



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2025-2026**

(Reference: [Inquiry into Appropriation Bill 2025-2026 and Appropriation  
\(Office of the Legislative Assembly\) Bill 2025-2026](#))

**Members:**

**MR E COCKS (Chair)**  
**MR S RATTENBURY (Deputy Chair)**  
**MS F CARRICK**  
**MS C TOUGH**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**THURSDAY, 31 JULY 2025**

**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**

Justice and Community Safety Directorate.....	795, 817
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City and Environment Directorate .....	817, 843, 880
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## **Privilege statement**

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*Amended 20 May 2013*

## **The committee met at 9.06 am.**

### **Appearances:**

Paterson, Dr Marisa, Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform

### **Justice and Community Safety Directorate**

Johnson, Mr Ray APM, Acting Director-General

Close, Ms Leanne APM, Commissioner, ACT Corrective Services

Taylor-Dayus, Mr James ACM, Acting Assistant Commissioner, Custodial Operations, ACT Corrective Services

Thompson, Ms Leigh, Acting Assistant Commissioner, Offender Reintegration, ACT Corrective Services

**THE CHAIR:** Good morning and welcome to the public hearings of the Select Committee on Estimates 2025-2026 for its inquiry into Appropriation Bill 2025-2026 and Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2025-2026. The committee will today hear from Dr Marisa Paterson MLA, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services and Minister for Gaming Reform; the Inspector of Custodial Services; Ms Tara Cheyne MLA, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy; and Ms Suzanne Orr, Minister for Climate Change, Energy and Water.

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

This hearing is a legal proceeding of the Assembly and has the same standing as proceedings of the Assembly itself. Therefore, today's evidence attracts parliamentary privilege. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of the Assembly. The hearing is 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 Dr Marisa Paterson MLA in her capacity as the Minister for Corrections. We also welcome the officials in attendance. Please note that as witnesses you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. As we are not inviting opening statements, we will proceed to questions. Dr Paterson, you had—

**Dr Paterson:** I have something I would like to say. In yesterday's police hearing, I read verbatim two emails between myself and Ms Castley, and in one of those emails I mentioned the name of one of her staff members. I would like to apologise for doing

that. I was just reading in the heat of the moment and did not mean to identify any staff member. If possible, and if Hansard can retract the name from the transcript yesterday, that would be appropriate. I will not mention the name again, but I do apologise to that individual for mentioning their name in the hearing yesterday. It was unintentional and heat of the moment and I apologise.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Dr Paterson. We will go to questions. I want to go straight off to the total cost of Corrective Services. It looks like it will increase by \$7 million this year to nearly \$132 million, and at the heart of this is the AMC. There seems to be a constant flow of information about the failings of the AMC. It includes media, FOI responses and reports from official visitors. What is the plan for 2025-26 to address the many problems in the AMC?

**Dr Paterson:** That is a great question, Mr Cocks. Thank you for it. As you are aware, the AMC is a very, very complex environment and has many, many challenges. It is also a workplace that has significant oversight—I would say probably more than any other workplace in the territory—which is highly appropriate and right. We have many reporting systems and many avenues for reports. So there are a lot of recommendations and a lot of focus on continuous improvement within the AMC.

I would like to begin by saying that there is incredible work that is carried out in our prison system by our Corrective Services. The people who work in these services do an amazingly hard job and every day put the care and safety of detainees and themselves first. So I would like to highlight the work that they do in keeping our community safe and the major contribution they make to community safety. I will hand to Commissioner Close and probably, Dragana. Do you want to speak about the changes in funding over the last year, Ms Close, and what the focus will be over the next year?

**Ms Close:** As the minister said, the corrective services portfolio is very complex. The Alexander Maconochie Centre, a facility that has so many different priority areas, is an aging facility. We make a lot of decisions in relation to facilities management and infrastructure development to make sure that we are fit for purpose to provide supports for the care and custody of detainees.

We have a lot of focus over this next 12 months on education and employment pathways for detainees. But the biggest challenge really for us in managing the care and custody of people is their health issues. We have people who have severe medical conditions—physical and mental health issues. So we are focused on trying to ensure that they have the right supports and mechanisms there. We do that in partnership with various organisations, such as Justice Health and Winnunga Nimmityjah. So there is a big focus on those issues and getting them ready to then participate in various programs, activities et cetera. It is costly to manage such a facility that has 24/7 support and management of over 440 detainees today.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay. To be a bit more specific, the official visitors have commented on the inadequate focus on rehabilitation and reintegration in the AMC, and that this in part lies behind high recidivism rates. How will you be addressing this problem?

**Ms Close:** We have specific people focused on what the plans are now for a long-term sustainable rehabilitation and reintegration focus for detainees. One of the key issues to

be aware of, though, is that the length of time detainees are with us varies greatly. Our population at the moment is more than 50 per cent of people on remand. We have to manage a very complex environment where we have women, we have males, we have max, high, medium and low classification of detainees. We are managing accommodation according to those needs. We have separation of at-risk detainees. We have detainees with disabilities. Managing and moving all of those parts is very difficult.

To make sure that they have access to their health services, there are hundreds of health appointments every week in the AMC, but also people get taken out from the AMC to the hospital.

**THE CHAIR:** Coming back to the question of rehabilitation and reintegration—

**Ms Close:** We have a lot of programs available. We have criminogenic programs such as drug and alcohol diversion. We have a residential rehabilitation facility in the AMC. We have domestic and family violence programs. That is on the criminogenic needs. We then are trying to assist people to gain skills through various training qualifications—certificates I, II, III and IV—with different types of educational opportunities, such as building and construction or other programs which will give them some hope of employment as they leave the AMC.

**Dr Paterson:** As I said, there is the new board.

**Ms Close:** Yes, we have established a new board, the Employment Integration and Rehabilitation Board. That board is established to look at what programs have been successful, what the needs are and what the ACT community employment options look like for people moving through the AMC and potentially, partnerships with organisations and educational facilities, which we already have—but trying to strengthen and improve those so that people are equipped with certain skills before they leave. We are also, though, managing people who are on shorter sentences potentially. It really is a difficult matching game to try to understand which detainees are interested, willing and wanting to do different employment pathways, and then us making sure that we can offer as much as we can.

We also have a whole lot of other support activities and programs for them—for example, Healthy Relationships. There is a list of different programs available to detainees to help them to manage themselves as they move through not just the AMC but also back into community.

**THE CHAIR:** Other than the new board, how much of that is new this year?

**Ms Close:** Not much of it is new this year. We are looking at strengthening what we have already been doing—for example, with literacy and numeracy. A lot of our detainees come with very low levels of educational background and have difficulty reading and writing. So there are programs to support them doing that. As I said, we are looking at how we strengthen what we have already have. There are lots of activities and lots of educational programs already on offer. We are just continuing to improve on those.

**THE CHAIR:** Again to be specific, there was a recent incident in which a female contractor was placed in a dangerous situation with a group of detainees. Was this an isolated incident or have there been other cases of contractors and other visitors being placed in dangerous situations?

**Ms Close:** I have only been in this role for six or seven months, and it was isolated, as much as I am aware. I understand that the detainees were not meant to enter the area that they did where the contractor was and they were removed as soon as it became apparent that they were in this area inappropriately. We managed the situation. We responded to the company. A contractor or their staff who comes into the AMC have training in relation to safety and security as well. We are making sure that we reinforce that for every contractor that comes on site.

**THE CHAIR:** If you are not 100 per cent sure, perhaps you can take on notice whether there have been other incidents and, if so, how many and when?

**Ms Close:** Over what period of time, Mr Cocks?

**THE CHAIR:** I think probably the past three years would be sufficient.

**Ms Close:** I will take it on notice.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Mr Johnson:** I just wanted to double check in terms of the type of incident, because it is a place where there are lots of different incidents and they all have different natures to them. Just to be clear: so what you are talking about is particularly related to contractors and external workers coming on site?

**THE CHAIR:** Contractors and any other visitors?

**Mr Johnson:** Visitors?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, the question was about contractors and any other visitors.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Ms Close, you talked in your remarks about the AMC being an aging facility. Given it only opened in 2008, I am really interested in what you mean by that because it is about 16 years old.

**Ms Close:** Of course, Mr Rattenbury. It is aging in that it is a 24/7 facility that requires a lot of maintenance and a lot of support for upgrades and the damage that is done. Often detainees do not respect the facility. So we are constantly looking at different ways that we can provide new technology and new support for the actual facility itself. We are looking at new ways that we can potentially supplement by solar power and other things like that. In terms of that part of it, there are facilities that are being built with very different modern amenities in different jurisdictions that we are aware of. That is what I meant by aging. Because of the wear and tear of a 24/7 facility that makes the facility age much more quickly.

**Dr Paterson:** I would also add to that. As we spoke about in the police hearing

yesterday, best practice in these facilities changes over time. I think that there are aspects of the AMC that would be designed differently in this day and age. There has been a lot of work done on the AMC master plan over the last couple of years. As part of this budget process, we have received funding over the next two years of \$2.4 million to start some of that work.

The highest priority is the health infrastructure—looking to upgrade the Hume Health Centre. There is \$900,000 for design costs relating to these upgrades. That will also see an expansion of two new satellite health clinics in the AMC. It can be very difficult and timely to get detainees from where they are housed to the Hume Health Centre. There are security challenges with that. There is also a very aged population cohort within AMC. This also presents challenges in terms of getting them to the healthcare centres. The model of healthcare service provision in AMC is changing, and we are excited about this budget funding to see those changes start to be implemented.

**THE CHAIR:** Just on that, you were talking about what other facilities have. The only specific thing I think I heard you mention was solar power. In the ACT, we are, presumably, at 100 per cent net renewable anyway. Is that really the highest priority?

**Dr Paterson:** No. No, sorry—

**THE CHAIR:** Also, it sounds like what you are saying is that it is just not the most modern facility.

**Mr Johnson:** There are two really clear examples. One is the detainee telephone system. When it was implemented into the system at the beginning of the AMC, it was cutting edge. Obviously, other systems have overtaken it. So we have just spent some money on upgrading it. We want to do some more work in cell technology, which is becoming the thing that we want to get to. That requires some infrastructure work. There are also things like the security system. A little electronic security system was put in 2008. Obviously, with changes over time, we had an upgrade to make it more modern. They are a couple of the other examples.

**THE CHAIR:** So, almost more than the facility, it sounds like what is aging is some of the technology.

**Mr Johnson:** I think that is probably the reality. The facility is the facility, but at the moment it still runs on gas, for example. We want to modernise that to electricity. There is a range of things like that that go to the nature of the facility. Bricks and mortar might well stay standing, but it is all the rest of the infrastructure that sits around it that supports the workers. A lot of that basic infrastructure also supports the work of reintegration and support for detainees and so forth—for example, education spaces and heating and cooling et cetera.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Yesterday, I wanted to ask where electronic monitoring is up to.

**Dr Paterson:** A lot of policy work has been undertaken and will continue to be undertaken on electronic monitoring. We are going through and assessing a whole range of different models. There are obvious opportunities. A lot of other jurisdictions that



have had electronic monitoring for a long time are now focused on bail electronic monitoring and for high-risk family violence offences. You would be well aware of the Tasmanian model, which is a very intensive monitoring system. We have been looking at that and other models in terms of parole and other potential options around home detention and those types of things, and looking at where the best pilot situation may be in terms of starting electronic monitoring in the ACT.

**MR RATTENBURY:** When you say “location”, I presume you mean cohort or class of people that it would be applied to—not a physical local?

**Dr Paterson:** No; the cohort of individuals—whether they are on parole or on bail.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I am pleased to hear about the policy work. What is the timeline for moving to procurement?

**Dr Paterson:** We will go back to cabinet later on in the year with a proposal to take this further.

**MR RATTENBURY:** The Chief Minister was very quick to come out, I think, in August last year and announce progress on this. We are now in July 2025. Do we not have a greater sense of a timeline at this stage?

**Dr Paterson:** We are progressing through the policy work. It is a really detailed scheme. There will need to be a lot of legislation that is introduced to implement this scheme. We want to get it right. We have seen other jurisdictions have fairly significant security breaches in the management of private electronic monitoring—in Victoria and New South Wales. Understanding and assessing all that, we do not want it to be a situation where the implementation is rushed and there are adverse consequences. We see the potential and opportunity with electronic monitoring and want to get the scheme right when we do go to implement in the ACT.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I am conscious of the conversation we just had about the facilities master planning for the AMC. What relationship do you see between electronic monitoring and expansion of the AMC? There are clearly options where more people can be in the community if there are options. Prison infrastructure is very expensive. Do you have a view on the best way to balance those two things?

**Dr Paterson:** I think that we do. We want the balance; that is exactly right. There will be instances where it is more appropriate for high-risk offenders. The courts will determine the appropriateness of whether they should be in the community on bail or whether they should be detained within the AMC on remand. The decision about who those people are and the risks associated to the community are a decision for the courts.

I think it is really important that electronic monitoring offers the opportunity that people may be able to remain in the community. But I also want to stress that, if someone is bailed, they should be bailed and electronic monitoring is a tool that is used, rather than a perception that electronic monitoring will keep the community safe. These are some of the issues that we are working through at the moment. Do you want to chat further about?

**Mr Johnson:** I think the point to be made is that electronic monitoring is only a means to an end. I think sometimes a conversation can come to electronic monitoring as a solver of problems. The work that is done around how you use it best is going to be the really important work that is now underway. Like the minister pointed out, there are lessons from other jurisdictions in the good and the bad, and I think we have an opportunity now to learn as best we can from other jurisdictions' experiences.

We have seen on occasion where it is gone wrong in other jurisdictions, and inevitably you carry a risk in terms of allowing people in the community on monitoring arrangements and what you do. You need to contemplate what services and systems you put around them and what protections you put to the community on those occasions, and which one you might want to start with—because there are a number of places where you can use electronic monitoring to build the system. But, again, it is a means to an end, I think.

What we are doing is trying to make sure we understand what the policy need is, where we best focus as we develop thinking on this, and where we apply the technology to. I guess the technology is arguably the easiest bit, because there is a number of providers for the technology. It is how we implement it in an effective, safe way for the community.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Do you have a priority cohort for that process at this time?

**Dr Paterson:** No; that is what we are working through at the moment—so not one to talk about.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Sure.

**Mr Johnson:** And they all carry a different level of risk, I guess, is the point to make. So there might be greater value but greater risk in different cohorts, and there might be an order of batting, if you like, in where you start on that journey. Maybe that is the simplest way to contemplate the work that is now being done to go, “Where do we start on the journey?”

**Dr Paterson:** But there have been feasibility studies and an expression of interest from providers for electronic monitoring. All of that work is informing the policy discussions that are underway now. When we do have a model that we will present to the Assembly and community, we believe it will be evidence-based and be the most appropriate model going forward.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Is there funding in this budget for the development of the electronic monitoring work or the staffing needed to undertake that work?

**Dr Paterson:** They are within the existing funding for JACS.

**Mr Johnson:** There was funding provided in previous budgets.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Yes. Is that still available?

**Mr Johnson:** The money is not available, but JACS is managing it internally. So we

still have capacity to work on that project through the legal policy and program team. So we are still focused on it.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Are the staff who were working on that project still on board, or did they have to go with the end of that funding?

**Mr Johnson:** If you are talking about individuals with names attached to them, they are still in the system and still doing work on it, yes.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I am obviously not trying to get the names of individuals; it is more about the expertise.

**Mr Johnson:** The expertise is still in place.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Okay.

**MS CARRICK:** But does that include funding for implementation? Will JACS be able to cover the implementation phase?

**Dr Paterson:** There will need to be a budget process for implementation.

**MR RATTENBURY:** So we are looking at at least next July if we have to wait for another budget decision?

**Dr Paterson:** Potentially.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I take your point, Dr Paterson, that the courts will make decisions on where people go. But—and this is perhaps more of a comment—my experience is that judges also need options available to them.

**Dr Paterson:** That is right. We want to give them more options. We want to build our justice system so that it has a range of options, because we know the impacts of sending people to prison are long term and we want to ensure that we have a whole range of options for sentencing.

**THE CHAIR:** We are, to some extent, talking about an activity that is driven by detainee numbers. In budget statement D, the estimated average daily cost per detainee was considerably lower than targeted but seemed to be due to higher than budgeted detainee numbers. Can you outline how you estimate the detainee numbers for the budget?

**Mr Johnson:** I can have a go. The population of the AMC is quite uncertain. It has moved over the last five to 10 years between as low as 370 right through to one point in 2018-29 where I think we had up to 450 or something. So it moves around quite a bit. Because the population is open to change—and, of course, a percentage of the population now is remand and depends on court decisions and so forth—it is very hard to actually nail a number in terms of what it is going to cost. It is not so much the cost of the system, because, inevitably, you still have to have staff and you still have to heat buildings et cetera regardless of there is one, 10 or 50 people in there.

**THE CHAIR:** There are a lot of fixed costs.

**Mr Johnson:** So there are costs that are a bit irrelevant to how many physical people there are—not all but some. The number actually changes depending on what the average number is, and there is a counter methodology that goes with that. During the year, there is a calculation applied to that in terms of working out what the cost per detainee per day is. All jurisdictions report it using broadly the same methodology through the Report on Government Services model. We also pick it up as a strategic indicator. So there is a range of ways to come to it. Am I answering your question?

**THE CHAIR:** It sounds like something that might be easier to put on notice—what that methodology is for forecasting numbers.

**Mr Johnson:** Certainly. I think methodology would be easy enough to put on notice.

**THE CHAIR:** Wonderful. In thinking of the longer term, have you undertaken work to estimate AMC detainee numbers in five or 10 years time—noting the uncertainty?

**Mr Johnson:** There is uncertainty to it. There are technical forecasting methodologies which have been used in the past and projected populations. We have not applied those methodologies because they proved to be quite inaccurate for such a small population. Leanne might speak to this, because we did have a discussion a few months or so ago about starting to do some of that work. Leanne, do you want to speak to that?

**Ms Close:** Yes. We have a very small research and data team who really delve into our available data and what the trends in the past have looked like—where we started with our detainee population and how that has changed—putting an overlay of ABS data and things out into the future for us to assess what the population looks like, what the changing crime types are and et cetera. Domestic and family violence, for example, has had a significant increase in the last few years in terms of people who were remanded or sentenced and serving time in the AMC. We are going to do a project on this very issue after we finish annual reports gathering of data. The other data you talk about there, as Mr Johnson said, the Report on Government Services, also has specific methodology that we follow, of course.

**Mr Johnson:** Sorry; perhaps to complete that question, I think it is useful to understand that you can make decisions that impact on the population. As an example, over the last five years there has been the work on counter-recidivism trends. There is an assumption that your trend is a certain way. Making some of those calls that is has reduced our recidivism rate has shifted it that way. So there is a bit of that in the mix.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, it does not account for policy decisions.

**Mr Johnson:** That is right. You can nearly make a line that talks about population growth, but we can say in the last five that population growth in the AMC is not the same.

**THE CHAIR:** That makes sense. Will this project that you were just talking about be met from existing resources?

**Ms Close:** Yes, it will.

**THE CHAIR:** Just to confirm my understanding, it sounds like there was some dedicated funding for the electronic monitoring work but that has come to an end. So you have kept the individuals. How have you made up the difference? Presumably, that means that funding has dropped if it has not been continued in some form.

**Mr Johnson:** The work has been done inside the directorate, and so it has not impacted on Correction's capacity. We have maintained the staffing. It becomes a question of priorities. We will just work around the priorities in terms of delivering that part of the service. The other the point I would make is that we had a body doing a lot of the project work that went to getting us to the point where we are now. The policy work actually requires a different skill set, and our legal policy and program's people who think about legal policy are also attuned in this body of work.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I want to come back to the timing question. In May 2024, immediately after a national cabinet meeting, the Chief Minister announced that the ACT would be implementing electronic monitoring. This followed the discussions at that forum about that gender-based violence. At the time, he said that ankle bracelets would be introduced "certainly within the space of months, not years". That was the Chief Minister's quote in May last year. How is the Chief Minister's position consistent with the failure to provide any funding in this budget to get the program underway?

**Dr Paterson:** I would say that the work is underway. It is incredibly complex work and we are working on the right model going forward. We want this scheme to work. It is very high risk if we get it wrong. So it is important that we do this properly and have the right sort of pilot cohort to begin the trial of electronic monitoring.

The other thing I would say is that other jurisdictions have had electronic monitoring for a long time and so they have quite advanced systems. We do not yet. So we have to set up an entirely new system from scratch, which will require a lot of training of police and corrections officers and also policy development, courts and that type of thing. So it is a pretty substantial piece of work to get this scheme implemented.

**MR RATTENBURY:** So was the Chief Minister wrong to say it could be set up within months?

**Dr Paterson:** The work was action straightaway from his words and there was budget money allocated to this work. This work is very—

**MR RATTENBURY:** But no budget money allocated this year. Has the Chief Minister's position changed or is the government not as focused as he wanted it to be?

**Dr Paterson:** No; the government is very focused on getting electronic monitoring implemented.

**Mr Johnson:** Perhaps I can correct the record in part. I have just been advised that we rolled over some funding that was unspent and was related to Aboriginal business case money. So we have a small amount of money for this year as well.

**THE CHAIR:** That is helping them—

**Mr Johnson:** That helps—yes.

**MS CARRICK:** I have been reading the Jumbunna report. There is the AMC section. Common themes are boredom and the lack of a structured day and purposeful activities. It says:

Boredom and inactivity in the correctional setting encourages drug use, undermines rehabilitation objectives and threatens security and safety.

I understand that, regarding drug use, there are risks of health issues like hep B. Will you consider implementing a needle exchange program?

**Dr Paterson:** Needle exchange programs have been discussed on multiple occasions in the last Assembly, and before that, I think. At this point, there are no moves to introduce a needle exchange program. Is there anything further that you would like to add?

**Ms Close:** Only in relation to services and supports we provide to detainees in relation to hepatitis C. We are working in partnership with Hepatitis ACT at the AMC, but also with Community Corrections. In the AMC, there has been testing underway over the last six months to determine how many detainees have hepatitis C or have had hepatitis C in the past. The Justice Health team provides support services—medical, education et cetera—for people who are positive to hepatitis C. We are continuing that, as I said, in the community. We have people who attend to report to Community Corrections, based on their parole or other obligations for reporting. We also have Hepatitis ACT working with us in Community Operations to provide that service to people in the community.

**MS CARRICK:** As you work your way through the Jumbunna report—and you have governance arrangements—will you keep an open mind to the possibility of having a needle exchange program in the context of goodwill and having better outcomes for Indigenous people in implementing the recommendations of the report?

**Dr Paterson:** We will always look at the best evidence and the safety and security of AMC in assessing all of these issues. It will remain a live conversation.

**MS CARRICK:** Thank you. It also says that we need to “focus on the demand side of drug use through improvements to programs, training, education and a structured day to alleviate the boredom in the AMC and to provide for daily routines and meaningful activities, including work”. How do you look at a structured day and reducing boredom to try to reduce the demand for drugs?

**Ms Close:** There are a lot of different activities and opportunities for detainees to participate in at the AMC on a daily basis. For example, there is a range of courses that we have delivered over the last 12 months and continue to do so. I mentioned earlier some of the certificate IIs. We have certificate II in construction. We have certificate III in business and certificate II in workplace skills. We have some other programs, such as first aid programs that are delivered for detainees. We have barista type programs. We have safe food handling and safe work practices. There is a list of about

20 or 30 different activities and courses. As well as that, we have our criminogenic program. People can undertake, as I mentioned earlier, domestic and family violence programs, aggression programs, and drug and alcohol programs specific to their potential needs. If people are on remand, they can volunteer to participate in those programs. If they have been sentenced, we encourage them to participate in those programs.

As well as that, during the day, as I mentioned earlier, we have health services and supports operating out of the AMC in a facility called the Hume Health Centre. That is staffed by Justice Health and Winnunga. We overlay that with other detainees who are before the courts. We are moving people between the courts and the facility on a daily basis. There are many different issues that detainees have to deal with on a daily basis, and we support them to make sure they have what they need on a particular day.

**Dr Paterson:** Some of the challenges around the environment at AMC include that you have to have very structured times when detainees can go from activity to activity. That requires staff to move people throughout the prison. It becomes a quite complex logistics exercise to get people to where they need to be, between medical appointments and this type of thing as well. It is a perpetual challenge that AMC staff are very committed to addressing.

**MS CARRICK:** What about culturally-sensitive programs?

**Ms Close:** We have a significant number of culturally-sensitive programs and programs specifically for First Nations detainees. The programs that I talked about in my last comments are all available to First Nations detainees. As well as that, we have some specific culturally-sensitive programs, such as Intensive Case Management, which is a program for detainees with high need as they prepare to leave the facility and go back into community. It is intensive because there are wraparound supports. That is undertaken in partnership with Yeddung Mura.

We have Yarning Circles. We have elders and community leader visitation programs and a cultural arts program. We have a mothers, family and culture program. We have transitional accommodation supports for them. Recently, in NAIDOC Week we had an open family day for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander detainees, where we had, unusually, all the women, men and various classifications of detainees together. Their families came in. We provided opportunities for support services to come in and bring information so that detainees and their families could access specific information that might suit their needs.

**MS CARRICK:** It is interesting. You can reel off a number of things that you do, but it seems to be at odds with the report. I do not know whether you have had a chance to read the Jumbunna report, the section for AMC, because it came out just yesterday, but it would be nice to be able to acknowledge what the report says and how it will be addressed in the future. It has some pretty damning things about systemic racism and—

**Dr Paterson:** Ms Carrick, as you are aware, the report was released yesterday. I very much acknowledge the authors of the report, the community's contribution and everyone who was interviewed and contributed to the report. It is a significant piece of work that will have a lasting impact in the territory. It is very welcome. There will be a

whole-of-government response. As you can see, there are a lot of parts to the system that contribute to the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our system, so it will require a whole-of-government response. So, rather than just going down to specific recommendations in the report, the government will respond in due course as a whole.

**MS CARRICK:** I appreciate that, but, given the circumstances—that we are here today and we are talking about the issues in the report—it would be nice to be able to acknowledge and talk about some of the stats and recommendations in it. There are some pretty damning things about systemic racism, the high percentage of Aboriginals, the use of force, strip searches and segregation.

**MR EMERSON:** You listed a number of programs. One of the lines in the report is:

First Nations male and female detainees in the AMC strongly value cultural programs and we were disturbed to see many popular programs had been discontinued or had limited access. The problem particularly impacted on First Nations women.

Could you take on notice or answer now with a list of any programs that have been discontinued in, say, the last five years that are specific to First Nations detainees and/or have limited access?

**Ms Close:** Absolutely, Mr Emerson. We can take that on notice. But I would like to add at this point, though, that, when we work in partnership with community organisations, for example, some of their programs do not continue either. We are reliant on Aboriginal organisations in particular to provide some of those supports. It is a partnership arrangement. Whether we are continuing them or they are available in the community, often there are other factors, not just what we do in Corrective Services. I will take that on notice.

**MR EMERSON:** I imagine that some people might be listening and feeling that you, in that response, are shifting the blame to them a bit, which I do not think you are attempting to do, but it sounded a bit that way to me.

**Ms Close:** No. I am sorry; I do not agree with you. We are working really hard. There is the list that I just read out about what we are doing with community groups and with First Nations detainees. I absolutely acknowledge the Jumbunna recommendations, and we will work through those. Where I disagree is that we are doing a lot in ACT Corrective Services and we will continue to do a lot, and we will continue to learn and improve on what we can do. In terms of your specific question, I have asked that question myself and I have looked at some of the statistics. I cannot remember the data, but we have that material and I will take it on notice.

**MR EMERSON:** Thank you.

**Mr Johnson:** A point to be made in terms of that request is that going back five years puts us in the middle of COVID. Having had the joy of working through managing, with my colleagues, the AMC during that period, a lot of programs were very hard to continue as a result of the COVID times. In the answer, we might frame the fact that



COVID would have had a significant impact on the availability of programs.

**MR EMERSON:** Sure. You might provide reasons and, if one of the reasons is that the organisation no longer exists, that is totally fair. You might want to include reasons for each program having been discontinued.

**Mr Johnson:** Indeed. And there was a period when a review was done, prior to the current commissioner, that looked at Indigenous programs and the view from some detainees that they were not quite working. We did a review and some did not continue as a result. We pick all that up. We will take the question on notice.

**MR EMERSON:** Thank you.

**MS TOUGH:** I want to pull together some of the things that have already been said this morning and what the Attorney-General mentioned yesterday about recidivism and boredom—the whole picture. We have talked this morning a bit about some of the vocational training courses that are available, but I understand the CIT does not have a presence at the AMC. Is it provided by a private RTO? How does that relationship work?

**Ms Close:** Several years ago, as I understand it, we went out for tender to find providers, whether that was one large provider of support for education and employment pathways or a range of smaller ones. The tenders that we received from some groups were quite exorbitant. We have a range of private, smaller businesses that provide some of those supports at the AMC now. We continue to look at that and the partnership potentials with the CIT et cetera. We will receive funding for that this financial year to have some people look specifically at that issue.

**MS TOUGH:** Thank you. While detainees are in the AMC, do programs exist to help them upskill, retain and improve basic things like literacy and numeracy?

**Ms Close:** Yes. We have had literacy and numeracy programs in the AMC for many years. One specific person comes in to provide support as well. That funding also looks specifically at how we can have a broader program that is more technology based. We are also doing some work in relation to technology in the facility at the moment. Other jurisdictions have implemented tablets for detainees to use. Tablets would allow us to provide a lot more educational resources to every detainee, but at the moment we are working on how we implement wi-fi in the facility. When we talk about an ageing facility, there are things like technologies that have moved on, such as the provision of wi-fi to enable us to use those sorts of technologies.

**Dr Paterson:** The other thing is that we have \$200,000 for a detainee literacy and numeracy assessment and intensive learning pilot, which will begin very shortly. That is also something that will give us a good indication of the literacy and numeracy needs of detainees going forward. As the commissioner said, other jurisdictions have moved to in-cell technology, with tablets, which I think is a very exciting opportunity to implement within the AMC. Not only does it offer educational opportunities for detainees; it also offers opportunities for them to communicate with family and maintain relationships with community. There is a lot happening in that space and we will continue to focus on it.

**MS TOUGH:** Would you be able to estimate, perhaps on notice, how many current detainees have not had the chance to participate in any training or work while in the AMC? I know numbers fluctuate. Sometimes the programs wait until there are enough people to run them or people miss out because of the timing and when they are in there.

