work.

MS ORR: So this report in December should, if I understand that correctly, say what has happened and what has been achieved and what still needs to be done as the next phase?

Ms Dolan: That is right. We will be receiving a final report that will have findings, recommendations, outcomes and progress—all of that detail.

MS ORR: There are a couple of comments that have been made that are quite different to the comments that I think we have heard from other parts of the community sector, where they are saying, “We would like to see this progress a little bit faster.” Ms Rule, you have made a couple of comments now about the sector saying, “We can’t go that fast.” I am trying to get a better understanding of the disconnect or the contrast in the different things.

Ms Rule: The sector is not homogenous. Some parts of the sector have capacity to engage with this stuff more deeply and more often than others. We are trying to not leave anybody behind in this and make sure that all views are considered. The bigger organisations with more resources who are most able to engage with this are probably the ones that are already more sustainable than some of the smaller services. So it is really important that we do not leave those ones behind. So, yes, we hear that, but we also hear the opposite end of the spectrum, which is, “We need time to engage with this effectively.”

MS ORR: Because I reckon the chair is going to give me the wind-up in a minute, I will start to close off this line of inquiry. Given that a lot depends on the new contracting coming out of the commissioning process and not everyone is up to going through that process yet—yet we know these pressures are happening across the sector—for those who are not ready to enter into a commissioning process but still need to provide services, what is happening with their contract?

Ms Davidson: That is why I was saying this sector sustainability project absolutely requires government to commit to the subsequent phases of the work. When we get that report at the end of this year, it will tell us what the next steps should be to make sure that we are not leaving anyone behind. We are bringing the whole sector with us and we are addressing the nuances of how we deal with those pressures.

Ms Dolan: Additionally, we also put in place contract extensions for the services for which that work has not yet commenced, where there is not readiness to commence, so that the organisations have contract certainty until we are ready to commence the commissioning processes.

MS ORR: Are they just getting a continuation of the contract they have or is it actually a response? Based on this, is the new indexation rate being applied? How are you making sure that you have the full cost covered? How do we know that the needs are actually being met for the contracts that are being extended?

Ms Davidson: This is the thing: the indexation does not completely address what organisations have told us is the range of financial pressures they are experiencing. It is different for each organisation, depending on the services they are delivering and the kinds of management structures they have to support in order to enable them to deliver those services.

MS ORR: I appreciate, in being part of the government—maybe I could give myself a bit of a poke here—

THE CHAIR: Last question.

MS ORR: Thanks, Chair. I knew it was coming. The wheels of government do not always move rapidly, one might say. If the first report is coming in December and that then goes through a cabinet consideration process, it is still going to be a while before anything is agreed out of whatever it is, shall we say. In the meantime, is it correct that the groups that are not entering into a commissioning process will have their contracts extended? I note that—as you have already said, Minister—it is not going to necessarily address the needs that have to be met. Will it still be a little while before we get a resolution on this?

Ms Davidson: In terms of the organisations that have to go through funding extensions before commissioning for outcomes commences in their part of the sector, each of the directorates that is going through a commissioning process is addressing that with all of the contracts that they are funding.

MS ORR: To simplify my question in the interest of time, it is more a case of: when are we going to have this sector's sustainability actually—

THE CHAIR: That is more than one question.

MS ORR: I am in trouble with the chair! When are we actually going to have the Sector Sustainability Program bedded down so that these issues, which have been around for a while, cease to be issues and we can move onto other things?

Ms Davidson: This project is absolutely embedded in government work at the moment. We have seen that for the 18 months that has been spent on phase 1 of this sector's sustainability work. I expect the report that is going to come through in December is going to give the incoming government, after the next election, a really clear understanding of exactly what needs to be done in the next phases of the project in order to make sure that we have a long-term sustainable and thriving sector. There should be absolutely no excuse for government to not go ahead and do that work. That is the purpose of getting that report.

MS ORR: “In the future” is the short answer?

THE CHAIR: I am going to stop you there. Miss Nuttall for the next question.

MS CASTLEY: Can I ask a supplementary?

THE CHAIR: One.

MS CASTLEY: By keeping my ear to the ground, I know we are talking about commissioning. We touched on this yesterday. Groups had to go to the media to get money, and we have heard from groups that they do not have certainty, even though, I believe, some contracts have been extended. Don't you think it represents a failure on the government's behalf that the community sector had to go to the media to try to get certainty and get what they need in order to exist and survive, such as Arthritis ACT and Kidsafe? These groups are really struggling. How long can they wait for the slow arm of government to catch up?

Ms Davidson: This absolutely goes to the third thing, and we have not really talked about it. We talked about sector sustainability. We talked about commissioning for outcomes. What we have not talked about is the fundamental relationship between the ACT government and the community sector—the understanding of government about how we partner with the sector. That is why both of those pieces of work have to continue, so that we can address those long-term financial sustainability needs and so that we can address the nature of the relationship between those organisations in the sector and the ACT government.

The ones that have gone through a commissioning process and have longer term funding contracts are going to be in a different position to the ones that have not yet gone through the process. As we were talking about before, there is nuance in what is needed for each different organisation. We do not have a homogenous sector. They are not all doing the same thing in the same way, so they need different contracts and different funding arrangements that actually address what the community expects them to deliver.

MS CASTLEY: I understand. I am just worried that, in the meantime, we will potentially lose some very good community organisations.

THE CHAIR: They have called it market failure.

MS CASTLEY: That is right.

Ms Davidson: Yes.

MS CASTLEY: That would be a terrible shame.

THE CHAIR: Just one question, Ms Orr.

MS ORR: Minister, I know you keep saying it is a government relationship, but, as the minister responsible, aren't you the person who should be leading that work?

Ms Davidson: This is the really interesting thing that community sector organisations have been telling me about in detail, not just for the period of time since December

when I picked up the administrative arrangements for this but for the entire 3½ years that I have been in this building so far. Quite frankly, I was hearing—from the people I worked alongside in the sector before I got this job—that each organisation is dealing with different parts of government, different directorates, and some of them are dealing with multiple directorates at once. When they are talking about their relationship with government, they are not talking about a relationship with one minister or one manager in one directorate; they are often talking about multiple parts of government.

That is why, when we talk about the importance of the Sector Sustainability Program, we talk about how we share information and data across directorates and how we manage the delivery of a greater complexity of services. There might be more parts of our health, human services, justice and education systems engaged in making sure that people's needs are met when moving into—

THE CHAIR: We might leave it there. I am not sure we are getting the answer that we are after—

MS ORR: I have a follow-up, but I will defer to Miss Nuttall.

MISS NUTTALL: I understand that the final report of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide will not be released until September, but it has already highlighted the need for a change in culture, the transition from military to civilian life, the challenges of veterans in incarceration and facing homelessness, the involvement of family in supporting veterans and the need for more support options for veterans. How is the ACT government planning to improve support for our veterans?

