



**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

WEDNESDAY, 6 AUGUST 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

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate	1298, 1311
Health and Community Services Directorate	1331, 1374
Infrastructure Canberra	1331

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 9.01 am.

Appearances:

Stephen-Smith, Ms Rachel, Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

Campbell, Mr Russ, Under Treasurer, Treasury

Mirzabegian, Ms Sanaz, Executive Group Manager, Procurement ACT, Treasury

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 today will hear from Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, Minister for Finance, Minister Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Sport and Recreation, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs and Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Mr Michael Pettersson MLA, Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations and Minister for Children, Youth and Families, and Dr Marisa Paterson MLA, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence.

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 the words, "I will take that question on notice." That will help the committee and witnesses to confirm questions taken on notice from the transcript.

We welcome Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, the Minister for Finance. 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 want to start, as we explore procurement once again, with the definition of "value for money". I understand there were amendments to the Government Procurement Act and regulation last year that expanded the definition of "value for money". Since that definition was broadened to include, I think, whole-of-life costs and community values, how many procurements have changed providers mid-contract, due to a revised value-

for-money assessment?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Mid-contract?

THE CHAIR: “Mid-contract” is probably the wrong term—changed providers between contracts, going from one procurement round to the following procurement, if that makes sense?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Thank you, Mr Cocks.

THE CHAIR: Between contracts would be a better way—

Ms Stephen-Smith: Yes. Obviously, there are some well-known examples where providers have changed. Whether that is specifically related to the change in the definition of “value for money”, I do not know.

Mr Campbell: I have read and I understand the privilege statement. No, I do not think we would be able to be so granular. Each time that you go to market for a new procurement, you would be going through all the criteria collectively, not just on that standalone item. I am not sure whether we have had any general feedback about how people are approaching the task. In terms of the specifics, Mr Cocks, I do not think we would have that available.

THE CHAIR: Okay.

Ms Mirzabegian: I have read and agree to the privilege statement. Thank you for the question. The changes that were made to the Government Procurement Act in relation to the concept of “value for money” were aimed at enhancing the understanding and application of the concept of “value for money”. While some of the matters that are now expressly provided for were not present in the previous legislation, the procurement framework, by and large, supported those concepts, anyway. As the minister and Mr Campbell have indicated, it is unlikely that there would have been a big shift, and certainly not midstream, in relation to a contract as a result of those changes to the legislation.

THE CHAIR: Are you undertaking any work to look at or measure the impact of that change or evaluate it from a policy sense?

Ms Mirzabegian: At the moment we have relevant performance indicators that we report on in relation to awareness of the policy framework around procurement. We also measure staff—the public servants—feedback in relation to the training that we provide. We are constantly seeking that, in some ways informal and in some instances formal, feedback in relation to people’s understanding of the framework and how useful they find the training that we provide. By and large, that is our way of measuring people’s understanding of and engagement with the procurement framework.

THE CHAIR: Are you looking at outcomes in that process?

Ms Mirzabegian: Outcomes?

THE CHAIR: Whether there is any difference—and this goes somewhat to the earlier question—between what would have been procured under the old approach versus the new approach.

Ms Mirzabegian: No, we are not looking at the outcomes. As I said, it is mainly because the framework is enhanced; it is not different, in a sense.

Ms Stephen-Smith: At a higher level, Mr Cocks, the broader procurement reform program that has been underway since 2022 is largely complete now, but it has probably not been in place for long enough to undertake an evaluation of the outcomes of the reform program as a whole. I am sure that, in the next few years, we will be reviewing the implementation of the reform program and understanding what the impact of that has been. We are already thinking about whether there are tweaks required to the reform program itself, as it goes through implementation. That is probably the level at which we would consider the outcomes of the whole reform program, not just of one element of legislative change, in terms of what that has meant for procurement outcomes.

THE CHAIR: I am glad that you anticipated my follow-up question, which was about the status of that reform program, and whether there will be an evaluation. It sounds like there will be an evaluation.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I do not think there is a formal timeframe for evaluation at this point. When we make changes like this, we always go back and review and evaluate, and see what the outcome was. The advice that I have is that, as of late July, with the 19 actions under the program, 16 were complete and three are in progress, so it has not quite been fully implemented yet.

We are continuing to get feedback, as I said, through implementation. Directorates and agencies are continuing to provide feedback about their experience with the reform program, and we are continuing to adjust as we go as well. As an example of that, the Procurement Board has provided some feedback about the new requirement, as have directorates, to review all proposed extensions of contracts. That is being considered—whether that change has been too broad and is creating too much unnecessary work for people.

Those are the kinds of things that we will continue to consider through implementation. I expect that, in a couple of years, we will have a proper look back and say, “Have we achieved the outcome from the reform program that we intended?”

THE CHAIR: What are the three actions that are not fully implemented yet?

Ms Stephen-Smith: From the advice I have, it is implementing the road map for a modernised procurement solution, mandatory adoption of the ACT government capability framework following the development of e-learning modules and other resources, and investing in our people through the delivery of further procurement-focused foundational e-learning modules available ACTPS wide. I cannot remember whether we talked about this in the last hearing, but Sanaz can expand on where we are up to in terms of those e-learning resources. Most of the resources exist; it is a question of putting them into the e-learning framework.

THE CHAIR: I am probably more interested in the second of those—the mandatory adoption of the ACT government capability framework. What is happening with that one?

Ms Mirzabegian: At the moment the government has a capability framework relating to the capability of procurement officers, the people who undertake procurement in the territory. We are also aware that, more broadly across Australia, the procurement profession is moving towards more formal professionalisation. At the moment, for example, you might appreciate that there are no undergraduate courses entitled “procurement”.

We are working with our colleagues across the states and territories to embed that and, hopefully, agree on a more consistent approach across Australia. This will allow our staff, the public servants, to move between, and to have their training, professional standing, recognised across, different states and territories.

Until we do that, our framework can be adopted by the relevant directorates as they see appropriate, in relation to the procurement positions that they have in each of those directorates. Once that occurs, with the natural move towards a more consistent approach across the states and territories, I think that there would be a natural move to that adoption by the ACT as a whole.

THE CHAIR: It sounds like the big barrier at the moment is getting the e-learning sorted out. I was interested in the term you used—“as appropriate”. It does say “mandatory” in the action for adoption of the capability framework. Is it a discretionary thing?

Ms Mirzabegian: At the moment the framework is out there, but it may be adopted on a voluntary basis by each directorate as they see fit, for the procurement roles that they have.

THE CHAIR: But it will become mandatory later?

Ms Mirzabegian: Yes. Once we have a better understanding of what each jurisdiction is doing across Australia, to make sure that we are consistent with them, we can make that a mandatory requirement. However, at the moment, while that space is in development, we are encouraging people to consider that and adopt that where it makes sense for their business. That is what I mean by “appropriate”.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Just to give a bit of a sense of that—and Sanaz can correct me if I am wrong—where we are talking about some of the smaller agencies, the work that is required to adopt the capability framework might not be justifiable, on the basis of the amount of procurement that they actually undertake, and they could continue to get support from Procurement ACT, rather than going through the whole capability framework themselves, if they are very small and they do not undertake a lot of procurement.

Ms Mirzabegian: That is correct. Indeed, the way that we have set up our tiered service delivery framework allows those entities that do not have their own capability to avail themselves of services that we can provide.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, I want to ask about procurement relating to small local businesses. Over many years, I think we have all received feedback of frustration from small local businesses. How do you think we are going in ensuring they are getting a good and fair opportunity to procure under the ACT's framework?

Ms Mirzabegian: I will take that question. The procurement framework has a number of elements that support procurement from small and medium enterprises. Related to the reform program, as we were discussing the reform program recently, we have embedded in our legislation a provision that allows a territory buyer, a person procuring in the territory, to approach a small or medium enterprise that is within the ACT region. That is also defined, and it is an exemption from the usual quotation and tender thresholds that we have. That is consistent with, and it enhances, the Canberra region local industry participation policy. It is up to each public servant looking at their procurements to avail themselves of the relevant provisions that we have provided in the legislation. It is considered on a case-by-case basis.

Ms Stephen-Smith: We do get feedback from local businesses that procurement processes are complex and challenging. That is feedback we have had, as you know, for many years. Some of the work that we are doing around supporting IT processes, in terms of our engagement with businesses and organisations through procurement relates to improving our ability to capture all the information once, and enable more streamlined access. Obviously, that will be more relevant for local businesses that are more likely to engage on a regular basis with the ACT government than interstate businesses that might engage in a one-off procurement.

MR RATTENBURY: Have you had feedback from the Business Chamber and others on how effective those reforms have been?

Ms Mirzabegian: We do engage with them from time to time. If I recall correctly, our next meeting is sometime in August. We discuss matters such as contract provisions and the content and language written in our request for tender documents, to make sure that they are accessible to small businesses or businesses who do not have the resources to engage a lawyer or a third party to provide advice to them.

The conversation at the moment is about how we can make the language and content of our request documentation and the contract documentation easily accessible by a small business who may not have the resources to engage third parties. Also, commercially, our position has been to provide a more equal playing field for businesses, for example, by making sure that we have sensible insurance provisions in our government procurement rules.

We do have a number of arms that, together, support that engagement with smaller businesses and guide public servants to make good decisions when they are engaging with small businesses.

MR RATTENBURY: On that last point, I noted your remark earlier around the rules being there to enable it, but it does require an individual decision along the way. Do you have any tracking? How do you measure whether what you have set up objectively does the job that you are trying to achieve, and is being used by people in their decision-

making to get the outcomes that are desired? Is there some checking of the outcomes?

Ms Mirzabegian: We have our notifiable contracts register, which registers the various contracts that have been made, \$25,000 and above. We do know that, in that space, a good number of our contractors are small to medium enterprises. I would have to get the exact figures; I do not have them. We know that is a sign to us that public servants are engaging with those small businesses.

MR RATTENBURY: That is the question I am asking, yes.

Ms Mirzabegian: I would need to confirm this, but I would say that more than half of our contracts, of all the contracts that we have, \$25,000 and over, are with small businesses.

Mr Campbell: In fact, Mr Rattenbury, there might have been a question taken on notice, so there may be some information coming shortly through the system.

MR RATTENBURY: Thank you; I will keep an eye out for that one.

THE CHAIR: I would also be interested in seeing it as a proportion of the value of ACT government contracts, not just the number.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Okay. We will take that on notice.

MS CARRICK: My question is about the lessons learned from procurements that have happened to date. Where the implementation of a procurement might not have gone so well, do you go back and look at the procurement that underpinned that implementation, to see whether there were any lessons learned about the procurement?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I think this comes back to what we were talking about in the last hearing regarding project management—the broad project, from conception through to delivery, and procurement being a part of that. If there are challenges in a particular project, the directorate that has responsibility for that would look at the project as a whole. Part of that would be looking at the procurement process.

HRIMS is a prime example of that. In looking at the entirety of the HRIMS project, consideration was given to the initial concept and how the decision was made to progress the project initially, in the way that it was, as a whole major change project. There was the procurement process, and the contracting and project management. There were lessons learned through the consideration of the whole of that project. Those lessons that related specifically to procurement would then flow back into the procurement process.