**Mr Johnson:** It would be a potentially difficult question to answer, partly because there could be a number of reasons for not running a program—one, the period of time they are in custody, and, two, their decision to not want to be part of a program, as opposed to wanting something and not getting it. I know what you are getting at. I just do not know whether we will have the data to know that.

**MS TOUGH:** There is no way of knowing whether someone was offered but did not take it up or just did not have the opportunity?

**Ms Close:** We would have to look at every single detainee record manually. We keep that in our case management system against each person, as opposed to a database where we would be able to simply pull out that information.

**Dr Paterson:** Perhaps we could look at whether there was oversubscription to particular courses. If there is any data on that, that might go some way to—

**MS TOUGH:** Yes—anything that is available that is not too hard to go through, by going through every detainee's record. I do not want to do that to you.

**Ms Close:** We keep data in relation to how many people attend programs, and we also keep some information in relation to detainees who enrolled in programs and then failed to turn up. Again, I will take that on notice, Ms Tough. It depends on which programs you mean as well. As I said, we have a lot of programs on offer. We keep data on the criminogenic programs in particular. I would have to take on notice whether we have data in relation to the general activities that I started listing earlier.

**MS TOUGH:** Perhaps you could look, and if the data is not there the data is not there. If you could look, that would be helpful. I know there is a bakery and a laundry in the AMC.

**Ms Close:** Yes.

**MS TOUGH:** What proportion of detainees work in those? And is the work they do able to support other agencies or is it just internal?

**Ms Close:** I will ask Mr Taylor-Daycus to provide some specific information in relation to the question. I would also touch on the fact that, because of the nature of the AMC, having women and men, we have to roster groups to go into those facilities and work. But a lot of great work that is provided by detainees happens at the AMC.

**Mr Taylor-Daycus:** The bakery specifically provides work for both male and female detainees. They work on shifts. The laundry has predominantly male detainees, again working on a shift basis. We do not provide any outgoing scope for other agencies; it is all internal. It provides bread, cakes et cetera that we use in daily meals.

**MS TOUGH:** Are there barriers to it being expanded to help support other agencies or be commercialised?

**Mr Taylor-Daycus:** In terms of a commercial operation?

**MS TOUGH:** Yes, to help detainees experience having a job working for a commercial corporation, so that, when they are released, they are able to continue that experience.

**Mr Taylor-Daycus:** The bakery already offers cert II qualifications. I am not sure about the laundry. I do not think they do, but certainly the bakery does. If we start to reach outside of the fence, for want of a better phrase, we would start to encroach on community operations—suppliers in the community. There is competitive neutrality. We would have to be pretty careful in that space.

**Ms Close:** But we are looking at industry options to say: how can we better use the facility, but also partnerships with other organisations in the community? We do that already through our Transitional Release Centre, as an example, and some of the certificate IIs and IIIs that we have in construction. We bring in people from community who have expertise and can deliver training and support so that detainees get those sorts of certificates which make them work ready when they leave the AMC. Transitional release is another area where we have a lot of partnerships. We continue to try to increase the number of workplaces, businesses, who will accept people who are in transitional release to work with them, with a view to get them permanent employment once they have left the AMC.

**MS TOUGH:** Thank you. Noting the time, I have a few more supps that I will put on notice to help the committee.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Miss Nuttall, you have a supplementary?

**MISS NUTTALL:** Yes. We heard from a recently incarcerated Torres Strait Islander woman that women are being offered hairdressing and pole dancing, and men are being offered trade certificates. I am really interested in understanding what the current program offering is for women versus men and how you might explain her observation.

**Dr Paterson:** I will ask Ms Thompson to explain a bit more detail about some of the women's programs specifically. Women in the AMC are able to access all of the various criminogenic programs and other educational type programs. Specific work has been undertaken over the last few years to support women in the AMC, noting they have different needs. They have access to some of those. I will ask Ms Thompson to expand on that.

**Ms Thompson:** Thank you for your question. The women have quite a lot of opportunities to attend education and programs from remand through to sentencing. The women-specific programs we partner with include Fearless Women and So Let's Talk About It, which talks about healthy relationships to try to equip them in dealing with relationships and bringing up children. We had Shine for Kids come in, which was a really successful program. Women were able to have their kids come along. The Office for Women comes in. The Sexual Health and Family Planning Clinic ACT comes in.

We have the Women's Justice Network, the Yindyamarra cultural program, and When Push Comes to Shove. So there are a lot of supports for women. We also have one that talks about hepatitis C. We have Let's Talk about Liver Health. That is done by Hepatitis ACT. We really focus on having professionals come in as an in-reach service to support us in supporting women throughout their whole journey.

**MISS NUTTALL:** To confirm, they have the same access to, for example, the kinds of trade programs that are being offered to men in the AMC?

**Ms Thompson:** I think that they would, if the numbers are appropriate and we have the trainers to come in and offer them.

**Ms Close:** The number of women in the AMC is generally quite low, so it becomes a logistical issue to make sure we have sufficient numbers who are interested in a particular certificate or trade. We are also looking at, potentially, technology and other things so that people can work through some of the non-physical aspects—using a tablet and educational materials. But we would have to take on notice how many are enrolled in any other certificate programs.

**MISS NUTTALL:** It might be possible, in the interests of time, to take on notice a comparative list of programs that are made available to men and women in AMC.

**Dr Paterson:** Just to demonstrate some of the challenges, on 1 July this year, the AMC had 17 women in custody and 14 were on remand. Only three were sentenced. So it becomes very difficult to offer a wide range of programs to women. That is a challenge that I am aware of. Having portfolio responsibility as Minister for Women, I see that as a priority, in terms of how we support women who are in custody. There was the electronic monitoring discussion. There are opportunities and advantages with the Community Corrections programs that we can offer. That is also really important.

**MISS NUTTALL:** I wonder how it might be possible to communicate that to detainees. Given the rostering challenges in practice, I can imagine what the available offerings might seem to be like to the women detained. They might feel like a bit of an afterthought. I hope that is not actually the case, but I would be interested to see how you would be able to communicate that to detainees.

**Ms Close:** There is a lot of communication with detainees. We have individual case managers as well. As every detainee enters the AMC, they are allocated a case manager who helps to support them through their time in the facility, including the supports they have, not just in the AMC but also, potentially, in community, where they have family or other commitments. That conversation does happen and happens very regularly.

**Mr Johnson:** Without labouring the point, I note the ratio of only three sentenced women. We are running at about 80 per cent remanded women. The time on remand is sometimes less than three to four months. Movement in and out of the place is unfortunately quite regular, so it makes it really challenging. We are contemplating how we can better support people on remand and try to reduce the remand population. We do not fully have the answers to those questions yet—how we can do the best we can by the small cohort of women on remand. That is an important part of the work to be done.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Perhaps, in taking that question on notice, it would be useful to understand the difference between theoretically being able to access the course and, because of the small numbers, it is never going to happen.

**Ms Close:** Of course. We deliver all of the various programs that Ms Thompson talked about in the women's centre. The women's centre is obviously isolated, as you know, Mr Rattenbury. We have to juggle and balance it: what do they need in a particular period of time, as well as the criminogenic requirements they may have.

**THE CHAIR:** Perhaps we could also find out how many women have applied for courses that they have not actually been able to get into.

**Ms Close:** Thanks, Mr Cocks. I will take it on notice. Again, I am not sure whether we have all that data, but I will certainly assess the data we have available to provide.

**THE CHAIR:** It goes to the same issue of working out whether people are actually getting into the courses that they need to progress.

**Ms Close:** Of course.

**MISS NUTTALL:** I am keen to ask about the Justice Housing Program. Could you confirm how much you have invested in the Justice Housing Program this budget?

**Dr Paterson:** We might have to take the cost of the Justice Housing Program on notice.

**MISS NUTTALL:** If you are taking that on notice, could I also ask whether you are able to inform us how many properties this funding will cover, how many people you expect to be able to accommodate, and the cohorts. I am interested in understanding whether this is meeting the current and forecasted need for Justice Housing.

**Dr Paterson:** Yes; we will—

**Mr Johnson:** I can probably talk generally. There is some material that we can get together. The Justice Housing Program has been in place for a little while. Regarding numbers, there were 10 general properties for Justice Housing and there is a particular program for Aboriginal people. That is a separate program. Both of those have services that are provided by external providers. We will have the number of people who are going through that. I can hand back to Leanne to give you those.

**Ms Close:** Ms Nuttall, in the 2024-25 financial year, in the Justice Housing Program and in the specific First Nations program for housing, 83 men and nine women were transitioned, including First Nations people. I do not have housing numbers with me. I can certainly take that on notice. There are a lot of referrals and assessments. It is also important to note that, if someone has a parole period, they cannot enter into a parole order under the Sentence Administration Board's monitoring without housing attached to that parole order. There is a lot of work in making sure that detainees have access to housing as they transition out of the AMC.

**Mr Johnson:** I think your question also went to sufficiency. It is important to

contemplate the fact that not all people who come out of custody need accommodation. It is not necessarily about trying to meet the need of everyone; it is about trying to meet the need of those most in need, so we can transition them back into normal housing. It is a short-term accommodation transition point. That is not to say that, if the need continues, people are not extended for a longer period until alternative accommodation is created for them. It is about a reasonably small group of people who are looking for critical housing to get things like parole and moving out of custody. It does not seek to solve the broader housing crisis, if you like, in terms of people coming out of the AMC. In fact, many people come out of the AMC and go back to home, go to family or go to other places.

**MISS NUTTALL:** For those who cannot go back home or to other places, have you ever been in a situation where someone has identified a need for housing and they have not actually had access to it?

**Mr Johnson:** A need for—

**MISS NUTTALL:** For the Justice Housing Program—that they have not actually been able to access it because it is full or there are not enough properties?

**Mr Johnson:** That is a good one to take on notice, because some work was done in terms of that. That question has been asked in the past. I absolutely understand where you are coming from. In terms of transitioning into that program, the work is usually started six months before they leave the AMC. Let's take that question on notice.

**MR EMERSON:** I have heard multiple reports of an incident involving serious harm to a corrections officer at the AMC in the last couple of days. Are officials aware of those reports?

**Ms Close:** No. I am sorry, but I do not understand the background to that. Serious harm in respect of what?

**MR EMERSON:** No report has been received regarding a serious incident at the AMC?

**Mr Johnson:** To an officer?

**MR EMERSON:** To an officer in recent days.

**Ms Close:** No.

**MR EMERSON:** Following on from recent revelations regarding officers' alleged involvement in contraband being brought into the AMC, what kind of support is being provided to officers?

**Ms Close:** Can you repeat that question?

**MR EMERSON:** There have been recent reports—quite public reporting—regarding alleged involvement of corrections officers bringing contraband into the AMC. I am wondering what kind of support is being provided to both staff and detainees in

response to those reports. What has been the response?

**Ms Close:** Contraband is a significant issue that we manage on a daily basis at the AMC. We have a lot of different scanning opportunities: bag searches and searches of detainees after they have potentially had a visitor or they have gone on transitional release and return to the facility. Staff have similar searches. We have bag searches for them, and we have scanning machines in relation to metal et cetera. In terms of specific supports, there is a lot of education about what is contraband—what should not be brought into the AMC—and that is for visitors, staff, professional visitors et cetera. Education is really critical. We have a significant number of supports for our staff and detainees in terms of psychological support, accessing various psychological programs, and EAP type programs, just as there are in many parts of any organisation. It depends what sorts of supports you are—

**MR EMERSON:** I am thinking about programs more broadly. A community member reached out to me earlier this year. Their father was a former corrections officer and took his own life post-employment. It has to be pretty traumatic working in that place, so what kinds of supports are there both during and post-employment?

**Ms Close:** We have wellbeing officers, we have peer support officers, and we also have similar support schemes for detainees themselves. For our officers specifically, we have a lot of wellbeing supports and we have psychologists available. They come in regularly and speak to staff across all parts of our business and workforce. It is particularly focused on the AMC because that is such a high-risk, high-threat area. They have other usual supports such as Lifeline. We provide this information regularly. If there is an incident, people are reminded of what is available. A technological aspect we are trying to introduce shortly is BrightSign, which has a whole raft of screens in the AMC. That sort of information is constantly scrolling through so that our staff can see it to make sure that they are reminded. That is available to them. Mr Taylor-Daycus can talk about the debriefings after a particular incident occurs, and again we have our wellbeing support that wraps around that.

**MR EMERSON:** Does any of that endure beyond the employment period?

**Mr Taylor-Daycus:** To ex-employees?

**MR EMERSON:** Yes.

**Mr Johnson:** We could take that on notice. If you are on workers compensation, there is a range of things available to you in that space. I would be loath to try to answer that without somebody with greater expertise. I think the answer to your question is yes. Once you have actually resigned and have exited the organisation, it is a different situation.

**MR EMERSON:** I would imagine so. Obviously, there are workers comp protections, but perhaps there are specific programs. There are for detainees, but I am wondering whether there is the same sort of thing for staff.

**Mr Johnson:** There is another initiative that I think is useful to contemplate. The work of corrections is difficult. It is like policing and emergency services. All services have

worked together to contemplate how to provide greater support to staff. One of the initiatives that goes across Emergency Services and Corrective Services is the EAP. I can never think of what it stands for.

**Ms Close:** Employee Assistance Program.

**Mr Johnson:** There is a provider, and traditionally that is a phone related service. For both Emergency Services and Corrective Services, we now have particularly dedicated staff from the EAP who attend onsite. The pick-up of that facility from staff has been really positive over probably the last three years. That is a relatively new initiative to try to find opportunities to help staff in what can be a very difficult area.

**Dr Paterson:** Also, there has been a lot of money, initiative and time invested in Blueprint for Change. That is around cultural change and wellbeing for staff in the AMC. An oversight committee was established in 2021 to implement that work. That has been ongoing and has been significant, and I believe it has been very beneficial.

**MR RATTENBURY:** On the question of staff and contraband coming into the centre, I am mindful of security issues, but can you give us an indication of what screening staff have to go through before entering the centre?

**Ms Close:** It is very similar to any visitor. Everyone goes through a metal detector. All staff are advised not to bring any particular items, such as phones, into the centre. It is very restricted, in terms of technology that people can take in. Bag search can happen. We have canine dogs, drug-detector dogs, that also provide security screening for staff and visitors.

**Mr Johnson:** You get a clear bag to carry things in. It can be seen through. Everyone is issued one of those.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Are all the scanning devices currently operational, and have they been over the last 12 months?

**Ms Close:** There is a device called a Rototurn. It is a device that turns around, for metal detection mostly, that has not been working. We have funding to replace that this financial year.

**MR RATTENBURY:** For how long has it not been operational?

**Ms Close:** I do not know, Rattenbury.

**Mr Taylor-Daycus:** Maybe six months.

**Dr Paterson:** There is \$1.3 million allocated in this budget to replace that.

**MR RATTENBURY:** When will that arrive?

**Ms Close:** We are currently in the procurement process. We have the funding available and we have people looking at the right procurement process to pick up the machine.



**Dr Paterson:** It is a pretty significant machine.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Yes. I have seen it.

**Ms Close:** Then we have to connect it.

**MR RATTENBURY:** What happens while that is not operational?

**MS CARRICK:** That is in a staff entry. That means all our staff go through the normal visitor entry instead.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** I have a whole collection of supplementaries that I could ask on this, but, given the time, we will wind up at this point. On behalf of the committee, thank you for your attendance today. If you have taken any questions on notice, please provide your answers to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*.

**Short suspension.**

Appearances:

Paterson, Dr Marisa, Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform

Justice and Community Safety Directorate  
Hughes, Mr Aaron, Chief Operating Officer  
Cvetkovski, Ms Dragana, Chief Finance Officer

ACT Emergency Services Agency  
Phillips, Mr Wayne, Commissioner  
Cleary, Mr Peter, Chief Officer, ACT Fire & Rescue  
Scott, Mr Rohan AFSM, Chief Officer, ACT Rural Fire Service  
Dutton, Mr David BM ASM, Chief Officer, ACT Ambulance Service

City and Environment Directorate  
Watts, Ms Michaela, Executive Branch Manager, Parks and Conservation Service  
Daines, Mr Nick, Senior Director Fire Management Unit, Parks and Conservation Service

**THE CHAIR:** We welcome Dr Marisa Patterson MLA, now in her capacity as the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. We also welcome the officials in attendance. Please note that, as witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. As we are not inviting opening statements, we will proceed to questions.

I hope that we can get to this fully, because I note that responsibility for bushfire preparedness seems to be somewhat split across different ministers. The ACT faces an increasing risk of severe bushfires and preparedness and mitigation are pretty critical to protecting lives and property. How many hectares of hazard reduction or fuel reduction burning have been completed in each year since 2020? How does that compares to the ACT's annual target?

**Mr Phillips:** For some of those details, I might call on the chief officer of the RFS or the Parks and Conservation people, who have better details on those actual hectares if, that is okay.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. As they are making their way to the table, I will also note that I will be asking about the number of kilometres of fire trails classified as fit for purpose as well.

**Mr Phillips:** That remit, with all due respect, sits within Parks and Conservation, not with the ESA, but we can answer those today.

**Dr Paterson:** But we will answer some other parts of your question.

**THE CHAIR:** I asked about the hectares of hazard reduction or fuel reduction burning completed in each year since 2020 and how it compares to the annual target.

**Ms Watts:** Without the figures year on year in front of me, I can tell you that, for the past year, between the Rural Fire Service and the ACT Parks and Conservation Service, there have been 17 fuel reduction burns that have been undertaken—that is over 2,067 hectares—and there have been seven ecological burns, with 60 hectares of ecological burns completed. We will take the remainder of that question on notice.

In relation to the roading question, PCS has commenced construction, maintenance and repairs of over 96 kilometres of roading and fire trail networks and another 99 kilometres of vegetation management across the Parks and Conservation Service estate.

**THE CHAIR:** How many kilometres of fire trails do we have and what proportion is classified as fit for purpose for firefighting versus those that require maintenance or upgrades?

**Ms Watts:** We have over 3,000 kilometres of fire trails or management trails across the Parks and Conservation Service estate. In terms of the classification, I will defer to my colleague Mr Daines to go into more detail for you.

**Mr Daines:** When we talk about the targets for hazard reduction burns in terms of hectares, we have moved away from that to a more nuanced, more accurate way of measuring risk, and that is under residual risk modelling. It is kind of out of vogue to be using the hectare targets; we realise that does not work and instead we work on where the risk is in the landscape. So it is less about the number of burns and the hectares burnt and it is more about the residual risk.

We have a target that we need to stay within the band of residual risk between 35 and 45 per cent. I am pleased to say that, after this year's hazard reduction burn season and all the activities in our bushfire operation plan, the residual risk is now 34 per cent. So it is even lower than the target band, which is fantastic news for the upcoming fire season.

In relation to your question about the number of roads maintained and whether they are up to standard, the answer is that they are all up to standard. They are all trafficable by firefighting appliances, and we will continue maintaining them as we go into the bushfire season. If you pick any random day of the year, there will be one road that needs a grade, that needs an upgrade, that needs something done to it. That is the cyclic nature of our work. I would be very confident in saying that our roads are all up to that classification. You will be also pleased to note that we are undertaking a strategic road review so that we can get a better understanding of vehicle carrying capacities and capabilities across the landscape, develop maintenance guidelines and come up with a strategic classification system so that we have the best trails in the best state at the best times.

**Dr Paterson:** I would also like to add that there has been significant work done on the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan. Mr Scott, would you like to speak to that?

**Mr Scott:** Yes. Strategic Bushfire Management Plan version 5 is currently going through the cabinet process. This is a whole-of-government plan for the next five years

for bushfire risk reduction. It has many stakeholders from across all directorates. There has been a complete rewrite as compared to version 4. The reason for the rewrite is we brought in the action owners and our priorities early and they helped develop the plan as it is going through to have the 71 actions with the six themes that we have currently got in there. Part of the SBMP version 5 is the Bushfire Management Standards, which then relate to that residual risk and how our land is managed and the different classifications there as well.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay; thank you. What is the current annual investment across ACT government in bushfire mitigation activities? That is including prescribed burns, hazard reduction and fire trail maintenance.

**Mr Scott:** We would have to take that one on notice to give you an accurate figure.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay, thank you.

**Mr Phillips:** Can I just add to that? Putting fire into the environment is only one way we manage risk. We have other ways of managing risk in regards to mowing, grazing, et cetera. So burning is just one aspect of the way we mitigate risk in the ACT.

**THE CHAIR:** I am certainly very aware of that.

**MR BRADDOCK:** I would note that the budget ambulance fees—both emergency but particularly non-emergency patient transport—have increased. I want to understand the impact due to those increases and whether has been any detriment to patient care and also whether there has been any movement in the item within the Green's Supply and Confidence Agreement about establishing a mechanism for people with private health insurance to not incur ambulance services and emergency call-out fees.

**Mr Phillips:** Thanks for the question, Mr Braddock. I will bring up the Chief Officer of ACTAS, David Dutton. So I will just do a quick team change, if that is okay.

**MR BRADDOCK:** No problem.

**Mr Dutton:** Thank you for the question, Mr Braddock. There are two components in relation to ambulance fees and charges. The majority of ambulance fees and charges were reviewed in line with the wage price index, which saw small increases across most of those fees, rounded down to the nearest dollar. The one exception in that piece of work was in non-emergency patient transport fees and charges. That was part of a triannual review that compared ACT to South Australia and Victoria in terms of relativity amongst jurisdictions. It also looked at the true cost of government providing those services. That is the predominant reason that that fee moved from previously being \$257 to \$364.

As part of the work that was undertaken are undertaken by the finance teams, they considered the issue of risk across changes to all fees and charges, and my understanding is that was assessed as low. Most of the charges relating to non-emergency patient transport are actually levied against institutions or facilities rather than individuals. For example, it might be moving a patient from one of our primary hospitals on the north or south of Canberra to the rehabilitation hospital, for example.

So it is part of their admission costs. But I would be happy to take any further questions on notice or defer to my finance colleague.

**MR BRADDOCK:** To make sure I understand you: the non-emergency patient transfer fee increased in line with the true cost that represents to the ACT territory?

**Mr Dutton:** That is correct.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Okay; thank you. The second part of the question is: has there been any work on establishing a mechanism for people without private health insurance to not incur an ambulance service emergency call-out fee?

**Mr Dutton:** Thank you for clarifying the question. Disallowable Instrument 2025-110 prescribes all of the fees and charges in relation to the Emergency Services Agency. Importantly, it also provides for different types of exemption from those fees and charges as they relate to ambulance treatment and/or transport. Section 5 of that instrument, items A through N, describes a range of circumstances in which an individual would not be charged a fee. Those are things like motor vehicle accidents, for example, a patient that might be in custody, a victim of domestic violence and a victim of sexual assault. There is also a schedule to that disallowable instrument that provides myself as Chief Officer an opportunity to review exceptional personal or other circumstances. So I have an opportunity to review those if there would be extenuating personal circumstances or serious financial hardship.

There is a range of information available on the ESA website from our front page in relation to ambulance fees and charges as well. That has been progressively updated as a result of community feedback about clarity of potential fees and charges that people might incur.

**MR BRADDOCK:** I will try to rephrase the question, and I will probably aim it for you, Minister. Has the government undertaken any policy work to examine how they can ensure that those without private health insurance or ambulances cover do not incur an ambulance service emergency call-out fee.

**Dr Paterson:** As the Chief Officer said, there is a range of circumstances where these fees are not payable. They are outlined in the instrument that he described and they cover a very broad range of circumstances. There is also financial hardship circumstances, exemptions and exceptional circumstances as well as pensioners, concession card holders and that type of thing where the fee may not be payable. Ensuring that we have a broad range of circumstances where people may be experiencing hardship is appropriate.

**MR BRADDOCK:** So those are continuing what were the previous exemptions and waivers that were in existence from the previous year?

**Dr Paterson:** Yes.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, if I can just jump in quickly: I think the question was whether

there had been any policy work done that goes beyond what was already in place. Can you just clarify that? It sounds like that is a no.

**Dr Paterson:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**MS CARRICK:** I want to ask about the ambulance staff attrition rate and what the difficulties are in attracting and retaining ambulance staff.

**Dr Paterson:** I might start with the fact that we have a new roster in place, which commenced last year. This is a nation-leading roster that we are very proud of. Mr Dutton, are you happy to speak to that?

**Mr Dutton:** Yes, Minister. Thank you for the questions, Ms Carrick. Attrition for the ACT Ambulance Service in the 2023-24 financial year, which is the latest set of data that we have available and published, was 8.8 per cent. That is against an Australian average of 4.4 per cent. So, whilst that is higher than the national average that we see, there are a couple of important contextual pieces I would like to provide you. The first is that, obviously, it is a small jurisdiction, and a relatively small number of staff leads to a greater percentage increase in our attrition rate than, for example, a large jurisdiction, like New South Wales, which has many thousands of paramedics.

Notwithstanding that, I can advise that, as of 17 July, ACT Ambulance had 23 vacancies against operational frontline paramedic positions. I will welcome 11 graduate paramedic interns to the service next Monday. We have seven lateral ambulance paramedics—those are qualified and registered paramedics from other jurisdictions—who are scheduled to commence with us in November this year. We are also finalising a second lateral recruitment process for both ambulance paramedics and intensive care paramedics. So, with the numbers that we currently have and the processes that are being finalised, I am confident that we will fill or come very close to filling the vacancies that we have in our current operational roster.

In terms of the broader context, I think it is important to note that all ambulance services around the country are growing. Certainly some of our larger jurisdictions interstate are employing many scores or hundreds of paramedics at a time. We need to make sure that we remain competitive in that environment. There are a number of things that attract paramedics, whether they are experienced paramedics who have worked for many years in another jurisdiction or whether they are graduate paramedics coming out of university, where ACT Ambulance is an attractive employer.

**MS CARRICK:** What are those that make you an attractive employer?

**Mr Dutton:** Size of service, the ability to move quickly and, whilst we might not have the scale of some of our larger jurisdictions, the ability of the ACT to look at changes in frontline clinical practice, for example, and we are able to put them through our governance processes and implement those changes relatively quickly. I am very pleased to say that the ACT does not have anywhere near the same challenges of ambulance ramping that other jurisdictions have. It is important to note that. As the minister said, our new emergency roster is a particularly attractive item to attract staff

to our jurisdiction as well.

**MS CARRICK:** Okay; thank you. I have a question about PFAS. Have you had a look at the PFAS around the fire stations in Canberra and have they been assessed?

**Mr Phillips:** Thanks for the question. All our fire stations and facilities have been assessed for PFAS. We have work in progress. Currently, that work is being done at the Kambah Ambulance Station, and we have done West Belconnen. The details of the PFAS I will have to take on notice.

**Mr Johnson:** Yes. Perhaps our chief operating officer might have a little bit more in terms of the program for PFAS. It is broader than just our portfolio, of course, but perhaps I can—

**MS CARRICK:** What about the impact on surrounding houses around fire stations?

**Mr Johnson:** We can try and take as much of that in the room, and then we will see what we can take on notice.

**Mr Hughes:** PFAS is a program of work that is underway. As Mr Phillips pointed out, the assessments have been progressed and we have work that has progressed across a number of sites. The Charnwood site is complete and the Kambah station is nearing completion as well.

**MS CARRICK:** That is the assessment; what about remediation when you are doing—

**Mr Hughes:** Sorry; that is remediation.

**MS CARRICK:** That is remediation?

**Mr Hughes:** The Charnwood remediation is complete and Kambah is underway.

**MS CARRICK:** What about houses that surround the stations? Do you look at them too? I suppose it leeches out around.

**Mr Hughes:** I would like to take that on notice to give you the exact detail of the methodology that is followed. But my understanding is that the assessment of the sites looks particularly at the sites where we understand PFAS has been used. All of the stakeholders involved in those sites are consulted as part of that as well.

**MS CARRICK:** Yes, if you could take on notice what sites have been identified and where they are up to with assessment and remediation and the contact with the neighbours.

**Mr Hughes:** Yes; happy to do that.

**MS CARRICK:** Thank you.

**MS TOUGH:** I want to go back to talking about bushfires, in particular the Aurora Valley bushfire. Last month, the Chief Coroner released the report. I want to knowledge

what the government has learnt since the event and how the inquiry is allowing the government to be better prepared for future bushfire seasons.

**Dr Paterson:** I will begin by acknowledging the coroner's findings regarding interagency communication, risk management and the importance of timely reporting in emergency situations.

**Mr Phillips:** As a result of the bushfire recommendations and the real conditions of the bushfires, we have taken on many recommendations, both nationally and locally, and we have a very good relationship with Defence with regard to the next time we have that threat upon us.

**Mr Scott:** One of those recommendations from the coroner was with regard to the risk assessments and also the communications between Defence aircraft. With the communications, there is designated aviation channels that Defence have access to which we use for all our aircraft. Also, in our Emergency Coordination Centre, there is a desk dedicated to Defence liaisons. That will be strengthened more so than what it was during the 2019-20 season. On the risk assessments and tasking needs, those crews will be briefed like they do with any other contracted aircraft.

The National Aerial Firefighting Centre, NAFC, Strategic Committee is looking at whether we need to fly aircraft, not just for Defence but also for contracted aircraft—using aircraft is a high-risk activity—for some of these particular incidents, particularly for reconnaissance and the things like that. I had the privilege of travelling overseas as part of a delegation, where we looked at aerial firefighting in particular in California, and the same issues that we have had here were highlighted over there as well—communications, airspace management, the need to fly and the risks associated with that. So it is a national and international issue. We are very comfortable that, as we move into other seasons, those recommendations will be met and exceeded from the 2019-20 season learnings.

**MS TOUGH:** Thank you. As a resident of Tuggeranong, particularly Lanyon, that is reassuring. You touched on California, and I want to talk about the LA bushfires in January, showing how climate change is impacting the bushfire season and how we are seeing bushfires in the Northern Hemisphere at the same time as our bushfire season. Is there any planning work being done to deal with the longer bushfire seasons and those overlapping seasons?

**Mr Scott:** This was a NEMA-led delegation, and there were six jurisdictions represented. Queensland and the Northern Territory were the ones that did not attend. They are now considering their fire season to be year-round in California, to a certain extent. For some background, the Palisades and Eaton fires occurred on 7 January 2025, which is actually in the middle of their winter—so not that you would expect. Within a 12-hour period, 16,000 structures were destroyed. It completely wiped out suburbs. So there is that very distinct climate change in extended seasons.