Ms Davidson: Given the high concentration we have of both serving and ex-serving veterans in the ACT and their family members, and the increased risk of mental health issues for veterans, there is a strong need to be able to work closely with the commonwealth government to improve veteran mental health and wellbeing so that we can prevent suicide.

There are some early preparations already underway to develop the principles and themes for an ACT veterans wellbeing framework to guide the work that we are doing in the ACT and coordinate that with federal government work that will also need to happen. This framework is being developed with some comprehensive consultation across different parts of ACT government and with community engagement as well. We are aiming to deliver that in the first half of 2025 so that we can give different parts of ACT government and the ACT veterans community time to consider, reflect on and identify the key issues and recommendations from the royal commission report that is due to be handed down in September, in order to inform and address what happens in the ACT veterans wellbeing framework. We know that this is a piece of work that will need to address increased levels of need.

MISS NUTTALL: What services are already available to support veterans in the ACT?

Ms Davidson: In terms of health services for our veterans, the ACT government has both clinical and non-clinical mental health suicide prevention and postvention support services for veterans and their family members. Veterans can seek support from any of our publicly funded mental health and alcohol and drug services that might be

appropriate for their needs.

We have veteran liaison services across our Canberra Health Services. There is free inpatient psychiatric care at Calvary Bruce Private Hospital. There is also an identified lounge at the Canberra Hospital on the south side that is specifically for veterans and families. We also have an ACT government veterans portal that has information on health and wellbeing support and assistance that veterans can access, including mental health and rehab services. That brings together things that are happening across both ACT and commonwealth government services and community organisations.

One of the other things that the royal commission have already identified as a key theme is transition support for veterans as they move into civilian life. The ACT public service is really committed to being a great place to work, for veterans and family members. We are a platinum pledge partner with Solider On. We have an ACT public service veterans peer networking group that also welcomes defence family members, which started in January this year. There is an existing executive champions network, which we are working to expand across more directorates. ACT government goes to the ADF veterans transition seminars, to promote those transition opportunities. Because of that we have actually experienced an increase in the number of employees who are identifying as veterans in recent years.

MS ORR: Minister, on the topic of the veterans wellbeing strategy, what is the time line for delivery?

Ms Davidson: That is the veterans wellbeing framework?

MS ORR: Yes.

Ms Davidson: That is the framework I was talking about earlier that we are intending to deliver in the first half of 2025, so that we can take into account the recommendations that we will hear about in the royal commission report in September, and to enable time for the veterans community to work through that with us.

MS ORR: When did that project start?

Mr Stathis: The project has already started. We have done some preliminary desktop research to look at what principles might guide the framework. That research has told us that we will need a whole-of-government approach to supporting veterans and families. Obviously, we will need to work in partnership with veterans, families and the broader community. We need a community-centred approach that recognises the diversity of the community, especially in the ACT. We know that we do not just have ex-service people; we also have a larger population than other states and territories of people that are actively serving at the moment. We need integrated supports and services as well.

They are the four principles that we have looked at, from the desktop research work that we have done. We are testing those principles with the Ministerial Advisory Council for Veterans and their Families. Between now and caretaker, we will work through that and develop the approach to ongoing consultation, taking into account, as the minister said, the recommendations of the veterans royal commission.

MS ORR: You mentioned principles. Are you looking at there being actions coming out of the framework as well, or will the framework guide the consideration of actions that need to be taken?

Mr Stathis: I am not sure we are at that stage. We want to do the consultation first and get a thorough understanding. The guts of the framework will be a guiding document. Depending on the strategy, what the consultations tell us will guide us in terms of—

MS ORR: I was not asking about actions; I was asking where the actions fit in the process of the development.

Ms Evans: I acknowledge the privilege statement. Ms Orr, we will, of course, have a range of actions that we will be responding to out of the royal commission. We expect that that will probably form the majority of the work. In the next term of government, we will be responding to those, and the framework will give us the way to respond to the actions.

MS ORR: So the framework will be quite critical in guiding how the response to the royal commission is approached. The part I am drawing—

Ms Davidson: With that said, there are some things that we know we are going to need to work on specifically with service delivery for mental health, suicide prevention and postvention support services for veterans. We have already started thinking about needing to work on these particular areas. These are things that I have already started to engage with the commonwealth government on, at both political and official levels.

MS ORR: In closing, I think it is quite fair to say that with CSD there is often a bit of a trend where you have a policy and then an action plan that goes with it. I guess the framework might sit more as policy and values. My question is: when does the action plan come?

Ms Rule: Without trying to dodge the question, the policy settings are really a matter for government, and then we agree with government on a set of actions. So it has to go through that normal—

MS ORR: So they are further down the train, yes.

Ms Rule: process of consideration by government and allocation of resources and the like.

Ms Davidson: That will need to occur in the first half of 2025. I would not want to preempt their decision, but it seems obvious there will need to be actions that go to service delivery.

THE CHAIR: I have a supplementary question on that. Minister, you mentioned some of the services available, including veteran liaison officers. I have spoken with a number of veterans and ex-service organisations recently, who are all asking about veteran liaison officers, because the DVA ones have been cancelled or suspended. Up until Saturday, when Veterans and Families Expo went there with the brochure, why was it

that veterans organisations had not been told or consulted about the new arrangements for veteran liaison officers?

Ms Davidson: With the veteran liaison officers at Canberra Hospital, I might need to take on notice the detail of what the changes are, because that would come under CHS rather than the offices for seniors and veterans. But, yes, there are a range of services we provide, and some of the ones that I talked about are actually from CMTEDD rather than CSD or CHS. It has to be a whole-of-government response. So, in terms of the detail of the veteran liaison officers, I might need to take it on notice to get that detail from CHS about how those arrangements are working now.

That originally came out of a commonwealth funded program that I think, from memory, reached its endpoint. We could see that there was still a need for it.

MS ORR: We still have Health appearing tomorrow, so we could always follow up there, but maybe you could take that on notice.

Mr Stathis: I might be able to add to the minister's response. Canberra Health Services has come and spoken to the Ministerial Advisory Council for Veterans and their Families about the DLO role. I know that they have also spoken with some key advocacy organisations such as RSL Woden Valley. They would have more details about the broader consultation.

MS ORR: Great.

Ms Davidson: Maybe I can provide that tomorrow. If not, I will take it on notice to provide the detail about consultation on the veteran liaison officer service.

THE CHAIR: Great, thank you. I think the ministerial advisory council are bound by confidentiality; I am not sure that they go out and tell everyone about it. But, thank you, if you would take those on notice.