I do not know whether there are any specific outcomes that you want to talk about, Sanaz?

Ms Mirzabegian: Indeed. As the minister, correctly, has indicated, each individual procurement considers its own lessons. For example, how was the interaction with the contractor? What was the relationship like? If there were any performance indicators in that contract, did they work well—the settings, the timing et cetera? Those

procurements are cyclical, meaning that they are repeat procurements. Generally, they are considered as part of the planning for the next procurement, and that is done individually.

If there are stakeholders, people who are procuring out in the territory, who find that perhaps part of the process for a template or other matter did not work very well, they are able to provide that feedback to us. We also consider any reports that are made—for example, any Auditor-General's reports. Indeed, a large part of the procurement reform program was based on the findings of those reports and giving effect to them.

We do use a number of sources centrally, as Procurement ACT, to receive that feedback and consider how we could improve the procurement process or the outcomes of that procurement for the territory. As the minister said, in relation to an individual procurement, that is up to the individual agency that is responsible for that.

MS CARRICK: IT ones are particularly problematic for everyone. Have you done any work around the procurement of IT projects and lessons learned from a range of them, and how that could inform your support of the directorates that are trying to deal with their IT?

Ms Mirzabegian: Digital Canberra is the agency responsible for setting IT policy more broadly. We do work closely with Digital Canberra. In fact, we have regular meetings where we discuss various matters that come up. One of the issues is, of course, the balance between the terms and conditions that the territory considers to be appropriate and our buying power versus the terms and conditions of ICT providers. That is an ongoing conversation that we are having, and we balance the risks.

We also talk about risks that are more appropriately dealt with through contractual mechanisms as opposed to procurement processes, as opposed to relationships and contract management. Yes, it is an ongoing conversation that we have. Unfortunately, there is not a one-size-fits-all approach for us. We try and make sure that our procurement framework is sufficiently flexible and agile to be able to deal with the different commercial arrangements that the territory needs to enter into, to make sure that they achieve and maintain value for money.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I can add a couple of specific things on ICT. Bettina is now the D-G of Digital Canberra. The establishment of Digital Canberra is partly an outcome of some of the challenges that we have had with ICT projects over time.

Even prior to the establishment of Digital Canberra, there was the creation of a whole new framework around ICT best practice in procurement and delivery. That goes right back to early project consideration and through the pre-budget and budget process. I cannot remember the name of the group, but there is a group that supports the budget process. Mr Campbell, I am sure, can remember the name of it. It considers all ICT business cases that come forward. It looks at the technology solution that is being proposed, and the design of the program. It thinks about whole-of-government ICT that already exists, platforms that already exist in other parts of government, and whether they could be built on to deliver that capability for that particular agency, so that people are no longer working in isolation from one another when they are considering new technology or technology replacement.

It looks at the maturity of the thinking about what those ICT projects might look like, and provides some recommendations via Treasury through to the expenditure review committee and cabinet around what the next stage of the project should be in terms of funding—the next step. That could be about architecture design, and how much funding is required for that stage of the project. That design work is then done with Digital Canberra, or what was DDTS in CMTEED, to inform the procurement phase.

In terms of the procurement stage, Digital Canberra is closely involved with that, mirroring the role of Infrastructure Canberra in infrastructure capital procurement. Also, the Procurement Board, over time, has had more expertise in the external people sitting on it, including the independent chair; they have more expertise in relation to ICT procurement and project delivery matters.

MS CARRICK: Across all procurements, not necessarily just ICT, when a directorate is trying to do its early engagement with the market, and they are trying to be clear about the scope of what they want, with your experience, are you able to help the directorate to be very clear about what the purpose and the scope are? If I am getting scope-creep, it can be very problematic. In order to help them to be very clear up-front about what the scope is, what the timeframes are and what the potential milestones could be that would be embedded in a contract later on, when there is a request for a proposal or an expression of interest, are you able to use your experience to help the directorates to narrow their scope?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Are you talking specifically about ICT?

MS CARRICK: No, not necessarily—about anything.

Ms Stephen-Smith: On ICT, that would now be the role of Digital Canberra, what was previously the role of the Chief Information Officer in DDTS. On infrastructure and capital projects, Infrastructure Canberra holds that expertise and would provide advice. More broadly, yes, Procurement ACT would be able to provide advice.

Ms Mirzabegian: That is right; in relation to goods and services procurements, not related to construction. As I was indicating earlier, depending on the maturity of the particular organisation, we have different tiers of service available to them. Our enabled tier of service allows for questions about anything to be asked by that directorate. Once we go into assured and managed tiers of our service, we provide more proactive assistance to them.

In the managed tier, in particular, we are involved from that very early planning stage with the directorate. We discuss with them what their needs are, and what outcomes they are trying to achieve. We support them in relation to conducting any market research that they have, to understand what the market looks like. From then on, we have a system to develop what we call a statement of requirements—what it is that we are going out to market for—which discusses the matters you were talking about, such as timing and other requirements, what the output or outcome that the territory is trying to achieve will look like, and so forth. That is then included in what we call our request documentation, which is that request for tender proposal, however it is designed.

In terms of the flexibilities that we have in our framework, we can also conduct industry briefings as part of a procurement. We do recommend those where the procurement is particularly complex, where we are doing something for the first time, where it is novel, or where we might think that the industry would benefit from an opportunity to have a face-to-face conversation with the territory.

Usually, that means the territory does a presentation for interested suppliers. We do advertise that ahead of time. Sometimes the suppliers register for it; sometimes they just show up, depending on the requirements that we have put in that request for tender. That is an opportunity for them to have a discussion.

Outside that, suppliers can always ask questions in relation to a tender, when it is advertised. You might see, if you look at our public documents, addenda to an RFT or an RFQ, which are the answers that we are giving to a question posed by one provider. For probity reasons, we make sure that those answers are provided to all tenderers, not just the person who asked that question. If needed, we then adjust our request documentation to make sure that that requirement is clarified. For example, if someone picks up something that does not quite make sense, we then clarify that and send that out. Does that answer your question?

MS CARRICK: Yes.

THE CHAIR: I have a question about the approach of going out to potential suppliers. I want to understand a little bit about the registration process. In order to get information about a procurement that is out at any time, you need to register, as I understand it, for the procurement portal; is that correct?

Ms Mirzabegian: Yes. To get notification, you do have to register, and to be on Tenders ACT.

THE CHAIR: Yes; that is access to Tenders ACT?

Ms Mirzabegian: The platform, correct. As you register, you can choose the areas that your company is interested in; you and I could register for that. You select the things that you are interested in, and the email that you have provided will receive a notification on an approach to market that is upcoming.

THE CHAIR: In terms of information that is available to everyone, information for which you do not have to be registered, what are people blocked from seeing until they have registered on that site? For example, can they see the actual tender documents themselves?

Ms Mirzabegian: No, they have to register to see the tender documents themselves. The reason is that, once they are registered, we then use that registration to communicate with that company and let them know that there are addenda and so forth. We do prefer it like that, so that companies who are interested in that procurement are then receiving the notifications.

THE CHAIR: Are you able to see the names of procurements?

Ms Mirzabegian: Definitely.

THE CHAIR: So you are able to search?

Ms Mirzabegian: Yes.

THE CHAIR: But you cannot see what is covered by that procurement until you register?

Ms Mirzabegian: Until you register, and it is a very simple process of giving your email, and access would be provided.

THE CHAIR: Is there any particular form that needs to be completed to do that, or is it just—

Ms Mirzabegian: Yes, there is an online form. It basically asks who you are, and asks you to give us your email details, for your registration. That would then form the basis of communicating with that person, body or entity—whoever has registered.

THE CHAIR: Have you received any concerns about that registration being a barrier to accessing information about procurements?

Ms Mirzabegian: No, we have not, because the companies who are interested in those procurements register so that they can receive the push notifications on what they are interested in.

THE CHAIR: I imagine there would be a spectrum of sophistication, when it comes to those who regularly engage with procurements versus those who are just starting potentially to apply or submit a tender for a procurement. Do you keep track of how many times people begin the process, or go to the page to register but do not complete that process?

Ms Mirzabegian: I would have to take that on notice, as to whether the system has that capability.

THE CHAIR: That would be useful.

Ms Mirzabegian: The process that we have is on our website, on Procurement ACT's public-facing website. We have a supplier portion that provides a short video for people who want to register on Tenders ACT. That gives them the guidance they need and walks them through that. We did that mainly to make sure that those smaller organisations, or people who did not have the sophisticated systems of a larger organisation, would also be able to navigate the site. Anybody can see that for themselves. If people are interested in engaging further with Tenders ACT, they can register. That would allow us to send them notifications of things that they are interested in.

Ms Stephen-Smith: It is not in my portfolio, but I want to take the opportunity to publicise something. The Lighthouse Business Innovation Centre offers Canberra-based businesses four hours of tailored advice. If you have a business that is starting

up, that is new, and someone is coming to you, you can definitely point them in that direction. That four hours of advice around how to grow your business, how to engage with these kinds of mechanisms, how to support your workforce et cetera is quite useful.

THE CHAIR: I understand. We have probably heard enough on that one. Ms Tough, do you have a question?

MS TOUGH: Yes, I do. I understand that ministerial staffers can access training on the procurement process, just as public servants can, so that they have that full understanding of the process. Even though non-executive members and staff are removed from the process, are there any opportunities for non-executive members and their staff to have training in how the procurement process works, so that when we get approached by people asking us questions about a procurement or disagreeing with a procurement, we have that bit of extra knowledge of the process?

Ms Mirzabegian: We do provide training to ministerial staff, in terms of, broadly, the procurement framework and the probity considerations, in case they are approached by a supplier in relation to a matter, at any stage during the procurement, and so that they know how to handle those queries. There is a bit of a question-and-answer scenario, and a discussion with them. I think we have delivered two of those sessions this year.

Ms Stephen-Smith: The Probity in Procurement Guide is also publicly available for anyone who wants to have a look at it.

MS TOUGH: Has any consideration been given—and you do not have to give an answer now—to whether that kind of training could be put on in the context of non-executive staff and members?

Ms Mirzabegian: Certainly. We are here to provide training to whoever requests it. As part of our training offering, we have standard training and training on request. We develop bespoke training for anyone across the directorate and the government. As part of that, we also have a discussion with them as to what it is that they wish to include in that training, or what the focus of that training should be. We then provide bespoke training to them, with the particular focus that is of interest to them.

MS TOUGH: Wonderful; thank you.

THE CHAIR: I want to ask about insourcing, and where things are up to with the insourcing framework. If I understand rightly, there is a threshold for procurements. I think it is \$200,000—any procurement over \$200,000 has to be assessed against the framework. Is that correct?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I do not have ministerial responsibility for the insourcing, I believe, so I will not say 100 per cent that that is correct, but you probably have the right information. Broadly, in terms of implementation of the insourcing framework and its interaction with procurement, one of the key questions is how to understand far enough ahead of a contract coming to an end. If it is currently an outsourced service that could potentially be delivered by ACT government public servants, one of the key issues in relation to procurement is understanding far enough ahead what contracts are coming up for renewal so that that process can be undertaken. I do not know whether

Mr Campbell has any more on where that is up to.