But it is not just about a fire season being extended; if we are not in fire season, we are then in that storm and flood season. Those extremities are quite broad but the impacts are quite large. Some of the impacts from the LA fires was post the event—the watershed events that occurred—and rain also destroyed some properties. So they sort



of got it from both ends. If you look at what happened over there, with 16,000 structures destroyed and 200,000 people evacuated, it was a significant event. To lose 30 lives is tragic, but it could have been a lot worse considering the evacuation orders.

As a delegation, we learnt a lot from going over to the States. We are very well prepared here in Australia compared to there, but we have had some learnings that we have brought back. Configuration is a major issue with building standards over there. Our building standards are quite robust and we are constantly evolving in that regard. The use of recovery and the community messaging was quite high as well. Our learnings were that we are in a good space here. Our Strategic Bushfire Management Plan 5 will strengthen that locally. As a nation, we are very well prepared—and we are looking not only at fire but also the storm and flood response as well.

**MS TOUGH:** That brings me to my other follow-up. How are we placed to deal with the bushfire season and the storm and flood season now basically happening at the same time—so those two threats happening at the same time?

**Mr Scott:** We have deliberately split the seasons now. So we will not have a high-risk weather season; there will be a designated storm season and bushfire season, because they are slightly different, and our messaging will target both of those hazards. For the bushfire hazard this year, our community engagement will focus really strongly at that street level. We will be having some street meetings with residents in bushfire prone areas. Members of the brigade will go out and have those one-on-one conversations, walk around their properties and better protect them.

Some of the learnings from LA as to how to prepare our property and how to message the community will help with that as well, because the biggest threat is not necessarily from the fire front and the direct flame impact; it is from those ember attacks. We had a presentation from the University of New South Wales. If you look at the leaves that fall from your property during that autumn period, that is where your embers will congregate around your house and that can be at 360 degrees. So a real strong focus for us into the coming season preparedness is to get the community to understand what ember attack is, how to better protect themselves and how to have their survival plan to act early rather than be forced to stay and defend or to shelter in place. A big learning from LA was to get people out if they are not prepared or, if they are prepared, to make sure that they can actually defend their property in the best way that is going to be safe for them.

**MS TOUGH:** Do we have plans for across the different parts of Canberra? Some places are easier to get out of than others. Do we have plans in place for those areas?

**Mr Scott:** We have relocation plans. We do not publicly announce those until there is a need to, because there is always a variable as to whether the incident is occurring. We have relocation areas identified and we have got various arterial roads that we can utilise. We are quite lucky in the way that our suburbs are designed. We have edge roads for better protection and we have good arterial roads to get people out. There are not many places that have one road in and one road out. Sometimes it is just as easy to go back two or three streets, shelter in place or relocate to a school oval to stop that ember attack and make yourself safe.

**Dr Paterson:** Ms Tough, there has also been a lot of work done on messaging.

**Mr Phillips:** Yes. We now have a national messaging system. We have the same amount of warning messages across every state and territory in Australia. Just recently, with regard to storms and floods, we now have an agreement with the New South Wales SES. Up to just recently, we were sort of blanked out of their warning systems and it looked like the storm was never hitting ACT, and we were doing the same with them. We now have an agreement with New South Wales SES that, if a storm is coming and it is going to hit Queanbeyan, obviously it is going to hit Canberra as well.

**MS TOUGH:** It shows the whole picture.

**Mr Phillips:** It shows the whole picture now. It is important to note that we are an island within New South Wales and we work within the tapestry of the New South Wales emergency management, both with bushfire and floods, so that we get a continuation of service and a continuation of warnings and response, regardless of the border at that time of crisis.

**MS TOUGH:** Thank you.

**Mr Scott:** Just to add to that, we have the National Fire Danger Rating System too, which has been implemented over the last couple of years. So, no matter where you go in Australia, the ratings are the same and the call to actions is the same. So, if people are travelling into Canberra, they know what to expect, and vice versa if we have people from Canberra travelling to other parts of Australia. That is a consistent messaging, which has been a big piece of work by all jurisdictions.

**MS TOUGH:** Thank you.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Back on the coronial findings, were there any findings from the coroner that were either a surprise to you or had not been identified in earlier internal reviews and other examinations?

**Mr Scott:** No; there was nothing that we found that was a surprise to us from the coronial findings. We were looking at the first 45 minutes of that particular incident. I was the incident controller on that day and I knew how it had unfolded. There was nothing out of the ordinary with that reporting of the fire from the aviation crew on board the Taipan.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Thank you.

**MR BRADDOCK:** I have some questions about the Acton Emergency Services Station. I want to understand the reasons that lie behind the schedule and cost increases that went along with that project.

**Dr Paterson:** Infrastructure Canberra?

**Mr Johnson:** Probably because of the way we are structured now—pardon the pun—it is a matter for Infrastructure Canberra in part. Certainly, if it was for us, we would probably need to take that on notice in terms of timing. Also, there are issues that we

would have to be sure that we could talk about, because we have contractors involved and there are commercial-in-confidence matters. So I would feel more comfortable if the question were put to Infrastructure Canberra, who I think are on tomorrow, or it potentially could be one that we take on notice, just to make sure we get our i's dotted and t's crossed on that one.

**Dr Paterson:** I have a few points I can add. The capital budget allocated for that project was \$40.317 million. The certificate of occupancy was received on 12 June, and the formal builders completion was awarded on 13 June this year. Currently, the station has been commissioned.

**Mr Phillips:** They are fully operational in the station now, and both ACT Fire and Rescue and ACT Emergency Service are running out of that station now. Since 22 July, the two services have been running out of that station. It is great, with an added benefit for response times in Canberra.

**Mr Johnson:** My understanding is that that came in on budget, under the \$40 million. But, if that is incorrect, we will correct the record.

**MR BRADDOCK:** I will ask the questions in an appropriate session. Just a quick question, Commissioner, just in terms of response times going west. You can very easily head east towards the city, but trying to go west out of Parkes Way is much more challenging. How is that working?

**Mr Phillips:** I will have to get some details with regard to any feedback from Fire and Rescue and Ambulance Service on the right-hand turn down at Parkes Way, knowing that when we have an event of a fire, in particular, we will have two appliances approaching from two different directions. Depending on where that fire will be coming from, it will be either coming from Aranda, I would imagine, or from Phillip as well. I would have to take that one on notice with regard to whether it has affected any times going to the west.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Okay; thank you.

**Dr Paterson:** I would like to add an additional point to your previous question. It came to my attention that the supply and confidence agreement is to look at how we would go about establishing a mechanism for people to receive free ambulance. So there will be work that is done on that.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Thank you. So that work has not yet commenced is what I understood from your answer.

**Dr Paterson:** Yes.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Thank you.

**MS CARRICK:** I am wanting to inquire about the Molonglo Emergency Services Station and its progress. Is it on time and on budget?

**Dr Paterson:** Yes, it is on time and on budget and taking shape very promptly. Again,

questions on the full details of that project would be best put to the Infrastructure Canberra team when they appear on Friday.

**MS CARRICK:** Okay, thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** I want to have a quick chat about the plan for dealing with electric vehicle batteries in ESA vehicles. We have seen the increase in electric and hybrid vehicles across the ACT, including within government and within fire and emergency services vehicles. There are fire risks which need to be dealt with—vehicle fires and fires in buildings, when batteries are being recharged—and risks around the disposal of spent batteries. What consultation has there been with ESA over the rise of electric and hybrid vehicles within both ACT government fleets and private use?

**Dr Paterson:** I will start by saying that this is very much an emerging challenge, nationally and internationally, around EV batteries, and a very interesting challenge. There is a lot of thought going into this both here in this jurisdiction and nationally. I will handover to Mr Phillips.

**Mr Phillips:** I want to say that we are at the forefront, as emergency services, of wanting to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, because, at the end of the day, we could be fighting fires that could be uncontrollable—and with severe storms and floods—due to climate change. So we are all for reducing emissions across the ACT and nationally. There are particular risks involved with lithium ion battery fires and the disposal of those. I will introduce the new Chief Officer of Fire and Rescue, Peter Cleary.

**Mr Cleary:** Good morning. Lithium ion batteries are a hot topic, so to speak! The ACT has seen an increase in lithium ion battery fires, and it is reflected in the early uptake of alternative energy in the ACT. As far as what is guiding the way we deal with it, in an emergency situation, we rely heavily on the research being done at the national level through AFAC. We do have our internal procedures for dealing with the fire, but one of our challenges remains the waste that is coming as part of that, so we are working across government on that. As far as how we are dealing with it if we have an incident internally—I think that was maybe what the question was looking at and how we are going to deal with batteries. Is that correct?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, including through to that disposal stage.

**Mr Cleary:** We are currently looking at a project; we talked about it a couple of days ago. We are looking at what our procedures are internally on how we deal with our own incidents, but, at the moment, if there is a battery fire, Fire and Rescue are the lead agency, and we will deal with it.

**Mr Phillips:** The biggest problem we have with lithium ion batteries is disposal, at the moment. In this room, there are probably 60 lithium ion batteries—I will take a guess. I have got one in my pocket; I have got one here on my desk right now. It is the disposal of those and where they go. We are working with NoWaste Canberra in regard to a massive campaign. We are working together and are in the infant stages of that in regard to where people put those lithium ion batteries, because that is the dangerous part of lithium ion batteries. We think of the big risk of the vehicles, but we know where they are. But once it hits the back of a garbage truck, there is a big chance of ignition. That

is a whole-of-government campaign to ensure that people dispose of their lithium ion batteries correctly.

**THE CHAIR:** What procedures are in place for disposal of fire and emergency vehicle batteries once they reach end-of-life?

**Mr Phillips:** The ones we have in our fire truck, for instance?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr Phillips:** I would have to take that on notice. I imagine that would be an ACT government policy in regard to the disposal of those batteries once they are at end of life in a vehicle.

**THE CHAIR:** Perhaps you can take on notice what consultation there has been, and what you have participated in, because I am interested to also find out whether alternative procedures were considered in that process.

**Mr Johnson:** Sorry, Mr Cocks, could I just double-check that question again? I am thinking about where we best answer it, to be honest. Is it about batteries in ACT government battery-powered vehicles specifically?

**THE CHAIR:** Specifically in fire and emergency vehicle batteries.

**Mr Johnson:** It is specific; yes, okay.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes. It has been suggested to me that simply burying the battery was proposed as an option, and I am interested to find out whether that has been discussed as an option.

**Mr Phillips:** No, I am not aware of that option whatsoever, Mr Cocks, at all—about the disposal of them. I will take that on notice. I would imagine that whatever the ACT government policy is in regard to all batteries in ACT government vehicles—our vehicles or ACT government vehicles—we will follow that policy.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay. In case you find that there was a discussion around that, can you come back to us on what locations might have been considered for burial of batteries as well? Just so I have got my thinking clear, can you tell me what the usual life of a battery is in fire and emergency vehicles?

**Mr Phillips:** I would have to take that, specifically, on notice, but I would imagine that the battery life of our vehicles would be probably hours or kilometres, and that would probably be the same as any other vehicle asset.

**THE CHAIR:** I am talking about the longevity of it. How often would you need to replace the batteries?

**Mr Phillips:** I am not sure of the longevity of the batteries. I would need to take that on notice.

**Mr Johnson:** If it is helpful, Mr Cocks, batteries in vehicles currently are quite some thousands of hours and hundreds of thousands of kilometres in terms of general use. And for the most part, ACT Fire and Rescue vehicles, being heavy vehicles, we will probably keep for longer; others we will move on out of the fleet, probably while the battery is still quite functional and appropriate. So I do not think we will ever need to really be disposing of batteries. It will go with the car to whomever it then goes to in the normal chain of events, if that makes sense.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay. Maybe that goes to my next question, which, very simply, is this: have we replaced any batteries in our fire and emergency vehicles yet?

**Mr Phillips:** We may be soon. I would take that on notice. Our current electric fire truck, the Rosenbauer, is with Rosenbauer at the moment for repair, and they are assessing if it is the batteries or a capacitor that is connected to the batteries. Either way, it will be a new capacitor—I do not know the technicalities, so apologies for that—or it will be a new set of batteries. If it is a new set of batteries, Rosenbauer will take the old batteries, because the fire truck is under warranty until the end of the year.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Going back to the discussion of battery fires, you were saying that we are leading the pack there. Is it possible to get, on notice, a table of what battery fires you have seen in the ACT? The broad type and where they occurred—whether it was a premises or somewhere else, or while they were recharging?

**Mr Phillips:** Yes, we have got that data.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much.

**MR RATTENBURY:** On that risk profile around lithium ion batteries—and I take your point, Mr Phillips, about the many in this room—my understanding is there are quite different risk profiles—

**Mr Phillips:** Correct.

**MR RATTENBURY:** around electric vehicle batteries and battery packs that go in electric bikes and scooters, and I am interested in device batteries. Can you talk us through the different risk profiles?

**Mr Cleary:** What we are seeing nationally, through the AFAC group, is that a good brand, with a good charger, being charged correctly, does not seem to be an issue. Some of the issues we are seeing are with discarded batteries that end up in the back of fire trucks and are then compressed.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Do you mean in the back of garbage trucks?

**Mr Phillips:** Garbage trucks.

**Mr Cleary:** Yes, garbage waste trucks. We are seeing a cigarette vape that is thrown out that has a battery in it that is compressed, and then that is causing a fire within the compression stage. Some of those smaller devices are causing what are minor fires, but, in the right scenario, that can turn into a challenge. That is a national trend. The other

trends we are seeing are with personal mobility devices—the scooters and e-bikes—which have had an impact; a child, or an adult, even, might crash it, and it has an impact which then damages the chemistry of the battery. Nationally, they are becoming an issue, but I will have to come back, like you requested, with the actual specifics of the fires that we are seeing, as a result of them. There is some good data on that.

**Mr Phillips:** The size of the battery and the location of the battery all adds up to the risk of that fire of the battery. A big battery on fire, with no other fuels around it, will not be as big a risk as a small battery in a house, for instance, that catches on fire. I do not want to play around with words but—

**MR RATTENBURY:** I understand what you are saying; thanks.

**Mr Phillips:** The other thing is reputation: big, good brands are less risk. People buying things online and importing them into Australia because they are getting something cheaper are a bigger risk. We do not know where that battery has been made or how it has been manufactured.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Thank you.

**Dr Paterson:** Mr Cocks, I have some information to answer Ms Carrick's previous question on PFAS.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay.

**Dr Paterson:** I will update you. With PFAS, there is a massive project across government. The Charnwood site remediation project is now complete and delivered within the two-year timeframe, and that was a \$3.165 million budget appropriation. The Kambah station works have been implemented ahead of schedule, and the site is due for operational return in August. There is a development application that has been approved for the planned remediation and upgrade works, which are scheduled to begin in August—immediately after the completion of Kambah—for the Fyshwick station. A DA has recently been submitted for planned Phillip station remediation and possible works. Chisholm station remediation and possible upgrade works design is to be initiated soon. Recommendations from the detailed site investigation report around the Forrest Fire Museum have identified a low PFAS risk, with no remediation works planned. And for all of those sites, where there are neighbours, there are affected-site scope works that are done to work out whether the neighbours are affected or not, and subsequent negotiations and discussions are undertaken if there are neighbours who are affected.

**MS CARRICK:** And is that information all publicly available? Did you say there was a report that outlines all of that?

**Dr Paterson:** I am not sure. I will find out what is publicly available on this, but we can provide information on notice to you.

**MS CARRICK:** Thank you.

**Mr Phillips:** Can I just add a bit of information about our batteries, Mr Cocks, if that

is all right? There is some additional information.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr Phillips:** All our vehicles are sold by whole-of-government for second life. ESA hands our vehicles to the whole-of-government for the next stages of that. All our batteries are being made by Volvo, not Rosenbauer—I need to correct that. And any batteries that need to be replaced whilst the vehicle is with the ESA are the responsibility of Volvo. I can say that burial of batteries has never been scoped or discussed within the ESA.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**MR BRADDOCK:** I have got some questions about the fees for fire service callouts for unintended alarms, particularly in high rise apartments, because reading through the determination there are some quite large increases there. I want to understand, when you have an alarm for an apartment building, is that being attributed to the individual who, for example, within their unit, might have created the alarm, or is that being attributed to the building owner or the owners corporation?

**Mr Cleary:** My apologies, I am quite new; I am not sure—

**Dr Paterson:** Three weeks in the role!

**MR BRADDOCK:** Fair enough.

**Mr Cleary:** Yes, I would have to take that one—

**Mr Johnson:** I think I can answer that one. What would happen for high-rise, multiple apartments is that the callout fee will generally be paid by the corporation. And, potentially, the corporation then might seek recompense from the owner of a property, if they find fault. I know this from personal experience, because in our particular building you get a note if the alarm goes off, and if, say, somebody has done it three or four times they will be asked to pay for it. But normally the cost will be borne by the corporation.

**MR BRADDOCK:** And will that particular cost be the corporate rate, which is \$2,000, or the individual rate, which is \$400, under the determination?

**Mr Johnson:** I would expect it to be the corporate rate, which would be \$2,000, but if that is not right, we will correct the record.

**Mr Cleary:** Yes; I will take it on notice, because I did overhear something in a meeting yesterday which suggests there are two rates. I will clarify.

**Mr Johnson:** Yes, there are.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Okay, thank you. I will be interested in the answers to that.

**MR RATTENBURY:** As you undertake that work, I think we are interested to



understand—Mr Johnson’s comment said it perfectly—if there is a rate for an individual who causes the false alarm in a building and, if they get ascribed it by the body corporate, are they paying the \$400 or the \$2,000?

**Dr Paterson:** It would be up to the body corporate—

**MR RATTENBURY:** How does that decision get taken? I am interested to understand how you are thinking about it. If it happened in Mr Johnson’s apartment because he burned his breakfast, does he get \$400 or does he get \$2,000 because he happens to live in a building, whereas if I live in a standalone house, I get \$400?

**THE CHAIR:** Dr Patterson, I think you just said that it would be up to the body corporate. I did not catch it properly.

**Dr Paterson:** I would assume, as to how much of the fee that they would pass on to the—

**THE CHAIR:** No, I am one step back from that. How does ACT Emergency Services choose to bill?

**Mr Phillips:** Yes, I do understand the question.

**MR RATTENBURY:** If they just go to the body corporate, they will just bill the corporate rate.

**Dr Paterson:** Yes

**Mr Phillips:** Yes, if we have policy or information on that, we will take on notice—

**MR RATTENBURY:** Thanks. I am clear with the question though?

**Mr Phillips:** Yes.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Terrific, thank you.

**Dr Paterson:** Also, the risks associated with an apartment building are substantially different to those associated with an individual resident.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Of course, yes.

**Mr Phillips:** If there is an actual—

**MR BRADDOCK:** Yes, but we do not want to disadvantage a resident who chooses to live in an apartment versus what they would experience as a fee if they were in their own house.

**Mr Phillips:** No, correct.

**Mr Johnson:** Yes.

**Dr Paterson:** I understand, but the risk profile is very different in attending those two.

**Mr Phillips:** And to be perfectly clear, if there is an actual fire, there is no charge. We do not want people thinking we charge for putting fires out.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Thanks.

**Mr Johnson:** We will clarify that. I think I know the answer, but in the absence of knowing I know the answer, we will come back to you with clarity.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Just noting timing, I am going to try and get to committee members, but it is likely we will not be able to go any further than that in this session. Ms Carrick, I think we are up to you.

**MS CARRICK:** Back to the financials, on page 41—it is a JACS Directorate one, so I do not know whether you can answer it—the appropriations go down over the forward estimates; the employee expenses reduce over the forward estimates. Does that leave the organisation sustainable when there is decreasing appropriation and employee expenses?

**Mr Johnson:** I might ask our Chief Financial Officer to come forward and she can speak to the particular detail of that particular line item. I guess part of that will be government initiatives that do not necessarily fund all four years of the forward estimates, so some of that funding might not appear in the forward estimates to continue, and that will be a matter for us to come back to government on, for pilots and other things.

**MS CARRICK:** I also notice the infrastructure program drops right off, so perhaps when more infrastructure is committed to, it might lead to some staff that are required to manage contracts.

**Mr Johnson:** That would be correct, indeed, but our Chief Financial Officer might be able to give you a little bit more detail in regard to the statements. I think the principle will be that, for instance, some funding might well not go to the full four years as matters are terminated, or in terms of staffing. I will hand to Ms Cvetkovski.

**Ms Cvetkovski:** Thank you. I think that is a similar question to what we had yesterday around reduction in the controlled recurrent payments. Similarly, our expense items would be reducing by the same amount, and the explanation is very similar in a way: it would be related, like Mr Johnson said, to initiatives that could be ceasing in the next few years. If you look at our appropriation table changes, you will see the ones that are dropping off, definitely in the last couple of years. Also, there are, some adjustments that have been made to our budget relating to whole-of-government expenditure reform reviews, et cetera.

**MS CARRICK:** Would you expect more initiatives to come on as the years progress?

**Ms Cvetkovski:** That will be up to government to consider in the future budget

processes.

**Mr Johnson:** Yes, and we would certainly be talking to government about those initiatives, obviously, and planning for them in terms of what we have learnt and what we think we need to take forward, and government will make a consideration on that front. I think it is important to say, though, that nothing in that tells me that we are looking at shedding staff or getting rid of staff. We have got to be efficient and effective, but we have got a service to deliver, and we will continue to deliver it.

**MS CARRICK:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Tough?

**MS TOUGH:** I am just interested in what measures are in place to support the mental health and wellbeing of ESA staff and volunteers, given the high-stress nature of the work.

**Mr Phillips:** Thank you for the question, Ms Tough. The ESA has a very good mental health strategy in place at the moment. Broadly speaking, at the moment, we are working with Converge, and we have onsite psychologists working with us, and we have had that since September 2023. Those onsite psychologists not only work within the ESA headquarters itself but also do volunteer visits out to sheds and units, and they visit fire stations and ambulance stations as well. Then we also have the EAP program with Converge and we market that, for want of a better word, heavily to our employees. That EAP facility is not just for our employees; it is also for their families. Many times, families need to talk to someone else in regard to their mental health or some concerns they might have about the mental health of their partner, who may be not acting normally that they can see. We have those facilities in place as well.

And then, we have a senior director who is in charge of wellness, for want of a better word. But another layer—and I do not want to say it is a down layer—and one of the important programs we have is peer support throughout the agency. The four agencies, the four emergency services that sit within the ESA, all have a peer support program—well-staffed and trained, and we are updating that training regularly. We did that again last year, and this year we are going to do some more training in upskilling our people in regard to peer support. We are going to extend the numbers of peer supporters as well, and we are going to increase those peer support networks through to the broader ESA enabling services, and that is part of the plan for this year.

We also have three chaplains and, most importantly, two dogs. Even though that can sound quite trivial, the two dogs add a big value. Lachie and Banksy add a big value to the health and wellbeing of our people. Banksy is the dog that sits in our ESA headquarters and spends most of the time down at the comms centre with our call-takers for ambulance, who probably take a lot of difficult calls, and our dispatchers for fire calls. A dog in that facility has drawn out a lot of benefits in regard to people's mental health. I did not understand that entirely myself. I have been around a long time, obviously, but I did not understand the impact of that.

We have also integrated some mental health first aid programs for our staff. So, if you manage people, how can you notice or be empathetic and compassionate to someone

who might be having a mental health crisis? And from there, where can we direct them? Is it to their own GP? Is it through to one of our psychologists or EAP?

Mental health and the wellness and the wellbeing of our people is not just my priority, it is all our executives' and chief officers' priority, and I think we take some pride in how we are doing that. We can do a lot more, of course. We will have to do a lot more work in improving mental health where we can, in mental health awareness where we can, and in any tools that we can use. The prevention of a person having a mental health crisis is better than the catch at the end

**MS TOUGH:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Wonderful, thank you very much. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your attendance today. If you have taken any questions on notice, please provide your answers to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*.

Appearances:

ACT Custodial Inspector

Minty, Ms Rebecca, ACT Custodial Inspector

Costello, Mr Sean, Deputy ACT Custodial Inspector

**THE CHAIR:** We welcome the Inspector and Deputy Inspector of Custodial Services. Please note that as witnesses you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. As we are not inviting opening statements, we will proceed to questions.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I am keen to understand the themes you are seeing in issues raised by AMC detainees, in particular, and we have heard this in the past, issues around the culture of corrections officers in the AMC. There are references in the Jumbunna report that came out yesterday, particularly for, I guess, non-Anglo detainees feeling like they are being targeted. Is that a trend that you are seeing or an area where you have comments?

**Ms Minty:** Thank you for that question. For the committee's information, I am an independent statutory office holder, so independent from corrections, and I visit the AMC regularly. At the moment we are conducting the Healthy Prison Review, which we are required under statute to do every three years. We are sort of deep in the data at the moment. In relation to the culture, I think that certainly it is—this will be really quite interesting, this Healthy Prison Review, because it is the third time that we have administered the detainee and the staff survey. So we are now starting to track how things are performing.

I do not want to go into what the results of that will be, because that will come out in about probably two to three months. Then I will have a lot more to say about that, but I certainly recognise that the Jumbunna Institute has raised some serious concerns across the jail in relation to things like racism, systemic racism. When we talk about systemic racism we are not talking necessarily about individuals that are racist, although that may be the case, it is also about how the systems and structures impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in jail.

In the Healthy Prison Review in 2022, for example, we did look at things like data around uses of force, data around searching, strip-searching and data around security classifications. What we saw was that Aboriginal people are also over-represented—I mean, over-represented in custody, we know that and that is a stain on the ACT, the significant overrepresentation, but even once they are getting into jail, they are more likely to be a higher security classification. So in the Healthy Prison Review for 2022, for example, we recommended an independent expert look at the classification system.

Part of our job really is to go back and see how those recommendations have been implemented and that is what we will be doing with this Healthy Prison Review. We are going to have an annex that will go through each of those recommendations and assess whether we think it has been appropriately implemented. Another thing that the Jumbunna report notes is that there have been many, many reviews and recommendations made over and over, and yet we are still seeing many problems

persist. So I see the role of my office as an important one to bring accountability so that we do not just have another review with another set of recommendations, and government is held to what they say they are going to do.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Thank you, and you just said the timing for the healthy prison report is the next couple of months?

**Ms Minty:** Yes, it has to be tabled by the end of this year. We are currently in the report writing phase, so I think tabling it will be in the third quarter to early fourth quarter of this calendar year.

**THE CHAIR:** Just quickly, because you brought up the principle of systemic racism specifically. This can be one of those terms that can be a bit confusing and it is not always exactly what it sounds like. So can I confirm, is it any part of the system that leads to disproportionate outcomes for a particular group? Or is there something more specific that you are looking at when you are looking at issues of systemic racism?

**Ms Minty:** I take the meaning of the term in a fairly broad way, in that the application of a law or a policy or a practice or a principle that can disproportionately have an impact. So it might be substantively equal on its face but it results in unequal outcomes, and it does not take into account particular experiences for people. What we have heard from the Jumbunna report, for example, is things further upstream, like perhaps profiling of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, meaning they are more likely to get picked up by the police. So these are things that on their face may look like they are perfectly innocuous but have a disproportionate impact.

And so this Healthy Prison Review—as this morning’s session illustrated, the AMC is an incredibly broad, complex environment and Healthy Prison Reviews are very broad. They cover every aspect of treatment and care of detained people, but this year we decided to take a more focused approach and we identified a number of spotlight topics. The treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is one of those spotlight topics, but we are also cognisant of the significant work that Jumbunna has done and so we will be carefully considering all those recommendations, including in relation to systemic racism.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes. No, thank you. So just to be clear, when you look at it, will you be applying a critical eye to issues to make sure you are separating issues like racial profiling, which may be systemic, but racially driven versus systems which may be more productive overall but can still lead to some degree of disproportionate or unequal outcome, given the proportion of people moving through the system from different groups?

**Mr Costello:** Yes, yes, and in our reports generally we have a mix of quantitative and qualitative data. So to your point, we will be hearing directly from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people about what their perceptions are. But also, as Rebecca said, we will be comparing the data that we collected in the Healthy Prison Review 2022 around looking at how Aboriginal people are represented across a range of measures, such as classification or segregation or uses of force.

**MS CARRICK:** On the same theme, the government says that they will respond to the

report in September, an interim response, and presumably they will look at governance arrangements and how they will implement the recommendations. Do you think you will be able to be involved in the governance and be able to contribute to how they implement this whole—

**Ms Minty:** Yes, I think it is a great question because it is a massive piece of work that has been done. The Jumbunna report talks about exactly that, about what sort of structures need to be in place to ensure a joined-up approach is taken across all the different directorates in government. I certainly am very willing to be part of that process. I think my mandate is a small piece of the puzzle, but it is an important one. The level of scrutiny that we are able to provide—with our three staff—of AMC and of Bimberi, going in unannounced or at any time with our own keys, without escort, I think is a really important accountability measure. So yes, I would be willing and able to assist that process going forward, with resourcing, if it were possible.

**Mr Costello:** Perhaps just further then I might add, in this current Healthy Prison Review we are doing at the moment, in terms of looking at the implementation of recommendations, we have broadened to not just ours but looking at things like recommendations from coroners in the past. So it might be that, if nothing else, when we come to do our next Healthy Prison Review the Jumbunna recommendations relevant to AMC might be something we could look at as well in that aspect.

**MS CARRICK:** When you do a Healthy Prison Review, do you go out to ACCOs, for example Winnunga, and get their views? I sort of find that the views that we heard this morning and the views from ACCOs, what was in the report—not that I have read it all, but I have started on the AMC part of it—where this intersects there is different—where the truth lies in it all.

**Ms Minty:** Yes, certainly that is what we seek. We seek to talk to a whole range of stakeholders. We talk to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, Winnunga, other organisations in the community and bring their views in. We talk to detained people directly, through surveys, and also through focus groups and walking around. So yes, I think that is certainly what we strive to do, to take a multidisciplinary, multistakeholder approach.

I also recognise that I do not have an Aboriginal staff member on my staff and the Jumbunna review did make a recommendation around having an identified position. I do note though, every time I do a review, I will have an Aboriginal person engaged, and we had the benefit of an inspector from Queensland who came to provide us a cultural lens and expertise in that respect. But I think there would be great value in having someone on an ongoing basis that has that connection with community in a more ongoing way.

**MS CARRICK:** Thank you, because it seems like you perhaps could be the glue between the two sides.

**Ms Minty:** Yes, I think that it is the case that we hear very different things. I think one example is around programs and purposeful activity and how a structured day—what that means, because we are hearing very different things. I suppose the framework that we take when we are doing these Healthy Prison Reviews—we have standards that are

on our website, particularly in relation to boredom and a structured day.