MS CASTLEY: I have few questions on carers, across a few different areas. On page 54 the budget outlook states that access to appropriate services for people experiencing mental illness is also extended to their carers. What does this budget do to assist with mental health and wellbeing support for carers, and, in particular, young carers?

Ms Davidson: In particular young carers?

MS CASTLEY: Yes.

Ms Davidson: Sorry, for a second I was expecting you to talk about mental health carers, given the start, but—

MS CASTLEY: Young carers can also care for people with mental health concerns.

Ms Davidson: Yes, they can. The ACT Carers Strategy that was delivered in 2018 actually received funding over a four-year period from the 2022-23 budget. Based on feedback from Carers ACT, the approaches to delivering the strategy have been further updated, so that work will continue to happen.

What we have been working on with Carers ACT is the delivery of that ACT Carers Strategy. That includes some things that have already happened, like a respite handbook for carers. It includes some practical information on supporting carers' wellbeing. They have also produced a coffee table book that tells the story of being a carer and talks about the sometimes very challenging experiences of carers. We have also invested in enhancements to the Carers ACT website and to the mental health carer navigation website to improve the access to information for carers. There is also \$200,000 in the 2024-25 budget to deliver local carer recognition activities and to provide governance of the ACT Carers Strategy.

There are some additional things I could talk to you about in relation to mental health carers as well, but this might go some way to explaining where that is coming from. Again, it was the 2022-23 budget that actually had funding over a four-year period to fund that strategy.

MS CASTLEY: So in this budget there is the \$200,000 for the recognition?

Ms Davidson: Yes, and that is part of that four-year ACT Carers Strategy plan that was developed with carers in the ACT.

MS CASTLEY: On the ACT Carers Strategy, the first action plan that was published in December 2021 listed engaging “the Canberra Business Chamber and the private sector to promote employment of carers and support for carer employees” as a priority. I believe it was postponed due to COVID. Has this objective been actioned since? Are there any related provisions in this budget?

Ms Davidson: Relating to employment for carers?

MS CASTLEY: Yes, and discussions with the business chamber and the private sector.

Ms Evans: No, not in this budget. At the time that those actions were considered, we then worked back with Carers ACT on how those actions would be closed off or finalised or moved into another phase, particularly as that funding came through for them to develop the next stage of the strategy. So, at this point, unless carers are pursuing that actively, there is no activity in that space.

MS CASTLEY: I have a final question about carers of people with disabilities. Budget statement G, strategic objective 1 is: “Strengthen the capacity of people with disabilities, their families and carers to maximise control over their lives”. Can you elaborate on how this budget will strengthen the capacity of carers to maximise control of their own lives?

Mr Stathis: It might be more in Minister Stephen-Smith's—

Ms Davidson: Yes, I think so. When we are talking about carers for people with disability, I think we need to acknowledge that there is some pretty major change going on in that space with the NDIS reforms and the development of foundational supports. There will be people who currently are doing a lot of unpaid care work due to unmet need in that area of disability care, and we may find that the foundational supports that

are developed actually provide some good support for carers as well.

MS CASTLEY: On recognition, Carers ACT have listed the creation of a carer recognition card as one of their election requests. Is this a policy? Is it something that you have discussed or considered? Is it something that you might consider endorsing? I understand that you cannot put a policy announcement out, but what are your thoughts on going down that avenue?

Ms Davidson: Certainly what the directorate has been doing to address the needs of carers has been very much aligned with the ACT Carers Strategy and the delivery of the actions under that that we have continued to work through with Carers ACT.

MS ORR: On the ACT Carers Strategy, can you remind me how many actions were in the first action plan, and how it is tracking? It is not a pass/fail test—it is a little bit! It is an open book test. Can you remind me how many actions there were and how you are tracking? I think some work was completed fairly quickly, but other work was not so quick, because it was always going to be done over the course of it. Can we get a bit of an update on where it is up to?

Ms Dolan: Sure. The initial three-year action plan included 25 actions grouped under five broad themes: services and supports for carers, recognition and awareness, inclusion, support for young carers, and workforce and skills recognition. They were the 25 actions that were under that original action plan.

MS ORR: The original action plan ran from 2020-something? Can you remind me again?

Ms Dolan: I will have to—

MS ORR: From 2021? It was three years, I think.

Ms Dolan: It was a three-year action plan.

Ms Rule: It is possible we do not have too much information on the previous action plan with us right now.

MS ORR: Apologies. What I'm trying to get at is: has that action plan been completed in this year?

Ms Dolan: Yes.

MS ORR: This is the part, Ms Evans, where you were saying there is now not going to be another action plan. Any further actions are up to carers, the carers steering group or—

Ms Evans: Yes. There may be actions proposed and we would work with them as their partners, but they had a set of principles they wanted to work to around the support of carers, and they are addressing that in the funding envelope that they have.

Ms Davidson: So the development of future action plans would be something that we

need to work through with Carers ACT in partnership.

MS ORR: Is there an intention to do that, or is it a bit of an open question at the moment?

Ms Evans: In 2023, Carers ACT expressed that they wished to change their approach to progressing the aims of the strategy. Rather than going to specific action plans in the same way, they wanted to have a range of short and longer-term actions that they would pursue, and that carers would be central to how they would develop those actions. To a degree, they are doing that work as they see fit, to go forward. It is not like a government endorsed action plan at this point; it is the actions that Carers ACT see are necessary to develop.

Ms Davidson: It is about maintaining some more agility to deal with the changing landscape for carers, in a period where there is a lot of change going on.

MS ORR: Can you just remind me what the durations are for the ACT Carers Strategy?

Ms Davidson: The ACT Carers Strategy was launched in December 2017. I do not actually—

Ms Evans: It was the ACT Carers Strategy 2018-2028.

Ms Davidson: Yes.

MS ORR: Okay. I guess my question is: is there any indication of where it might go? If you are going to develop a new strategy, you do need to start before the old one expires, because they are usually—especially when they are co-designed—not short processes. The action plan has expired, and if Carers ACT does not drive something it is not coming. Is there any indication as to where this work might pick up, with these other bits maybe being in a state of—

Ms Davidson: I would expect that we will continue to partner with Carers ACT on their agile action plans that they are currently working on, and that the next 10-year strategy to replace the one that is expiring in 2028 will be a decision that will need to be made by the government at that time, closer to the date. 2028 is still a little bit of distance away, but there is no reason why we cannot continue to deliver on action plans in the meantime, as part of the current strategy.

MS ORR: What I am going over in my mind is that we have these plans that Carers ACT are doing. Irrespective of what government does, Carers ACT have got to do their thing, because they exist to advocate for carers. So that is never going to stop—I hope. We have this strategy, but we have no government actions behind it. My question, Minister, is: what is the government doing to support the strategy that we still have in place for a number of years? We do not seem to have any government committed actions, if I have understood it correctly, because it has been directed by Carers ACT, and their plans are not necessarily government plans.