Mr Campbell: I actually do not have that information to hand. We do not normally have responsibility for it, but we could take it on notice and redirect the question. Let me clarify the question that you are asking first.

THE CHAIR: What I am trying to find out is: how is it interacting with the procurement process broadly? It sounds like it factors into the forecasting before it becomes procurement.

Mr Campbell: Probably the best way of thinking about how it interacts with Sanaz's team is that there is now this forward-planning part of the process, in terms of what might come forward in the next year or so. It also helps to inform the work of the Government Procurement Board. It helps the directorates to be on the front foot about what is coming up, and they would need to consider those procurements in the context of the insourcing framework. As to where that policy framework is up to, I cannot answer that.

THE CHAIR: Who has responsibility for it?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Minister Pettersson. More broadly, it is the Office of Industrial Relations and Workforce Strategy. In terms of officials—

THE CHAIR: I would imagine, though, that there is some interaction, and I am getting a sense that there is.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Definitely. I take a strong interest in the insourcing framework.

THE CHAIR: Part of what I am trying to work out is that there is a lot of concern from many community organisations that currently receive funding or provide services. We have had some extensive discussions about what the difference might be, in that some of the things they do might be insourced. I am trying to find out whether, under the procurement arrangements, there is any delineation that would allow those organisations to work out whether their services are at threat of being insourced.

Ms Stephen-Smith: In terms of the procurement element of that, it comes back to the conversation we were having previously about service funding agreements and grants, and procurement versus grants arrangements. At a broad level, for most of our human services delivery, we are now undertaking commissioning processes where we would be looking in advance at how the entire sector is structured and who is doing what.

From my perspective, in terms of the insourcing framework, it would be part of the consideration of that bigger picture of service mapping, as to who is appropriately placed for taking responsibility for what. Largely, our consideration around insourcing, or non-government service delivery, is around new services. For example, with the eating disorders residential centre, there was quite a discussion about whether that should be delivered by Canberra Health Services or by a non-government organisation. It would be unusual, but not unheard of, for a service that is currently delivered by a non-government organisation to switch to being delivered by a government organisation. That would largely be where it is a service that is delivered on behalf of

the government.

MS CARRICK: I am looking at budget paper B, and you have \$12½ million. What are the main drivers of the \$12½ million for the procurement section?

Ms Stephen-Smith: The overall budget for Procurement ACT; is that what you are talking about?

MS CARRICK: If you look at page 27 of budget paper B, it lists things that the directorate delivers. What would be included in the \$12½ million for procurement?

Ms Stephen-Smith: There are quite a few staff.

Ms Mirzabegian: I can speak to that. Structurally, in terms of staff numbers, the majority of our staff numbers are involved in providing services to the territory through what I referred to as the tiered services framework for looking at our whole-of-government arrangements.

MS CARRICK: How many staff are there in procurement?

Ms Stephen-Smith: We will take that question on notice.

Ms Mirzabegian: We can take that on notice, as to the exact numbers. We also have a unit dedicated to the capability uplift, and making sure that our training is delivered appropriately. Another portion of our funding is in relation to providing probity advisory services to the territory. We have a probity adviser who provides those services free of charge to whoever, across the territory, has a probity question. We also have some funding to have two lawyers placed within Procurement ACT, who are able to provide contract advisory services, again, to whoever seeks to have that advice. We are not charging the territory entities for that.

We also have a very small policy team that looks after things such as the legislation, making any amendments, making sure that we are keeping that policy current and contemporary. For example, one of the policies that they are working on at the moment is the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander procurement policy review. There are a number of policy considerations that that team looks after. We also provide secretariat support to the Government Procurement Board.

MS CARRICK: If you could provide a breakdown, on notice, of that \$12½ million, that would be great.

Ms Stephen-Smith: We will take that on notice.

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*. The committee will now suspend the proceedings.

Hearing suspended from 9.48 am to 12.01 pm.

Appearances:

Berry, Ms Yvette, Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation.

Pettersson, Mr Michael, Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations.

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

Arthy, Ms Kareena, Deputy Director-General, Economic Development

Fulton, Ms Caroline, Executive Branch Manager, artsACT, Economic Development

Kelley, Ms Rebecca, Executive Branch Manager, Sport and Recreation, Economic Development

Young, Mr Michael, Executive Group Manager, Work Safety Group, Office of Industrial Relations and Workforce Strategy

THE CHAIR: We welcome Ms Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Sport and Recreation, and Mr Michael Pettersson MLA, Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations. 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. I note that Minister Berry will leave this session at 12.45 pm. As we are not inviting opening statements, we will proceed directly to questions. Ms Carrick, you are very enthusiastic to get us started today.

MS CARRICK: Thank you, Chair. I would like to start by saying I welcome the recent funding announcements for Canberra United and the Capitals. It is terrific for women's elite sport. In my questioning, I would like to focus on community sport. Minister Berry, could I confirm that you are the minister responsible for sports and rec policy, which would include the distribution of community facilities across Canberra?

Ms Berry: Yes.

MS CARRICK: Thank you. What is your policy on the distribution of indoor sport facilities and aquatic centres across Canberra?

Ms Berry: Bec might be able to talk to a bit of that. Basically, when new areas of the city are built, we work across government, with the planning minister and others, about the needs for a particular area. We work through that process as a new suburb is being built, and also make sure that we look at some of the older suburbs.

Ms Kelley: As the minister said, it is an ongoing process. It is not a set policy, if you like. It is an adaptive process that looks at certain opportunities within new areas of development, such as Molonglo or Gungahlin, which are our most recent growth areas, and also what sports tell us about their needs and growth and the utilisation of existing assets. Opportunities also arise when national sporting organisations or commonwealth funding is offered around some of the aspirations of sports. We have spoken previously about our infrastructure survey that was done two years ago. It invited all of our peak sporting organisations to put forward up to 15 key priorities of their infrastructure. That

has allowed us to understand where the sports are up to, but also to explore opportunities where sports might have other funding to partner with government.

All of those things come into the assessment about where the next appropriate development opportunities are for various sports, whether they are outdoor sports grounds, which tend to be where the new suburban developments are, or indoor sporting facilities, which, as we know, are more difficult in terms of land provision. But we are certainly looking at a number of facilities, noting demand in that space at the moment. With respect to aquatic facilities, you are aware that we have an existing aquatics framework in the territory. The government is currently considering the need for a review or renewal of that strategy.

MS CARRICK: What are the criteria in your sports policy for determining where community facilities will go? And do you take account of public transport links?

Ms Kelley: A number of factors go into considering where facilities go. First and foremost, it is about where the demand is and where there is possibly a shortage. In the most recent years, that has been Gungahlin focused, and it is now looking towards Molonglo. Looking at the current Gungahlin projects, whether that is the Gungahlin tennis facility, the Taylor District Playing Fields or the Throsby District Playing Fields, those are still talking to the undersupply within that area for many years. The same would be applied to other growth areas.

In terms of the participation bases, we note that it is not necessarily district based, in that most of our sports acknowledge that they utilise facilities right across Canberra. That is not something we specifically look at. Things like public transport routes are certainly identified once we get to the site identification stage and move to the design process. Generally, those types of things come up through consultation with user groups, but certainly through the DA processes that are associated with such developments.

MS CARRICK: Do you agree that town centres should have aquatic centres and indoor sports facilities? One reason is that they are the major hubs and that is where the transport goes. You can put a facility out in the bush somewhere and then try to get public transport to it, but the whole concept of Canberra and the decentralised model is that the town centres were supposed to have the community facilities, because everybody can get a bus there from around the catchment. Is that a thought in your determination of where sites would be?

Ms Kelley: Certainly, historically a number of sporting facilities were in and around our town centres. Now that those town centres are developed in the way they are, there are more challenges in establishing new facilities in and around the town centres. It makes sense that they are located in those areas. That is why, at the moment, that is generally where they are, in terms of primary aquatic facilities and also major ovals, athletic centres and other club based centres. That is not to say that, as our city grows, there is no need to explore other areas where there is appropriately zoned land, because the reality is that that is where the land is available. To take the arts facility in Tuggeranong as an example, that is a site that is co-located within the town centre, but it was also one of the very few blocks available within the region that is appropriately zoned.

MS CARRICK: On 20 March, the Assembly agreed to a motion calling on the government to establish a cross-directorate working group for the Woden town centre. This working group is to help identify sites for an aquatic centre, indoor sports stadium and arts centre. Is the sports and recreation policy team involved in the Woden town centre cross-directorate working group?

Ms Kelley: Yes; we are.

MS CARRICK: Are you making progress in identifying sites for these facilities?

Ms Arthy: It is quite difficult for us to answer the specific question you ask, because it is part of a cabinet process and we are not the lead on how that is going together. All we can say is that we are providing input about potential sport and recreation needs, but the broader question about that project would probably be better directed to another portfolio as we are not the lead.

MS CARRICK: I appreciate that you are not the lead, but are you inputting on the policy requirements? It is a large catchment. It is so big that the tram is going there. So that is where people go. Presumably, you help to identify sites.

Ms Arthy: Perhaps I could say that we are making very strong cases for consideration of sport and recreation facilities.

MS CARRICK: And presumably, being on the policy side of it, the size of the facility and the needs for the area—policy input on the need for the facility?

Ms Arthy: There are many competing priorities for limited space in Woden, so there is a lot of consideration going into this. In terms of what we may or may not be saying about the sporting facility, it is probably a bit too soon, because decisions need to be made about the priority for the Woden town centre before we get into designing what a sport and recreation facility may or may not look like.

MS CARRICK: Presumably, the indoor sports and aquatic centre and the arts centre are being identified as priorities for the town centre?

Ms Berry: Ms Carrick, if I can assist, a working group has been set up to discuss this, and pre-empting any decisions or policy or changes that come out of that working group would not be appropriate at this time.

MS CARRICK: Thank you. What policy work is being done to assess and mitigate the risk of the Geocon pool in Phillip not being financially viable as a public facility and closing to the public?

Ms Kelley: That would be a matter for the City and Environment Directorate.

Ms Arthy: Yes. As we talked about previously in hearings, anything to do with that particular pool is a matter for the City and Environment Directorate, because it is a privately-held pool with conditions put on it as part of the lease arrangements. We certainly are not doing any specific work in relation to the Geocon pool, and any

questions about it should be directed to the other directorate.

MS CARRICK: Should the Geocon pool not be available to the public, as the minister for sport, how will you manage the shortfall of aquatic facilities in Woden?

Ms Berry: It will be available to the public.

MS CARRICK: How can you guarantee that?

Ms Berry: That might be a question again for another directorate, but it is definitely the intention that the pool would be available to the public. It would not be viable for Geocon or anyone managing the pool for it not to be available to the public. That would just be—

MS CARRICK: But we have seen private pools fail before—Phillip, Oasis, Big Splash. There is a history of privately funded pools failing, so how can you guarantee that this is commercially viable?

Ms Berry: I do not think it is a question I can answer, but I will take it on notice, as far as the work that has been done in that space is concerned.