There are four main elements that I consider as part of that. Firstly, it is around education, and so that might be vocational education, maybe a certificate, maybe basic literacy and numeracy. Then there is work, so jobs that are going in the prison. There is the bakery and there are various other things. I think we need to dig down a bit more into what that means. Many of those jobs, for example a unit sweeper, might be for a couple of hours a week. So, that is not keeping—whereas, you know, some of the detained people in bakery might be doing six hours a day, four days a week. So, that is a very different amount of activity compared to doing an hour of taking bins out in a unit.

Then the third area is programs. So, there is obviously criminogenic programs, but we are above 40 per cent of people on remand at the AMC at the moment. They are not doing criminogenic programs as they are presumed innocent. So I think that is an important focus, what programs are on offer. We know that people on remand may be there for very short times, or they may be—we may not know what date they will be released. So of course, that has to be taken into account, but it is a huge gap. I think particularly for remandees.

Then the fourth area around not being bored is around recreation, leisure, exercise, those sort of things, you know, hobbies. So, I think unpacking what we mean by boredom is important. This Healthy Prison Review will be focusing on all four areas because it is one thing to look at a list of programs that may have been offered or may not be running, but the picture is quite nuanced and we need to dig deeper. Particularly in those areas, I think, there is a lot more work to do.

**MS CARRICK:** Yes, thank you, I agree. With jobs, what opportunities are there to get out into the community to particular work sites?

**Ms Minty:** Yes, I think that will be something to consider as well in the Healthy Prison Review because our focus as a community—I think we have the concept that we send people to prison, sentence people for rehabilitation, to reduce the chances that they are going to re-offend and by doing that, we are keeping the community safe. So, I think work release is an important point. We do have a transitional release centre with 20 beds. The occupancy is still lower than we would like to see. We raised in 2022 that less than half the beds were being occupied. We have to build on these positive strengths that we can, to reintegrate into the community.

**THE CHAIR:** You have spoken a fair bit about the Healthy Prisons Review now. There has been a fairly constant flow of information highlighting failings in the AMC, including media, FOI responses and official visitors. Will this go some way to working out what is going wrong and what can be done?

**Ms Minty:** I mean, absolutely. I think the whole framework for setting up the inspector was promoting continual improvement. So I think that is exactly what our recommendations are angling towards. At the end of the day, we make the recommendations and it is up to corrections to implement them and to various other stakeholders to hold them accountable. We will also recognise good practice where we see it. There will certainly be good practice identified in the forthcoming review. When



we go out, there is plenty of staff that are so passionate and care deeply. They are doing challenging work and they are passionate about it. But we need to really build on the strengths and—yes.

**Mr Costello:** I think the inspector said it earlier, but perhaps it is worth noting again, the Jumbunna report does attempt to bring together a number of those previous reports and then put a roadmap together, which is often drawing upon recommendations and findings from previous reports, not just from us, but from many organisations that you talk about.

**THE CHAIR:** That is useful because it sounds like there will be a layering of the Healthy Prisons report over the top of that report.

**Ms Minty:** Yes, the timing is quite useful for us in terms of seeing where we can really support and where we need to sort of highlight the points that have been made by Jumbunna.

**MS TOUGH:** Ms Carrick and the Chair have covered what I was going to ask about because we had a lot of chat about recidivism and boredom the last day or so. On a different tack, we are five years on from COVID-19, and when it hit there were a lot of changes in how custodial facilities operated and how people were able to just operate in those facilities but then see family and friends where they were able to have visitors. Five years on, how have things changed in terms of protocols and access to visits, and are there sufficient measures in place to protect the detainees and staff if something like this does happen in the future?

**Ms Minty:** Yes, I think we did see when the COVID outbreak—one of the real positives was how quickly corrections implemented video visiting facilities and that has persisted as the other restrictions have gone down, which I think is a really good thing.

I think the visit centre is—there was some discussion this morning about the facility. The visit centre is essentially designed for 255 detainees. I think that was the number the treasury came up with originally when they made projections for the AMC. Obviously, it is significantly surpassing that. So, there are limitations but they are not unsurpassable. I think there is opportunity to enhance the space.

In terms of what have we learnt? We did a critical incident review into a death in custody that occurred in the management unit during COVID times and I think that really highlighted the impact that isolation can have on detained people and their mental health. So I would hope that if we went into this situation again there is a real cognizance of, yes, there is legitimate health grounds to isolate people, but what supports can we put in place at this time when they are most vulnerable? So, I think more awareness of that.

As a result of that critical incident review, and then subsequently the coroner made some recommendations, corrections have now implemented a suicide prevention framework. They worked with Justice Health and with other stakeholders. So I think that is a real positive that has come out of an extremely tragic circumstance. I think, yes, being mindful of the impact that isolation has when you are in detention has been brought to the fore from COVID.

**Mr Costello:** I might just add two other points. One is audio visual visits have become more commonplace. That is sort of a positive, I suppose, that came out of the COVID experience.

In the other side of our work, we do not just provide oversight of the AMC, we also provide oversight to the Bimberi detention centre. So, wearing our National Preventive Mechanism hat under the optional protocol to the convention against torture and other inhuman treatment, we did some work in 2023 looking at the isolation of young people at Bimberi. What emerged from that was that changes to visits had occurred and changes to some other practices across the centre that occurred during COVID were continuing even when community restrictions had been removed. So, I think a lesson learned there is perhaps for us all to be vigilant and mindful that emergency measures that are quite appropriate during a pandemic need to be wound back as the risk of that pandemic reduces.

**MS CARRICK:** In the Jumbunna report it talks about boredom leading to drug use. When people come out, they need to get drugs. They have built up a debt in prison. So they come out, they have to pay the debt and that leads to them going back to prison again. So, there is recidivism. It seems to be a bit of a terrible cycle. Are you able to drill into that and unpack that at all?

**Ms Minty:** Yes, absolutely. I mean, drugs are a problem in prisons everywhere, but there has certainly been a lot of attention about drugs in the AMC in the past few years, and for that reason, drugs and harm minimisation is a spotlight topic. So, we will certainly have more to say in the report about what is occurring.

I think it is important in a prison context to note that drug strategies have three important elements. One, reducing supply, stopping the drugs coming in to the extent possible, noting that it is probably impossible to completely eradicate them. Two, reducing demand. The Jumbunna report links demand reduction to purposeful activity to stop that drug seeking behaviour. When we go into units, in the middle of the day, there is 30 men with not a lot to do. They should be doing programs and activities.

Then the third element is around harm minimisation. When we talk about harm minimisation, a real positive is that the AMC does have naloxone, a drug that reduces the impact of opioid overdose. So that officers can now—and again in the 2019 Healthy Prison Review, we recommended that officers actually have access to that. They do now, which is really positive. If there is an overdose after hours, they are able to administer this drug.

But harm minimisation is very broad. It includes things around minimising harm associated with sharing needles, for example. I think there was some discussion this morning about hepatitis C. Australia is not on target to meet the target of eliminating viral hepatitis C by 2030, and prisons are the reason for that, primarily, because we are seeing reinfection in prison. Now we have antiviral treatments such that in 12 weeks you can rid yourself of viral hepatitis. It has been a game changer, but not for prisons. Aboriginal people tend to be over-represented in contracting hepatitis C because they are also over-represented in prisons. I think there is a lot more we can do in all three areas.

**MS CARRICK:** Also, looking at how it is a part of the whole recidivism problem.

**Ms Minty:** Exactly, and I think that having drug and alcohol supports through care, for want of a better word, and in reach of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations—we do have Winnunga based in the AMC, but other ACCOs coming in and providing that support so that when people go out they continue with that support.

**THE CHAIR:** On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your attendance today. If you have taken any questions on notice please provide your answers to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*.

**Hearing suspended from 11.51 am to 12.47 pm.**

Appearances:

Cheyne, Ms Tara, Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy

Paterson, Dr Marisa, Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform

City and Environment Directorate

Peffer, Mr Dave, Director-General

Fitzgerald, Mr Bruce, Deputy-Director-General; and ACT Waste Manager

Rynehart, Mr Josh, Acting Head of Access Canberra; Registrar-General; and Acting Commissioner for Fair Trading

Cubin, Ms Derise, Executive Branch Manager, Licensing and Registration, Access Canberra; and Commissioner for Fair Trading

Vaile, Dr Jodie, Executive Branch Manager, Strategy, Data and Governance, Access Canberra

Bassett, Dr Louise, Executive Branch Manager, Fair Trading and Compliance, Access Canberra; and Controlled Sports Registrar

Chan, Ms Yu-Lan, Executive Branch Manager, Corporate Support and Capability, Access Canberra

Lhuede, Mr Nick, Construction Occupations Registrar; Architects Registrar; Professional Engineer Registrar

Mangeruca, Mr Giuseppe, Acting Executive Branch Manager, ACT Gambling and Racing Commission

Chesworth, Ms Fiona, Senior Director, Better Regulation Team

McMurray, Mr Kerry, Chair, Libraries Independent Working Group

**THE CHAIR:** We welcome Ms Tara Cheyne MLA, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy, and Dr Marisa Paterson MLA, Minister for Gaming Reform. We also welcome the officials in attendance. We have many witnesses for this session. Please note that as witnesses you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. As we are not inviting opening statements, we will proceed to questions.

**Ms Cheyne:** And my correcting the record.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, Ms Cheyne, I believe you have a quick comment you wanted to make.

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes, thank you. I very much appreciate the committee's indulgence. Thank you for the opportunity to correct the record regarding comments I made in response to questions about the Rent Relief Fund and Care Financial. During the latter part of my session yesterday, I said words to the effect of, "Despite some requests over the last little while for some data from Care, about what has the demand or pressure been in the last little while, I have not received that. So that makes it pretty difficult for me to consider modelling."

I made those comments in good faith. Nevertheless, it has come to my attention that what I understood had been asked of Care, at my request, is not what actually had been asked of Care. This appears to have occurred due to a miscommunication of what I was seeking, for which I take full responsibility. Accordingly, I wish to correct the record by withdrawing that statement and any inference that Care had not been cooperative or forthcoming in response to the requests made of them. I look forward to engaging with Care on the data that I remain interested in understanding, and in the meantime, I unreservedly apologise to Care and to the committee.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Cheyne. Moving onto questions, what I would like to jump into is regulatory reform and the speed of applications. Mr Peffer, you are the new Chief of the ACT City and Environment Directorate. I understand that you have said that excessive bureaucracy is slowing public servants and that more decisions should be made closer to the coal face, so the directorate will streamline internal signoffs to speed up service delivery. Now, can I ask, exactly how many internal signoffs were required for a simple liquor license variation in 2024-25, and what will that change to under the new faster decision structure?

**Ms Cheyne:** We will just welcome the Executive Branch Manager and Commissioner for Fair Trading, Ms Cubin, Chair.

**Ms Cubin:** I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. Excuse me Mr Cocks, would you mind repeating just the outline of that again, please?

**THE CHAIR:** Okay. So it was, how many internal signoffs were required for a simple liquor license variation in 2024-25, and what will that figure change to under the new faster decisions structure?

**Ms Cubin:** Thank you for the question. So, currently with a liquor license variation, rather than a new application, it would be signed off by a senior director in my branch. We have been looking at the delegations as to how to reduce the levels for signoff and the risks that might link to the particular signoff of the license. So, for example, for a full license, that decision would either be made by me or by the senior director. For a commercial permit, or a liquor permit, or a variation, then we would lower the decision-making process—we are lowering the decision-making process—to speed up that aspect but also give more responsibility and accountability to our staff.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay. So I guess the question is rather than just who signs off ultimately on it, how many levels would a simple liquor license variation be considered by, or flow through, in the path to that final signoff?

**Ms Cubin:** So with a variation, an amendment to the license, generally that would be a relatively simple process. It would be applied for in the branch and then it would be assessed. Depending on what the amendment was, for example, if it was seeking an increase of an occupancy loading, then we would need to involve the ACT Fire and Rescue. If it is decreasing, then we can make that decision based on some calculations, and so it would speed that component up.

**THE CHAIR:** So, within the process—maybe I am not being clear—presumably there

would be someone who received that application—

**Ms Cubin:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Is it the same person who processes that application? Then would it be—you have said a senior director would sign it off, is there a junior director—are there any other clearance levels in between that? How many steps is it going through from receipt to clearance?

**Ms Cubin:** I understand what you are asking. I guess there is different types of elements to the license. So from—

**Ms Cheyne:** It depends. It depends on what variation is being sought.

**Ms Cubin:** Well, yes. So I would say—

**THE CHAIR:** Is there a minimum?

**Ms Cubin:** —on average, it would be two to three people.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay.

**Ms Cubin:** Two to three processes.

**THE CHAIR:** Is that the sort of thing that would change under this new structure to try to reduce the number of steps?

**Mr Rynehart:** We are always looking for opportunities for efficiencies and to make the decision at the right level and the lowest practical level. There is a balancing point. Sometimes it is beneficial to have a person receive the information and collate and a different person to make that decision. It builds in an internal balance and check. But we are always looking for opportunities to make the decision the most efficient way that we can.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay.

**Ms Cheyne:** Access Canberra briefs me weekly, and part of that briefing provided to me is about new liquor licence applications and any variations. I cannot recall a week where there has not been at least several variations to a liquor licence. It is a constant process, and I would truly be surprised if there were more steps than necessary in that, given the regulatory with which they change.

**THE CHAIR:** Maybe it would be more useful if I moved to: what is the current median processing time for the 10 most common licence or permit types? What targets will apply from 1 January 2026?

**Ms Cheyne:** We publish target timeframes for occupational licences. Are we talking about all licence types now or still liquor?

**THE CHAIR:** All licence types. I am after the top 10 most common—to keep it in the

realm of those routine things where it would seem to be where the larger load would land, I assume.

**Ms Cheyne:** There is a dashboard that appears on the Access Canberra policies, accountabilities and reporting webpage, which I am happy to share with the committee. That identifies the target timeframe for occupational licence processing. and I think it makes clear where there might be a bit of a variation with that target timeframe. I do have some information for this month, 1 July to 22 July—so not a huge sample—on the average processing times: for real estate agents, 51 days for new applications and 72 days for renewal applications; for assistant agents, 40 days for new applications and 87 for renewal; for security employees, 52 days for new applications and 26 for renewal; for traders, 48 days for new applications and 21 for renewal; and, for liquor licenses—there has only been new applications in this financial year—155 days.

I think Ms Cubin can talk you through why that is longer. I think the data shows it longer than it probably actually is, because often proposed licensees put in their application before they have everything ready for Access Canberra to process it. Ms Cubin will tell you more. It has been 20 days for the average processing of new tobacco licences and, for renewal applications, it has taken one day. That is not 10; it is six that I have in front of me.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. And you will share that dashboard information—

**Ms Cheyne:** The link to it, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** —that provides more information in there as well.

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes, of course we can.

**THE CHAIR:** Are you adjusting the targets in line with the idea of streamlining internal sign-offs to speed up delivery?

**Ms Cheyne:** If I might speak for Mr Peffer and then, if I have really misinterpreted this, we can hash it out in front of everyone. I think there are processing timeframes across the directorate, not just Access Canberra. What I observe with my city services hat on—and we can talk about this later—is that, particularly in the planning space, there is engagement with our waste policy unit and engagement with our development coordination and Roads ACT. Already you can see, for some of the more complex builds, that there are multiple touch points, and some of those can take quite a period of time.

Access Canberra is always looking for room for improvement. But, as you heard from Mr Rynhart before, there has been, I would say, a real evolution in the last five years to streamline as much as possible and to ensure that decision-making occurs at the lowest, most appropriate level, if that makes sense.

**THE CHAIR:** It sounds like you are saying that those comments were largely directed towards other parts of the directorate, and you think that probably the Access Canberra processes are reasonably streamlined already.

**Ms Cheyne:** It can certainly be looked at again. But Mr Pfeffer will explain his comments, rather than me interpret them.

**Mr Pfeffer:** Thank you, Minister. Thanks for the question. My observation, coming into the organisation, is that Access Canberra has built some degree of success in terms of partnering with businesses to get them up and operating. There is plenty of decision-makers that actually sit out of their regulatory bounds. The opportunity we have with the new directorate is it actually brings a lot of those teams together.

Where teams would typically focus on what their particular timeframes are and the things that they need to get done but perhaps not be able to see it end to end for a full approval—which might include actually obtaining a development approval or constructing something to bring a business to life—that end-to-end approval process is something that now largely sits within a single entity. We still refer some things out to utilities, for example, but that end-to-end line of sight will really improve our ability to look at what we can do concurrently. So, knowing that someone wants to get to a point of opening a business—what are those approvals?—we might be able to actually advise the proponent, “You can lodge that now; we will start to process that,” knowing that they need to get to a particular end point. So there is the external facing approvals and the process we go through there.

Another big one for us is internally. There is a lot of corporate business that sits behind the scenes, running a big complex organisation like this. It is a billion-dollar entity and a lot of things need to happen day to day to ensure it continues to work, to ensure that our inspectors—who are out right now doing inspections—can do their job well. We will be looking at both that external interface business and the broader community as well as what we can do internally to have a nice, slick corporate set-up to really support our frontline.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay. I understand you made comments about eight layers.

**Mr Pfeffer:** Sorry; about what, Chair?

**THE CHAIR:** There was a reference to “eight layers”.

**Ms Cheyne:** Are you saying “eight”?

**THE CHAIR:** Eight; that is correct.

**Mr Pfeffer:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Was that specifically in regard to things like development approvals?

**Mr Pfeffer:** We are going through a process now of actually mapping out the broader system that governs the series of approvals. I think it is probably safe to say there are many more than eight steps in that—and probably multiples of. So we are going through a process that looks at that. Internally, there are plenty of documents that flow through the organisation that have many, many sets of hands on them to get to a particular point. That comes at the cost of time and it costs money, and it does not recognise, necessarily, the effort that people are putting in at the point close to where the business is happening,



the action. My intention with the organisation is to start to truncate down those layers of approvals and the sets of hands that something needs to get through, to either end up with the minister, with a proponent, with the business, with the community or wherever that might be.

**THE CHAIR:** So what was that “eight approval layers” referring to?

**Mr Peffer:** There are briefs that move within the organisation which might be generated at a point within a particular team, at a junior level, which then works its way up through a series of management tiers and then through executives, and bounces around different areas in the organisation before ultimately leaving the organisation to go to the minister or elsewhere. I am not sure that those layers always necessarily add sufficient value that would justify us having particular documents generated at a level in the organisation—

**Ms Cheyne:** I can give you an example of more than eight. Would you like it?

**THE CHAIR:** I am not sure I would like it, but you are certainly welcome to share it.

**Ms Cheyne:** It does not exist quite like this anymore, but, when I first became city services minister and tried to understand why the directorate had a target for ministerial responses of 28 days and why that was never met, it became very clear to me that there were multiple approval layers—and by “multiple” I mean multiple times multiple—before it got to me.

Members who have been here for some time would know that more consistently now my office will provide with information from the directorate rather than necessarily templating it for city services related answers. Sometimes you get a fun reply from me. We have really tried to find ways to take levels out of there. I have done that with in my own office as well. But what I was able to map in city services shocked me, to tell you the truth. With city services matters, I think people are just usually looking for a resolution rather than an explanation of how many trees we have in the city. That is the approach that I have taken. So it is not just in approvals for licences or development applications; there are layers of review everywhere.

**THE CHAIR:** Are there any specific regulatory powers that will be delegated downward, or are you still going through the process of identifying what the opportunities are?

**Mr Peffer:** In time, I think there will be. Ms Cubin just spoke about a particular example. But organisation-wide there will be hundreds, if not thousands, of delegated decision-making roles in the organisation that we will assess as we move through and map out these various processes to figure out who is best placed to make the decision, recognising that it has to be risk-based.

Many of these decisions really matter—not just for a business but for the broader community—and so some of them genuinely need those assurances in there. As a regulator, it is really important that the decisions that we make are fair. People will look for equity in decision-making. Sometimes that will mean that more than one person needs to be involved in assessing a decision to make sure that it is consistent.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay. There is a lot I can put on notice, but I want to come back to some of the numbers that you gave us, Minister, around processing times. Some of those still seem very high. We are talking 51 days and 87 days, when I would assume that people have already gone to the effort of putting together all the information that is needed. What is driving those what seem to be quite long—

**Ms Cheyne:** I will go straight to the operational people, who do that initial processing.

**Mr Rynehart:** Mr Cocks, one of the challenges of looking at time as a single measure of decision-making is that, in many of our licence processes now, we undertake actions on behalf of the applicant. For example, with a security licence, the person applies and then we obtain their criminal history check for them, and that can take some time. So sometimes with our processing we are not necessarily 100 per cent in control of it.

We could reduce that time by requiring the applicant to go and get their own criminal history check before they came into us. But, for the person, it does not actually make it any better and probably worse, because they would need to collate all the information and then provide it to us, as opposed to provide us enough information for us to take some actions on their behalf. So, yes, some of these applications do take time.

We are speaking here more about liquor licences. There are not many of those decisions but they often attract attention and there are often varying views about the appropriateness of an application, and we need to balance those things against something like a driver's licence, which is done in the service centre when the person arrives. So, by volume, those applications are effectively decided immediately by an ASO staff member.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you actually measure the amount of time that it is active—I guess Access Canberra time versus it has been handed off to some other organisation or back to the applicant to respond?

**Mr Rynehart:** I think in some places we would—not consistently across all applications. But I think with some of them I think we do monitor—

**Ms Cubin:** Generally, Mr Cocks, it will be on receipt of their application that I guess the clock starts ticking. Then we will work with the applicant—sometimes they are not always fulsome applications—and highlight what might be missing from the application. With a liquor licence there are legislated actions that we need take, like a 30-day public consultation timeframe. So it does depend on the particular licence type, because there are other obligations within the law that we need to also facilitate.

**Ms Cheyne:** A liquor licence has a mandatory 30-day consultation.

**THE CHAIR:** What I am trying to work out is whether that consultation time is always included in these numbers.

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes, it is.

**THE CHAIR:** Which makes it a bit difficult to compare and work out where things are landing. Have you considered a process where the clock effectively gets stopped at

different points? I know that, federally, places like the Therapeutic Goods Administration would stop the clock at particular points when it is not within the organisations control.

**Ms Cheyne:** I am going to welcome to the table Dr Vaile, who is a data expert extraordinaire.

**Mr Rynehart:** While Dr Vaile comes to the table, I would say yes, although we do tend to measure based on a customer's impact, really. At the end of the day, we can stop that clock, but the customer is still going to see the same amount of time with that measure.

**Dr Vaile:** We are working on a range of different efficiency measures within Access Canberra. Data is part of that. It is actually quite difficult when you are talking about aggregated numbers to actually look at things like where you can stop the clock, because you are not actually comparing apples and apples; you are frequently comparing very different processes. It is a factor that we have looked at, and we will continue to explore ways of being able to stop the clock and reduce down some of the known factors.

But, for many of the licences and registration types that we are talking about, there can be a range of different factors that come into play, including a criminal history check. Another may be that we did not receive a complete application in the first place. That might be only one small piece or it could be 10 pieces of information that are missing. So there is a very, very broad sort of divergence of the way that things come to us.

**THE CHAIR:** There have been a few times when “applicants not providing the full package of information” has been mentioned. Is that the driver of what looks like long processing times, or do we not have the data to confirm that?

**Dr Vaile:** It can be one of the drivers. It is not the sole driver, but it can be one of the drivers.

**Mr Rynehart:** Sorry; if I could just correct the record: security licensees are required to provide a criminal history check with their application. But, for some others, we do undertake it on their behalf—for example, working with vulnerable people et cetera.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I want to ask about the Gambling and Racing Commission's relationship with Access Canberra. Mr Rynehart was here the other day when the chair of the board was here, and we discussed the fact that the GRC pays \$5.9 million a year to Access Canberra for service provision. I am interested to explore how that is allocated for compliance and enforcement activities, how many people do this work and how we ensure the GRC is not subsidising activities unrelated to gambling and racing—to sort of follow on from the discussion we had on Friday.

**Mr Rynehart:** I think as I mentioned previously, the way that Access Canberra operates is more generalised. There is a compliance team, there is a licensing team and there is a customer team, and the activities of the Gambling and Racing Commission are within those teams. A piece of work that we are currently undertaking is to review the MOU,

particularly to look at more detailed and specific measures to give better transparency. The most recent Auditor-General report did indicate that there are opportunities there for us to improve, and we are considering how we do that more transparently and move forward.

The compliance and enforcement activities are part of the fair trade and compliance branch, and a component of each staff member's role is a gambling and racing function. However, there is not a specific FTE that is allocated throughout.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I appreciate the explanation. How then is the sum of \$5.9 million arrived at? I accept your explanation that there is no particular allocation. So how then is the decision taken that it is \$5.9 million that the GRC gets charged, for one of the better expression?

**Mr Rynehart:** I will hand over to Mr Mangeruca.

**Mr Mangeruca:** There is a historical aspect to the amount that is paid from the commission to Access Canberra, which has historically been indexed by CPI and WPI each year on a core basis. The initial funding allocation that makes part of the MOU is based on the amount of appropriation that the GRC had at the time that it was a standalone entity, and I think 2014 was the final year of that.

**MR RATTENBURY:** So, basically, whatever they had at that time for those purposes became the lump sum that goes to Access Canberra? Have I understood that correctly?

**Mr Mangeruca:** That is correct.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Thank you.

**Mr Rynehart:** Sorry; I realised in your initial question you were asking about how we know what activities are being undertaken. We are working through an activity at the moment, renegotiating the memorandum of understanding between the GRC and Access Canberra, as well as establishing a statement of intent and statement of expectations for each of the GRC functions, which will include—

**Mr Mangeruca:** I might elaborate for Mr Rynehart.

**Mr Rynehart:** Yes.

**Mr Mangeruca:** The commission has undertaken an end-to-end review of its governance processes in conjunction with Access Canberra. As part of that, starting at the highest level, the statement of intent has clear objectives and actions that are high priorities for the commission. That will come down to a statement of expectations, which creates clear KPIs in relation to each operational area within Access Canberra. That, again, will trickle down to operational plans for each of the teams that provide services to the GRC with key deliverables. Those deliverables are then integrated into reporting that will come to the commission board each month so that there is a level of assurance that there is delivery against those. The MOU, through our renegotiation processes, will, again, have clear KPIs and mechanisms to deal with this where any KPIs are not met.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Thank you. One of the issues that the Auditor-General picked up in their report related to investigations. I am aware that the Auditor-General's discovery period ended in December 2023 and there has been a range of work done since then—so that context may assist. They did make some critical comments about investigations. Looking at the public information about enforcement outcomes from the GRC, I cannot see anything since the end of 2023. There is an enforcement register or a participant register on the website. I cannot remember its proper name, but you know what I mean—

**Mr Mangeruca:** Yes.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I am interested in what is been happening with enforcement activities in the intervening period.

**Mr Rynehart:** I will hand it to Dr Bassett for that.

**Mr Mangeruca:** Can I potentially provide some introductory context?

**Mr Rynehart:** Yes.

**Mr Mangeruca:** I hate to keep leaning back to the statement of intent but, under the statement of intent, one of the objectives that has been outlined is a clearer move to transparency. You have intimated about reporting under the public enforcement register. As it currently stands and as the secrecy provision within the Gambling Racing Control Act is currently drafted, there is only a certain subset of enforcement actions that we can report on that, and they relate to actions under the Gaming Machine Act. In relation to that, we are only allowed to report on that register once any review period has been finalised. So, where there is a merits or judicial review of a particular matter, that will not appear on the register. That, I suppose, is the broader context.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I was not aware that secrecy provisions extended that far. So the high-profile matter at the Hellenic Club would not appear on the register because it is still potentially under review?

**Mr Mangeruca:** Exactly.

**MR RATTENBURY:** And I guess you cannot answer my subsequent question about other related matters, under the current legislation. I do not want to assume the answer. Is that the case?

**Mr Rynehart:** That would be correct. I would assume probably not. I think we would struggle to provide a lot of detail on many of the activities.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Okay. I am conscious that the minister is mindful of those and he is undertaking reform. So I think I will just leave it there for now. Thank you.

**MS CARRICK:** I want to ask about compliance in the building industry. Do you do licensing of trades?

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes.

**MS CARRICK:** Is there any intention to look at licensing more of the trades?

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes.

**MS CARRICK:** What is the process with that?

**Ms Cheyne:** That sits with policy ministers in terms of things like developer licensing and the licensing of engineers. But I will hand over to Mr Lhuede—and I will not lead you further astray.

**MS CARRICK:** There are roofers and a whole heap of them in the ACT that are not licensed.

**Mr Lhuede:** To answer the first part of your question, we license in terms of what we traditionally call trades. We currently license electricians, plumbers and gasfitters in the territory. They are the three trades that we license. Within those categorisations, there is a range of different enforcements and sub-trades. That is what we currently license.

As the minister correctly pointed out, the matter of additional trades being licensed is currently a policy matter for government and is being looked at through the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. At this point, we provide input to that policy development, which can look at, for example, the types of defects that we are finding through our processes of inspection and investigation. But, ultimately, it is a policy matter for government to make the decision on which trades to licence.

**MS CARRICK:** Okay. What about public certifiers? Was there not a decision that there would be more public certifiers?

**Mr Lhuede:** Minister?

**Ms Cheyne:** No, Mr Lhuede; I will just let you go. I will say something I regret.

**Mr Lhuede:** Thank you, Minister, for your confidence. That actually covers two terms of commitments of government. Under the last government, there was a policy developed around enhancing certification processes. The current government's election commitment was to look at or bringing in government certifiers. That is currently policy work that is being developed, again, by the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. So that is where that currently sits. So, yes, there is a very clear decision or commitment to bring in government certifiers. That work is currently in preparation for the policy term.

**Ms Cheyne:** Ms Carrick, to talk more politically, it was an election commitment in 2020, as you would recall, for ACT Labor, and the development of that work was undertaken in a portfolio held by a not-Labor minister, quite towards the end of the term, I suppose. I think it would be fair to say that there was some really good work done, but not quite in the way that Labor politicians had been anticipating when we had drafted that election commitment.

So there was definitely work undertaken to strengthen some of the processes. Obviously, Mr Lhuede's compliance team already does a terrific job. But the idea of public certifiers was the position that we wanted to create, and that was not quite being achieved in the development of the policy. That is why the election commitment was made again.

**MS CARRICK:** What are the timeframes now? Assumably, the policy is developed, and then you will have to recruit them into your organisation.