Ms Davidson: Those action plans that Carers ACT are developing are being done with the ACT government, and they need to be aligned with the priorities and the outcomes

that are set in the existing ACT Carers Strategy, which runs through to 2028.

MS ORR: When are the actions for government coming to—

Ms Davidson: This is the point of having an agile action plan—you need to be able to actually address emerging issues that are coming out.

Ms Rule: I think the main commitment is that there is funding provided through the budget to Carers ACT to deliver the ACT Carers Strategy. So it is not that we are delivering; it is that the funding has been given to Carers ACT to deliver on the strategy. I think that is the main commitment to add action behind the strategy—it is the funding that has been attributed.

MS ORR: Ms Rule, can you help me out and remind me what funding has been given to them to deliver the strategy and the time period for that money?

Ms Rule: It was an additional \$825,000 over four years in the 2022-23 budget.

MS ORR: So we would be roughly halfway through?

Ms Davidson: About that.

Ms Rule: Chair, I have some information to cover off one of the questions asked earlier. If you would like me to put that on the record, I can be quick.

THE CHAIR: Sure.

Ms Rule: Regarding the question about indexation that Ms Orr asked earlier, the rollover amount is actually not about indexation; it was just that that is the line item that was originally in the budget. It is because we extended the contracts with Capital Region Community Services and the University of Western Australia.

MS ORR: For the two projects? So they are acquitted in a different year?

Ms Rule: Yes. It just got rolled over into the next year—

MS ORR: So it is not actually an indexation amount going to any contracts—it is just those two projects?

Ms Rule: Yes, that is right.

THE CHAIR: I just have a clarifying question before I go to my substantive question. Minister, you talked about the Veteran Wellbeing Framework. In the budget, it talks about the veteran wellbeing strategy. What is the difference between the two?

Ms Davidson: Between the framework and the strategy?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Davidson: Neither of them is an action plan. The Veteran Wellbeing Framework is

there to give us some guidance on the kinds of actions that we need to take as a government to work with the veteran community to meet their wellbeing needs. It is timed when it is to enable us to be inclusive of the kinds of responses we need to make to the recommendations of the royal commission report in September.

MS ORR: I am not sure I have got the difference.

THE CHAIR: And the strategy?

Mr Stathis: I believe it is the same thing—if you are talking about the strategy.

MS ORR: Is it just a typo?

Mr Stathis: Yes.

THE CHAIR: On page 6 it refers to the strategy, but, when someone else said strategy, you said, “No, it is a framework.”

Ms Davidson: It is a strategy, then.

MS ORR: We can use them interchangeably?

Ms Davidson: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Okay. I was not sure if I was looking at two different things.

Ms Davidson: Yes. There are two different words, but, essentially, they are serving the same purpose here.

THE CHAIR: I was just making sure that I was not confused. I will move onto a substantive question about the Age-Friendly City Plan. This is also referred to on page 6 of budget statement G:

Develop and implement the Age-Friendly City Plan 2025-35, informed by consultation with the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing and the local community ...

What is the funding allocated to that?

Ms Davidson: To the consultation for the—

THE CHAIR: To the whole thing about developing and implementing the Age-Friendly City Plan.

Ms Davidson: The current Age-Friendly City Plan that ends at the end of 2024?

THE CHAIR: No, 2025-35.

Ms Davidson: The new one? Okay. Mr Stathis can speak to the funding allocation for the Age-Friendly City Plan 2025-35.

Mr Stathis: It was \$205,000 allocated in last year's budget to be resourced at CSD.

THE CHAIR: That includes consultation with the local community? When do you think that Age-Friendly City Plan 2025-35 will be ready to go?

Ms Davidson: The consultation closed on 28 June this year. I can give you a bit more information about what we know so far from that consultation, but the Age-Friendly City Plan for 2025-35 is intended to be launched in 2025.

THE CHAIR: January? December?

Ms Davidson: That will be a decision for the government at the time. I cannot tell you who is going to be in that after October.

THE CHAIR: Okay. The other one finishes in 2024, so there could be a period of time when there is no new one in place. Is that what we are saying?

Ms Davidson: There is sometimes a transitional period between one plan and the next, for a whole range of different strategies and plans. The decision about what actually is in the next Age-Friendly City Plan will need to be made by the government at the time.

MS ORR: Can I just clarify: the dot point on page 6 says, "Develop and implement the Age-Friendly City Plan 2025-2035." Can I take it, then, that the implementation may be subject to future budgetary considerations?

Ms Davidson: Absolutely.

MS ORR: That amount—I think it was 200 and something you said—would not be the full implementation.

Ms Davidson: Yes, and it depends very much on what is actually in that plan.

MS ORR: "Develop" more than "implement" is kind of where we are up to.

Ms Rule: It is sort of both. Often these strategies are across a range of areas. For example, with the Disability Strategy the government agreed the strategy and some funding for early initiatives, but we expect the strategy to be part of the decision-making related to future funding bids as well. This one would be similar.

THE CHAIR: Is your directorate the major player in developing the Age-Friendly City Plan? Does it belong to you?

Ms Davidson: Yes. While there is a whole-of-government approach to being an age-friendly city, the Age-Friendly City Plan is absolutely something that is looked after by Community Services, in the Office for Seniors and Veterans. We work very closely with the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing.

Ms Rule: We also work across government. Clearly, CSD will not own all of the actions in any future plan or implementation of that plan. We work with our colleagues across

government to coordinate advice to government on what that strategy and plan might look like.

THE CHAIR: Do you get input from City Services when you give them feedback about things like footpath repair and the kinds of items that older people might identify as what they would like to see done better in an age-friendly city: lighting, footpath repair and amenities?

Ms Davidson: Yes. The Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing is also quite involved in that sort of oversight and monitoring of the plan, that coordination work, and has really appreciated the engagement of other directorates that are delivering on the actions in those meetings to talk through where things are up to and what is going to be happening next.

Ms Rule: Ms Lawder, it is both. For example, let us hypothesise that the strategy says something about city infrastructure that is age-friendly. CSD are not the experts in that. We would go to other directorates across government and say, “What are the infrastructure priorities for making the ACT age-friendly?” It would be a dialogue across government about work that is already underway or additional work that might be needed to meet the priorities of the strategy.

Mr Stathis: We have got an executive sponsor group across all directorates and we meet biannually to discuss where they are up to with their actions on the current plan. We would intend to continue that into the future.

THE CHAIR: How much money was spent on implementation of the current Age-Friendly City Plan in the last financial year?

Ms Davidson: Are you wanting to identify just the amount of money that was spent to provide the oversight and coordination of delivering on the plan or are you looking for how much was spent on delivering each of the action items in the plan?