MS CARRICK: Okay. As the minister for sport, we need to know how you are mitigating this issue and what the alternative is should it fail. Where is the sports and recreation needs analysis that determined that only a 25-metre pool and associated smaller pools would meet the need for the Woden, Weston Creek and Inner South catchment?

Ms Arthy: Ms Carrick, we have provided this evidence several times before. To reiterate, we provided some advice to the then EPSDD around what is happening in relation to pool size across Australia. It fed into their processes and their consultation processes for a final decision to be made. I am very confident in the information that we have provided on the public record through various FOI questions on notice and inquiries. If you like, we can pull out the same questions again and refer you back to them.

MS CARRICK: If you could provide that advice—

THE CHAIR: You will take that on notice?

Ms Arthy: Yes. As I say, we have provided it many times before.

MS CARRICK: I cannot recall it.

THE CHAIR: Provide the source of information and we can go to it.

Ms Arthy: Yes.

MS CARRICK: The advice that you provided to EPSDD. That would be terrific.

Ms Arthy: I am confident that is on the public record, so we can refer you to those

places.

MS CARRICK: I have only seen emails going back and forth from the FOI that talked about the conditions that would be in the Territory Plan.

Ms Arthy: The advice that we provided was in an email, so that is probably what it is.

MS CARRICK: It does not say why it is a 25-metre pool and the advice. It just says it will have some outdoor areas—

Ms Arthy: They are different. We will get the right reference for you so you have the correct advice to look at.

MS CARRICK: What is your policy around private funding versus public funding for these sorts of facilities? Do you have a policy around it? Some areas get publicly funded pools and some areas get privately funded pools, so what is the policy around the best outcome?

Ms Arthy: That is a difficult question to answer in terms of policy. Some of the private pools are businesses, not through the government. If they choose to set up a business in a particular way, that is a matter for the private sector. The government does not get involved in decisions of the private sector. There are occasions, and it is done on a case-by-case basis, when the public sector will partner with the private sector. For example, we did that with CISAC in the early 2000s, in relation to the provision of a pool.

MS CARRICK: This is for new district pools—big ones—not little learn-to-swim pools.

Ms Arthy: CISAC has a very large pool and it caters for a fairly large town centre. The simple answer is that you do it on a case-by-case basis, when it comes to the best way to provide facilities in a particular area.

MS CARRICK: Thank you.

MISS NUTTALL: Going back to the original question and looking at long-term sports playing, you mentioned the priority survey on facilities. How do you do demand analysis for sports facilities other than via a survey? Is that the extent of it?

Ms Kelley: It is part of the analysis. Sports are getting more sophisticated themselves in the way that they present their strategic infrastructure proposals to us. A number of our state supporting organisations have strategic infrastructure strategies now that talk to where they think clubs need enhancing or there needs to be additional provision on top of what is already available to them, whether those are ACT government assets or within the private sector. There are a lot of conversations, but, as we have also noted previously, we also rely on them providing data and evidence now. It is not just a case of: “We would like new cricket nets here.” The conversation goes to: “What is the evidence around that? Where is the club? What do the participation numbers look like?” In short, in most cases, particularly if it is not just about ongoing repairs and maintenance funding that is managed through the City and Environment sportsground

team, we have to develop business cases, in terms of the rationale for provision and the need for that facility over another one.

As I said, the infrastructure survey was a really useful process for us. It allowed the sports themselves to say, “This is our number one priority, and this is the one that we would like to work with you on most closely.” Then we move to, as I said, greater analysis of what that demand actually looks like. I have spoken about tennis in other hearings. They have great access now around booking courts, but that is also providing a really strong data source to give us. On any given day, we can see the utilisation of courts, so, when they come to us and say, “We need more,” we can say, “How are you utilising the times that we can see through evidence? You have supply that is not being utilised.” That is the type of work that goes on in the background all the time across sports.

MISS NUTTALL: It is helpful to understand how real-time utilisation rates feed in. It still seems to be ad hoc. We would have hashed this out in previous sessions. We have been calling for a facilities management plan to properly plan sports and rec infrastructure and upgrades to support community wellbeing. Why would government continue with ad hoc funding arrangements for sports and recreation organisations across Canberra which essentially force them into competition with each other?

Ms Berry: I will start. I do not agree with that comment, Miss Nuttall—that sports are competing against each other for funding or for upgrades to their facilities. By their very nature, of course, they are competitive, but I would say our sports community is fairly united, and that comes out in our regular CEO meetings with sports communities on sports generally across the ACT. Of course, every sport will want everything at once—I get that—but they understand that we need to manage their current facilities, which are mostly ACT government owned, and their aspirations for new facilities at their fields or indoor sports facilities as well. One of the things that we have done to address some of that increased need is by increasing funding to sports grants. That provides more sports with more opportunities for upgrades and the ability to access that funding. That goes to the work that Sports and Rec does around understanding the participation rates of individual sports.

It is not a funding model that is equally distributed, because sports do not have an equal level of participation or, indeed, need for facilities. It is about understanding where that need is. Also, giving sports the chance to aspire to having higher participation rates, in whatever it might be, is important to the work that Sports and Rec does. Those are things that need to be considered as far as sports funding is concerned. We work very closely with them to understand. In the ACT geographically, we can get across the city and we know everyone. Everybody knows each other. It has worked pretty well, I think.

THE CHAIR: Sorry, Miss Nuttall. We will have to keep moving. We do not really have enough time in this session to go too deeply into some of this. Ms Clay, do you have a quick follow-up?

MS CLAY: I do have a quick one. Minister, can you tell me when the last time you spoke to the Big Splash owners was, and what the update is on Big Splash?

Ms Berry: I have never spoken to the Big Splash owners.

MS CLAY: The directorate? Has the government made contact with the leaseholders?

Ms Berry: I have emailed them. I have sent them a letter, but I have not spoken to them.

MS CLAY: Can you tell me when the last interchange of information was between the government or the directorate and the operators of Big Splash, and what the update from that interchange was?

Ms Berry: I will take that on notice.

MS CLAY: Maybe this will be taken on notice too. We asked whether the government was taking enforcement action against them, and it was not.

Ms Berry: That is not with my portfolio responsibilities.

MS CLAY: All right. I will lodge the rest on notice.

THE CHAIR: Minister, you mentioned a working group earlier in the discussion. I think it was across government.

Ms Berry: That was through a motion in the Assembly.

THE CHAIR: Yes. Organisationally, where is the working group based?

Ms Berry: I might have to take this sort of question on notice. The lead of that does not sit with me. We are just a stakeholder in it.

THE CHAIR: That is what I am trying to find out: who is the lead agency for that one?

Ms Berry: We will find out.

THE CHAIR: What is the scope of participation of your team?

Ms Berry: We will take that on notice as well.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MS TOUGH: This year's budget saw arts activities funding increase by 50 per cent to \$1.5 million for the year. What kinds of projects is this supporting, and how is it strengthening our arts sector?

Mr Pettersson: That is a wonderful question, Ms Tough. I defer to Caroline.

Ms Fulton: The uplift in funding for arts activities projects will be delivered through our arts activities funding category, as well as our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Arts Program. We anticipate it will enable up to 40 additional projects to be supported across a range of art forms, as well as individual artists, groups, community groups and organisations.

MS TOUGH: Is that spread across the territory—bigger projects and little ones?

Ms Fulton: Yes. They are delivered through competitive grant processes, so it always depends on where the applications come through. Our five-to-50 category is peer-assessed, with recommendations made to the minister. The cultural arts program is assessed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peers. The up-to-five-arts activity category is assessed by artsACT staff within a six-week turnaround.

MS TOUGH: Do we have a good uptake of people who apply for the grants?

Ms Fulton: Yes. We always have a high demand for all of our programs.

Mr Pettersson: One thing I would add to that is that, if you are interested in any of the projects being funded, it is all available online on the artsACT website. There are some really exciting and interesting things occurring in our community, so make sure you check them out.

MS TOUGH: Wonderful. Thank you.

MS CARRICK: Could you please let me know, of those grants, which ones are given to somebody who is actually undertaking the project in Woden, Weston Creek or Molonglo—not somebody who lives there and goes to Ainslie to do their program but undertakes it in those districts?

Ms Fulton: We provided figures for the 2023-24 financial year to a question on notice, but I can provide you the figures for 2024-25.

MS CARRICK: That would great. Thank you.

Ms Fulton: I will keep it within the arts activities funding. That is the broadest range of arts activities. We had 82 applications supported in 2024. Of those, 13 were from people who live in the Woden, Weston Creek and Molonglo area, which is approximately 16 per cent of all of the applications supported.

MS CARRICK: Did they undertake the activity there or did they go somewhere else to undertake the activity?

Ms Fulton: Regarding the individual applications, I will have to take that question on notice. Some of our activities might be for professional development. That could mean attending a residency overseas or somewhere else in Australia. It could potentially be in terms of undertaking some works in a studio space, in their home, or something along those lines. I do not have that at hand.

MS CARRICK: Perhaps you could tell me where the activity is undertaken. It shows demand, so that is good.

MISS NUTTALL: I am keen to chat about synthetic grass sports fields. Why are Taylor and Stromlo getting synthetic grass sports fields rather than natural grass surfaces?

Ms Kelley: The application of synthetic grass sports fields at both Stromlo and Taylor is part of the demand response for sports, in that the use of synthetic fields is significantly higher than turf sportsgrounds. We note that, over the last couple of weeks, due to inclement weather, we have had a number of sportsground closures, which impacts competitions. The only grounds that are able to stay open and accessible during those weather events are the synthetic surfaces. We are certainly cognisant of the concerns around synthetic surfaces. We have commissioned some further work to support the contemporary synthetic surfaces that are being used for sportsgrounds. That will address a whole range of concerns and will look at the organic infill and the like that is supporting the best application of these in a safe way, for both the environment and the user groups. I do not have the specific increase in access hours for you, but we can certainly provide that if you are interested.

Also, from an ongoing maintenance perspective, they are not maintenance-free, which we need to understand. Ongoing repairs and maintenance are required, and there is the application of water. It all works towards a positive favour, being more manageable and more accessible for the community.

Ms Berry: It is important to point out that, when hockey is played on grass, it becomes a much more dangerous game. I am sure anybody who played sports in school and played hockey on a non-synthetic field will know the danger that comes from the uneven growth of grass. It would be a complete change to hockey if we were to remove synthetic fields completely from the ACT.

MISS NUTTALL: My colleague Mr Braddock moved a motion around AstroTurf, which both the government and the opposition agreed to eventually. How compatible is planning for the new synthetic fields with the intent of the motion?

Ms Berry: I think they are compatible. We are doing work to understand the innovation around synthetic fields. There are some scary photos online of synthetic fields that are falling apart and some scary reports from sports and others—perhaps more in the international space—but that is not the picture of synthetic fields here in the ACT at all. We do not want to scare people with those kinds of reports. We are making sure that our fields comply and are safe, and we are making sure that we stay as close as we can to the most innovative ways of using that kind of sports infrastructure for our ACT community.

MISS NUTTALL: One of those reports would be the one the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment did into AstroTurf. Are you taking that into account with your planning for synthetic ovals too?

Ms Fulton: Yes; we absolutely are, right through to the recycling and re-use options as well. The full lifecycle is being considered.