**Ms Cheyne:** That is probably one for Minister Steel. You have planning tomorrow?

**MS CARRICK:** Yes, tomorrow.

**Ms Cheyne:** I have probably said as much as I can without getting in trouble.

**MS CARRICK:** Okay. On bringing the two agencies together, assumably, it seems to be a good idea to co-locate and get efficiencies in processes. But, when you have the DA approvals area and the DA compliance area in the same organisation, how do you ensure that there is no conflicts of interest or there is a Chinese wall between so that they are not influencing each other?

**Mr Pepper:** That is a good question. The teams share the same objective. So I am not sure they are necessarily seeking to achieve opposing or conflicting things. We have had an internal discussion, being very mindful of the independence of our statutory decision-makers and how we preserve that, in terms of how we design the organisation and how we get our teams to work together. I do not have a sort of final concluding remark of, "Here is how it is going to work." That is something that we will keep front of mind as we look at the organisation.

As we progress, there is a range of things that we will do within the new directorate. Some of it will be structural in nature, as in bringing certain teams together where it makes sense. Some of it will be cultural, in terms of how we might seek for some teams to come together and work better together. Some of it may actually be regulatory or process-based, where we need to seek decisions from ministers about, "How would you like this process to work in the future? We can see a better way."

**MS CARRICK:** In the past, there were rules. It is probably a bit easier now. Regarding outcomes, a DA goes through, it is approved, and builders push the boundaries. When it comes to certifying, the boundaries are also pushed. Things slip through the cracks. This is where appeal rights are important. People who find that something has been detrimental to them, by what happens with neighbours, have the opportunity to take that to ACAT and have the matter addressed. If there are no appeal rights, it is a bit of a slippery slope. How is the whole process held to account?

**Mr Pepper:** I think the particular aspect of the process that you are talking about is probably best handled in the planning session that we have scheduled for tomorrow. But, in terms of compliance with leasing conditions or approvals, that is where we rely on complaints mechanisms, and we have our proactive and reactive inspection regime that sits under Access Canberra.

**Mr Rynehart:** Access Canberra operates under an accountability commitment that is on our website. Part of that framework includes a decision-making policy which explicitly discusses conflicts of interest and how to manage them. It says that a decision-maker should not be involved in a decision where a conflict of interest exists and that the decision-maker has the power to make the delegation authority. We have a construct that we operate within that and it explicitly deals with occasions when conflicts of interest present. Many, if not most, of our decisions are reviewable, either through ACAT or through the courts. There is always the mechanism which systemically holds us to account for the decisions that we make.

**Mr Lhuede:** I will add a final point to that. The Planning Act, at chapter 13, very clearly sets out how complaints are to be received and handled and the actions that can be undertaken. The elements of receiving and investigating complaints are clearly defined in the legislation, as are the subsequent processes, through natural justice, but also appeal, implementation and so forth.

**MS CARRICK:** There are issues to think about when you have private certifiers who work for developers, builders or house owners. There is densification. There is a force to densify, and things slip through the cracks and are pushed through. I just make that comment.

**THE CHAIR:** I believe there is provision within one of the acts—I have lost which one—that explicitly allows for the appointment of a government certifier. How many qualified certifiers are currently employed by the government?

**Mr Lhuede:** The Building Act allows for the appointment of a government certifier under quite specific conditions. It may be where the existing certifier may no longer be able to carry out the duties or where an owner, for example, is unable to obtain the services of private certifiers and can demonstrate that. There are quite strict provisions. I will get to the second part of the question, Mr Cocks. In those circumstances, we can do a number of things. We can appoint a private certifier as a government certifier. In a way, that is to manage the risks and liabilities that might exist with a more complex matter. For example, people may not be able to engage a certifier because of risk. The government can, in effect, take on an element of that risk and appoint a private certifier. We can engage as required.

Going to the second part of the question, we have a number of specific positions within our compliance audit team that are identified for certifiers. In those positions, we have two principal certifiers and one general certifier appointed. Their job is to focus on class 2 buildings—that is, residential high-rise buildings. They undertake audit in that space.

**THE CHAIR:** You said there are two positions. Are those positions filled?

**Mr Lhuede:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. But the work is limited to class 2 buildings. Does that mean the audit function is only looking at class 2 buildings?

**Mr Lhuede:** No. I have two teams in that space. One team looks at—



**THE CHAIR:** The qualified certifiers are only looking at those—

**Mr Lhuede:** They are only looking at the class 2 buildings. That is correct. However, we have a separate team that looks at class 1 buildings. Within that team, whilst we do not have specific positions for certifiers, we have people with building and trade qualifications undertaking audits.

**THE CHAIR:** I am not 100 per cent up on the Building Code, but I believe there are more than just two classes of buildings. Are you looking across the suite of all other classes as well—commercial, hospital, aged care?

**Mr Lhuede:** Yes. we are, as needed. The first team looks at class 1 and 10A—that is, detached dwellings, plus things like decks, pergolas et cetera. The class 2 team is focused on class 2 buildings, but from time to time they look at the range of classes 2 to 9. The focus is on class 2, because that is primarily the residential element and is the area of greatest risk. That is why it is targeted in that space. But they do look across the board. That team has looked at a range of things around commercial and other types of developments. Importantly, there are other parts of our business—for example, the electrical, plumbing and gas and inspectorates. They also do quite a lot of work in the space of more complex builds—for example, hospitals. They have a lot to do with—

**Ms Cheyne:** A ridiculous amount of work.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. There was reference to engineers registration earlier in this discussion. My understanding is that we had reached the stage where all engineering professions were covered by that scheme, but it looks like the licensing system is not due to be sorted out until June 2026. Is that correct?

**Mr Lhuede:** No. Unless I have misunderstood the question, that is not correct. Engineers registration became effective as of 6 March this year.

**THE CHAIR:** Table 77 of budget statements E, regarding the infrastructure program, seems to indicate the licensing system is not due to be completed until June 2026. That is probably the IT system.

**Mr Lhuede:** That may relate to the property developers regulation.

**Ms Chan:** I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. We are building a common licensing capability to handle all of our online licensing. Engineering registration, as you heard, went live in March this year, and the one for property developers is coming online. There is work to do.

**THE CHAIR:** That is what it is referring to.

**Ms Chan:** That is correct.

**THE CHAIR:** I have a bunch of questions. I will put them on notice.

**MS TOUGH:** My question is also to Mr Lhuede. There are a number of vacant shopping centre sites around Canberra, including Richardson shops in Tuggeranong.

Over the years, there have been lots of discussions around the powers of government and having to do stuff about these vacant sites—whether the government needs stronger powers to enforce the leases on these sites so that they are actually operating in compliance with the lease. What powers do you have to enforce lease agreements on these sites when the purpose is to provide a commercial space like a shopping centre? And what have you done to explore those powers or potentially use them?

**Mr Lhuede:** Thank you. That is a good question and a very relevant one to work underway at the moment. With the Planning Act 2023 being released, a new controlled activity was included in schedule 4. That controlled activity relates to the use of leases, where they have not been used for their purpose for more than 12 months. In effect, if it has not been used for its principal purpose for 12 months, that is a controlled activity. Those powers had not been previously available under the Planning and Development Act 2007. Also, there were previous positions around understanding those particular provisions and the 12-month element that we have been working on understanding.

Recently, we have received advice specific to that, and we are looking at enforcement and regulatory options on a number of sites in relation to that new controlled activity. They are currently live investigations. We need to go through a series of processes in terms of showing cause for natural justice. We need to also look at the options and considerations, in an enforcement sense, we may apply. I am not really in a position to talk about specifics, but the key aspect is that the new controlled activity order exists around lease use—the failure to use a lease for more than 12 months—and we are looking at regulatory options around that at the moment for a number of sites.

**MS TOUGH:** Wonderful. Do you have a timeframe on those investigations?

**Mr Lhuede:** I would not want to put a firm date on it. We are looking at a couple of sites at the moment. We may be looking at initial stages of action over the next couple of months. That being said, these matters are subject to appeal. Actions might be significant, so they can draw out over some time before we get to that end point. But we are doing it at the moment for a couple of sites.

**MS TOUGH:** Wonderful. I assume that, if action is commenced, the sites that are being investigated would become known. I do not want to prejudice any investigations.

**Mr Lhuede:** Not necessarily. We do not publish that type of information. There are processes whereby information can be sought on specific areas, but we do not publicly announce the regulatory activity.

**Mr Peffer:** It would depend on the outcome.

**Mr Lhuede:** Yes, and because we do not know yet. If they are appealed—for example, to ACAT—that obviously becomes public.

**MS TOUGH:** Thank you.

**MS CARRICK:** Are there commercial properties where we do not know who the owner is? I noticed that, in Queanbeyan, there were half a dozen of them and the local council sold them off because they could not find the owner.

**Mr Lhuede:** Generally speaking, we have not had a problem in finding out who the owners are. Sometimes it can be challenging to contact the owners. They may not be in the territory; they may not necessarily be in the country in some cases. But, through the lease system, we are able to find the owners. Finding out who the legal title is held by is generally not the issue. Sometimes it can be about contacting them.

**MS CLAY:** This follows on from Ms Tough's question about Richo shops. My colleague Ms Nuttall has been pretty active on this one too. We are wondering how much it has cost the government so far to fix the vacant shopfront there.

**Mr Lhuede:** I will take that on notice.

**MS CLAY:** That is great. You might be able to advise on this now: is that a cost that government pays or is that a cost that you then charge the leaseholders?

**Mr Lhuede:** I can only speak on the planning aspects of it, in that we undertake inspections in relation to the lease provisions. Any directions given in relation to that site—although I think the last inspection was on 10 June and it was not deemed unclean—are imposed on the owner. There may have been other actions undertaken by CED.

**Mr Fitzgerald:** I have read and understood the privilege statement. Unfortunately, no, that is not a recoverable cost. Any cost that City Services incurs as a result of undertaking clean-up activity is a cost borne by City Services.

**MS CLAY:** Does that also apply when the government puts up fencing?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** Yes.

**MS CLAY:** So the government has to pay all the costs to deal with a site that the owner is not looking after?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** Yes.

**MS CLAY:** There is a different site, Big Splash, which may be one of the other sites that you are looking at. We have some public domain information on this one, but I do not know how much you can tell us. There is some compliance activity going on. We were really pleased when we found this provision: when a site has not been in use for a continuous period of one year for the purpose for which the lease was granted, they are in breach. I would imagine that the Big Splash site would come up to breach in September this year, given that it was meant to open as a swimming pool in September last year. Given that it is July now, are you able to give us an update of where we are up to—or you could take it on notice—and what the current plans are for enforcement action on that?

**Mr Lhuede:** I will answer that as I answered the previous question—that there are currently matters under consideration and I am not really able to provide any further information on actions and what we may undertake in terms of regulatory action, for similar reasons. We are specifically looking at the lease provisions and the new

controlled activity. We are looking at that over a number of sites, and one of those is Big Splash. That is where I will leave that. We have taken other actions in terms of the security of that site. As I think most people will be aware, there have been ongoing issues around access to that site. Under separate provisions of the lease, around keeping it in repair, we are taking regulatory action with the owner to better secure that site. They have endeavoured to do some work, but people continue to cut the fence, frankly, which is a problem.

**MS CLAY:** Are you able to be a bit more specific about the steps you have taken? That sounds very reassuring. I am just not actually sure what you have done.

**Mr Lhuede:** Again, it is an active process in relation to controlled activity and controlled activity orders. We go through the process of a show-cause notice. The owner is given an opportunity to respond, and we will make a decision and enforce that. That is the process that we are looking at at the moment.

**MS CLAY:** It is reassuring that the enforcement action is going on at these unused sites. That is really good to see. I think the communities in both Richardson and Jamison are quite reassured about that. I am interested in the earlier description, Mr Lhuede, that this was a brand new provision. I think it is schedule 14 under the Planning Act 2023 now. I thought there was a power under the old act; it is just that it was not used.

**Mr Lhuede:** In relation to the 12-month lease—and I might have to take this on notice, but I will endeavour to answer it—it is a new provision under schedule 5. However, as I recall, there were provisions in relation to lease termination under the Planning and Development Act that touched on the 12 months, but it was not a controlled activity. As I understand it, it was a more complex process to try to address it, because it only allowed the one option of, I think, lease termination. That is my recollection of that matter.

**Ms Cheyne:** Some crown leases have a section on what constitutes a breach of the crown lease. I believe that some of those say that, if it is not used for 12 months for the purpose identified in the crown lease, there is usually termination of the lease. There are different levels, but the one that Mr Lhuede is referring to is perhaps the most explicit in relation to the Construction Occupations Registrar.

**MS CLAY:** I think I followed all that. There may have been pathways under the old act, but they were not as easy to use, and this is the pathway that Access Canberra is now choosing for enforcement.

**Mr Lhuede:** It was not as easy to use and did not provide the range of options that are available for a controlled activity order. My understanding is that it only went to termination. Controlled activity allows for a range of options for the leaseholder.

**MS CLAY:** You may not be able to answer this. This might be for another session. Let me know. We have a letter from one of the ministers that says there are no current plans for rezoning. I want to confirm that the Big Splash site is not being rezoned. Is that a question for you or is that a question for—

**Mr Lhuede:** That is a question for the minister.

**MS CLAY:** The sports minister or the planning minister?

**Ms Cheyne:** The planning minister.

**MS CLAY:** Thank you.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Is it possible to get figures on how many controlled activity orders and lease terminations were conducted by Access Canberra in the last 12 months? You can take it on notice, if you wish.

**Mr Lhuede:** I am happy to answer that now. There were 13 controlled activity orders last year compared to six the previous year.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Thank you. I have a series of questions on libraries. Firstly, the government response to my motion on libraries earlier this year suggested that the National Library of Australia was available as a service or had additional capacity. I want to question this. The National Library of Australia plays a different role, as a national reference library, and it does not have the community programs that a local community library, like those of ACT Libraries, have. Do you have evidence that the two libraries can be substituted for each other in terms of the services they provide the community?

**Ms Cheyne:** I will invite Mr McMurray to the table, simply because he has been doing some further work for us as part of an independent working group on libraries, in terms of the mapping of services. He can speak to that in a little more detail. I would not necessarily characterise national libraries as not providing community services or programs. I think they do. It may not be in the form of the accessible level that we see at our community libraries—services for young children or young families, English conversation classes, and things like that—but they certainly do provide book launches and opportunities to speak with authors. There have been some pretty extraordinary exhibitions in the past and talks relating to those. A number of community organisations make use of the space as well for inviting guest speakers.

They are not directly interchangeable, but it is not a fair characterisation to say that the National Library does not provide that sort of community service. However, since we responded to that part of your motion, Mr Braddock, Mr McMurray has done some further work about the servicing that is provided by libraries across the ACT. I will hand over to him to expand on that.

**Mr McMurray:** Thank you, Minister. I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. In relation to the first part of the question, I agree with the minister. The Heritage Library, when it was part of Libraries ACT, prior to the MoG, provided an open-access service to the community, the same as the other libraries, but, from talking to them, the interest group is very defined. People generally go to the Heritage Library for very specific reasons and research. It is far more refined than most of the other libraries in Libraries ACT.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Sorry, Mr McMurray—I was actually referring to the National Library, not the Heritage Library.

**Mr McMurray:** My apologies.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Is there an update on the future of the Civic Library, given the Civic Square and Canberra Theatre redevelopment?

**Ms Cheyne:** No. However, Mr McMurray has been undertaking work which has produced a report on some of the issues that we have identified across libraries, and that report has recently been shared with staff.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Will there be a Civic Library after the redevelopment of the theatre?

**Ms Cheyne:** I cannot answer a question about the redevelopment of the theatre.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I am asking about the library. Will there be a library in the city in a number of years, after the site is redeveloped?

**Ms Cheyne:** I do not know the full extent of the redevelopment of that site at this stage, but I do understand, from my previous role as Minister for the Arts, that the fin, as it is known, is not going anywhere.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Minister, you just referred to a report being made available to staff. Will that be publicly released as well at some point?

**Ms Cheyne:** It was confidentially shared with staff.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Will it be released at some point in the future to the Assembly?

**Ms Cheyne:** That is a matter for government to consider.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Okay. My next question is: according to the library's administrative fees website, Libraries ACT has abolished the discounted room hire rates for not-for-profit organisations, resulting in more than a doubling of the fees charged to them, because they are now charged at a commercial rate. Why was this decision made?

**Ms Cheyne:** Probably, I think because of the nature of Libraries ACT transitioning to Access Canberra from 1 July, but the fee instruments were determined before 1 July. The appropriate EGM of that decision, when it was made, is not here for this session. So I will take it on notice.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Okay. Which session would have been the appropriate—

**Ms Cheyne:** The next one.

**MR BRADDOCK:** The next one?

**Ms Cheyne:** Well, this is the appropriate session, but the EGM from the time, now that Libraries ACT has gone to Access Canberra, and it has been there for 31 days, is Access Canberra. I do not recall and I do not have that information in front of me. Access

Canberra does not have that information available to them because they were not involved in that decision.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Okay.

**THE CHAIR:** Sorry. Perhaps Minister, would you be able to get that information before the end of this session?

**Ms Cheyne:** Probably. In fact, there may be an explanatory statement attached to that fee instrument that explains it. Just let me have a look, but it depends how many questions I get.

**MR BRADDOCK:** One last question for libraries then. In response to some of the questions on notice about library staff—and there is a big discrepancy between the large branches which have eight to 10 staff FTE on average, versus the smaller branches like Erindale, Civic and Kingston, which have one to two FTE. How does the government go about deciding how many staff are needed at each branch? Is there a lower limit for the staff safety or wellbeing that you cannot go below? What is the review process to determine that?

**Ms Cheyne:** That is an excellent question, Mr Braddock, and something that Mr McMurray has spent the last few months exploring, and yet the answer is probably not a short one.

**Mr McMurray:** I will attempt to make it a short one. There was an establishment of minimum numbers done as part of Libraries ACT which was about what is the minimum number of staffing required to ensure the branch remains open, and work health and safety factors were considered. In order to achieve those minimum numbers, a risk assessment was done at each library at the time and determined the minimum number of staff that would be required to operate the branch.

Kingston, for argument's sake, whilst listed as two, has a lunch cover, so at all times there is two. So really there are basically two and a half people at Kingston Library to ensure there is no person ever working alone. For the bigger libraries, of course, it is based on the size of the risk assessment, the volume of the people coming through the door, borrowings and returns, and number of programs being run on a particular day. So that is how those numbers are determined, as what were called minimum numbers.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Minister, I just want to come back to the question about the Civic Library because I was not quite clear on the answer in terms of what the government's future plan for a library in the Civic area is.

**Ms Cheyne:** So this is part of that report that I just mentioned. It is with staff and it has been with staff for less than 24 hours. It is comprehensive, if I may say so. It has numerous findings and recommendations in it, including about where some areas in Canberra are overserviced and where some areas are underserviced, particularly in terms of the library opening hours, rostering and a lot of the questions that you are asking. What is critical, though, and mentioned throughout the report, is that while there are findings made and recommendations provided, nothing can be implemented without direct consultation with staff, unions, the independent working group and treasury.

So this is a lengthy report that staff, I would say, are digesting. Mr Rynehart has led an all-staff meeting this morning about it. There are numerous interrelated findings and recommendations within it, including about rostering and potential service delivery and model changes. My commitment to staff is that nothing is changing until this has been worked through with staff and consulted on with staff. So I cannot say definitively either way.

I would stress that this is not, and never has been, an exercise about closing libraries. Mr Rynehart will be leading the work over the next few months, effectively to codesign with staff, the approach to the recommendations that have been provided, and to essentially get staff feedback, buy-in and endorsement of whatever the changes may be and then present that to government. I expect that process to conclude by the end of the year.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Where in that process will you commit to informing the public and the Canberra community as to the future of the libraries?

**Ms Cheyne:** I think when I say end of the year, that certainty will be provided by the end of the year. So what I am hoping is that there is quite a quick bit of work that is going to require a lot of hands on deck and engagement from staff. And again, at the moment, we are not even onto day two yet of them having this report. So there is still a bit to digest, but I believe Mr Rynehart and Ms Springett are doing some tours of libraries starting from tomorrow—Monday?

**Mr Rynehart:** Friday.

**Ms Cheyne:** Tomorrow, to begin this work in earnest. I would expect that effectively a proposal that considers the recommendations as a whole will be presented to government in the start of the fourth quarter of this calendar year. Mr Rynehart might have more to say.

**Mr Rynehart:** I think only to just reinforce that it is early days. One of the key processes that we are going through is to work with our team, and work with our people, to find the right outcome and to work through the processes of considering the report, considering the recommendations, and what is a feasible and the best approach to the response. We had an all-staff meeting this morning and also met with each of the relevant branch managers and are working through what it means and supporting people to understand the report, so then we can work with them to really think about where we go from here with the next steps.

**MS CLAY:** I want to have a chat about DA processing and how that is going. We are in the second or third year now what is really a housing decline situation, where new builds are slow and at slow rates—

**Ms Cheyne:** I am not sure it is this session at all.

**MS CLAY:** DA processing times? No?

**Mr Peffer:** Tomorrow.



**MS CLAY:** Development application processing? Tomorrow, okay.

**Ms Cheyne:** I do not have that and nor does Minister Paterson.

**MS CLAY:** Sure. My apologies.

**MR EMERSON:** I wanted to chat about the Liquor Act and different definitions for licensing arrangements. Looking at some of the definitions, a bar, on my read, is defined as a premises where the predominant activity is the serving of liquor for consumption at the premises, whereas a nightclub is a premises where the predominant activity is dancing and entertainment. Of course, most nightclubs also involve the serving of liquor and many bars involving dancing and entertainment. My question is, how does compliance with the differing definitions work?

**Ms Cubin:** From a licensing perspective or from an on-the-ground operational enforcement perspective?

**MR EMERSON:** Well, both. Someone makes a submission and you determine whether they are in the right category?

**Ms Cubin:** Yes, absolutely. So the key difference is with a nightclub licence—and it all comes down to occupancy loadings. I feel like I talk about this a lot. With a venue as a nightclub they have the dancefloor and they sometimes have a different capacity for people, within the venue. Quite often it is the applicant that will be determining the type of licence that they wish to apply for. Then the fee determination obviously sets out the risk components related to that particular licence type. So it comes down to occupancy loading and the type of operation that they are running.

**MR EMERSON:** Okay. Do you ever say to someone, “Well actually you know, you have applied to be a bar, but we think you are a nightclub,” or vice versa?

**Ms Cubin:** We have a lot of engagement with licensees. Sometimes there might be the discussion around those two categories, or it might be a discussion around whether they are actually wanting to operate with a general licence, which means they might have the opportunity to have an on-venue, or on occasions they might decide that they can then operate off-site, like from a catering perspective. We have a number of licences that operate under that licence category as well. So there is definitely a conversation with applicants about what they are hoping to achieve with the type of venue that they are wanting to operate.

**MR EMERSON:** Okay. Does anyone ever attempt to recategorize?

**Ms Cubin:** Yes, they do attempt to do that.

**MR EMERSON:** Successfully?

**Ms Cubin:** Yes, absolutely. I mean, at the end of the day it is the decision of the applicant. We will again work through with them the elements around that. I think with some of the reforms that have happened, some venues are considering their occupancy

loadings to take advantage of the reforms that the government have implemented. So there is a range of conversations that we have with venues about what they, again, what they are hoping to do or achieve with their premises.

**Mr Rynehart:** I think, and it has been a long time since I have looked at the Liquor Act, and Ms Cubin will squint at me when I am incorrect here—I am too far away to hit me! My understanding is that fundamentally the nightclub licence allows for a greater density of people in the premises, as opposed to a bar. So fundamentally, the question about whether a business is trying to open a nightclub or a bar, is in many ways, their assessment of their business, of how many people they want in the premises, and we work with them to achieve their outcome in that model.

**MR EMERSON:** Great.

**Ms Cubin:** Yes, sorry. I default to talking about occupancy loadings, people density.

**MR EMERSON:** This is part of why I am asking this. It looks like there is about a \$10,000 gap, this is before the reductions, right, but a \$10,000 gap in the cost of a liquor licence for nightclubs compared with bars, with the same capacity operating. It depends on the opening hours and all of that sort of—that looks like kind of the largest gap.

**Ms Cheyne:** Based on the risk profile.

**MR EMERSON:** Sorry?

**Ms Cheyne:** It is based on the risk profile.

**MR EMERSON:** So I am trying to understand, I suppose, if it is up to the venue or not? Why would anyone ever register as a nightclub if the fees are more expensive?

**Ms Cheyne:** Well we do not have many, do we?

**MR EMERSON:** What is that, sorry?

**Ms Cubin:** Yes, we do not.

**Ms Cheyne:** We do not have many nightclubs.

**Ms Cubin:** No, we do not have many nightclubs. I think, as the minister said, the way the fee determination works obviously is based on risk, and some venues have chosen and been in that category for a long time. I think part of that again also depends on, again the applicant or the licence holder, as to the type of venue they want to run, what type of conversations they might have had from an insurance perspective, like there is a whole range of other factors that they would consider with regards to that.

**MR EMERSON:** Has any consideration been given to harmonising any of these categories where they are really close together?

**Ms Cubin:** I guess that more broadly is a matter for the government. However, there have been reviews over time.

**Ms Cheyne:** No, I think where the focus has been in more recent times has been what gaps we have been missing in the economy, and I suppose in the market, in terms of some of those smaller wine bars or micro bars. I think it is a capacity of less than 30 and less than 10 respectively. So we have more created different licence types which have considerable discounts attached to them to encourage that activity.

**MR EMERSON:** Like when the alcohol is secondary to the primary activity, those sorts of licences as well, right?

**Ms Cheyne:** Again it also comes down to risk profile. You know, if you have a small venue, the fewer people that are in the venue generally, not all the time, but generally, the risk is lower.

**MR EMERSON:** You mentioned the reviews. I am wondering if there has been any work done on looking at say licensing definitions, like licensing specifically, and costs compared to other jurisdictions for the different categories? Is that a piece of work that has happened? It might be in the last five years. It might be needed to be taken on notice, I am not sure.

**Ms Cheyne:** We have looked broadly, particularly as part of this reform work. I think that the discounts that we have been offering have gone beyond what they are in New South Wales. However, I do note that New South Wales is looking to do what I think is a third tranche of reforms. But Dr Vaile and Ms Chesworth—Ms Chesworth in particular—have been leading the policy development around the reforms. So she can tell.

**Ms Chesworth:** As part of the reform work to introduce the liquor licensing night-time economy reforms since 2024, we undertook a Night-time Economy Review. That document is publicly available. In that document it has a jurisdictional scan across all jurisdictions regarding their different fees, the way they structure their fees and the way they describe their different licence categories. I do need to caveat it because it was performed in February 2024. Jurisdictions do change fees and the way they structure their licences. So it was correct at that time, but it does give quite a good indication, particularly in relation to the sorts of reforms that we were looking at, what the arrangements are in other states and territories.

**Dr Vaile:** The team have maintained those contacts, and they continue to get updates from the other jurisdictions over time as well, but obviously, that reform was a specific point in time.

**MR EMERSON:** Do you happen to have any recent updates internally? Are you able to provide that on notice? Obviously, I will go back and look at the review. If you do not, that is okay.

**Ms Chesworth:** I mean, would you be looking at all sort of licence categories, or particularly focusing on bars, nightclubs?

**MR EMERSON:** Well liquor licence specific and the jurisdictional comparison. The minister mentioned New South Wales, obviously we always get that comparison.

**Ms Chesworth:** Okay, yes.

**Ms Cheyne:** If we have anything recent, but I do not think it would be appropriate for us to create something.

**Ms Chesworth:** I mean, it is difficult sometimes to compare across because as Derise mentioned, the general licence category, based on my latest understanding, something like that is not available in New South Wales. So it is actually quite difficult for businesses to set themselves up under that business model. Whereas the general licence category allows them to have both onsite consumption, but also sell liquor for takeaway, and that is proved popular with a number of businesses that have popped up recently in Canberra in different areas. So, there is not always a clear parallel—

**MR EMERSON:** Okay.

**MS CARRICK:** Can you explain the licensing rules, or why it is that we have so many clubs and not so many pubs?

**Dr Paterson:** I guess, by clubs you mean like the Hellenic Club, those types of clubs?

**MS CARRICK:** Yes, you look at in that area, in the south, in Woden: lots of clubs. But we used to have pubs: there is the Statesman in Curtin; there is the Kingo; there used to be the Wello; and there used to be the Ambo. Where have they all gone? Why do not people want to do that?

**Ms Cheyne:** Where were these?

**MS CARRICK:** The Ambassador was at Mawson.

**Ms Cubin:** Thanks for the question, Ms Carrick. I probably cannot run through why demographics and things have changed over time, but I will say that on the Access Canberra website, we have what is called an interactive map for liquor licences. If anyone is interested, you can actually move through time to look at certain locations to see what venues were in situ at that time.

**Ms Cheyne:** It is cool.

**Ms Cubin:** Yes, it is actually a useful comparison. So at a point in time you could determine, say 10 years ago, this is what the venue situation looked like and then move through that and see what it looks like at this point in time. But as far as determining why venues may choose to close, or redevelop, or transfer a licence, again as I explained to Mr Emerson, it is often the applicant, and we just help to facilitate.

**MS CARRICK:** Okay. Thanks. I just thought there might be some governance arrangements you might prefer, because of poker machines or something, or to be a club.

**Ms Cubin:** I guess more broadly that is the decision of—

**Dr Paterson:** I think also, in terms of gaming machines—there were 42 licensed venues across the territory, 39 clubs and three hotels. It probably is a bit historical too, in terms of clubs having poker machines for a long time and being allowed to have a greater number of poker machines. So the revenue has been greater and they have been able to expand, that type of thing. I would suggest that is part of the historical context of how we have got to this point, similarly to New South Wales. Whereas you look at Western Australian which has predominantly hotels, and clubs are a completely different context, and they do not have poker machines over there. So I think it is just a long term historical operating environment.

**MR EMERSON:** Another Woden map here: you are going to love this. I am going to send it to you.

**MS CARRICK:** Okay, thanks. I will cry when I see all the stuff we used to have.

**THE CHAIR:** We might bring things to a more contemporary consideration than The Contented Soul.

**Ms Cheyne:** No, no, I was enjoying it.

**THE CHAIR:** And if, just before 1 July, a whole bunch of disallowable instruments dropped, including waste management and resource recovery fees determination, domestic animals fees determination, public unleased land fees determination, animal welfare fees determination and, of course, Working With Vulnerable People background checking fees determination? I am keen to dive in a little bit to understand how some of these fees have been set; if fees were indexed by the wage price index or consumer price index, have those figures been used; and what extra margin might have been added and for what and whether that relates to specific costs or service upgrades.