THE CHAIR: Delivering.

Ms Davidson: Delivering on each of the action items? That might something that we would need to—

Mr Stathis: It would be across directorates. We would need to seek information across directorates.

Ms Davidson: We would need to coordinate across directorates to collate that information, I think.

THE CHAIR: All right.

Ms Rule: We certainly do not have that information here today.

THE CHAIR: Has there been money allocated to the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing for projects for seniors?

Ms Davidson: Sorry; what was that last bit?

THE CHAIR: How much money has been allocated for the ministerial advisory council?

Ms Davidson: There was some funding that was related to the Remuneration Tribunal decision.

Mr Stathis: Yes, Minister. In the last budget there was \$136,000 allocated across four years to remunerate the ministerial advisory council.

THE CHAIR: Any money for them to undertake projects?

Ms Rule: We undertake the projects, on the advice of the council.

THE CHAIR: Right.

Ms Rule: They do not actually do the work themselves.

THE CHAIR: How much money is allocated for that?

Ms Rule: There were a few things allocated in the 2023-24 budget. There was \$260,000 for the seniors arts festival, some money for a dementia-friendly film screening program and \$100,000 for the first dedicated intergenerational live-in program for aged care, through the Gold Soul Companionship Program. A number of specific things were funded in that budget. Those budget proposals are developed with input from the council, but the council does not actually deliver those. We give them money to implement them.

Ms Davidson: They are an advisory council, rather than deliverers of pieces of work.

THE CHAIR: Are those examples funded again in this year's budget?

Ms Davidson: The funding that was allocated for those items was in the 2023-24 budget, not in this year's budget. Those were pilot programs that continued over a number of years. They were not one-year pieces of work. I think we have already talked a little bit about the seniors art festival in this session.

THE CHAIR: Okay; thank you.

MS CASTLEY: Has all the money gone that was budgeted?

Ms Davidson: Some of that funding has already gone through procurement processes to allocate the funding to providers to deliver on things like the seniors arts festival. There is also the dementia-friendly film screening program.

MS CASTLEY: So that is ongoing? That is my point.

Ms Davidson: Yes.

MS CASTLEY: It is not as if everything got done in last year and all the budget has gone; we have still got activities for this year?

Ms Rule: Yes.

Ms Davidson: That is right.

MS CASTLEY: Okay.

Ms Davidson: We have still got activities that are ongoing.

MS ORR: Just changing the topic here, I want to go back to page 6 and the social inclusion and connected communities bit. There is a bit here that says, “working alongside emergency material and financial assistance providers and food security organisations to deliver critical food and material assistance to vulnerable Canberrans”. On page 24, if I have got my pages correct, there is a funding line there about “cost of living support for vulnerable Canberrans, emergency material, financial aid and food relief”. Can I please get a rundown on what that dot point is covering and what the money is going towards?

Ms Davidson: Yes. Is that the \$913,000?

MS ORR: Yes; that is the one.

Ms Davidson: That is support for emergency material and financial aid programs and food relief services. The breakdown of that is that there is \$490,000 to deliver increased emergency material and financial aid and \$423,000 to deliver increased food relief support for Canberrans. Those funds in food relief will be used to ensure the delivery of freighted goods into ACT community food pantries and to OzHarvest for food rescue and distribution.

In terms of the emergency material and financial aid program, that is for things like the provision of grocery and petrol vouchers, clothing and bedding, medicines, and support with utility bills. It is recognising that there has been an increase in the immediate needs of Canberrans during the cost-of-living crisis. With regard to the food relief, that is building on the increase of \$389,000 in funding for food relief that was in the 2023-24 budget. It is recognising that we are continuing to see increased demand for services, as well as fluctuations of up to 150 per cent in freight costs. That is why there needs to be an increase there.

MS ORR: Okay. So the \$323,000—I hope I got that. Sorry; you were talking quite fast. I hope I wrote that down correctly.

Ms Davidson: Sorry. There is \$423,000 for increased food relief support for Canberrans.

MS ORR: And \$490,000 for the—

Ms Davidson: And \$490,000 for increased emergency material and financial aid.

MS ORR: Okay. Regarding the \$423,000, which was the food relief, is all of that additional money going to OzHarvest for freighting?

Ms Davidson: No. Part of that funding is also an increase in funding for Foodbank NSW/ACT, which is the organisation that gets the supplies into Canberra that a lot of community food pantries are reliant on.

MS ORR: On that \$423,000, can you give me a breakdown of what is going where?

Ms Davidson: So with that \$423,000, I do not have the figures to hand myself about how much is going to Foodbank, but Vasiliki might be able to explain the detail.

Ms Bogiatzis: I acknowledge the privileges statement. The \$423,000 will be used to ensure, as the minister said, the delivery of freighted goods to ACT community food pantries and also to OzHarvest to support food distribution and rescue. We are working with those two providers to identify the best allocation of funding, and they have provided us with some information to support the expansion of their services. We are just currently in the process of negotiating what that might look like on the ground, and how that funding can best be located to meet need.

MS ORR: Okay. So the \$423,000 will be split, in some way, shape or form between Foodbank New South Wales & ACT and OzHarvest. Is that correct?

Ms Davidson: Yes.

MS ORR: And what that looks like is being worked out, depending on the conversations you are currently having around where the food is being distributed.

Ms Bogiatzis: That is right. We have made a commitment to existing providers, both within the emergency material and financial aid program, and also within the food assistance program, to work with existing providers in the first instance. We do not want to bring in new providers when they have been—

MS ORR: When you say, “existing providers,” are we talking about Foodbank and OzHarvest or are we talking about the—

Ms Davidson: Yes.

MS ORR: We are not talking about the pantries—

Ms Evans: And there are other providers that sit in the emergency material financial aid—

MS ORR: So that I have it correct in my head, and we are all on the same page: the pantries that these groups are stocking are the ones that we see out in the community. Is that correct? Where are the goods going?

Ms Davidson: They are going to a range of community food pantries, and this is why we also had funding in the 2021-22 budget of \$475,000 over four years for VolunteeringACT to support a food security program that includes a food relief network

that meets monthly to share ideas and knowledge and best practice approaches across that growing network of community food pantries.

They also have a food relief database that helps us with evidence-informed decision-making about what is actually happening out there in the community. Certainly, we are finding that there is absolutely a growing need. The other difficulty, in terms of having to budget for food relief in a cost-of-living crisis, is the fluctuation in freight costs that I mentioned earlier. This is not something that any of our community food relief pantries are in control of, but they end up being the people who feel the impacts of that. Providing for funding to cover the costs of getting the supplies into those community food pantries so it is one less thing for them to worry about, is critically important in making sure that they are able to keep doing what they do. They are often being run by volunteers as well.