MISS NUTTALL: Beautiful. Will these playing fields be fully shaded?

Ms Fulton: No.

MISS NUTTALL: In that case, how many summer days do you expect to see the fields close each year due to hot surfaces?

Ms Fulton: We have two primary synthetic fields currently in use. One is at Nicholls and one is at Melrose High School. They are accessible for sporting user groups out of hours. To my knowledge, we have not had any closure dates due to heat. I would have to double-check that. I am certainly happy to take that on notice. It is not an issue that has been routinely raised with us, nor has it impacted in the same way that wet weather has on ground access.

Ms Berry: One of the ways to overcome that sort of extreme heat during the day is by making sure that we have lighting on the fields, so that they can be accessible at night when it is cooler. It is a way that we are adapting to warming weather. It is not necessarily about covering fields. Synthetic fields can get quite hot in the hotter weather. Cricket, for example, is a sport that is outside all day in the heat, and they are already raising issues and awareness around sun cancer and exposure. Having lights that are appropriate for sports to play in the evening alleviates those kinds of concerns and provides opportunities to continue to play sport in a hopefully cooler environment.

MISS NUTTALL: Has any mind been given to things like hybrid services—real grass on synthetic boxing and things like that? Is that one of the options you are exploring?

Ms Kelley: Over time, the team has certainly become aware of that. This is something that we work quite closely on with our colleagues in the City and Environment Directorate's sportsground team. There have certainly been trips to interstate fields and national conferences. There is certainly a range of trade shows that the team has looked at. But, in terms of the use of a hybrid surface at Taylor and Stromlo, that is not the intended plan at this point, but there would be a rationale that we can provide to you.

MISS NUTTALL: I would be very grateful for that, if that is possible. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I have a supplementary question around synthetic fields. It is no longer in my backyard, but Monash Primary School has a synthetic oval that was installed around 2008. A long time ago, when I was chair of the school board, I tried to contact you to get some action after the school community had been trying to get that field replaced for some time because of health concerns. There was degradation of the field and microplastics were in the general area. How do you provide for the replacement of synthetic grass and synthetic fields, given it has a limited life?

Ms Kelley: To date, we have not had to replace any of the ACT government sportsground assets. Monash is an education asset, so I cannot speak to that one. In terms of replacement, we can only talk to tennis and hockey synthetic replacements, which again are not ACT government assets; they are managed by those sporting groups. They are essentially under an asset management plan that the sport would have in place. There is a seven- to 10-year life cycle. Either the sport has an appropriate sinking fund in place to look at carpet replacement or, in some cases, like hockey, for example, where there are compliance changes to grounds and it is actually an upgrade, they would be eligible for a grant to support that type of replacement.

THE CHAIR: What is the expected lifespan of AstroTurf fields?

Ms Kelley: Again, it is around the seven- to 10-year mark. We would have to double-

check that because the quality of the turf has changed significantly and each new product that comes out is a little bit different, so they are not all like for like. I can certainly confirm the lifecycle of our current synthetic fields for you.

THE CHAIR: That would be great. You will take that on notice?

Ms Kelley: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Is that just for the turf itself or does that include the whole infrastructure? If I understand correctly, you have to replace the top surface and then you have to replace what lies underneath it as well.

Ms Kelley: Correct. Again, it is case by case, because not all the profiles are the same. The profiles that would be put in place at Stromlo and Taylor could be quite different to what is currently in place for Nicholls, because things have evolved over the years.

THE CHAIR: Minister Pettersson, I want to come to the government insourcing framework. I was told this morning that this sits with you rather than Procurement ACT, which is somewhat surprising.

Mr Pettersson: We might have an official online. That is possible.

THE CHAIR: We have an official online, do we?

Mr Pettersson: I believe so.

THE CHAIR: The insourcing framework, as I understand it, has a threshold; I think it is \$200,000, and any procurement or services or works valued over \$200,000 need to be evaluated under the insourcing framework. Is that correct?

Mr Pettersson: Mr Young?

Mr Young: I acknowledge and will comply with the compliance statement. Was the question in relation to the Secure Local Jobs code or the insourcing framework?

THE CHAIR: This is the insourcing framework and the threshold above which that applies.

Mr Young: Apologies; I can look that up for you. The officials responsible for the insourcing framework are not actually here. That was part of a different output class, but I will look that information up and provide it before the end of the session.

Mr Pettersson: I believe you are correct though—\$200,000.

THE CHAIR: You may need to take this on notice as well. I am interested in how many procurements were assessed under that insourcing framework in 2024-25.

Mr Pettersson: We will take that one on notice for you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. What I am very interested in is how that insourcing

framework applies to services like our community services organisations, where they are providing services from the government. Many of these organisations have expressed concerns that the contracts for services which they provide, not the grant funding but contracts for services, are vulnerable to being insourced following on from some of the commissioning processes. I would be interested in any advice that you can provide around how that applies—the interaction between our community services organisations, the insourcing framework and the commissioning processes that are underway. I appreciate that this crosses all sorts of areas of government.

Mr Pettersson: It does cross a few, and I will not really proffer a view on the commissioning process itself, as that sits with Minister Orr. The insourcing framework considers contracts over \$200,000 that are ongoing in nature, with ongoing funding; involve a vulnerable workforce, consultancy service, municipal service or security service; and do not relate to services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people where the outsourced option is delivery by an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation. I do not want to go far down this garden path, but I think that criteria would rule out a large part of the concerns you have raised.

THE CHAIR: I think probably there is a portion that it would rule out. If you could take on notice any interaction between your team that is responsible for the insourcing framework and Minister Orr's commissioning process as well, and whether there has been any consideration of the insourcing framework in that commissioning process or any input.

Mr Pettersson: I am happy to take that on notice. With responsibility for the policy settings behind the insourcing framework, there is a separation between the decision-making about those contracts and that service offering. We will take it on notice; we will get an answer back for you.

THE CHAIR: To wind that up, then, I am interested in what records are made available around decisions and if there is any public information on decisions around insourcing and how those decisions were made, and what training or guidance is provided to procurement officers around the insourcing framework. Again, I am happy for that to be on notice if it is easier.

Mr Pettersson: I know there is quite a lengthy assessment process, and that is all very well documented, about the decision-making. I am not sure how publicly available that is, so we will have to come back on notice.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much.

MISS NUTTALL: I would love to chat about Tuggeranong Skatepark, if this is the right place for it. You have got upgrades proposed in this budget. What do those upgrades entail?

Ms Berry: No, not for Tuggeranong. It is more for the other sports that were here last week—more with City Services.

MR RATTENBURY: I am pretty sure they told us that was you.

THE CHAIR: I think they told us it was you.

Ms Berry: Did they? Okay. There is not funding for Tuggeranong Skatepark. I think there is some maintenance. I am guessing here because I do not have the numbers in front of me. But I understand the need for improvements and/or a new skatepark at Tuggeranong. I have met with the skateboarding community, and we have agreed to develop a strategy, which I talked about at length last year—I think, and leading into the election—for skatepark users.

We are in the process of developing a draft policy with information provided by the Canberra skateboarding community, which will include working on a plan on what will happen at Tuggeranong Skatepark. I am trying to answer everything that I think you are going to ask me.

MISS NUTTALL: I really appreciate that; that certainly ticked a few off the list. In terms of the Tuggeranong redevelopment, can I confirm that you remain committed to a full redevelopment of the Tuggeranong Skatepark, given that ACT Labor did vote for it last year, in my motion?

Ms Berry: We are, but we are going to work with the skatepark user groups to understand what that might look like, and whether it is a complete replacement or a phased-in renewal of that precinct, because I think a lot of different users have different views on the usability of the skatepark as it is. That is why we are getting the strategy worked up, and then we can have those conversations with the broader group of users and understand where we need to go forward.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you. Do you have a timeframe for the skatepark strategy?

Ms Berry: I cannot recall. I will take that on notice.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you. I understand that there was a proposal to heritage list the Tuggeranong Skatepark. Could you go to the impact that a proposed heritage listing would have on your commitment to fully redevelop the skatepark?

Ms Berry: That would obviously provide some challenges out there, and I think that the proposal has mixed views. I understand that people are fairly united on the Erindale redbrick skate area—rightfully so—but I think Tuggeranong is a different beast and has very different views.

MISS NUTTALL: Would it, for example, impede your ability to do a full redevelopment?

Ms Berry: Yes.

MISS NUTTALL: Anecdotally, I am assuming that part of this is about preserving the hip and spine elements of the Tuggeranong Skatepark. Is that the feedback you have had?

Ms Berry: Again, that is part of the work that the strategy will be looking at in uncovering what the plan is and the way forward.

MISS NUTTALL: Beautiful. Last but not least: do you have any more detail on what consultation with skatepark user groups will look like?

Ms Berry: Again, I do not have anybody here that can help me with the answer, so I will take it on notice and see what I can provide.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you, and sorry for the confusion.

Ms Berry: That is okay.

THE CHAIR: Ms Berry, I understand that you probably have to head off.

Ms Berry: Yes, thank you.

THE CHAIR: We will move to Ms Clay.

MS CLAY: Thank you, Chair. Arts Minister, I would like to have a chat about arts centre and organisation funding. In the Greens-Labor supply and confidence agreement, we got a commitment to uplift arts centre and organisation funding by 25 per cent plus indexation. Can you tell me what date that increase commences?

Mr Pettersson: I will hand over to Caroline.

Ms Fulton: Ms Clay, are you talking about the increase in funding for arts organisations?

MS CLAY: Yes, for arts centres and organisations. What date does the increase of 25 per cent plus indexation begin?

Ms Fulton: That will be considered in a future budget context, in terms of the increase in funding, but we do currently have the Arts Organisation Investment Program open for applications at present. That competitive program is open now.

MS CLAY: So the uplift in funding is not in the current budget?

Ms Fulton: No.

MS CLAY: And there is no decision as to when that uplift in funding would commence?

Ms Fulton: That would be a matter for government.

MS CLAY: Right. We do have an agreement with government. I do not quite know how to move this forward, Minister.

Mr Pettersson: I appreciate the concern you are seeking to raise. Decisions about allocation of that funding, I think, would be able to proceed in a manner consistent with those objectives, in line with this budget, pending future government decisions. The intention of government is, of course, to deliver upon all their election commitments.

MS CLAY: Yes, over the course of the term!

Mr Pettersson: I am very confident we will be able to deliver our election commitments in a manner consistent with the issue you are raising.

MS CLAY: Sure. I will keep asking questions; I will get shut down when you cannot answer them. The indexation rate that has been committed to—what is that indexation rate going to be when it does commence?

Ms Fulton: I can talk in terms of the indexation rate that has been applied for 2025-26.

MS CLAY: Let's start with that.

Ms Fulton: It was 2.5 per cent, provided to the arts organisations and the arts centres in their July instalment. If it has not been paid out already, it will be paid out in the next week or so.

MS CLAY: What is that basis that 2.5 per cent has been picked?

Ms Fulton: It is on their base funding rate, and it is accumulative. It will be their base rate, their 2024-25 indexation, and then the 2.5 per cent put on that total.

MS CLAY: Why 2.5 per cent?