**Ms Cheyne:** If we could perhaps limit the fees to within the Access Canberra realm for this one, if that is all right, and we can talk through WWVP as well. What I would say in a general sense for everything is that we do have some fees that have not been looked at for a long, long period of time. When they were first determined it might have been in a particular setting or a point in time and things have then changed rapidly. Probably the biggest one that comes to mind is my “favourite” Public Unleased Land Act, which we can talk about in the next session.

With WWVP, we can certainly talk through what the rationale was regarding the \$11 fee for volunteers. It, at least partially, relates to some of the sustainability pressures that we have seen with the scheme. There are numerous other examples in government where the fee does not even begin to start to recover the cost of delivering the service. I would not say that a fee needs to be charged for all services, of course, but there are some where there is not necessarily a tiered approach. If, let’s say, someone needed a turnaround on a marriage certificate in a day, historically, we have not had, “If you need it urgently, you pay a little bit extra for the time that staff are devoting to prioritise that.”

**THE CHAIR:** Okay.

**Ms Cheyne:** All of this work has been underway for some time. But if we want to go to some specifics, I can—

**THE CHAIR:** As a broader observation to start with—and maybe we can go to some other specifics—it seems like there was almost a baseline increase above wage price index. One of the observations I have made, looking through the budget papers is that, when the government is paying out money, it looks things are tied to CPI and, when the government is taking in money, it seems to be largely linked to WPI, which of course is somewhat higher. But, for the fees, it looks like there is a baseline of wage price index plus, if I recall correctly, about 0.35 per cent.

**Ms Cheyne:** Of which one?

**THE CHAIR:** As a baseline, it looks like the lowest that we have is about 0.35 per cent above wage price index—and that is across multiple fees.

**Ms Cheyne:** I think we are extending a little bit into the Treasurer's or maybe the Minister for Finance's area regarding tax policy.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay; so those are not necessarily just set according to the costs of recovery, but—

**Ms Cheyne:** If I recall correctly—and, again, someone kick me if this is not entirely what occurred—I believe there were instructions provided to the agencies from Treasury about the general guideline of assessing fees against a particular policy and what those determinations should look like and, if there were fees that were outside of those guidelines, that needed to get a particular endorsement through cabinet.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay. For the fees that you are responsible for, did you undertake demand or behaviour modelling to see whether the higher fees would deter compliance or generally shift behaviour?

**Ms Cheyne:** Do you want to talk about WWVP?

**THE CHAIR:** I am happy to talk about Working With Vulnerable People, but I am interested in the broader question as well. It sounds like Working With Vulnerable People is an instance where there is behaviour change that you were looking to achieve.

**Ms Cheyne:** To go to the general principles, it can depend. But I would say that there are some—which I cannot quite point to it in the immediate—where, like I said, the fee has not had someone properly look at it for some time, and it has almost not been worth collecting the fee, and yet has come at quite a cost to government, for example. There has been some realignment, and that is where we have seen some of those increases. There have been some other things where we have identified a particular service that there is demand for that we might be able to provide, and then there is potentially a new fee associated with that. Japanese domestic number plates—which are coming—is one of them.

**THE CHAIR:** Bring it on.

**Ms Cheyne:** Indeed. On WWVP, I will hand over to Dr Vaile and Dr Bassett in a moment because they know this intimately. I feel like I know a lot, but hopefully they

can correct whatever I say that is wrong.

When the scheme was established, back in 2011, there was modelling undertaken of the scheme and it suggested that a forecast of 42,000 registrants. That number is now, I think, 172,000 currently—so not over time or registrations ever; that is what we currently have in the system, which is a lot bigger, I think, you could say. Funnily enough—and I have gone right back to the debate at the time, and when there was a decision to not have a fee for volunteers, which made a lot of sense—even Mrs Dunne said, “There are going to be some financial implications, and we do not have a real handle on how many people will be required to have such a card and it is hard to quantify the information on the financial impacts, but they would be considerable.” That was very prescient—because it became true.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Ahead of the time, Mrs Dunne.

**Ms Cheyne:** I know. I do miss Mrs Dunne some days—not most days, but some. That was absolutely correct, and I think that is what has occurred.

There are some other issues with the scheme overall in a sustainability sense in that there is no distinction or requirement currently to prove that you need a registration for a volunteering activity and to link the volunteering activity to a genuinely regulated activity. So I think what we have seen is basically a very well-intentioned creep from some volunteers and organisations to be on the safe side and to have a registration because they might interact with a vulnerable person. That was never the intent of the scheme. In fact, the legislation provides for all sorts of examples where registration is not required—like a plumber going to a school to fix the pipes, and it might be during the school day, and a kid might say, “Hello”, but that is not the primary purpose of the function of being there.

**THE CHAIR:** It sounds like where you are heading is that the intention of this particular fee was a disincentive to become a registered—

**Ms Cheyne:** No; what I would say is that we are at a point now, with 172,000 people in the scheme and with some further policy changes that have occurred at a national level and at a local level, where there has effectively been a structural deficit in the management of this since its creation and it is worsening. There was a period during COVID and when we extended the scheme’s registration from three years to five years where a whole lot of registrations were aligned with the timing. Now we can see this peak coming of renewals that is way beyond anything we have ever had to deal with before—even when we have a scheme at the moment that the demand for increasing and increasing.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay.

**Ms Cheyne:** Probably the most significant change in a policy sense has been continuous monitoring. Some people on application may need a risk assessment to be undertaken. But after they are registered, everyone in the scheme is continuously monitored. So, if we have some information about someone, the teams will investigate and potentially do a risk assessment. If they steal a loaf of bread, that is going to be a notification on the system and a risk assessment will be required—and then the extent of the risk

assessment costs. You can imagine that, if there is a whole heap of people in the scheme who do not genuinely need a working with vulnerable people card or registration, a lot of effort and a lot of cost that has been gone into that might not necessarily have been required.

The fee came about because we needed to go to government for the fifth year in a row or something like that to seek more funding to be able to deliver the scheme effectively. In doing so, it is not uncommon to try to offer up a contribution from within the area that is seeking the initiative funding. I think we ended up getting \$5.9 million—and obviously the offset of the fee was a very small proportion of that. It was intended to both collect the costs of the background check and the production of the card but also not to dissuade people from volunteering or dissuade people from registering if they are undertaking a regulated activity, but to start more of an engagement exercise across the entire volunteering sector, and the employment sector about, “Is this a card that you really need?” So, in a behavioural way, yes, an \$11 fee is intended to start that discussion more broadly, and our intention from the beginning was to work closely with the sector on that—and, effectively, it still is our intention. But I might just check if Dr Vaile or Dr Bassett needs to correct me on anything I have said.

**THE CHAIR:** In the interest of time, I do not want to dive too deeply into anything.

**Ms Cheyne:** Don’t you? I thought there was a lot of interest in this.

**THE CHAIR:** It sounds like there may be some supplementaries on their way.

**Ms Cheyne:** Okay.

**THE CHAIR:** I am sure we will dive into the details in a myriad of supplementaries. But, at the moment, I want to understand the behavioural considerations and whether that sort of consideration of behavioural impact actually flows through to other activities as well. For example, under the Waste Management and Resource Recovery (Fees) Determination 2025, most items increased by about three—

**Ms Cheyne:** Waste is the next session. I am really happy to continue the discussion about the purpose of fees, but waste is for the next session.

**THE CHAIR:** That is all right. Generally across fees, do you undertake that same consideration of whether there will be a behavioural impact if you adjust the fee?

**Ms Cheyne:** I cannot speak for all ministers or all fees, but I think that is a consideration. Certainly with libraries, for example, in the “olden days”, when people carried coins, there was the cost for printing and photocopying of 10c or 20c or whatever it was. That really is a fee that is not worth collecting when someone is printing only up to 20 pages at a time, and libraries also do not have the facilities to process a fee that is not in cash. That is one of the reasons that printing remains free in our libraries. So there are different behavioural considerations. They are not all about encouraging or discouraging behaviours; they are also about what the overall cost is to government in collecting a fee.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay. I am going to open up to supplementaries, because I know there



is a bit of an interest in some of the things we have been discussing. I am going to start with committee members and then I will go visiting members.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I am interested in the discussion about the working with vulnerable people card. I think it has been understood for a while that it has had a much higher uptake than perhaps was anticipated originally. It was recognised in the ACT Volunteering Strategy Action Plan, which was released in 2024, in which Volunteering ACT and the government agreed to it together essentially to address this under point 12 in that action plan.

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes.

**MR RATTENBURY:** So I am interested that you chose to implement a fee before actually working on the steps that had already been agreed to. Part of the objective was to send a behavioural signal. Surely the better approach would have been to try and make all these people that do not need one understand rather than have to bring in a fee.

**Ms Cheyne:** I think it was both. In bringing forward the business case to government with an offset, Access Canberra has very little by way of offsets or other contributions that it can provide to budget initiatives that it seeks, because it is so frontline service delivery based. Other agencies can redirect resources; if Access Canberra redirects resources something suffers. So there was a what I think is still a reasonably modest offering put up, while also acknowledging that we needed this funding now for the sustainability of the scheme; that there are further policy changes coming at a national level and that work has already started with Volunteering ACT and ACTCOSS more broadly about that action. All of that context was considered.

I am very happy to take responsibility, perhaps for my naivety, about the \$11 fee and the signal that that might be sending before that work had been complete. I would note that the act had two reviews legislated: one that was supposed to occur after the first five years of operation. That review occurred in 2017. Then there was supposed to be one after seven years of operation. That never occurred. So we have not had a wholesale review of the sustainability of the scheme. It is still part of the work that we will be undertaking. But, ultimately, yes, I blame it on my naivety.

**MR RATTENBURY:** So is the work underway on item 12 in the action plan to actually sit down and see whether we have the settings right and are sending the right message?

**Ms Cheyne:** That is underway in earnest.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Terrific.

**Ms Cheyne:** And it is not just volunteering, either. Obviously, we do not need volunteering to talk to us about the employment sector.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Of course.

**Ms Cheyne:** We have the same issue in the employment sector, but there are different solutions there that we can employ.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Of course.

**Ms Cheyne:** Also, that is more cost recovered.

**MS CARRICK:** Could you provide a list of all the Access Canberra fees and charges and what they were and then what their impact on the 2025-26 budget was—what the increase or decrease in the budget was?

**Mr Rynehart:** Ms Carrick, do you mean the difference in the fee from last year to this year?

**MS CARRICK:** Pretty much.

**Mr Rynehart:** The fee determinations that largely indicate last year's fee and this year are on the legislation register. That may be sufficient. Or are you talking about what the overall revenue impact is?

**MS CARRICK:** I am interested in all the different fees and charges and what the impact on the budget was—so you can see it line by line.

**Mr Rynehart:** I think the fee determinations that are set on the legislation register probably give that indication between last year and this year for each fee.

**MS CARRICK:** Is that one document or is that a load of different documents?

**Ms Cheyne:** What I can tell you, Ms Carrick—and perhaps Mr Rynehart can read it with me at the same time, just in case I misinterpret, like I did yesterday—is that there is income from taxes, license fees and fines. That is within the Access Canberra line item in the controlled budget statements in budget statement E. It is \$409,000 for this year—so this year from last year. So it is an increase of \$409,000.

**MS CARRICK:** So you do not have a breakdown of the Access Canberra fees and charges and their movements?

**Ms Cheyne:** The Access Canberra fees and charges are all publicly available, but they sit against different acts. I think there is somewhere that consolidates them all, but they are disallowable instruments that are provided for under the primary legislation. Working With Vulnerable People, for example, does not sit under an Access Canberra act; it sits under the Working with Vulnerable People (Background Checking) Act, and then there is the fee instrument there.

**MS CARRICK:** But Access Canberra would have collected the fee should it have gone forward, wouldn't they?

**Mr Rynehart:** The fees are set by each piece of legislation. The Working with Vulnerable People Act sets its fee, the road transport legislation sets those fees, et cetera. The setting of the fees are the responsibility of the policy area and the policy minister. We collect and we administer, and our website would indicate the fee of each transaction. I do not know if there is a consolidated list of all fees that we collect, because we effectively collect across the entire ACT public service through our

customer channels. But, definitely, the fees are determined according to each piece of legislation and then there is a disallowable instrument that is attached to each of those which sets out the legislative fee for the year.

**Ms Cheyne:** We do have it. It does exist. I will send you the link.

**MS CARRICK:** Thank you.

**MR EMERSON:** Going back to your ongoing compliance checks with the continuous monitoring. How exactly does that work? I feel like people should know more about that. My understanding is that we are the only jurisdiction or one of the few jurisdictions that do it. Maybe you can just provide some detail for us.

**Dr Bassett:** Thank you for the question. Continuous monitoring is a feature of the Working With Vulnerable People scheme. It is for the purposes of working with children checks and also for the NDIS check. In different jurisdictions, it is slightly differently applied. In the ACT, that is a single point, if you like, and that is conducted inside the Working With Vulnerable People scheme. In other jurisdictions, it operates slightly differently.

The continuous monitoring component means that Access Canberra, in its administration of the scheme, receives information from a wide range of information entities. If you think about the early childhood education and care regulator, for example, and if you think about reportable conduct and other information sources, we receive that information. If that information is about a person who has a registration, we will then examine that information to see whether or not it is relevant to the person's registration and whether they should continue to hold it.

**MR EMERSON:** So you do not have to kind of seek it out; it is almost like an automatic trigger?

**Dr Bassett:** It comes to us—and it comes to us from many different sources. There are mechanisms whereby we get that on a regular basis, and entities can report to us at any time. If somebody has, for example, a reportable conduct matter, they often report to the Ombudsman and to Access Canberra at the same time. So we often get that information simultaneously. We can then investigate it, and we also will receive it from the Ombudsman.

**MR EMERSON:** So we are pretty certain that all the triggers that should be happening are happening?

**Dr Bassett:** That is right. And I can be quite confident of that, given the amount of information that we get and the amount that we receive from all of those entities. We also get information about charges in the courts and we get information from investigations that are conducted in various settings. So we are receiving information from a wide range of sources.

**MR EMERSON:** When did that start? Is it related to the 2017 review of the scheme or is it separate?

**Dr Bassett:** It was a recommendation of the 2017 review, and I can say that, given that I was working in the policy agency at the time. It is technically a question for the policy agency but, in fact, I was in the policy agency at that point.

**MR EMERSON:** Okay.

**Dr Bassett:** It also came into effect when we introduced the NDIS. So we passed it into legislation in 2021 when we introduced the check for the NDIS.

**MR EMERSON:** I have been trying to chase up where we are up to with those 26 recommendations. Should I be asking Minister Orr?

**Dr Bassett:** That is a question for the policy minister, yes.

**MR EMERSON:** It has been put to me by a few different organisations that we are the only jurisdiction where they cannot do live verifications of the card numbers.

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes.

**MR EMERSON:** So that is your understanding too?

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes.

**MR EMERSON:** I just wanted to check, because I get this “We are the only jurisdiction” thing all the time. I actually want to fact check it.

**Ms Cheyne:** We collectively hate it. But there is a reason, which is that all of our resources are spent administering the scheme as it is, and we simply do not have the capacity to provide the slight innovation that is needed for that access, because we are struggling to sustain the scheme as it is.

**MR EMERSON:** Okay.

**MS CARRICK:** When you say you do not have capacity, is that financial capacity or IT capacity to do it or people capacity? What sort of capacity?

**Ms Cheyne:** It is the volume of registrations in the scheme and the associated flow-on effects in terms of the costs of that and the cost to staff and to time. We have had to supplement what is funded for that year on year and seek a Treasurer’s advance or further funding in the budget to ensure we can keep on top of the registrations and processing them in a timely way.

**MS CARRICK:** Is it not an IT project?

**THE CHAIR:** Just to be very clear: so what you are saying is that you do not have the financial resources and human resources available at the moment to dedicate to that project?

**Ms Cheyne:** It is already more than 100 per cent expended, because every year we have to come and get more money.

**MR EMERSON:** Page 3 of budget statement E lists under new directorate priorities for this year supporting improvements and efficiencies in the Working With Vulnerable People Registration Scheme. I think we have spoken a bit about the efficiencies. Is there anything else you can share regarding improvements on the user end? Is this one of those things that is under consideration?

**Dr Bassett:** As the minister has outlined and has very clearly indicated, we are 100 per cent subscribed into the current workload. However, the function for organisations to be able to look up a registration is something that would be very beneficial. It is certainly on the minister's wish list and certainly something we are looking at. I would just say on that that organisations can email us and we can look up the information should they have a registration number and details of the person, and it can be pretty much instantaneous. So, while it is not a facility that exists, we can provide that information—and, if it is urgent, we can do that very quickly.

**MR EMERSON:** In practice, people will send a list every month or whatever.

**Dr Bassett:** They will, yes.

**MR EMERSON:** Is that up to them—timing wise?

**Dr Bassett:** It is an obligation on the employers to make sure that anyone who is working for them in a regulated activity has a registration that is valid and current and does not have conditions that would prohibit them from doing that particular regulated activity. So there is an obligation on employers to make sure that their staff or their volunteers have a registration that is current and appropriate for the kind of work they are doing.

**MR EMERSON:** Thanks.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. I was hoping other people might get to my questions, but they did not. So very quickly, I hope: one of the key references to the Working With Vulnerable People Scheme was on page 104 of the *Budget outlook*. It refers to “Investing in public services—strengthening Access Canberra’s service delivery”, and has \$3.883 million in offset revenue. The only revenue that was mentioned there was the Working With Vulnerable People volunteer fee. Were there any other charges that contributed to that offset?

**Ms Cheyne:** I am going to have to take it on notice, Mr Cocks. I do not think it relates to charges. I think it might relate to initiative funding that may have been reprofiled, but I will check.

**THE CHAIR:** Can you get me whatever information you can on what makes up that figure?

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes, I can do that.

**THE CHAIR:** Where I think you were heading before I let others ask supplementaries was: how was the \$11 fee calculated? Was it actual processing costs versus policy

signal? Did you model whether it would deter volunteers or for example, community sport coaches, from applying?

**Ms Cheyne:** The fee is based on the \$4 it costs to print the card and the \$7 it costs to do the background check—or the other way around?

**Dr Bassett:** No; that is correct.

**Ms Cheyne:** That equals \$11. That is again far below the overall cost of the processing and the registration. But we thought it was a way of still being really respectful to volunteers and their time that it effectively is a very quantifiable cost.

In terms of the modelling, as I said, we have got this spike. We have incredible modelling and data that shows where the renewals are coming, but we have also got more applications for new registration coming in than people leaving the scheme.

**THE CHAIR:** I understand that. I am just trying to find out whether there was any modelling of the expected behaviour change?

**Ms Cheyne:** I would not say that there was directly. But, also, when we talk about the timing of the \$11 fee and working with Volunteering ACT, because we knew that when the vast majority of people would potentially be having to pay that fee was in 2027, we figured the overall cost to the community would not be felt hugely until then and that would give us the time to be working through what we needed to across our policy agencies and with Volunteering ACT and others on how we make this sustainable.

**MS TOUGH:** Minister, you mentioned the scheme being over 100 per cent subscribed—

**Ms Cheyne:** For our funding envelope.

**MS TOUGH:** Yes, for the funding envelope. Looking at the budget papers, controlled recurrent payments have increased significantly based on last year. I think it is \$16 million—

**Ms Cheyne:** For Access Canberra?

**MS TOUGH:** For Access Canberra, yes. But to me that kind of looks like taking on the Better Regulation Taskforce and the libraries. Has that actually increased in real terms? If you are saying this is over 100 per cent subscribed, what does that actually mean for things like the Working With Vulnerable People Scheme in actually being able to deliver that scheme but then any other things that Access Canberra is doing and growing?

**Ms Cheyne:** Your read is exactly right. I think it is about \$14.5 million that has come with the libraries overall appropriation and staffing profile and about \$1.5 million which has come with the better reg team. That is the increase in the controlled recurrent payments from last year for Access Canberra. So, in terms of whether there has been any real increase for Access Canberra, I think the answer is no. Effectively, we do have growth throughout Access Canberra, especially due to population and demand drivers

that are contributing to a structural deficit. Where it is felt the most at the moment, I think, is in WWVP, but there are other areas as well where the demand for the services that Access Canberra is providing is exceeding the funding envelope that we have in the controlled recurrent payments.

**Dr Vaile:** Access Canberra has put in place a range of efficiency measures over that time to control the growth in that. It does not actually match the data trends in that situation. So we can see that those efficiency measures are really biting in and is taking some of that pressure off the agency. But there are definitely pressures on it.

Minister, there was also an answer with regard to the \$3.883 million revenue offsets. With regard to the \$888,000 that was mentioned for Working With Vulnerable People fees, the other \$2.995 million was also from an increase in the licence and registration fees from the Common Licensing Capability Program, which is funded for 2025-26. That is the full amount.

**Ms Cheyne:** We have the answer on the library's community not-for-profit hire.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Yes, that was me.

**Mr Peffer:** Room hire for community purposes remains free of charge, except if there is some damage or the room is not left as it was. What has happened, though, is previously we had separate categories for those fees: one being government agencies and not-for-profit bodies and the second being commercial and private bodies. They have been combined. The question specifically, Mr Braddock, was, I think: why were they combined? That was to simplify the structure that exists.

**MR BRADDOCK:** But the impact of that simplification has been a doubling of fees for not-for-profit entities.

**Mr Peffer:** That has increased the fees for not-for-profit entities.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Simply to say that you could achieve the simplification of the fee structure?

**Mr Peffer:** The logic behind it was to simplify the structure.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Thank you.

**Ms Cheyne:** Mr Cocks, I know we are out of time, but could I have the committee's indulgence to table the top 10 licensing types and the median processing times, so that we are not relying on my 21-day dataset?

**THE CHAIR:** That would be wonderful.

**Mr Rynehart:** I will work on median processing business days. For the 2024-25 financial year, Working With Vulnerable People was 11; electrician licences was three; plumbers was four; security employees as a new licence was 24 days; gas fitters was four days; security employees renewal was nine days; drainer was four days; public vehicle accreditation ride-share was one day; licensed real estate agents renewal was

45 days; and registered sales people real estate new was 22 days.

**THE CHAIR:** And that is the occupation licences?

**Mr Rynehart:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your attendance today. If you have taken any questions on notice, please provide your answers to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*.

**Short suspension.**



Appearances:

Cheyne, Ms Tara, Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy

Orr, Ms Suzanne, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans

City and Environment Directorate

Peffer, Mr Dave, Director-General

Fitzgerald, Mr Bruce, Deputy-Director-General; and ACT Waste Manager

Childs, Mr Daniel, Executive Group Manager

Pedersen, Mr Andrew, Executive Group Manager, Infrastructure Delivery and Waste

Rampton, Mr Tim, Executive Branch Manager, Roads ACT

Davidson, Mr Geoff, Executive Branch Manager, Development Coordination

McMurray, Mr Kerry, Chief Executive Officer, Canberra Memorial Parks

**THE CHAIR:** We welcome back Ms Tara Cheyne MLA, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy, and welcome Ms Suzanne Orr MLA, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water. We also welcome the officials in attendance. We note that Ms Yvette Berry, Minister for Sport and Recreation, sends her apologies today. We have many witnesses for this session. Please note that, as witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly.

As we are not inviting opening statements, we will proceed to questions. Ms Orr is attending the session to only take questions relating to waste policy, so I will ask for an indication of those questions so we can bring them forward first. But, to start, Ms Cheyne has a clarification.

**Ms Cheyne:** Thank you, Chair. I appreciate your indulgence again. I answered Ms Carrick's question on the change in fees and charges collected by Access Canberra—what is budgeted for this year compared to last year—and my answer was completely wrong. I am embarrassed that I even put it on the record. Please ignore me. I have taken it on notice.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Are there any questions from committee members on matters of waste policy?

**MR RATTENBURY:** I have some, but I was going to defer them to Ms Clay. How that works in your system I will leave to you.

**THE CHAIR:** That is all right. We will go to Ms Clay.

**MS CLAY:** Thank you. I have a question on the Circular Economy Strategy. A recent Auditor-General report said there are no performance reporting measures in that strategy. Do you plan on undertaking performance reporting in that strategy? And do

you have any plans for what you will be tracking against?

**Ms Orr:** I will defer to Mr Fitzgerald on this one. I think he has the detail.

**Mr Fitzgerald:** I have read and understood the privilege statement. We are going through the process at the moment of looking at where we are up to in the current implementation. Once government has considered the report, we will release an update as to how we are progressing against the actions. We have acknowledged that there needs to be some level of accountability against the actions and the implementation of that plan. That will be released in the near future.

**MS CLAY:** This year?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** Yes.

**Ms Orr:** It is all subject to government decisions.

**Mr Fitzgerald:** It is all subject to government decisions—correct.

**MS CLAY:** I will ask about some individual actions in the Circular Economy Strategy. You might be able to give me an update on where they are up to. Has the procurement guide been delivered yet?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** No. Unfortunately, that action has been delayed while it is considered as part of the broader procurement review that was undertaken in the last three months. We expect it will now progress.

**MS CLAY:** As part of the broader procurement review?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** Correct.

**MS CLAY:** Have you established stakeholder working groups for product stewardship? We are all very excited to see product stewardship coming along.

**Mr Fitzgerald:** That is another one that has been delayed while we look at what other jurisdictions are doing in this space. At the national level and at the individual jurisdiction level, there has been significant progress on areas of product stewardship. Until we can really define what the national scene is doing, it is not beneficial to bring those stakeholder groups together at this point. That said, we undertook a textiles hub earlier this year to bring together interested players in textiles and look at opportunities to see what can happen with textiles and understand the feasibility of undertaking further work in this space.

**MS CLAY:** In the budget, I saw reference to textiles and the arts. Is it that work?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** Yes. It is very closely aligned to Arts ACT and the work that they are doing—making sure that we can gather as much of the material itself, the textiles, and understand the players in the textile industry, but also what its end use could possibly be, with a focus at the moment within Arts ACT to look at beneficial reuse of as much material as possible.

**MS CLAY:** A number of players in Canberra are already in that space. How do they feed into that process? Is Arts ACT reaching out to those individuals?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** I believe that to be the case. A range of participants were in the textiles workshop. All were major players in textiles in the ACT. That generated really useful intelligence for us on how we work with Arts ACT to go to the next steps in that process.

**MS CLAY:** Have you explored any legislative options to encourage product stewardship in the ACT or are you mapping the legislative schemes that are happening in other states at the moment?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** We are mapping the other schemes and how they are progressing. Batteries are the most topical at the moment, and there is the work that New South Wales in particular but also Victoria have done in this space. We are looking at what other jurisdictions are doing. Internally, we have considered how our existing legislation may be able to compel people to comply with national schemes. The Circular Economy Act is designed so that we can compel people, once we have a product stewardship scheme in place, to comply with the scheme.

**MS CLAY:** To make it mandatory here?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** Yes.

**MS CLAY:** That makes me very happy. That is great. I would love to see some timelines on it, but I am not going to push you for those today. It is clearly not up to that.

**Mr Fitzgerald:** I appreciate that.

**MS CLAY:** Have you made any progress on the circular economy grants?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** It is an area in which we are still considering how to best add value. We work closely with other government agencies, such as Invest Canberra, to make sure that we are directing it appropriately and that it is not cutting across other areas of innovation within—I have forgotten their name—the Canberra Innovation Network. It is a separate area in the Chief Minister's—

**MR RATTENBURY:** CBRIN.

**Mr Fitzgerald:** Indeed. They have been able to fund a range of smaller projects to provide them with start-up capital to look at opportunities across a range of waste areas and circular economy items.

**MS CLAY:** Has there been any progress on making the circular economy one of the indicators in our Wellbeing Framework? Is that something that we are likely to see in the circular economy report or is that not a piece of work that is progressing?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** We certainly advocated for that as part of the review of the Wellbeing Framework. It is certainly, from our perspective, a key element of measuring wellbeing

and understanding how we are best achieving the goals that we set through the plan. It is up for review and will be considered as part of all the other recommendations.

**MS CLAY:** I have one last question, Chair. We are rattling through them. Mr Fitzgerald is doing a great job. I am wondering whether you have explored possible locations for the circular economy innovation precinct. Finding land in Canberra is pretty tricky.

**Mr Fitzgerald:** The immediate answer is no; we have not identified an exact location. We would obviously see value in co-locating it with some of our other resource recovery elements, such as what we have in Hume. The difficulty, of course, in any sort of circular economy industry is the breadth of potential activities undertaken in order to achieve circularity. You can have very toxic activities in trying to generate a recyclable product. You do not want to co-locate that necessarily with a textiles hub type situation. More broadly, we would need to finalise what could be in a hub. It may not be a single location; multiple locations could be brought together under the umbrella of the circular economy.

**MS CLAY:** Thank you.

**MS CARRICK:** I was wondering about the Mugga Lane landfill area. What is the life of that?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** At the moment our current cell has a life of until early-ish 2030. We are currently looking at master planning Mugga Lane to see how many additional cells are available to it. The current fill rate is heavily dependent on how long we can use a cell for. If we fill them up faster, we obviously have to close them faster, but, at current fill rates, we are looking at around 2050 before we have expended all our landfill capacity at Mugga Lane.

**MS CARRICK:** What happens after that? I know 2050 is a long way away.

**Mr Fitzgerald:** It is certainly something we would need to consider. Our preference, given it is such a long way away, is that, by the time we get to 2050, we will not need landfills. I do not have a strategy to get us there, unfortunately.

**Ms Orr:** It is aspirational.

**Mr Fitzgerald:** Indeed. We need to look at reducing the fill rate. The more we can reduce the rate of fill of our landfills the longer we can prolong their life and the longer we have to make that decision.

**MS CARRICK:** Thank you.

**MS TOUGH:** My question is based on Mr Fitzgerald's answers to Ms Carrick's questions and the aspiration of no landfill by 2050. We currently have a Waste Management Strategy and we have the Circular Economy Strategy. How are they working together without being duplicative of each other?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** They are very much their own documents. They have been developed knowing that, in the first instance, the circular economy piece is going well above just

waste management, as it should. It talks more broadly about the opportunities to generate industry to enliven the opportunities. The waste strategy itself is a much older document and still has some of the older references and older thinking, in terms of resource recovery. It generally talks about resource recovery targets and how we get there.