MS ORR: Based on that previous answer, and correct me if I do not have this quite right, the food relief network that has been funded for four years meet the range of community pantries, and they discuss the need and where it needs to go. And then Foodbank and OzHarvest, using the funding they get from government, help those pantries. Is that correct?

Ms Davidson: Each of the community food pantries operates independently, and they all operate within their own organisations according to their own mission and objectives; but having a network, a food relief network, where they can exchange what they are seeing out there in the community and share best practice approaches to how they deal with it, is really important for supporting the sustainability of that sector in the community.

You see this not just with food relief but you will see these kinds of networks supported across a range of different areas in the community sector, where different organisations are all seeing different things and they need to have opportunities to get together and say, “We are seeing there is an emerging issue here that we need to respond to collectively,” or “We can share information about how each of our individual organisations can deal with it.”

Ms Rule: The biggest cost to this program is freight, and this money is to subsidise the freight to allow essential supplies to come into the ACT to be distributed to the community providers.

MS ORR: So the community providers are organising what food comes to them and what-not. I think I am starting to catch on to how this works—yes. The community providers organise their own relationships with the delivery of what food is coming in to stock their pantries, but government helps out with assisting with the freight costs. That is essentially the crux of it.

Ms Davidson: That is exactly right. They have still got agency and control over what it is that their food pantry is doing.

Ms Evans: And to clarify, Foodbank is responsible for the freighting of food. OzHarvest focus on food rescue. So they are slightly different models of operation. There are 16 food pantries in the ACT that food gets distributed to, and they are all run

by, generally, community organisations.

Ms Rule: Foodbank works with big national companies that bring food in, freight supplies in, that then gets distributed. You are probably familiar with the OzHarvest model.

MS ORR: With both of them, yes.

MISS NUTTALL: I understand the pressure on households, and on services to help, is unlikely to let up soon, so how are we going to make sure that the food relief sector is working as efficiently as possible to deliver more services to more people in need over the long-term.

Ms Davidson: I think that really goes to the importance of continuing to support that food relief network and the coordination work that VolunteeringACT has been doing for that food security program. The fact that they have now got a food relief database is really helpful because it means that, as we are moving forward with how we ensure the sustainability for our community food pantries and for food security for people feeling those cost-of-living pressures, we are able to really make decisions that are based on what we are actually seeing happen in Canberra that is unique to Canberra and not what might be happening in other cities. In order for that to work well, it requires a diversity of different providers to be able to come together and share that information, because they are all operating in slightly different parts of town and under different models.

MISS NUTTALL: We have been fortunate over the past couple of years to not experience bad fire seasons, other severe weather or natural disasters in Canberra. We know such events are inevitable, especially given the ongoing and escalating climate crisis. With that in mind, how is Canberra preparing to ensure that when the next major disaster hits, and it is when and not if, we are ready to help people recover from its impact?

Ms Davidson: Again, this requires that ACT government has a really good strong relationship as partner with the community sector. It is often the community sector who are the first responders to social recovery needs after a disaster, as opposed to immediate emergency management in the moment. We know that there will be, after a disaster, often an increase in people's experience of gendered violence or domestic and family violence, or mental health and drug and alcohol support needs, as well as actual housing and material support needs. So making sure we are working with our community sector, which really deeply understand the needs of those people who are most at risk in those situations, is pretty important.

The way in which we have gone about trying to ensure we have that understanding is through the ACT Emergencies Act and the ACT recovery sub-plan work, and then going into the ACT government's social recovery framework. There was funding in the 2022-23 budget over two years to support the development of the ACT government's social recovery framework, and over the last year the Community Services Directorate have led the process to develop that framework that sits under the ACT recovery sub-plan and the Emergencies Act. That should guide and underpin our social recovery planning and preparedness work in the ACT, alongside the community sector.

MS CASTLEY: I have a question about the ACT volunteering strategy 2024-2034. The cost of replacing volunteer labour is, and I believe we have a report here that says, \$3.3 billion. I am wondering how is it that the previous volunteering strategy and action plan ended in 2021 and yet the new one is not yet released for the 2024-2028 period.

Ms Davidson: There were a few things going on in 2021, and our volunteering sector was really heavily impacted by what was happening during that year, and in 2022 as well. So we have been working closely with VolunteeringACT and the sector in the ACT on what needs to happen next and the way in which we need to understand the big shifts that have happened as a result of what occurred over those years. In February of this year, there was a joint workshop with VolunteeringACT, which included representatives from the ACT volunteering strategy advisory group. They talked through the findings of the previous ACT Volunteering Statement Action Plan that ended in 2021 and started to progress the work on a draft strategy to replace that. I could ask Mr Stathis to talk through the detail of where that work is up to now.

Mr Stathis: As the minister said, in terms of the developing of this new volunteering strategy, we are partnering with VolunteeringACT. They undertook pretty extensive consultation between 2021-23 and developed a listening report, which is available on their website. That consultation included consulting with around 100 VolunteeringACT member organisations. They also spoke to other volunteering-involving organisations. They talked to specialist peak and representative organisations. They also consulted with ACT government, the Department of Social Services, Volunteering Australia and volunteering peak bodies in states and territories. We have used that as the basis for the development of the framework.

As the minister said, we also had a workshop with VolunteeringACT and their volunteering strategy advisory group. In addition, in March of this year, we held an inter-directorate working group, which CSD hosted, where we identified all the areas within ACT government that are relying a lot on volunteers, including schools, hospitals, parks and reserves, and sports. That strategy is currently going through government approval processes at the moment, so it is going through cabinet.

MS CASTLEY: So the idea at the outset that the government would endorse the strategy is what we are hoping for. Having the strategy beginning in 2024, when the previous plan's volunteering statement was from 2018-21—so I think we have that gap again.

Ms Davidson: 2021 and 2022 were highly unusual years in any city, and Canberra is no exception to that, particularly for our volunteering sector. They experienced a lot of disruption and difficulties during that period of time because of what was happening.

MS CASTLEY: I understand, but if the old one went from 2018 to 2021, was there not one in the works ready to roll out, or did the wheels just fall off because of COVID?

Ms Davidson: To be perfectly honest, I think the community was actually dealing with a lot of really big existential threats in 2021 and 2022, and we needed to be able to deal with those. To ask the community to be planning for the next draft strategy while they were dealing with the unfolding challenges of COVID, I do not think would have been

reasonable. We did continue, though, to partner with and work with the volunteering sector during that period to provide support to them and to better understand the challenges that they were experiencing. The nature of some of the volunteering activities did absolutely change during that period.

MS CASTLEY: It is a huge amount: \$3.3 billion is such a valuable amount of work that they do for us. I am wondering what actions are in this budget for the volunteering sector? Could you just run me through that?