Ms Fulton: Because that is the amount that has been received to the ACT arts fund—

MS CLAY: I have heard there are different indexation rates in different sectors. I think WPI is quite a lot higher than that, and most of the costs that are incurred by these organisations are probably more closely linked to wages than to other things. The community sector has a different indexation rate. Who in government could tell me who is picking what the indexation rates are?

Ms Arthy: I think, Ms Clay, that is probably a question for Treasury, because Treasury sets those sorts of measures.

Ms Fulton: And they are set in the budget context.

MS CLAY: I would assume, Minister, that when government is making its decision about the 25 per cent increase, it would also be making its decision about the indexation rate.

Mr Pettersson: I assume so. The funding for the arts organisations current round concludes at the end of 2026. Whilst the application process has started now, the decisions and the consequential decisions of funding are actually somewhere down the road.

MS CLAY: Yes, okay. Have the arts organisations been given programming funding to run arts programs?

Ms Fulton: Yes, if that is their business, in terms of what they have been granted funding for.

MS CLAY: What is the time period for that programming funding that they have? Do they get two-year funding, or five-year funding or—

Ms Fulton: For arts organisations, it is four-year funding. Their funding is currently from 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2026. For arts centres, it is a period of five years from deed of grant.

MS CLAY: And is the programming funding for the four years and the five years, or is the programming funding for a shorter period of time?

Ms Fulton: No. We provide what we would say is “operational funding” to deliver “x activity” over the period, and it is up to the arts organisation or the arts centre in terms of how they deliver that. Our funding is contributing to their programming.

MS CLAY: Can I get a breakdown of—you may not be able to give it yet—how much of the arts organisation and centre funding goes to each centre? Where does that information appear?

Ms Fulton: It is on our website, in terms of their base funding amount.

MS CLAY: Is the craft and design festival funding part of this arts centre and organisation funding pool?

Ms Fulton: Are you talking about the new initiative funding that came through? That is a separate initiative, and that will be provided on top of.

MS CLAY: Excellent. That is a good answer! It looked like, in the budget papers, that the arts funding was partially offset; did I read that correctly?

Ms Fulton: For Screen Canberra’s funding—are referring to?

MS CLAY: There were partial offsets listed in there. Page 75 of the budget outlook, I think, which I have not brought with me, my apologies.

Ms Fulton: I will find it myself.

MS CLAY: Or, alternatively, if you can tell me or take on notice any offsets in funding in the arts portfolio.

Ms Fulton: I will take it on notice.

MS CLAY: If you can take that on notice and come back to me on anywhere that there are offsets in funding, that would be fantastic. Minister, I wonder, when you are talking to the Treasurer, would you be advocating for a higher indexation rate that is maybe pinned to WPI or pinned to other community sector or other indexation, rather than the 2.5 per cent that has been given in past years?

Mr Pettersson: I will not speak to specific initiatives or seek to announce new executive policy in this setting. Rest assured, I advocate fiercely within all my portfolios to ensure that interests of arts in the ACT.

MS CLAY: We have just checked. The craft and design funding was actually lumped in with the programming funding. So maybe you can come back on notice with a breakdown.

Ms Fulton: Yes. The offset amount that is referred to in terms of that actual measure is, I believe, staffing expenses—so offsetting a position for progressing an application become part of the UNESCO City of Design Network. So in terms of that amount within that measure, the \$163,000—

MS CLAY: Sorry; you have lost me. There was an artsACT public servant who is no longer doing that work?

Ms Fulton: Yes, that would be offset within an unfilled position within broader economic development.

MS CLAY: Does that mean there are fewer staff in artsACT?

Ms Fulton: No.

MS CLAY: Am I being quite unusually stupid here? If the offset funding is from staffing, where did the staff go?

Ms Arthy: This is part of the broader economic development reprioritisation. Every year, when we look at what our priorities are, we move people around. In this case, we were asked to provide funding to fund the resource needed to progress City of Design from within the existing resources. So it is actually impossible for me to say where it came from, because it was part of a bigger reshuffle that we did to be able to move people around.

MS CLAY: So we are doing the UNESCO City of Design?

Ms Arthy: Absolutely, yes.

MS CLAY: And we do have a staff member to do that?

Ms Arthy: Yes.

MS CLAY: But then somebody is not doing something else?

Ms Arthy: We have moved it from somewhere else. I have a very large portfolio, and our choices included holding a position vacant elsewhere. But, because we had such a big change in some of the focus this year, we have just moved our resources around. But we have made sure that artsACT has a staff member to be able to progress the City of Design.

MS CARRICK: Mr Pettersson, is your portfolio involved in the cross-portfolio

working group that we were discussing before?

Mr Pettersson: I do not believe so.

Ms Arthy: Ms Carrick, the minister's portfolios specifically are not there. Sorry, we do have an arts focus and sport and rec focus predominantly. With me being around the table too, there is also always the business element as well. But, definitely from the arts point of view, we are contributing.

Mr Pettersson: The particular prong of your motion and your ambitions for Woden that is relevant to my portfolio is an arts centre. That body of work is largely being captured through the arts assets needs analysis, which is probably the most useful place to ask questions.

MS CARRICK: How does your needs analysis and then the contribution to the working group gel? How does your arts work and economic development—

Ms Arthy: I think, Ms Carrick, it is always the art of government that priorities change and things change. What we can do—and I am only talking very generally—is we would be advocating for whatever priority is needed, either in arts or in sport and recreation, but we would putting into there, saying, “This is what we believe.” We do have this arts needs analysis that we are about to commission, and, as the work progress, we will be feeding in the results from that into whatever consideration there is around the broader Woden town centre working group.

MS CARRICK: My understanding of the need is a funky, cool street theatre in the core of Woden. That is what the residents are telling me.

Mr Pettersson: Say that again; I missed that?

MS CARRICK: A funky, cool street theatre in the core of Woden. Where that new West Plaza is would be really good.

Mr Pettersson: All right. Noted.

MR EMERSON: My question is about youth participation in elite sports—so we will see how officials go, as the minister has left. I heard from the mother of a young football player, who is the only boy who identifies as Aboriginal selected to be on the ACT Rugby League team for his age group and given the opportunity to participate in a national competition interstate. This would cost his family around \$5,000 for uniforms, car hire and travel. His mother indicated she would have to go into debt to manage the cost, but she was going to do that, because she wanted to make sure he could participate.

The only elite youth sporting scholarships that we found that were available—with the help from some in the minister's offices as well—are the ACT Government Interact Scholarship of \$500 and the federally-administered AIS Local Sporting Champions Grant, which is \$500 to \$700. But, in this case, he was not available for either because of timing constraints. They had been selected, and they were going and competing quite quickly.

The feedback I got, in the mother's words, was that most of the boys selected came from private schools, and the lack of support limits participation in sports to only children from families who could afford it. Was any consideration given to introducing new measures in this budget to support athletes, especially young people, though not exclusively, who face financial barriers when it comes to representing the ACT?

Ms Kelley: Not in this particular budget. It is fair to say that it is a fairly routine request that we get to assist juniors, be that from under 10s right through to under 18s, for participation at national championships or, in some cases, even international championships. Unfortunately, in terms of the resources that we have to support community sport, it is targeted at organisations as opposed to individuals, unless that individual is categorised by their national body and is eligible for an individual athlete scholarship underneath our ACT Academy of Sport.

I guess it is a good problem to have, in that we have hundreds of local Canberrans who represent on the national stage and, in fact, the international stage. It just has not been a viable program previously where we could look at individual support to cater for the diversity and breadth of participants. That is where programs like the Local Sporting Champions, when you say it out loud that it costs \$5,000 to attend but only a \$500 contribution, it is fairly minimal. In some cases, we also refer participants back to the sports, in particular rugby union, where there could be options for subsidy provided through the state sporting organisation. As you say, this a fairly unique opportunity, particularly for an Indigenous athlete, and support could be provided through that avenue.

MR EMERSON: And the two I named are the two that are available?

Ms Kelley: In terms of elite sport. Every Chance is our other program, but that is generally accessed for more community-based participation.

MR EMERSON: You mentioned referring kids or their families back to the sports. Have you considered working with any of those sports and getting additional programs together? We tried to do that in this case as well and tried contacting rugby league. I do not know whether it would be co-funding or government assistance of any kind to help bridge that gap, just in the figures, for kids facing disadvantage looking to play elite sport.

Ms Kelley: It is most likely an area that we need to have a further conversation about, simply because there are so many. Fundraising efforts by the sports generally bridge this gap in a lot of cases, and teams themselves do a lot of fundraising. I am not too sure what is happening in the rugby league space with respect to that at the moment. But a \$5,000 participation fee to attend a national championship, unfortunately, is not uncommon. With the pressures of cost of living but also not wanting to go on to support athletes that are on a high-performance pathway who do not get there, it might be a growing issue that we need to look at. But certainly to date, it has not been something that has been able to be accommodated through the foundation that we have in sporting—

MR EMERSON: I know Local Sporting Champions is a federal program, but do you know if the \$500 to \$700 has been the amount for an extended period?

Ms Kelley: As far as I am aware, it has been fairly consistent for a long time. I am not even aware that their funding pool has had any increase. I think it is a fairly static program.

MR EMERSON: Thank you.

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*.

Short suspension

Appearances:

Berry, Ms Yvette, Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation.

Health and Community Services Directorate

Rule, Ms Catherine, Director-General

Newman, Ms Brooke, Executive Branch Manager, Client Services

Hayward, Mr Lewis, Chief Financial Officer

Balaretnaraja, Mr Ash, Executive Group Manager, Housing Assistance

Infrastructure Canberra

Cahif, Mr Ashley, Deputy Director-General

Khan, Mr Faheem, Executive Group Manager, Delivery—Places and Spaces

Valler, Ms Megan, Executive Branch Manager, Housing Assistance, Infrastructure and Contracts

THE CHAIR: We welcome back Ms Yvette Berry MLA, now in her capacity as Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs. 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 directly to questions. Ms Barry, I am happy to pass my first question to you.

MS BARRY: Thank you, officials, and thank you, Minister, for attending today. My first question is around the planned reduction in client service visits. The planned visits have dropped from 11,000 per year to 6,000 in 2025-26. I would like to find out what risk you considered to justify this change.

Ms Berry: I will hand over to Ms Rule in a moment, but the risk to our tenants and also to our housing managers was identified over the last year, I suppose, as being a risk such that we were not prepared to put Housing ACT staff in those kinds of situations. So now it is two people per visit to maintain that safety. But I will ask Ms Rule to provide a bit more detail.

Ms Rule: Thank you, Minister. The minister is right: we have changed the requirements for our client services visits to ensure our staff safety. So, instead of staff going out individually, they are going out in pairs. This is in direct response to a number of incidents that we have had where staff safety has been significantly compromised. It does mean that we will do a lesser number of client service visits. But we are doing some work to make sure that those visits are based on risk, so that the clients where those visits are needed the most will be assessed and those visits will be undertaken. We are also making sure that our tenants understand the avenues that are available to them to raise issues such as maintenance requests and the like that may have otherwise come up in the course of client service visits to ensure that those things are still ongoing and not waiting for a client service visit to occur.