Resource recovery is one thing. The two have different frameworks and different ways of looking at waste. One is around the reduction of waste and the other is around avoidance in the first instance. Avoidance sits across both. They are complementary. There is a need for us to, in the near future, revisit the Waste Management Strategy and how it sits in the hierarchy. From our perspective and from the perspective of other jurisdictions, the circular economy sits above all and should be very closely aligned to things like the Climate Change Strategy and the land use strategy to make sure that it is the driving force behind all our different strategies.

**MS TOUGH:** Thank you.

**MR MILLIGAN:** I have questions in relation to the night-time economy. I know Ms Cheyne would be very excited to—

**Ms Cheyne:** That was for the last session, Mr Milligan.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Really? It looks like you will be getting a question on notice.

**Ms Cheyne:** I missed you.

**MR MILLIGAN:** I bet you did! I will move on to stormwater infrastructure. That fits within this area.

**Ms Cheyne:** We will invite Mr Rampton to the table as the Executive Branch Manager of Roads ACT. He has stormwater infrastructure as his responsibility.

**MR MILLIGAN:** The budget papers say that the government will improve and invest in our stormwater networks, underground cabling and so forth, but there seem to be some discrepancies in relation to the *Budget outlook*. On page 267, under the same project title “Improving stormwater networks”, \$720,000 is allocated for this project in the same year, compared to the additional \$690,000. I am wondering whether you could explain what the discrepancy may be?

**Ms Cheyne:** Do you mean the initiative of improving stormwater networks, \$720,000?

**MR MILLIGAN:** Yes.

**Ms Cheyne:** What was the other figure you gave and where is it from?

**MR MILLIGAN:** There is another section where it states that there was an additional \$690,000 allocated, in budget statements E, for the same project. If you have budget statements E, it is also mentioned there, but it has allocated \$690,000 for the same project.

**Ms Cheyne:** I think it is about what they are sitting under, regarding the titles, Mr Milligan. I do not think they are necessarily comparable, but I could be wrong. The figure that you are talking about in budget statements E is on page 56. Bruce understands financials better than I do. There is a revised funding profile of \$690,000 from the previous financial year to this financial year. That appears under the heading for changes to appropriation of controlled capital injections. Then, for 2025-26, there are works in progress. That reads that we have \$720,000 for improving stormwater networks. I am not sure whether—

**MR MILLIGAN:** Is what the networks were prioritising identified anywhere—what the money was spent on—and has it been completed?

**Mr Rampton:** I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. Thanks, Mr Milligan. We are still working through what we plan to do with that. We have a number of candidates for improvements in stormwater, but we are still working through that program.

**MR MILLIGAN:** When would that be due to be finalised and decided on?

**Mr Rampton:** I would expect the team to bring a program to me within six weeks on that.

**MS CARRICK:** What are the criteria for stormwater? Would it be densification or augmentation—that you need to augment the stormwater system because of densification—or is it maintenance, where it is broken, or—

**Mr Rampton:** It is usually a combination of both. We would typically undertake a quite targeted CCTV inspection of some of the areas where we know we have flooding. We are looking for defects, breakages and intrusions from other services. It is quite often a repair type of program as opposed to augmentation where we have densification.

**Ms Cheyne:** Mr Rampton might be able expand on some of the weird and wonderful things that have broken through our stormwater infrastructure through no fault of our own.

**Mr Rampton:** That is right. We have some fantastic photos in the office of Telstra lines in stormwater passages and other conduits that pierce through infrastructure. We occasionally find sewerage has been inappropriately tied into stormwater. We are always looking at hunting those down and trying to find the source of them.

**MS CARRICK:** Now that Environment and City Services are in the same portfolio, perhaps where stormwater is, the big drains and the creeks, there could be a look at planning for naturalisation of some of the stormwater creeks—for example, Yarralumla Creek?

**Ms Cheyne:** That is probably a question for either the planning minister or me tomorrow, in the landscape plan session.

**Mr Rampton:** We work closely with our colleagues there and the Office of Water,

under the Healthy Waterways Program. We regularly meet—quarterly—to talk about our progress and put plans together for those projects.

**THE CHAIR:** There seems to be a big focus on repairing and maintaining to current capacity, but we certainly have some areas where the infrastructure is really aging. Yarralumla is one of the areas that I have used as an example before. There have certainly been some significant problems with stormwater through the Yarralumla area during particular rain events. Are you also looking at a forward plan of what needs to be upgraded and repaired simply due to aging infrastructure in those areas that have been earmarked for densification?

**Mr Rampton:** Yes; we are. We are working with our colleagues in Environment and EPSDD as well to look at stormwater strategies in those areas. We know the Yarralumla Creek area is quite constrained and already subject to high volumes and high-speed water during major events. We needed to do a major repair last year near Curtin. There is work with light rail stage 2B planning happening in that corridor as well. We are working closely with our colleagues at iCBR as well to see what the future of Yarralumla Creek looks like in that area.

**THE CHAIR:** To be clear, it is not just Yarralumla Creek; the entire stormwater system throughout Yarralumla was designed a very long time ago.

**Mr Rampton:** It is also an area where we looked at partnering with the Commonwealth on grants funding to see if we could augment the existing facilities and look at opportunities for us to put in retardation basins to try to take some of the load off the system. We use a range of techniques—not just increasing the pipe size—to try to control stormwater.

**MS CARRICK:** But it is also about getting sediment ponds around the lake. As it comes out of Yarralumla, it impacts on the blue-green algae, as I understand it—when you have the nutrients coming through the stormwater system into the lake.

**Mr Rampton:** That is right. We have a program where we regularly clean and maintain the gross pollutant traps and racks. We are looking at removing some of the debris that goes in there. We did a really interesting trial with our colleagues in EPSDD last year that was related to street sweeping and the organics that are washed down the trains. We did a trial in Tuggeranong related to that. There were some really interesting findings.

**MS CARRICK:** Do you work with the NCA? Some of this is NCA land. They have a project on their books for a nice big wetland in Yarralumla which acts as a sediment trap to improve the quality of the lake. Do you work with the NCA at all?

**Mr Rampton:** Yes; we do. We are working closely with them on a number of stormwater projects—things like the catchment at the bottom of Coranderrk Street, which is also an NCA asset, and the pond on Parkes Way. We talk with them regularly. They have done a lot of work recently on the Parkes Way corridor, and we have been working them on that to help them, not only with the stormwater stuff but also with traffic management et cetera.

**MR MILLIGAN:** While we are on stormwater—I hope this fits within your responsibilities, Ms Cheyne—this is in relation to Hall and the upgrades that we have been pushing for for the last three or four years, and probably even longer. There does not seem to be very much development happening in that space. I am wondering whether I can get an update on where that is up to.

**Ms Cheyne:** It has its own page on the website. Let me read from that. It looks like it is pretty up to date. It says:

Preliminary design work is progressing for stormwater improvements ... A community pop-up will be held on ... 13 August 2025 for the local community to meet with the project team and ask any questions about the proposed design. More information ... is in the drop-down list ...

It is at 4 pm to 6.30 pm at the Hall Pavilion on Gladstone Street. There will be further information available for residents about the tree assessments, heritage considerations, and any proposed changes to streetscapes within Hall Village. Community feedback will inform the final design. Once that is finalised, it will be shared with the community, and work can be started because we have funding provisioned.

**MR MILLIGAN:** There has been no funding allocated at this point towards anything apart from preliminary investigations?

**Ms Cheyne:** I believe we have full funding provisioned, but I have been wrong about finances before on this day.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Do we know what that funding is and what it is for?

**Ms Cheyne:** Let me try to come back in this session, and, if not, I will take it on notice.

**Ms Orr:** I look forward to seeing you at the consultation, Mr Milligan.

**MR MILLIGAN:** I wrote it down.

**MR EMERSON:** Regarding water quality and stormwater work, is consideration being given to using organic fertiliser across all public land where we are fertilising, to reduce the incidence of blue-green algae and so on?

**Ms Orr:** Not using fertiliser so there are fewer nutrients going in or using fertiliser that would—

**MR EMERSON:** Using, say, organic fertiliser. I do not want to say “on playing fields”, because that is in a different session, but where we have the opportunity to.

**Mr Fitzgerald:** This is the right session. This goes to sport and recreation as well. We do look at opportunities to limit and control the material that we put on. The team developed programs of fertilising that make sure that we limit run-off and also undertake like activities at the same time, such as aeration, to make sure that as much material as possible is retained onsite. Regarding organic material, we are trialling opportunities for other types of materials, such as coconut husk, and how that performs



as an alternative to some of the other chemicals that we have used in the past. How we are managing our sports fields is certainly part of our thinking.

**MR EMERSON:** Thank you.

**MS CARRICK:** My question is about Yarralumla Nursery. We were talking to the local Landcare groups on the first day, on community day, and they mentioned that they were creating their own nurseries—one and possibly more. It made me think about opportunities for Yarralumla Nursery to better support the local Landcare groups.

**Ms Cheyne:** Lots. Thank you for the question, Ms Carrick. We have an encouragement policy being developed for Yarralumla Nursery. It is an extraordinary organisation with 110 years of knowledge, seed banks, and so on. There is a real opportunity for us to relook at its functions and that what it can provide is better integrated back into the directorate's functions. For example—and this is not about Landcare, but you will see the point I am making—EPSDD, in its previous capacity with Parks and Conversation, has some biosecurity officers who might notice that someone has moth vine growing over their fence. They might go, “Knock, knock. Hey, that’s a really terrible plant and we would love to remove it. We’ll give you a voucher so you can replace it.”

The information that has been provided to me is that, at some point along the line, that voucher is not for Yarralumla Nursery but for local business. When we have an asset within government that is producing those, I think it makes sense. As much as the intent was pure, in terms of supporting local businesses, government within government always reduces costs. That is true right across some of the municipal infrastructure standards that we have. As we design our public realm upgrades, under this new structure I am trying to get Yarralumla Nursery in all those conversations, because they are the keepers of all the knowledge. Being able to access them in the community and being able to access them through government is part of that as well.

**MS CARRICK:** Excellent. I worked there many decades ago.

**Ms Cheyne:** Did you?

**MS CARRICK:** Yes. It was my love-job.

**Ms Orr:** Isn’t this your love-job?

**Ms Cheyne:** I think you were very lucky.

**MS CARRICK:** Yes. It is an extraordinary place.

**Ms Cheyne:** I have to do everything to stop my advisor from leaving and going there. It is beautiful.

**MS CARRICK:** It is a really terrific place. There are the business rules around it. The Landcare groups were saying, “You have to get batches of 50 or more.” You do not have to. That is just a business rule. They used to collect local cuttings and local seed and grow them, and then they went to just bringing them in from other places and hardening them off—pulling them up. There are a lot of opportunities; it is just about

the business rules around it.

**Ms Cheyne:** Absolutely. The public service taskforce report that gave a bit of structure to the machinery of government changes made it very clear that the opportunities for Yarralumla Nursery are huge and that the government should look at those. It is currently a wholesale provider. It provides plenty of funds to government as well, but there are some areas that I just cannot understand. People have told me, “We went to Bunnings to buy X, Y, Z plants to put in the ground,” and I said, “But Yarralumla Nursery has some.” Again, it is probably down to those business rules.

**MS CARRICK:** It had a tree nursery too. It had a lot of deciduous stock. You could pump it out into the environment.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, how much funding has gone to Yarralumla Nursery this year?

**Ms Cheyne:** In recurrent funding or initiative funding generally?

**MS CLAY:** How much recurrent funding is there? And, if there is any additional one-off funding, how much funding has gone to Yarralumla Nursery?

**Ms Cheyne:** I will take it on notice and try to come back you in this session. I need to check. There was certainly some asset renewal funding in last year’s budget I just need to check the status of that, in terms of whether it was re-profiled or not. I will come to you.

**MS CLAY:** It would be great if you could come back on the recurrent funding as well. The community Landcare group that I think Ms Carrick was talking about mentioned that they have everything they need to set up a community nursery for their land care; they were just looking for \$40,000 of funding. I do not know whether there is \$40,000 worth of funding in the budget, but is—

**Ms Cheyne:** Minister Orr has recently put out two grant programs—a community garden one and Cooling Your Suburb.

**Ms Orr:** It was for environmental groups. I think both grant rounds are known to various groups and they will look for opportunities under those. It would technically be tomorrow. I am happy to have a chat about those.

**MS CLAY:** We can do it tomorrow.

**Mr Fitzgerald:** The majority of the funding that Yarralumla Nursery receives is related to its asset maintenance obligations. Some of that is around water recycling opportunities and some of that is around the maintenance of the heritage structures which are throughout the compound. As you all said, it is very beautiful there. Regarding ongoing recurrent funding, we will come back to you on that.

**MS CLAY:** That is fine. Thank you.

**MR MILLIGAN:** I want to go to Yarralumla Nursery improvements. In the 2024-25 budget, there was \$208,000 for that, and then the budget for this financial year is

\$116,000. I want to know what that money is going towards. And have any of these improvements been delayed?

**Ms Cheyne:** What you are talking about is the same project. Some of that money that was provisioned for 2024-25 has been spent, but \$116,000 has not been spent, so it has been re-profiled to this year. It is not additional funding; it is part of the same bucket—one project. If I recall correctly, it is related to—

**Mr Childs:** Minister, I can probably answer that one for you.

**Ms Cheyne:** Thank you.

**Mr Childs:** That is the remaining re-profiled amount for the stormwater upgrades. I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Those stormwater improvements go everywhere, don't they?

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes. Yarralumla Nursery has its own flooding problem, so we committed a reasonably good bucket of money from the Asset Renewal Program to support that.

**THE CHAIR:** Could I clarify: what was the reason for the re-profiling?

**Mr Childs:** It has taken some time to work through the network issues there and have that managed. The area is quite extensive. There are a lot of trees and other bits and pieces. Looking at how that stormwater operates and the proximity of the lake, and other bits and pieces, is taking some time to work out.

**THE CHAIR:** So there has been a bit of a delay in—

**Mr Childs:** Yes. I do not have the specific details on why it is delayed, but I know that there were some complications in that space.

**THE CHAIR:** Perhaps you can take on notice why it has been delayed and by how long?

**Mr Childs:** Sure. No problem.

**MS TOUGH:** The budgets for city services, roads and infrastructure are quite considerable, but controlled recurrent payments, as a portion of those federal costs, is quite small from what I can see, and it appears to be pretty static over the years. Given the capital investment in new playgrounds and other assets that is underway and what the government has promised in the regional plans that we took to the election, is there a commensurate uplift in the staffing required to service those assets in the budget as well, to operate and then maintain them?

**Ms Cheyne:** Mr Fitzgerald, you have my full permission to talk at length.

**THE CHAIR:** I encourage you to not talk too much at length. We have many people wanting to ask questions.

**Mr Fitzgerald:** The growth of the city continues to be a key challenge for us in how we manage the provision of city services. There is a constant issue for us in looking at how we manage the varying needs of the community and providing a service that meets that expectation. Growth has outstripped our ability to resource it. It is something we are looking at. Some of the items that Mr Pepper spoke about in our session earlier today were around understanding what the costs are and how we can best manage those as well. It is a substantial budget.

We have been heavily reliant on seasonal conditions, as to what our work program is from year to year. From that perspective, it is sometimes very difficult for us to operate within the confines of what is appropriated to us. That is something that we are constantly working with the minister on, to try to address what is a structural deficit that we have from year to year. Of course, I would love to see a huge increase in our resourcing, but we need to balance that against all other government priorities.

**MS TOUGH:** Mr Pepper and Mr Fitzgerald, are there projects for which there is an adequate budget for the lifecycle of the assets, and, if there are not, how do you plan to tackle that going forward?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** All assets are different. The asset categories themselves and the level of maintenance are different, and the level of amenity that we are now seeing through some of our developments is different. Our biggest challenge is that we want a vibrant city that has a lot of activation and urban amenity, but each of those come with a different maintenance cost and a different maintenance obligation. That is something we would like to work on in the budget, to look at how to best work with developers in particular to get a contribution scheme where they work with us to make sure that those assets are preserved into the longer term, rather than just when they are handed over. For us and our teams, where we can have that relationship with developers is really exciting.

**MS TOUGH:** So where developers are putting in a new suburb or a new area, and they put in a wonderful playground or a wonderful community asset: they have paid for all of that. Though it could be an amazing asset, when it is handed on to government, the government then has to budget for an asset they have not built.

**Mr Fitzgerald:** Exactly right.

**Ms Cheyne:** Sometimes there is a small funding for operations and maintenance that comes with it. But, I think we have learnt—both from developer-initiated projects that TCCS becomes the custodian of, as well as our own projects, to be honest—that the O&M fund is not necessarily keeping pace with the life of the asset, especially when there is an asset that is aging. I think everyone can point to examples in their suburb, whether it is stormwater, playground, a toilet, footpaths; whatever it might be.

For some of those, we really do want to extend their useful life. But when we have limited funding, our ability to do preventative maintenance is also quite tricky. It is a complex problem that a new, fresh organisation and D-G are looking forward to providing advice to government on, I think.

**MS CARRICK:** Because weeding and graffiti constantly come up.

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes. We will talk about it, hopefully tomorrow. So weeding sits in two areas: in TCCS and in Parks and Conservation. There is some absolutely incredible data that PCS captures of its treatment of weeds. When you see what they have mapped, and what they have mapped of what they have treated, it is unreal. We do not have that in the city services part of government yet, but I want to. We had a conversation about this just this week; to be able to show the community where people have been.

At the moment, the best that I can do is provide that in narrative form, in the weekly maintenance update that is provided. But being able to show where we have been and giving the community some confidence that we are on this and we are sharing our resources in the best way possible to get some uplift, I think will build a lot of trust. In the city services space, I do not have that presentation of data in the same way yet.

**Mr Fitzgerald:** Minister, there is also the distinction of weeds within our urban parks compared to our nature reserves. I think a lot of people categorise weeds within the urban realm, which may just be grasses. They are not actually weeds in which we are needing to actively manage for any other reason except amenity. With our colleagues in Parks and Conservation, they obviously are tasked with making sure that they have control of proper weeds that have potentially noxious impacts to the rest of the environment. We are very conscious of that.

Again, it is one of those areas that is heavily season-dependent. If we have a rainy season we will see weeds particularly where we get the greatest feedback, that is weeds in our median strips and in our concrete verges. They are areas where we know that it causes concern to the community. This year was one where, because we had a lighter season in terms of rain, the horticultural teams were able to get out much earlier than we have ever before and really got on the front foot. So, comparing this year to, say, last year, I think you would notice the difference in terms of amenity within the suburbs. The teams take great pride in being able to finally get to some of those jobs that have just been delayed because of other priorities.

In terms of graffiti, we have just seen an escalation on our public assets that we have just not been ready for. In terms of jobs logged, last year we were at about 50,000 jobs. It creates an enormous burden on the team. And that is just on public assets. That does not take into account graffiti on other infrastructure. So, it is a huge problem. We are certainly working with ACT Policing to look at opportunities for us to try and get that number to a much more manageable level, but it is tough.

**Ms Cheyne:** And I think with graffiti in particular, it is not just as simple as rocking up with your graffiti removal kit or a fire hose, or whatever it might be, to remove it. We are seeing more and more creative locations for graffiti: some that are very public but actually really hard and dangerous to get to. So we also have to consider the safety of staff, so in short, it sucks.

**THE CHAIR:** Do we have any supplementaries? Mr Milligan?

**MR MILLIGAN:** Maybe. I mean, we started off on infrastructure right? Is that correct? You sort of went into staffing—

**MS TOUGH:** It was staffing as a proportion of the whole budget; how staffing costs quite a small portion, where there is so much stuff to cover with that limited number of staff. So, I guess you could stretch it however you want to, Mr Milligan!

**MR MILLIGAN:** Okay, so my question was more to Ms Tough than the minister! I will not need to ask then, and we will focus on something else.

**THE CHAIR:** So, no supplementaries on that one. I think, Mr Braddock, we are up to you.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Thank you, Chair. I have got a series of questions on cycle paths. The first one is the Federal Active Transport Fund where the ACT government was unsuccessful in securing federal funding for the C5 cycle path along the Streeton Drive and the Kuringa Drive cycleway. Does this budget provide money for these projects? Also, for what projects is the ACT government seeking the Federal Active Transport Fund each year in the forward estimates?

**Ms Cheyne:** I will hand to Mr Fitzgerald and Mr Rampton.

**Mr Fitzgerald:** Yes, it does include the commonwealth funding for progression of those projects and we are in the design phase for those. On your question of longer-term cycle infrastructure: we work closely with the commonwealth government in terms of matching our long-term infrastructure plan with what they have in their decision-making framework. We are constantly looking at opportunities to review our infrastructure plan to make sure it is providing as much as possible in terms of bang-for-your-buck on dollar spent. Working hand-in-hand with the commonwealth certainly delivers that.

**MR BRADDOCK:** So, what is the government planning to do in terms of which projects it is seeking federal government funding assistance with over the outer years of the budget, of the forward estimates?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** I would suggest that is still a consideration of the government.

**MR BRADDOCK:** My next question is about the Garden City Cycleway Stage 2. I can see the funding for each year, and it is zero in '27-28. I wanted to check: why is that the case?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** I might have to take that on notice.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Next question is regarding Light Rail 2B where the EIS is calling for active transport connectivity with new pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure. Will the government plan and resource cycle paths along the 2B corridor as a priority in the project? Or will Woden residents have to wait until the completion of the project, for when that infrastructure will become accessible and available?

**Ms Cheyne:** There is an answer to this. It sits with iCBR.

**MS TOUGH:** Mr Rampton has the answer.

**Mr Rampton:** Yes. The planning for that project between Woden and the city is what we are calling an allied project to Light Rail Stage 2B. So iCBR are not in the room here today I believe, but they are leading that piece of work at the moment to space-proof the corridor and also do some preliminary investigations on what that actual infrastructure would look like.

**Ms Cheyne:** Mr Braddock, we will take it on notice. I just do not have the right minister or people here and I do not want to have to correct the record again. I think I know the answer but I have learned my lesson, so I will take it on notice.

**MR BRADDOCK:** That is very fair. Just as part of the on-notice, the question surrounds: do we have to wait until the completion of the project to get the cycle path?

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes, so it is, ‘Will the footpaths and cycle paths be constructed with light rail or after?’

**MS CARRICK:** Or before.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Or before.

**Ms Cheyne:** Or before, yes.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Thank you. Coming along to the Hall cycle path: does partial funding from the Federal Active Transport Fund pertain to this? A feasibility study was conducted in 2024. Is construction actually contained within this budget?

**Ms Cheyne:** I believe—but I could be wrong.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Happy for you to take that on notice.

**Mr Fitzgerald:** The Hall path construction is not in the ACT budget yet. That was just a consequence of timing from the commonwealth budget. Certainly, we are progressing towards construction for that project.

**MR RATTENBURY:** What is the issue from the commonwealth budget?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** It was just a timing issue in terms of the Active Travel Fund and the approval of the fund, which does not necessarily operate on the same timeline as the commonwealth budget.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Does that just mean you did not get confirmation in time to then address it in the ACT budget?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** Yes.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Thank you.

**MR BRADDOCK:** My next question is: following the most recent audit of the cycle pathways, what does this budget fund as a result of that audit?

**Mr Rampton:** In the budget papers, and particularly in the asset renewal program, there are a number of regional path funds in there; for Belconnen, Woden, Weston, Tuggeranong, the inner north, inner south et cetera. We are currently working up our program for what projects we will deliver through that. It will be a combination of renewals; so, replacement of panels, repair of defects, construction of new infill or missing links, all as part of that program.

**MR BRADDOCK:** What has not been achieved through the budget that ought to be identified as an issue?

**Mr Rampton:** What has not been funded?

**MR BRADDOCK:** Yes.

**Ms Cheyne:** We will have to take on that on notice, Mr Braddock. Let us just double-check.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Final question, Chair, if you are indulgent. I have also heard regular feedback in terms of wayfinding signage as an important area the government could focus on improving. What is the government doing in this space, and how does it plan to improve wayfinding for cycle path users?

**Ms Cheyne:** There was a refresh regarding the C1 and C2 cycle paths and the signage relating to that a few years ago. If you have a specific area where you have heard that, Mr Braddock, that would be helpful for us to understand.

**MR BRADDOCK:** It was mostly southern Canberra and older parts like Woden and Weston Creek, those sorts of areas.

**Ms Cheyne:** There is a path upgrade and connection occurring near the RSPCA led by SLA and that is an opportunity for us in that area to provide some better wayfinding, but if there are other specifics I am happy to pass it on.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Thank you. That is it from me.

**THE CHAIR:** I think, Mr Milligan, you had one, and Mr Emerson?

**MR MILLIGAN:** Obviously, we do not have cycle paths right across the ACT; big job to do. So a lot of our cyclists also use footpaths. That brings me to my substantive! During the ACT election just gone, Labor made a commitment to put \$5 million towards a footpath fund. I would like to know where that allocation of funding is at, at this point in time. Also, how did you come to the rationale to pick the areas for this fund, which are Belconnen, Tuggeranong, Weston Creek and Woden, but exclude the electorates of Yerrabi and Kurrajong?

**Ms Cheyne:** So Mr Rampton just answered that. It is in this budget.

**MR MILLIGAN:** How much has been spent where and on what?

**Ms Cheyne:** On a line-by-line breakdown, I cannot give you. But the provision was



delivered through this budget for those. Regarding the commitments, it was relating to the areas where there is greatest need, especially with regard to the age of the asset and where we know that there are considerable defects or areas that require some pretty significant intervention for us to bring up to standard. So that was a political decision.

**Ms Orr:** Can I also add Kaleen and Giralang, which are in the electorate of Yerrabi, are also in Belconnen. It is not my electorate. I am just saying.

**MR MILLIGAN:** According to the Treasury website, the Weston Creek and Woden footpath fund was deemed to be withdrawn due to time constraints. Can you talk to that?

**Ms Cheyne:** Pardon?

**MR MILLIGAN:** The Treasury website states that the footpath fund for Weston Creek and Woden was deemed to be withdrawn due to time constraints.

**THE CHAIR:** I think Mr Milligan is going to the election commitment; the costings were deemed to have been withdrawn.

**Ms Cheyne:** Okay. Do I take that as a comment?

**THE CHAIR:** It is a question.

**Ms Cheyne:** So, during the election we submitted things for costings but we submitted that too late. Because Treasury did not get to it because of our timing, it was deemed to be withdrawn.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Is that in the forward forecast for funding to be put aside for improvements to Weston Creek and Woden in this financial year or the next?

**Ms Cheyne:** It has been. The funding was provisioned through this budget.

**MR MILLIGAN:** The full \$5 million?

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes. I mean, I would need to look over the forwards, but the \$5 million is—

**Mr Rampton:** Across four years. The \$5 million is across four years.

**MR MILLIGAN:** So over four years, not in the next financial?

**Mr Rampton:** Correct; it is over four years.

**Ms Cheyne:** Which was the commitment.

**MR MILLIGAN:** How much has been forecast for this financial year of that \$5 million?

**Mr Rampton:** It is \$1.25 million. It is evenly spread across the four years.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Okay.

**THE CHAIR:** Are the assumptions that underpin the budget decision consistent with the assumptions within that election commitment?

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Is that \$5 million, at \$1.25 million a year, new money or is that money that has been repurposed from somewhere else in the budget?

**Ms Cheyne:** It is part of the Asset Renewal Program. There is funding that we have allocated through that, and effectively it is new money.

**MS CARRICK:** Is there a line item in the asset renewal part of the program for it?

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes, I think there is.

**MS CLAY:** Feel free to take it on notice. I am interested in what the level of demand is for footpath and cycle path repairs on Fix My Street and whether the costings we have just heard would actually clear that level of demand. Have you costed that so that all of those reports are fixed within 30 days or some kind of reasonable timeframe like that?

**Ms Cheyne:** No. As we discussed at length before, our asset base and the need for repairs and that we are largely in a reactive cycle demonstrate that we always need more funding for the maintenance of our assets and the preventive maintenance. A lot of this is about reactive maintenance, but these are the areas of greatest need. I think there have been several questions on notice recently that I signed that go further to answering your questions about the kinds of requests that we receive and our ability to respond to them—at the very least, to make them safe.

**MS CLAY:** Is there a dollar figure? Has the government got a dollar figure on what it would cost to fix cycle and footpaths to the level that Canberrans are reporting problems?

**Ms Cheyne:** I do not believe so.

**MR EMERSON:** I will just quickly ask about Sherbrooke Street active travel schedule. I know consultation has happened on that. I was just wondering if we know when that design will be made public.

**Ms Cheyne:** When the design will be made public?

**MR EMERSON:** Yes. I think there has been a consultation process already on design and development.

**Ms Cheyne:** At some point. I have been briefed on it recently. We will take it on notice. I reckon we can answer it in this hearing. For all the people listening, that is a direction.

**MR EMERSON:** Thanks.

**MS CLAY:** I would love an update on the Materials Recovery Facility. Do you have a timeline for when that might be operating?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** It is a project being run by Infrastructure Canberra, and I believe they are coming next week. The timeline is operational at this stage. By mid-2028 is when we are hoping to see materials starting to flow through that facility.

**MS CLAY:** And we will continue to recycle interstate until that happens?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** Correct.

**MS CLAY:** At a cost of about \$12 million.

**Mr Fitzgerald:** Yes.

**MS CLAY:** So that is a similar situation to that we have had for a few years?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** Yes.

**MS CLAY:** The new facility—and I think this is a policy question, but you will correct me if it is iCBR—will not be recycling soft plastics. Will the new facility have the ability to make technological changes if the ACT government decides that it wants to recycle soft plastics in future, or will we just be stuck with a facility that can never do it?

**Ms Cheyne:** I do not think that is a policy question. It is a delivery/operational.

**Mr Fitzgerald:** It is a delivery question. I am happy to throw in my opinion.

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes; go for it.

**Mr Fitzgerald:** Thanks for your indulgence. The answer is yes; these facilities, as designed, are able to be upgraded for new technology. Soft plastics will create a challenge, regardless. What we have seen in other MRFs that have trialled the collection of soft plastics is that it reduces the availability of the MRF significantly, because you have instances where the soft plastics gets caught within the various moving parts of the facility and so it creates a challenge in collecting it efficiently.

My personal belief is that it is not the most appropriate way in which to collect soft plastics. Some of the other product stewardship schemes that are being contemplated by some of the big supermarket chains are more appropriate. That drop-and-go type product is a much more reliable source. It also increases the value of the material, because it is better sorted than what we would see through schemes like Curby. With the work that the Australian Packaging Covenant organisation is doing around soft plastics, I think there is still greater work to do around avoidance being our best bet in terms of capturing that material or, indeed, not having it manufactured in the first instance.