Ms Davidson: We have talked about some of the food relief work that is being done in the sector, and we have also talked about some of the other community sector sustainability and commissioning work, and some of those organisations do engage quite a few volunteers in their work as well as paid staff. In terms of what actions might come out of the next strategy, I think that will need to be a decision made by government at the time that they are looking at that draft strategy and first action plan. The final strategy will actually be released later this year.

MS CASTLEY: Okay. Later this year.

THE CHAIR: I have a quick follow-up on volunteering, from, I guess, the bigger picture to a more specific example. There are a number of volunteer veterans claims advocates in the ACT who are ageing, and it is getting more and more difficult to get new volunteer advocates and to maintain the knowledge of existing advocates. What work can, or is, government doing to try to assist in that area, given that if all of the advocates go, there will be quite a gap? What is it the government is doing to support the ongoing demand for—

Ms Davidson: Yes, so many of those advocates are supporting people going through DVA claims processes, and the changes that the three different acts are going through at the moment in harmonising and streamlining—

THE CHAIR: Sorry, in the interests of time; I understand what they are doing, but I am just asking what could you do to get more or to fill the gap?

Ms Davidson: Yes. Certainly, I continue to advocate for support for veterans advocates to the commonwealth, but it is of course their responsibility to ensure that—

THE CHAIR: You feel it is a commonwealth responsibility? Yes. Okay.

Ms Davidson: veterans advocates have a good understanding and the support and training needed to deal with DVA bureaucracy.

THE CHAIR: This question is about older Canberrans and digital literacy. Many older Canberrans need support with online forms and systems. They have been receiving assistance from ACT government services, including ACT Libraries and Access Canberra. COTA Australia provides some work at the libraries, for example, but I have heard that the libraries have been saying they no longer have capacity to assist older and vulnerable Canberrans to complete ACT government online forms or to replace or apply for their ACT seniors card.

Access Canberra have also said they are unable to assist or support a vulnerable older person with this process, other than directing them to a self-serve kiosk. For many seniors, who have no digital literacy, applying for this entitlement excludes them from attending at these government services. We hear that at Fix My Street as well. The push for everything to be online does not suit some older Canberrans. What are you doing to ensure that older Canberrans get support to do their business with the government online if they need some support? What will be provided to them that is not online?

Ms Davidson: This highlights the importance of having a new Age-Friendly City Plan that addresses the evolving needs over time of what it takes to be an age-friendly city. There are certainly some changes that we have made in some of our government services to make them more accessible to older people in our community. I refer, for example, to appointments at Access Canberra and making sure that the design of both physical spaces and systems that people are working within is more dementia-friendly. Certainly, there will be a need to continue to make more of our services accessible for older people. It is about understanding that not everyone will have the same level of digital literacy in accessing services online. Some people will still need to access things in person.

THE CHAIR: How can you advocate within government to ensure that Libraries ACT staff or Access Canberra staff are adequately resourced or enabled to assist older Canberrans when they ask for help to apply online at those locations? There appears to be a resourcing issue.

Ms Davidson: Some of the things that we have already done have been done within the context of the Age-Friendly City Plan and the actions that are being taken as a result of that. Having a new Age-Friendly City Plan gives us opportunities to identify what actions need to be resourced as part of that work. It enables us to have some transparency and accountability to the community about what actions we are taking to do that, and to engage the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing and whole of government in that oversight and coordination of the delivery of that.

THE CHAIR: That is the new Age-Friendly City Plan, which you have said will be available next year, in a new term of government.

Ms Davidson: Yes.

THE CHAIR: What about tomorrow, if Aunty Edna goes to a shopfront or a library and tries to apply for a seniors card and no-one there has the capacity to help her?

Ms Davidson: With seniors cards in particular, work is being undertaken at the moment for the ACT seniors card program. There was an independent review of that program that considered a whole range of matters, both operational and the membership experience, and digitisation was one of the things that was considered.

We heard from that review that government concessions, including transport and car registration, are some of the most highly valued benefits of the program, and that the majority of the cardholders are open to digitisation of the program but need there to be flexibility in how that is done. Generally, there needed to be more awareness of the range of benefits that were available. That report was publicly released on 26 May last

year.

Work has continued since then on co-design for the future seniors card program. On 19 March this year, an investment plan was released that highlighted how the commissioning cycle has informed the program changes and set out the long-term intentions for that seniors card program. That is still going through processes at the moment for the delivery of the new program over the next two years.

THE CHAIR: I am concerned about the next six months. It would appear that, because the ACT seniors card is currently combined with the MyWay card, the majority of active seniors card holders will need to renew or replace their seniors card. From where will they get the help to do that in the next six months or so?

Mr Stathis: I might go to your first question, Ms Lawder, about help with applying for a seniors card. As you know, COTA administers the card for the ACT government. They will help older people with applications for a seniors card. I think we acknowledge that there is a gap. Part of the senior sponsors group that we have for the Age-Friendly City Plan is where we can raise those issues, and we certainly have discussed those.

THE CHAIR: There is nothing, really, in the short term?

Ms Evans: Seniors can use their current card just as a flash card. It will be accepted. If they went into Libraries ACT, for instance, they would get the advice that COTA could assist them, if they needed a new card. In the meantime, they would also be reassured that they can utilise their existing card and just show it.

THE CHAIR: Do you think that COTA has the capacity to help just about every current seniors card holder to renew or replace their card in the next six months or so?

Ms Davidson: One of the things that we found in the independent review of the seniors card program is that there are many cardholders who are open to the digitisation of the program.

THE CHAIR: I am not concerned about the many; I am concerned about the few—

Ms Davidson: What I am trying to say is that it is not every single seniors card holder who will go through the same process to renew their card or access support for that. The Community Services Directorate has contracted COTA ACT for a two-year period to test the findings from that commissioning process and run a “try, test and learn” from the delivery of the new specifications developed through commissioning. I would note that we are continuing to work with Transport Canberra around how the new MyWay cards will work, with the aim being that there will be one card that allows for both public transport access and seniors card discounts. The process of being able to do that will continue.

Mr Stathis: Just to be clear, the change to the new MyWay system does not affect anyone that currently holds a seniors card. That seniors card is a flash card and will remain in place. It will not be deemed null and void with the change to the new MyWay system.

MS ORR: Going to page 24, budget policy decisions, there are a couple of savings, or negatives, here—implementing a direct appropriation model for Procurement ACT and the Territory Records Office. There is another one here—investing in our digital future. There are some pretty large numbers against them. What do those projects cover?

Ms Rule: They are not ours. They are not in this portfolio.

MS ORR: They are not in this one? Okay. Where would I ask about that?

Ms Rule: Territory Records is in CMTEDD—

MS ORR: Yes, but it is against your—

Ms Rule: as is procurement. Are you in budget paper G?