MS BARRY: Thank you. You mentioned that there were a number of incidents. I am

happy for you to take this on notice. Can you provide estimated numbers or how many incidents occurred?

Ms Rule: Yes, we can provide that on notice. They have been significant. There is a number where we have had to take out workplace protection orders. There is a number where we have had to have police involved. There have been circumstances where staff have had weapons produced in the course of a client service visit. Protecting the safety of our staff has to come first.

MS BARRY: Thank you. Have you done an assessment as to what impacts this would have on maintenance of property or modifications? My understanding is that some clients do not know how to advocate for themselves and do not even know that maintenance is required.

Ms Rule: As I said, we have done some work—and we will do ongoing work—to ensure that the channels through which they can raise maintenance issues and requests. The client service visits are not necessarily about maintenance; they are about a whole range of things. They are about inspecting the property. They are about engaging with the tenants and making sure that things are okay. They are about inspecting the property, to a degree, and making sure that the tenant is meeting their obligations as well as Housing meeting our obligations. They are about a whole range of things.

We are making sure that tenants understand different mechanisms for raising their maintenance requests. As I said, we are assessing risk. So those tenants who may be least able to advocate for themselves—that is part of the risk assessment—are, therefore, more likely to receive a client service visit than other tenants may. They can also ask for us to come and visit them because there is something required, and other services often will do that as well. At some of our locations where there are a number of service providers visiting those tenants, we may well have a service provider who rings us and says, “You need to come and have a chat with this person.”

MS BARRY: Thank you for that. I do understand that you are undertaking a process to identify and to inform clients about what is available. Can you explain that to me? What does that work look like?

Ms Rule: It is an ongoing discussion with our clients to make sure they understand the best ways in which to raise maintenance requests. Whether that is via phone or other mechanisms, we are keen to make sure that people know that they have the right to raise proactively maintenance requests and to ask us to assist. Ash, you might be able to add a little bit more detail, or Brooke, in terms of how those requests get made.

Ms Newman: Good afternoon. Our tenants can raise complaints, queries or maintenance inquiries through a number of mechanisms—through our official channels, which could be through our shopfront, our central access point; also via telephone to our call centre as well as to their housing manager; and we also take email inquiries.

MS BARRY: My understanding—and please correct me if this is wrong—is that inspections are about protecting the ACT assets, amongst other things. Are you confident that, with the reduced visits, the assets would be in good condition?

Ms Rule: As I said, that is part of the risk assessment. Most properties that we have in the public housing portfolio are lived in by families in normal sets of circumstances and the properties are maintained to the level that we would expect them. We know that there are some properties where we have ongoing issues. We are pretty aware of where those properties are and who those tenants are, and so we are able to go and visit those properties as part of that risk assessment. As I said, we will also get referrals from other service providers. There is a whole range of ways in which we can identify those things. But we tend to know the properties where we need to go and visit and make sure that the assets are being looked after in the way that they should be.

Ms Berry: And it is not just the asset; it is obviously for the tenant too. When there are crises that the ACT community might be experiencing—storms, fires, COVID and things like that—Housing ACT knows where our most vulnerable clients live and so proactively gets in touch with some of our most vulnerable clients to make sure that they are getting the supports that they need during those circumstances. That is another level of vulnerability, but this is understanding even more our client's needs depending on the complexity of their lives.

MS BARRY: Was consideration given to outsourcing those visits to, say, Programmed, for example?

Ms Rule: No.

MS BARRY: If not, why?

Ms Rule: Programmed is responsible for maintenance. One of the things that we get out of the client service visits is not just the visit to the asset itself but actually the engagement with the tenant. That can often lead to us helping those tenants with a whole range of circumstances that are not housing related. For example, we will work closely with NDIS providers to make sure that tenants who have NDIS packages are getting the things to which they are entitled. We might help refer people to health, mental health, drug and alcohol and other types of services that they might need. We have a close relationship between our housing staff and our child protection staff, as examples. Some of the tenants we deal with need extra help and those visits are one opportunity to make sure that our tenants are getting some of the other services that they may also need beyond housing.

MS BARRY: If what you have identified is one of the benefits of having those regular visits, how are you planning to mitigate that then?

Ms Rule: As I said, we are doing that based on risk. We are assessing risk about which tenants may need our support, both from a physical asset point of view and other point of view in planning those client services.

MS BARRY: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I want to follow up on a comment you made earlier. I think you said that tenants are producing weapons during some of these visits?

Ms Rule: There have been a couple of instances where tenants have produced weapons when our staff have been undertaking client service visits.

THE CHAIR: On how many occasions has that happened?

Ms Rule: It is a small number. I will have to take the actual number on notice, but there have been a handful of occasions where that has occurred.

THE CHAIR: What are the repercussions for a tenant if that occurs?

Ms Rule: It depends on the individual circumstances. If appropriate, we would get ACT Policing involved. We also have a range of measures in place about dealing with tenants in terms of what is appropriate behaviour, how we mitigate those behaviours and being clear on what our expectations are, right through until to eviction of tenants from properties. That is not a step that we take lightly but, in some circumstances where tenants are continually unwilling or unable to comply in an unreasonable way with the things that they are required to do, we will work with ACAT to seek an eviction order. But, again, that is the sort of end of the process.

There are a number of things that we will do in terms of being very clear with tenants about what their obligations are. As I said, we have had a number of cases where we have had workplace protection orders in place, for example. We try to use all of those mechanisms available to us to ensure that tenants are able to meet their obligations but that the staff are kept safe.

THE CHAIR: Is there a procedural document about what that flow looks like or a policy document of some sort?

Ms Newman: Yes, we have a risk management tool that we are utilising now that goes through a number of questions relating to the tenant's circumstances, and then it would flag at the end once we have completed it whether they are low, high risk or extreme, and we will accordingly action based on what that comes back with.

THE CHAIR: Is that something that can be provided to the committee?

Ms Newman: I would imagine so, as long as it is de-identified without specific client data.

THE CHAIR: It is the policy document and the structured decision-making I am interested to understand.

Ms Newman: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

Ms Rule: Just to round this out, I would like to emphasise, though, that the vast majority of our tenants do the right thing. The vast majority of tenants want to work with us like tenants in the private market and they are keen to meet their obligations. These sets of circumstances are not in the majority; they are a minority, but we do take them very seriously.

THE CHAIR: Absolutely. I found it quite surprising that any ACT government official would be confronted with weapons. Just to clarify, what are we talking about when we talk about weapons? Are we talking firearms or are we talking knives?

Ms Rule: Knives and blunt objects. I do not think we have had any instances recently that I can think of where firearms have been produced.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MR RATTENBURY: In answer to a question on notice, you advised that as at 7 November 2024 there were 2,975 households, comprising 4,844 people, on the public housing waitlist. According to the Health and Community Services website, as at 31 March, there were 3,189 applications for public housing. Does this mean that the public housing waiting list increased by 214 applications over a five-month period?

Ms Berry: It has actually increased more than that.

MR RATTENBURY: If there is a more up-to-date figure, I would be pleased to hear that.

Ms Rule: As at 30 June 2025, there were 3,402 applicants on the public housing waitlist. Of those 1,341 have standard housing needs; 1,973 have high housing needs; and 88 have priority housing needs.

MR RATTENBURY: So it has gone up 16 or 17 per cent in the course of six months—from my quick maths? I am in the ballpark. What do you put that increase down to? That is a surprising increase.

Ms Rule: It is hard to identify any one factor. Everyone's circumstances are different. I can imagine that the cost of living is impacting and availability of housing through other channels is also impacting.

MR RATTENBURY: In that context, the abolition of the Rent Relief Fund will certainly not help the growth of the public housing waitlist. Is that a fair observation?

Ms Rule: It is not up to me to comment on whether that is a fair observation or not, Mr Rattenbury.

MR RATTENBURY: During that period, how many public housing properties under the Growing and Renewing program were completed?

Ms Berry: That is actually good news. We have been growing our public housing stock now, as I said, with 2023-24 being our best year with the construction of 212 built. We have purchased 45. So that was the total of 257 new homes. In 2024-25 we have had 180 constructions and 33 purchased. So that is a total of 213 over the 2024-25 year. I think we currently have 356 in the pipeline to meet the commitments under the Growing and Renewing program.

MR RATTENBURY: I agree, Minister, that is good news, although in the context of

the growth in the waiting list must be a cause of concern for you.

Ms Berry: It is, although I would say that there has also been a reduction in wait times for our priority—I am not sure who has this information. I think it is useful to have this on top of it as well because we have been working hard to make sure we can get people in homes quicker when they become available. There has been a reduction in the wait time. Is that right?

Ms Newman: Yes. In the last financial year, the priority waitlist has actually reduced, which means we are housing people faster based on their need.

MR RATTENBURY: On that list. What about the other two categories then?

Ms Newman: They have remained around stable, approximately stable. But those who are most in demand for our services are being housed at a faster rate.

MR RATTENBURY: Thank you. According to page 133 in the *Budget outlook*, nearly \$3.4 million is allocated over four years for hotel accommodation. This includes a trial of an alternative approach to housing accommodation by establishing a program that utilises the existing Housing ACT properties to provide short-term accommodation to those who cannot be supported through other crisis options. Does this mean that the Housing ACT stock would otherwise be a stable longer-term dwelling for someone and will be used for that program?

Mr Balaretnaraja: We are still designing the program. We are working with the joint executive pathway to understand what the sector is going to be needing to be able to respond to this. At the moment, the arrangements have not been settled yet. It could be that we use vacant properties. It could be that we use existing stock.

MR RATTENBURY: What is the difference between existing stock and vacant properties?

Mr Balaretnaraja: They are one and the same.

Ms Rule: Just to give you an example, Mr Rattenbury, of how that would work, sometimes we have vacant properties where we are doing an assessment on whether we are going to sell that property or whether we are going to develop that piece of land—we are looking at a whole range of options for that asset. But that can take some time, particularly if something is in development application. So we do not fill that property for the long term but we might use it for a short-term vacancy. We are just trying to look at how we use that stock to best effect all the time.

MR RATTENBURY: So, roughly, how many dwellings do you have in mind for this program even in the trial phase?

Ms Rule: It changes day to day. Stock becomes available as people move in and out of public housing properties. We try to have a very small vacancy rate. It is a small number but it changes day to day.

MR RATTENBURY: So there is no target for the trial; it is going to be a little bit of

see what is available?

Ms Rule: It is a trial. We are going to see what works and how we can best manage that stock to best effect.

Ms Berry: We did do something similar before with newly arrived refugees. This was some time ago. I am going back through my memory files, but we did do a similar program through Housing and it was very much up and down and very much temporary while they were doing their resettlement programs for that sort of six-month period. That worked okay. It was only a handful of homes, but that gives us something, I guess, to look back at and say, “We have done this; how is that going to work for the sector now?”—because it was different; this was pre-COVID.

MR RATTENBURY: I appreciate the sentiment of not wanting the maximum utilisation of what we have. Will the trial be run by Housing ACT or through a community sector organisation?

Ms Rule: The plan is for us to run it, given that it is a trial, and then we will think through what the options are if it becomes something we want to embed longer term, and we will have that discussion with government about who delivers that service.