**MS CLAY:** Designing it, sure. I am pleased to hear you talking about the role of other recycling schemes. Is the government working on policy to support the last supermarket scheme for soft plastics recycle collapse, because the business model does not work without government support?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** Yes.

**MS CLAY:** Does that mean you are now looking at government assistance, or are you working with the supermarket industry to make sure that the next scheme does not collapse?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** They have formed a task force to develop a pathway forward. We are yet to see what that pathway forward is. Partly, we do need to wait to make sure that there are reliable and consistent off-take arrangements for the material once collected. The issue that we saw with REDcycle is that, once you lost a facility, you no longer had the capability to actually take the product anywhere. Having the opportunity to recycle it to a much higher form than what REDcycle was able to and being able to take it back to its core polymers, if available, is where we actually get greater benefit. That is where I am hoping we will see the supermarkets partnering with some of the scientific organisations to work out a better product.

**MS CLAY:** This term, do you think, Mr Fitzgerald?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** This term?

**MS CLAY:** Yes.

**Mr Fitzgerald:** I think we will see a report. As to how much movement we see, this is one of those areas where it does require industry to scale up and, at the moment, I have not seen any evidence that we are seeing industry get to a scale where we would be able to take quantities that we previously saw through REDcycle.

**MS CLAY:** We have got local organisations like Lids4Kids that have set up small recycling schemes that pick up all sorts of materials, including quite a lot of the things that people expect they can put in their recycling bin but they cannot—little red tags, small bits of plastic and small bits of metal and things like that. Has the government considered partnering with some of the existing schemes to recycle things that the Materials Recovery Facility will not recycle, given how many things this new facility will not be recovering and the fact that we do not seem to have any dates for when these other solutions will kick in?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** At this stage, we have not. We are still focused on the replacement of our Material Recovery Facility. We are still absolutely focused on making sure we are getting the highest level of diversion in terms of volume and tonnes out of landfill—and that is the Material Recovery Facility. As to opportunities with smaller, more boutique style arrangements for recycling, I think that is where a stronger focus on our circular economy can guide that piece of work. We do not have the opportunity for a product stewardship scheme with some of the things that Lids4Kids take. There is no hope that there will ever be a product stewardship scheme for some of those items. So what is it that they can then do to uplift the value and to retain it rather than

send it to landfill? We are absolutely happy to work with them. But, as I said, our focus at the moment is around getting significant diversion from landfill, and our best way forward is through the Material Recovery Facility.

**MS CLAY:** I am pleased you accurately predicted where I was going next—our waste-to-landfill figures. At page 13, we are looking at a graph—which I have been looking at for quite a few years now—that shows that our resource recovery rate goes up a bit and goes down a bit. We have not really made progress forwards. Last year was a particularly bad year. We recovered 67 per cent of our waste stream overall, but usually we have been hovering around that 70-75 per cent mark for a couple of decades now.

I am really interested in this magic line that goes up that predicts where our resource recovery rate will be. It has been about the same magic line we have seen for the last 10 years or so, where we go from 70 or 75 per cent to 90 per cent, and I have not heard anything today or read anything in the budget that tells us how we are suddenly going to get to that level in 2024-25 or 2025-26. Can you explain how that works?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** Yes, and I can say with absolute certainty that we will not get to that target. That target is as published in the Waste Strategy for the ACT, in which we looked at achieving a 90 per cent resource recovery target, but that was on the basis that we would also include other elements, such as waste to energy as part of that recovery. Obviously, government has a different idea now in terms of what waste to energy may mean for resource recovery. Going back to an earlier question, the need for us to really look at the Waste and Resource Management Act and the Waste Strategy to understand what is achievable is important, because I think we are on a different trajectory.

I think what you see in the numbers, though, that, while it looks bad—it looks like we are on the decrease—what we have been ramping up over the years is making sure that we get data on interstate movement that I do not think we ever really were able to grasp before. In the last financial year, we had about 220,000 tonnes of material that went across the border. That material and how it then interacted with other facilities throughout the region was previously not known to us.

If you look at what was, in effect, material in the ACT that was previously measured and compare that to the material that we recover, we are at about 80 per cent. So what we have historically done is still working; we have just got better at actually understanding some of our other waste streams, such as the construction and demolition material that is flowing outside of our border. So there are positives in what we are seeing. But, as to the 90 per cent pathway, at the moment, we will not achieve that.

**MR MILLIGAN:** I think Mr Braddock will probably appreciate this question. It is relation to the government's commitment to increase funding or to provide funding for skate parks and playground upgrades and so forth over the forward estimates. In that election commitment announcement there was \$1.5 million for this year and the following year and then \$2 million in the third year—for a total of \$5 million. But in this budget that is just been handed down by the government, this year it is \$2 million, \$2.5 million and then 2.7. So it has gone up \$2.2 million—right?

**Ms Cheyne:** Mr Milligan, could you tell us what page—because I do not even know what you are talking about.

**MR MILLIGAN:** I thought you memorised your budget. Page 62 of budget statement E has those figures.

**Ms Cheyne:** Thank you.

**MR MILLIGAN:** But then your own party's announcement and costing is obviously a separate document. What is that additional \$2.2 million to cover and what justified that increase from the figures in your announcement?

**Ms Cheyne:** Now I know what you are talking about. Skate park upgrades and—

**MR MILLIGAN:** Better community infrastructure and playground and skate park upgrades.

**Ms Cheyne:** And we are on the Asset Renewal Program page.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Yes. It has gone up \$2.2 million compared to your announcement during the election. I just want to know what has justified that additional funding. Has it been the reports that the government has conducted with the playgrounds and safety audits and the skate park? I just want to know where that funding is to go and what has brought it on—the additional funding compared to the election announcement.

**Ms Cheyne:** I am going to take that on notice, Mr Milligan, because I do not have the election document in front of me and I want to do a comparison over the outyears, especially as it relates to playgrounds and skate park upgrades. I also need to double-check. I am not the minister—she is sick—so we will take it on notice and I will provide you with a concrete answer.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Skate park upgrades—wouldn't that fall under City Services, just like sport?

**Ms Cheyne:** Minister Berry and I have a split of our responsibilities that is agreed between our offices, and she has skate parks. I do know this, so please let me take this on notice so I can compare it with our election document, because I wrote the bit about the playgrounds. Let me understand what the thinking was compared to what is in this budget.

**THE CHAIR:** Can I check, Mr Milligan, and confirm, that we are talking about LAB085, the Labor question request?

**MR MILLIGAN:** Yes, LAB085.

**Mr Fitzgerald:** I would also point out that the Asset Renewal Program is not solely just a reflection of election commitments. We also had programmed activity works, particularly around skate parks, that had to be undertaken; it is not necessarily a direct one-to-one reflection. We also have just general maintenance activities to keep the assets and prolong their useful life.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Yes. I guess my question is more: where has this maintenance

occurred?

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes; what the money has been spent on. I will come back to you on that.

**MR MILLIGAN:** You can probably take this on notice: we would like to know where the audit is at in terms of safety compliance for our playgrounds and skate parks, because I do not know—

**Ms Cheyne:** It is undertaken often.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Yes. I want to know how many have been assessed as not being compliant, how many are waiting to be completed to make them compliant, and how many other playgrounds and skate parks are yet to be assessed.

**Ms Cheyne:** We will take that on notice.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Excellent, thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Emerson?

**Ms Cheyne:** Hold on. I have an answer about Sherbrooke Street.

**MR EMERSON:** Great.

**Ms Cheyne:** I found my briefing note. The most recent advice I have, which is from, I think, the end of June is that the design is effectively complete and is going through some internal feedback. It is going through a process of internal stakeholder consultation and receiving feedback. Effectively, the design package is expected to be in my office imminently. I have just done a trawl through the folders. I cannot see it there, so I do not think I have got it yet. I expect to receive it in the coming little while, notwithstanding I am on leave in six days.

**MR EMERSON:** And do you know, for the decision point—because it might be part of the Garden City Cycleway or it might not—if that is coming later or if that is decided in—

**Ms Cheyne:** I am not sure at this stage. I think that answer will be in what comes through.

**MR EMERSON:** That is good, thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Your substantive question, Mr Emerson?

**MR EMERSON:** Thank you, Chair. I noticed there are some new fees being introduced this financial year for construction activities that require footpath closures. There are various other fees, but they are the ones I wanted to focus on. I think it is \$100 to \$200 per day, per block, depending on the time of day and the day of the week. My first question is whether these fees apply retrospectively to construction activities that are already underway.

**Ms Cheyne:** No.

**MR EMERSON:** Easy. What are the current policy settings that allow for construction to occur that blocks footpaths?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** Each development is different—the understanding of what the actual development is. We have developments now that, effectively, go boundary to boundary in terms of the development. There are a couple of examples across the city now, where you see that. As a consequence, we have to work with the developer to understand what the land requirement is, and we work through, as part of the temporary traffic management and permit system, what the impact is to the community and how we best minimise that. Particularly on some of the more constrained sites, we, obviously and unfortunately, have to take up more space to make sure that the truck movements and the deliveries are safe. Each one is different. It is certainly not something that we implement with the developer and then ignore. There is a compliance piece that is undertaken. We make sure that the developers are operating within the agreed temporary traffic management plan. We also work to see if there are any opportunities for us to open up areas sooner and to make sure that the impact is as limited as possible on the community.

**MR EMERSON:** That all happens in the initial DA process, right?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** Yes.

**MR EMERSON:** When it is then handed to a head contractor or a builder, do you ever have issues—you mentioned compliance—with them then going to the edge to the envelope?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** It is not necessarily compliance. It is, I think, staging, which is often what you will see. There are recent examples of this, where construction will commence on, say, utility movements, and that will happen at the same time as they are starting to build a site compound, and you get to a point where you are undertaking two temporary traffic management activities that may have been approved separately but are being done at the same time. You have situations there where you have a greater number of footpaths closed than we envisaged in a single application, and that is a coordination piece with the developer itself.

**MR EMERSON:** Are there any kinds of consequences for them—for the developers—when that sort of thing happens?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** Generally, what we find is once it is pointed out to them, they are very willing to accept that there is an issue, and they make modifications to address it.

**MR EMERSON:** And those modifications are to what they are doing in terms of construction activities or—

**Mr Fitzgerald:** Correct. Yes, that is right.

**MR EMERSON:** the detours and that sort of thing, or both?



**Mr Fitzgerald:** Signage, and that type of thing, to make sure there is a clear line or a clear detour for pedestrians and cyclists to take. Sometimes because of that conflicting temporary traffic management, you may also get conflicting signs. It is about clearing that up and making sure that users are not confused—that is where we get those unsafe issues.

**MR EMERSON:** We are moving in the direction of fees, and I assume it is revenue-raising but also disincentivising excessive closures.

**Mr Fitzgerald:** Yes.

**MR EMERSON:** Is this a step in the direction of bringing the ACT in line with some other places where footpaths have to say if they are not in good condition?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** Yes. It is that opportunity for us to work with the development industry to say what is possible out there and to ask, “What can you do differently to maintain those access pathways?” There is a hierarchy there that you would look at, and you would also consider what infrastructure is available across the road and how far the road distance is. All of that will come into play, but, certainly, the fees are designed to make sure that roads are not closed for long periods of time, particularly when they are not used, and there is a disincentive to undertake some of those actions where there is not a safety or productivity requirement from the development itself.

**MR EMERSON:** Okay. People are sending me photos of shipping containers and gantries from other parts of Australia but also from Hong Kong, Copenhagen and wherever else—

**Mr Fitzgerald:** And it is very much in relation to density. I think, while those examples are obviously relevant, for Pitt Street in Sydney, making sure that that remains open compared to some of our more suburban laneways is a reasonable response. It does impact on productivity, and every time you impact on productivity within a construction site you increase the cost of the housing or whatever is being developed. It is getting that balance right and making sure we are not just passing on the cost to the end consumer of the property and, potentially, delaying the finish of the disruption because it is very difficult to move around site. Although, it is not a one-size-fits-all answer.

**MR EMERSON:** Okay. You mentioned before about the staging. You said there are recent examples. I am not sure if the Botanical in Turner is that example you are thinking of—

**Mr Fitzgerald:** Yes.

**MR EMERSON:** I was out there yesterday and bumped into people who were from Roads ACT who were having a look at another potential route. They did not let on much once I told them I was a politician, so they all did their jobs very, very well, don’t worry! For those sorts of call-outs, is that a cost that the government has to bear? Is that just part of doing business or is that something that we go back to developers for?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** We do have fees attached to temporary traffic management, and I would not say it covers the compliance aspect, but we do have a dedicated team of

network operations and people who make sure that the city is operating at its best level possible. This is a cost to government, but I think it is also to the broader benefit of the community; I think that would be agreed.

**MR EMERSON:** Great. It looked like they were doing a good job. Finally, does the government receive complaints through Fix My Street for these types of closures?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** Yes.

**MR EMERSON:** Do you then direct your team to have a look at it? Is that a normal pathway or is it separate, if you know what I mean?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** It is the normal pathway. We receive the majority through Fix My Street, and we certainly would encourage that because it allows the team to coordinate their response. Rather than multiple channels, having Fix My Street as a single channel does make our life much easier.

**MR EMERSON:** Okay. Might you be able to provide, perhaps on notice, for 2024-25 how many Fix My Street requests were related to path closures?

**Ms Cheyne:** Or it will be in the annual report.

**MR EMERSON:** At that level of detail? I am happy to have a look.

**Mr Fitzgerald:** We, in our annual report, have the numbers of temporary traffic management plans, but that would include both roads and paths within it.

**MR EMERSON:** I am thinking about complaints more so than—

**Mr Fitzgerald:** Yes, sure.

**MR EMERSON:** You might get some, and then the detour works fine, and there is no complaint. Is that right?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** Yes, that is right.

**Ms Cheyne:** We will try and get the breakdown as much as we can. Sorry, I was talking about the next year's annual report, 2024-25 is not out yet. But we will see what we have in terms of the breakdown and the workflows in Fix My Street. And if it is not possible, it is just the system limitation. I have some other answers that I said I would try to give before 5 pm.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes

**Ms Cheyne:** For Sherbrooke Street a further update: I have just been given more information that the stakeholder internal consultation is taking more time than anticipated when I got the update at the end of June. Now it looks like it will be shared with the public in the last quarter of 2025, and we will obviously aim to do that as soon as possible in the last quarter of 2025 but do not want to mislead.

Yarralumla nursery recurrent funding is \$1.403 million for this financial year, which includes \$321,000 of community service obligation for the free plant issue.

For funding the Hall cycle path, there is \$500,000; it is reflected in the budget, but it is in some forward years. As funding within the ARP, it might move. There is \$500,000 for detailed design, and the preliminary sketch plans for that are already completed, I believe, so I expect we will move into detailed design later.

For the Hall stormwater upgrades, we received federal government Disaster Ready funding for two projects. The total of that was \$494,000, and that was split between two pieces of work; one of them is the Hall Village design. As I said, there is a community session on 13 August, with the preliminary sketch plans. It is a complex design because of the heritage requirements, and the cross-section of the street. We only have funding for the detailed design at the moment, and that work needs to be completed so that we can understand the cost of the upgrades.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. I will pass my question to Mr Milligan.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Thank you, Chair. On another Labor election commitment, because it is a bit of a theme—

**Ms Cheyne:** I am delighted to spend so much time on it.

**MR MILLIGAN:** I would like to ensure that they are being delivered. One of them, in particular, is an all-abilities public playground in Florey, for people with disability. I think the costings are at \$924,000 over two financial years to build this facility, and it was noted by Treasury that there is no provision to build toilets at this facility that is to be built in Florey. I would suspect that the community would also be calling for toilets to be built there. Will there be provisions to look at building toilets at this facility, and why did we pick Florey?

**Ms Cheyne:** I will take on notice “why Florey?” because I know Minister Berry was heavily involved in this election commitment. In terms of toilet funding or not, it could be one of two reasons; one reason being that we do not have the location determined in Florey yet, and of course, from the election commitments in 2020, we have delivered a public toilet there recently. I am not saying that is definitely where the location will be, but we need to scope the location, which I do not believe has occurred yet.

In terms of overall funding and election commitments—and I guess this probably applies to any other questions you might have, Mr Milligan—a good portion of our election commitments on our regional plans are funded or appropriated through this budget, but election commitments are delivered over the course of a term.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I wanted to ask about the FOGO trial. First of all, how many households are currently included in the trial?

**Ms Cheyne:** We just added another 1,120 recently, through last year’s budget. I do not have the total number immediately to hand.

**Mr Fitzgerald:** I will have it for you shortly.

**MR RATTENBURY:** No problem. Let me go on with a couple of questions; I was just trying to get the baseline, there. Minister Cheyne just spoke about expansion. Is there further expansion planned, or what is the timeline? Obviously, the ultimate plan is to expand to the whole city, but what are the steps to get there?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** The expression of interest for the facility itself went out recently, and Infrastructure Canberra are running that process. At this point in time, we have got no expectation that the trial will be expanded from its current level until the new facility is operational.

**MR RATTENBURY:** So, it is essentially constrained by the current ability to process the material?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** That is correct, yes.

**MR RATTENBURY:** If you are in the middle of procurement, I suspect I know your answer, but have you got a ballpark of how long it is going to take to bring the new facility online? Is it a 12-month exercise, a three-year exercise or—

**Mr Fitzgerald:** It is subject to procurement, and Infrastructure Canberra would be better placed to answer that question. But it is certainly a facility of a similar scale to the material recovery facility, which we have said will be operational by 2028.

**MS CLAY:** Did we get those numbers on how many households we are up to?

**Ms Cheyne:** We are getting them.

**MS CLAY:** I am interested to know that we managed to expand it recently for more households, but we cannot do any further expansions until the new facility.

**Ms Cheyne:** It was a modest expansion within the capacity of what we have got right now. Really, there is no further capacity beyond that.

**Mr Fitzgerald:** The usefulness of the expansion was to test in other areas of the ACT, particularly in multi-unit dwellings because that is where we have had the most issues in terms of contamination. So, it was to go outside of Belconnen and see whether that issue is replicating elsewhere so that, as we design the full scheme, we know whether there are similar issues at play, and whether we can build in solutions for those.

**MS CLAY:** So, the expansion is not so much constrained by process and capacity; the expansion was in order to be able to do apartment buildings? It was to test a new thing?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** At the moment, the material is processed, effectively, within two shipping containers. This is material for which—because it is putrescible and because it has potential for contamination—the larger you go, the more systems you need to have in place. At the moment, we are effectively using a windrow processing methodology. As you get more material, that becomes very difficult to manage—particularly for compliance with our odour standards. There are also issues of leachate and how that is managed on a site that is designed just for green waste.

Expansion is possible at a very small scale. Certainly, once you get to a level where you need to potentially undertake environmental studies in order to further expand, I think we would have difficulties in terms of achieving the appropriate systems to get the environmental authorisations.

**MS CARRICK:** My question is about parking. It is a fraught issue.

**Ms Cheyne:** May I check: is it parking policy/availability, or is it parking enforcement?

**MS CARRICK:** It says in the budget papers that the government will undertake a review of parking demand across key urban and town centres. Is that you?

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes. It is all me, but Access Canberra is the enforcer of parking.

**MS CARRICK:** This is more about the policy.

**Ms Cheyne:** Okay. Is that you, Geoff? Come on up.

**Mr Davidson:** I have read and understood the privilege statement.

That piece of work would be undertaken this year. We will be having a look at different parking patterns and behaviours across the territory; what our current pay parking areas are; and what the fees are. Then we will be looking at the best way to achieve our strategic directions, to try to ensure that we have parking which is available to support the activity centres, but that also helps to achieve our transport strategy goals, including mode shift and behaviour change.

**MS CARRICK:** And for the small local shops that are not on the major transport alignment, will they be a part of this review as well?

**Mr Davidson:** The terms of reference for that review are yet to be drafted. That is something to be considered in drafting those terms of reference. I cannot think off the top of my head of any examples where pay parking currently applies at local centres. So the focus would be predominantly on areas where pay parking currently applies, or areas adjacent to those current pay parking areas.

But local centres are certainly somewhere that we can explore. There is evidence in the community feedback that there are parking pressures at local centres as they are changing—and as we are seeing changes in some of those areas with, for example, an increase in working from home.

**MS CARRICK:** When you say local centres, are you referring to local shops like Torrens, as opposed to a group centre like Southlands?

**Mr Davidson:** That is right.

**MS CARRICK:** Okay. And if a part of this is about mode shift, will you be looking at putting Park-and-Rides along the main alignment to facilitate people through the mode shift?

**Mr Davidson:** That is not within the scope of this piece of work. But the directorate, more broadly as part of its transport plan in the strategy, does look at the integration of all modes and services, and the infrastructure to help achieve those goals. Park and Ride does play an important role in that regard.

**MS CARRICK:** When you look at some of the local shops, people do park there all day and then walk off down to the main arterial and jump on the bus. Is that the sort of thing that you will be looking at?

**Mr Davidson:** You are quite right. There are examples of where we have informal park-and-ride occurring. It might be people taking advantage of unrestricted parking at local centres, sports grounds and other facilities. I do not expect that it will be a formal part of the terms of reference. It might be that, in undertaking that study, we do identify some issues such as that; and it might make recommendations on how that could be addressed through changes to pay-parking regimes.

**Ms Cheyne:** We are trying to effectively balance, Ms Carrick, the turnover for businesses at some of our local centres and groups centres where we are seeing that all-day parking, with encouraging mode shift. Also, effectively, this is an asset for the government, and we are always looking at whether we are making the best use of the value of the asset. That is what this work will do. But as Mr Davidson said, the terms of reference are not done yet.

**MS CARRICK:** Regarding the turnover of business, is looking at paid parking in local shops likely, as opposed to time limits—five-minute, 15-minute or two-hour type time limits—to keep people moving through? There are time limits at some of the shops, but then shop owners will complain about a lack of compliance. People park there for ages. Some of the shops are packed.

**Ms Cheyne:** This is part of the issue. I can think of some group centres that I know intimately that have two-hour limits. Access Canberra's enforcement staff cannot be everywhere all the time. They honestly do an incredible job. Some people risk it and feel that the cost of a fine every so often is worth the risk. It is not ideal. It is not really the message that we want to allow to fester, I suppose. It is about understanding the parking behaviours in different centres across our city and what the most appropriate fee or other measure is according to the behaviours that we are looking at—not replacing like for like, but without significantly disrupting someone's way of commuting or whatever it might be. We are trying to make sure that parking is being used for the reasons intended.

**MS CARRICK:** Will you work with the planning directorate as there is densification around our shops, so that, if somebody moves into a spare space at the shops, they bring parking with them? An example would be where a childcare centre with about 80 places moved into Torrens. It did not bring any parking with it, so it bogs down the parking at the shops. The shop owners complain that the car park is now full of childcare parents as opposed to people moving through the shops. Is that sort of thing considered too when planning happens for densification?

**Ms Cheyne:** This is the really fun stuff that Mr Davidson's team has to deal with every

day.

**Mr Davidson:** There is a requirement in a development application to provide a transport impact assessment. It would depend on the development type and also the zoning of the area. Those transport impact assessment guidelines were recently updated and published on 1 July. That is for a 12-month pilot period. That includes an enhanced focus on the types of things that you have mentioned. Part of that assessment needs to look at parking—what the current conditions are, what the parking impacts will be from the development, and how they could be mitigated or addressed. It might be through an increased supply of parking or there might be other measures to try to reduce the impacts of the development in that area.

**MS CARRICK:** Where do staff park? They just use the spots for the shops.

**Mr Davidson:** Yes; that is right.

**MS CARRICK:** Thank you.

**MS TOUGH:** I notice that Mr McMurray is still in the room. I was wondering whether I could push my luck and ask a cemetery staffing related question as it is part of City Services.

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes. I expect Mr McMurray is delighted to assist.

**MS TOUGH:** Staff at cemeteries and the crematorium are dealing with families at their most vulnerable time. It is really the worst part of some people's lives. How do you support, manage and retain your staff when they are in those situations day in and day out? How do you provide a safe workplace for the staff?

**Mr McMurray:** Thanks for the question. You are right: it is a challenging environment every day for them. There are a couple of pieces to the jigsaw puzzle. One is that I have a counsellor attending our staff meeting every four months. It provides an open forum for staff to talk openly with her. She stays for about another hour and a half to have private one-on-one conversations. The other piece is ongoing training for staff about vicarious trauma and dealing with grief and loss, but it is just a reinforcement program. We have seen it, particularly with some employees who commit very heavily emotionally to delivering a service. Compassion burnout keeps accumulating.

**MS TOUGH:** I would imagine that some employees really lean in and give compassionate care to families, and I am sure families really appreciate that. How do you manage that compassionate burnout so that you are not losing staff and you still have staff providing a great service to families?

**Mr McMurray:** We rotate some staff where we can, to give them a break. In relation to the crematorium, which is probably the area that is impacted the most, we again rotate staff in and out of the crematorium to give them a break.

**MS TOUGH:** Do you find that is a good way of managing psychosocial injury and potential workers comp—the kinds of situations where employees just cannot come back to work for a period of time?

**Mr McMurray:** Over the last three years, we have not had that incident. At this stage, we believe it works. We also have the employee assistance program that staff reach out to.

**MS TOUGH:** Wonderful. Do you have a feedback mechanism for staff about whether they think the employee assistance program is going great or not so great, or they want to see the councillor come more often?

**Mr McMurray:** The offer for the councillor to come more often or have one-on-one conversations outside the EAP is simply a matter of asking me for it, which is what happens.

**MS TOUGH:** Wonderful. Thank you.

**Ms Cheyne:** For my own interest, you said the greatest impact is at the crematorium. Are you able to expand on what that means?

**Mr McMurray:** There are probably two issues to it. If I were picking the most impacted staff, it would be crematorium staff. The reason is the viewing room that was built as part of the crematorium. About 22 per cent of all cremations have a viewing, a view charge, so that is an impact. A service is held in the viewing room, so the emotion period for staff is 45 minutes, and you could have three or four of them in a day. The other impact is for customer service staff, front-facing staff, who deal with people who walk in and have no idea what to do next. It may have just happened or they need guidance about a plot, a product or funeral directors.

**MS CLAY:** I would like to ask questions about the Urban Wood Reuse Plan. I am wondering what the source of the timber is—the wood that we are using in the Urban Wood Reuse Plan. Is it construction or demolition timber? Is it from urban trees? Where is the timber from?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** It is purely sourced from our urban forest. It is from tree removals or storm damage material. It is exclusively from our own operations.

**MS CLAY:** What re-uses are you looking at?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** We held an external stakeholder session last week to look at the opportunities for wood re-use. There are lots of examples of what could be possible. We had people from the ACT woodchopping society keen to be involved in making sure that they have a steady supply of material. Obviously, mulch is a huge element and provides a really significant contribution, not only to our parks and gardens but also to schools and other community groups. To be able to go further and manage our woodyards in a way that maintains the integrity of wood when we are doing field work, we are cutting it to a length that may have greater value if it were milled or dried or for another type of activity. Our woodyard coordinator works with Indigenous organisations to look at opportunities to take material and put it into our reserves to make sure that we have native elements reintroduced into some of our parks. All of that is being considered.



One of the key elements that we heard is about understanding the provenance of some of the wood. That gives value. It might be that a tree came from a street where someone grew up. That connection increases the value, whether that is commercial value or broader community value. That is what we are looking at in terms of the wood re-use plan. There has been huge engagement. There is great excitement about the possibilities for the material that we recover. As I was saying earlier with City Services, we do not harvest our own materials; we are dependent on the particular circumstances. The type of wood and the value of the wood will differ from year to year.

**MS CLAY:** If people were not involved in that external stakeholder consultation session or are not involved in this scene, how would they get in touch with this work?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** There is information on our website. We encourage people to send any ideas they have through to the community engagement email address that we have on our website. I am not sure that we have stood up a YourSay website. We might. We will see whether a YourSay will—

**MS CLAY:** Coming soon would be fine. Have you ruled out a commercial-scale wood to energy program or are you just doing re-use, woodworking and using the wood as wood and mulch?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** The material that we generate is not necessarily what we would use for engineered fuel. Generally speaking, it is too high quality. Also, we have both hard and soft woods. That mix generally does not lend itself well to that process of wood as fuel. The opportunities for that are still in the construction industry as opposed to our woodyards.

**MS CLAY:** It would be a waste. And we are not burning wood from the urban forest, are we? It is not for wood heaters?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** No. None of our material is used as firewood.

**MS CLAY:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** We are somehow in the astounding position of wrapping up a session on city services.

**MS CARRICK:** I have a question.

**Ms Cheyne:** Chair, we have a few things that we took on notice and can provide you now to save everyone the hassle, if that would be all right?

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Carrick, could you be quick?

**MS CARRICK:** Yes. This is a city presentation or city maintenance question. I do not know how you manage so much area. Woden Town Square picnic tables are either broken or missing. Slats around the picnic tables are gone. The stage is broken. The garden beds are unkempt. There is graffiti everywhere. It is a matter of pride.

**Ms Cheyne:** Ms Carrick, how about we organise a walkaround of officials with you?

**MS CARRICK:** That would be fantastic.

**Ms Cheyne:** We can use your eyes as an audit for that area.

**MS CARRICK:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, you have a few things for the committee?

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes. I have been provided with an updated figure on Yarralumla Nursery. The actual figure of the recurrent funding is \$1.491 million, including a CSO of \$321,000. It was not wildly off, but I wanted to get that right. There is a total of 6,592 households—4,162 are single use; and 2,430 are multi-use dwellings, households, that are now part of the FOGO pilot. I confirm again that I will take on notice the Yarralumla Nursery improvements. I think I need to look at the election commitments vis-a-vis active travel paths and funding. Finally, having understood what Mr Milligan was asking about Florey—the question he asked about the toilet—it was simply a comment from the Treasury that a toilet may be necessary. The funding does not reflect the cost of a toilet, so I will take that as noted.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. We have still managed to wind up with one minute to go. On behalf of the committee, thank you for your attendance today. If you have taken any questions on notice, please provide your answers to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*.

On behalf of the committee, I thank witnesses who have assisted the committee through their experience and knowledge. We also thank broadcasting and Hansard staff for their support. If a member wishes to ask questions on notice, please upload them to the parliamentary portal as soon as possible and no later than five business days from today.

**The committee adjourned at 5 pm.**