MS ORR: Yes.

Ms Wood: Ms Orr, they are savings that the government has taken, I suspect across a range of portfolios, to fund priority projects.

Ms Rule: Each directorate has an amount of money taken and given to those centralised functions like the Territory Records Office. A bit of money comes out of CSD's funding. It is usually based on some calculation of our size—number of employees, number of records or whatever it might be—and everybody pays a bit of tax into the centre to provide those shared services, if you like.

MS ORR: Is it a whole-of-government decision that is taken elsewhere that means you are no longer liable for your portion of the pie?

Ms Rule: We contribute money to pay for the overall pie.

MS ORR: I get what you are saying; yes.

MS CASTLEY: I have a brief question on community sector reform. I note that many community groups have possible income streams, potential or current, related to the operations. Does the government run any programs to assist community groups in becoming more financially sustainable, and does this budget support any of those outcomes?

Ms Davidson: That would be the kind of work that we would be doing through both the sector sustainability project and the commissioning for outcomes project, in terms of working with the sector to prepare for and go through the process of commissioning for outcomes as a different way of contracting services.

THE CHAIR: How many staff work in the seniors area of the directorate and how many work in the veterans area—FTE?

Ms Davidson: In terms of the number of FTE for the offices for seniors and veterans, Mr Stathis will be able to answer that. Again, if we are talking about ensuring the delivery of things like the age-friendly city project or the future veterans wellbeing

strategy or framework, these are commitments that are being made by whole of government; so there will be staff working across a whole range of directorates to deliver on the actions.

Mr Stathis: There are four staff allocated to seniors and veterans in CSD.

THE CHAIR: They are not allocated to the seniors or to the veterans?

Mr Stathis: No, they work across the portfolios.

Ms Evans: Ms Lawder, in addition to those staff, in the strategic policy division, broadly, we have a pool of policy officials who work collectively around some of the broader strategies. They are not dedicated in the same way to particular portfolios. They pick up the work as it comes in; so those four staff would be supplemented or would have additional support.

THE CHAIR: It is not CSD; I presume it is Health that does ACAT assessments in the ACT. Is that correct?

Ms Rule: It is not CSD. You are probably right, but I am not 100 per cent certain.

Mr Stathis: Either Health or CHS.

Ms Rule: Mr Stathis is right; it could also be Canberra Health Services.

MS ORR: When you took on notice the veterans liaison health person, can I check the information? You were going to take communication—

Ms Davidson: We were talking about consultation with the veterans community about veterans liaison officers. I would have to check *Hansard* as to exactly what we were talking about.

MS ORR: I want to know what representations have been made to you about it in the conversations you have had, and in the advice from DVA. I think it was federally funded. So it is whatever conversations—not just the community but also the department.

Ms Davidson: I can find that out, yes.

MS ORR: If there was any advice provided to you as to what might be happening, from DVA as opposed to the veterans—

Ms Davidson: Yes, there certainly have been a number of briefs about it.

THE CHAIR: Can you give me an update about funding for reducing elder abuse? Is the funding remaining stable or is it increasing or decreasing?

Ms Davidson: That might be a question best asked of the Attorney-General in terms of admin arrangements for the funding. Certainly, the work is continuing with the network of organisations that are working to reduce abuse of older persons in the community.

THE CHAIR: Okay; I will ask the Attorney-General. The veterans expo: I enjoyed it. I have had some questions asked of me about the tender process and how that worked. What were the criteria for the tender for delivery of the veterans expo?

Ms Davidson: That went through a procurement process. Mr Stathis can speak to what the guidelines were for that procurement.

Mr Stathis: Yes, that is right.

Ms Rule: That information is published on Procurement ACT's website. Mr Stathis might not have it at hand. He may, but if he does not, it is available and it is a published tender, so it will be available on Procurement ACT.

Mr Stathis: For the veterans expo, we put out a request for quote to six organisations, the majority of which were veterans organisations. We had two responses to that. From that we ran an assessment panel, along the lines of the regular procurement guidelines, and COTA was the successful organisation.

Ms Rule: Can I clarify one issue about the veterans liaison officers? Just to be clear on the question on notice, somebody suggested—perhaps you, Minister—that that would be referred to Health. CSD cannot take that question on notice because we do not hold that information.

Ms Davidson: If you want to work out the wording for what is the question on notice to go to Health to answer—

MS ORR: We actually have Health appearing tomorrow, so we can ask Health. The question we wanted to put to CSD was about whatever CSD—

THE CHAIR: You had said you would take it on notice.

MS ORR: might have had. There is no need to take it on notice on behalf of Health. That is fine. It was about whether CSD, and the minister with responsibility for veterans, had any role or conversations with DVA, with the veterans.

THE CHAIR: On the VLO.

Ms Davidson: Okay. It might actually take a little bit more time to get the answers back, because we will need some information from CHS and some from me, as the minister for veterans.

MS ORR: We can ask Health.

THE CHAIR: We only want CSD interaction about veteran liaison officers, if any.

Ms Davidson: Okay.

THE CHAIR: We can ask Health.

Mr Stathis: I can clarify that Health has spoken to the Ministerial Advisory Council

for Veterans and their Families on a number of occasions around—

MS ORR: Relating to this matter?

Mr Stathis: Around VLOs. Ms Lawder, I think you said earlier that the council members are bound by confidentiality. In these sorts of instances, where it is about information provision, we encourage those members to talk to their networks about things.

MS ORR: They would not necessarily be bound by confidentiality?

Ms Davidson: No.

Mr Stathis: Absolutely not.

MS ORR: I am comfortable with asking Health tomorrow, but if you are happy to take on notice whether there is anything further you can add, about what considerations CSD might have had around this role—

Ms Davidson: Yes.

Ms Rule: We can answer that now, which is to say there have not been further considerations from CSD on this. I am conscious of the very short time frame for QONs this time.

MS ORR: It is always good to get an answer.

Ms Rule: We have not been involved in further discussions or advice to the minister.

MS ORR: CSD has had no role in anything to do with the veterans liaison officers apart from facilitating Health to speak to the ministerial council on a number of occasions?

Ms Davidson: Yes.

Ms Rule: That is exactly right.

MS ORR: I believe that question no longer needs to be taken on notice.

THE CHAIR: You have answered the question. If we want more, we can ask Health. We will bring the hearing to a close. Thank you very much to all of those who have appeared today and answered our questions. If you have taken any questions on notice, please provide your answers to the committee secretary within three business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank all of our witnesses who appeared today for their experience and knowledge. I thank broadcasting and Hansard for their support. If a member wishes to ask questions on notice, please upload them to the parliamentary portal as soon as practicable and no later than three business days after the hearing. The meeting is now adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 4.54 pm