MR RATTENBURY: How long does the trial last for and what is the evaluation metric?

Ms Rule: We do not have a set time period. I think it has really been about a discussion with government about how to use that stock in a different way. We will see what we learn and we will adjust. It is not something that requires, for example, legislative change. We can do it within our existing mechanisms. We are going to try a few things and see what works and see what does not and go from there.

MR RATTENBURY: Treasury has been very flexible with this budget. You can turn up with a roughly scoped program and get it through the budget process. Ainslie Village consists of 23 properties which house 172 individual tenants in shared accommodation for people with high and complex needs. In 2018, the government set aside \$350,000 to look for alternatives for tenants and others in supported accommodation. At the time, it was recognised that the infrastructure resulted in issues around the complex. What was the outcome of that investigation and what are the government’s intentions now for Ainslie Village?

Ms Rule: I will have to take that on notice. I am not sure we have anyone here who can talk to what happened as a result of decisions taken in 2018. In terms of the investigation itself, we can take that part on notice. In terms of plans for Ainslie Village, I am not sure, Ash, if there is anything you want to say about that. It continues to house tenants and we continue to work with community service providers on Ainslie Village. We are not actually working on what is the sort of future. We are not working on changing the mix at Ainslie Village right now.

MR RATTENBURY: So it is sort of the status quo at Ainslie Village?

Ms Rule: Yes.

MR RATTENBURY: Thank you.

MS TOUGH: I want to go back to the questions about the public housing waitlist. You said that high-priority people are being housed quicker. Could you provide how many people have come off the waitlist and been provided a home in the last financial year?

Ms Newman: Absolutely. So that is the priority waitlist. We have three—priority, high needs and standard. There were 612 people who came off the priority housing list in the last financial year and were housed.

MS TOUGH: Wonderful. How about the other two lists?

Ms Newman: I will have to take that on notice.

MS TOUGH: That is fine.

MR RATTENBURY: Is that 612 people or 612 applications? We know the numbers are different.

Ms Newman: Sorry; 612 applications.

MR RATTENBURY: Thank you.

MS TOUGH: Do you know how many people that equates to?

Ms Newman: Not off the top of my head; sorry.

MS TOUGH: That is all right. Could I get that on notice?

Ms Newman: Absolutely.

MS TOUGH: Awesome; thank you.

MS BARRY: How many people are on that priority list?

Ms Newman: As of 30 June there is 88.

MS BARRY: And the others?

Ms Newman: High needs is 1,973 and 1,341 on the standard list.

MS BARRY: Thank you.

MS CLAY: The Indicative Land Release Program for 2025-26 has 3,184 residential dwellings and, of that, only 58 will be public housing. I am pretty concerned to hear that the public housing waitlist has gone up, from under 3,000 to 3,400, and that we only have 1.8 per cent of our ILRP dwellings set to be public housing. How did someone come up with a target of under two per cent that should be public housing?

Ms Rule: Ms Clay, that is not us. We do not set the requirements for the Indicative Land Release Program.

MS CLAY: Do Housing ACT and the minister for housing feed into how many public homes we need in our land release program?

Ms Berry: Yes, we do. I think you are taking a part of the program of all housing being built, and I have just talked about the 356 that are in the pipeline, inclusive of the next 52 that are on the Indicative Land Release Program. Our commitment and our policy are that there is at least 15 per cent of public, community and affordable housing in all developments, and we are meeting that commitment.

MS CLAY: Yes, it is a combined commitment for public, community and affordable. What is the commitment for public housing from that?

Ms Berry: From what, sorry?

MS CLAY: Fifteen per cent of new developments will have public, community and affordable housing.

Ms Berry: Yes.

MS CLAY: I am trying to work out how much public housing we will be getting over our forward years, given that our public housing waitlist has skyrocketed. We are not going to reduce that unless we have more public homes.

Ms Berry: We have committed to an additional 400, as part of the more recent growth and renewal program. That includes the 356 that are in the pipeline now to be completed—the target that was set to be completed at the end of that program. We have committed to build an additional 1,000 public housing properties between now and 2030.

Those are not the only homes that are being built for people who are on lower or no incomes. That will also include community housing, for which we have provided some additional funding within the ACT, as well as through the HAFF funding that the federal government is providing, along with a range of other initiatives. I should note that, on the public housing application list, of 3,402 applications, 522 were also on the community housing register.

Whilst we are the answer—absolutely, public housing is the answer for those most in need in the ACT community—there are still other options, including community housing and affordable rentals, that will be built within the next five years as well, to meet some of that need.

THE CHAIR: Ms Clay, did that go to the answer that you were looking for?

MS CLAY: It did. I have one specific example of that. I am trying to work out how Housing ACT feeds into these government targets. For instance, we have Denman Prospect stage 3, which is another land release of around 3,000 homes. That will have 60 public housing homes in it. Does Housing ACT feed into those by saying, “Here’s a

new, big land release greenfield estate that will have two per cent public housing”? Do you have input into that process?

Ms Berry: Yes.

MS CLAY: Are you setting that target? Are you saying, “Yes, we only need 60 here”?

Ms Berry: We set the target based on a number of factors—on the availability and suitability of homes being built in that area for public housing; also, the existing number of houses within a particular suburb, so that we are not creating problems with an overstocking of public housing within a particular suburb. It is not just new suburbs that we build housing in, and we do not just build. We also buy public housing off the private market. What you are seeing in those figures is a portion of what is being built and delivered for public housing and community housing.

MR EMERSON: Going back to Mr Rattenbury’s questioning earlier around vacancy and making use of those properties, obviously, construction at CIT Woden is finished. It looks incredible, and we have the new youth foyer there, with 20 beds, I believe, for young people experiencing homelessness. Are those beds in use?

Ms Berry: Not at the moment, because we are still going through the defect stage with the project. That means going through and checking that everything is working—switches are working, and that kind of thing. Whoever built the project comes in and does the repairs. That is a process that is being worked through right now.

MR EMERSON: Assuming we need a provider, when did the procurement process start in order to get a provider for that site?

Mr Balaretnaraja: The tender is open at the moment. It will close at the end of this month.

MR EMERSON: When do we anticipate that the defects will be addressed?

Mr Balaretnaraja: We are unable to anticipate that. At the moment the builders are already working through the already-opened CIT. They are working through the defects rectification process there. They will then work to address the defects with the youth foyer.

MR EMERSON: Based on the timing of the tender, when would we expect that the provider would be ready to fill those beds?

Mr Balaretnaraja: We would expect the provider to be on board by December.

MR EMERSON: December of this year? Okay.

MS CARRICK: My question is about budget paper C, page 110. The infrastructure program drops off. There is some work in progress, which I would assume would be the 356 that you are doing this year. There is no new works money in 2027-28 or 2028-29. Can you tell me why your budget drops off?

Ms Berry: That is because we will be completing this growth and renewal program; then we will be commencing the new program and building the additional 1,000 homes between now and 2030.

MS CARRICK: When do you commence the new program?

Ms Berry: At the completion of this program, which is 2026-27.

MS CARRICK: How do you maintain the industry building at capacity? With most programs, you plan, you have your peak and your drop-off. How do you ensure that there is no drop-off and that you are keeping the construction industry at peak capacity?

Mr Cahif: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. Part of the work that Infrastructure Canberra is doing in relation to the new build of over 1,000 additional public houses is to do the design of this program with industry, as well as balancing issues such as industry constraints, along with a regular supply. That work is being undertaken as we speak. We are well aware of the requirement for ramp-up of industry, as well as bringing them along. There are multiple ways of doing this, in terms of what sort of delivery models are used here. That can involve early contractor involvement and staged finance. There are various methods. That is the work that is being done by Infrastructure Canberra, as we speak.

Ms Berry: There is \$4 million in the budget for that planning work.

MS CARRICK: Yes. You are developing a program now to replace the growing and renewal one. Do you talk to industry? Is there any community consultation? When is it due to be finalised? Does the public get to see the new program?

Mr Cahif: Absolutely. There is already consultation occurring with industry. There was a recent industry roundtable with the specific topic of housing. Infrastructure Canberra regularly works with industry on a whole range of topics, and housing is regularly one of those issues raised. There will be a wider consultation piece this year. As the minister said, there is funding for this planning and delivery work; that will be with consultation as well.

MS CARRICK: When you buy houses, why don't you buy the Mr Fluffy blocks that people want to get out of? There are 14 left. Some will stay there forever, until they die. Some want out. Why don't you buy them? They are in older areas and are potentially blocks of a reasonable size that you can develop.

Ms Berry: We did buy some.

Ms Rule: When we make any purchase decision, we look at: what is our stock in that area? Is that where we need housing? What is the land like? What can we do with it? Is it good value for money in terms of what we need to achieve? We have bought some. We do not have a policy for or against. We treat them like every other purchase of a block, where we would look at it based on all of the needs of whatever program of work we have going on.

MS CARRICK: Will you look at the last 14 and see whether there are any that people

want to sell, and see whether they suit your needs?

Ms Rule: We are not in the business of going doorknocking on the 14 that are left, but—

MS CARRICK: But the asbestos task force might be able to help you.

Ms Rule: That is where I was going. In terms of working with other parts of government, if we identify an opportunity that exists to purchase additional land, we will assess that, as we would with any other piece of land.

MS CARRICK: I know of one. I am not sure whether there are others, but there is definitely one. We heard about it here at estimates.

MS TOUGH: I understand the government has been working on a multi-unit property insourcing trial at a few of the housing developments across Canberra. Can I ask how this work is progressing and what is involved?

Ms Berry: That is a good question. It is going well. We are learning a lot about these properties and our tenants, and how we are managing the insourcing and bringing them into a government-led insourcing project. I will ask Ms Valler to provide a little bit more detail.

Ms Valler: With the MUP trial, it only started in June 2024, and we have taken 12 months to have a look at it; you are right. We are up to 10 sites at the moment. We have been able to look at works that relate to common area ground maintenance, including rubbish, sharps removal and those kinds of things. We have also had an opportunity to look at the planning works that we do on those sites, which is making sure those certified services are up to date, with security, fire and lift, and that cyclical maintenance is done. We are in a position now that we have finished that part of the MUP trial and a report will be provided to inform future insourcing opportunities for government.

MS TOUGH: What is the timeframe for that report going to government?

Mr Khan: We are working towards the end of this calendar year, Ms Tough, for the government to then consider it, and to inform future decisions.

MS TOUGH: It is likely to be a decision for the next budget process; thank you.

MS BARRY: You talked about that report. Will it be tabled in the Assembly? If not, why not?

Ms Rule: Not really.

Mr Khan: We are preparing a document for the minister, to then inform decision-making. It would be a choice for—

Ms Berry: Usually, I would use that information in my yearly updates to the Assembly on the housing portfolio. I will take it on notice. I am sure the information would be fine.

MS BARRY: If you can provide it to the Assembly, I think it would be useful.

Ms Berry: Rather than providing it separately, I can include that information in my update.

MS BARRY: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Just to clarify, are you taking on notice to provide the information or taking on notice whether you can provide the information?

Ms Berry: I think I can provide it, so that is not taken on notice. As to whether I provide the report or not, I will take that on notice, because I do not know what it will have in it.

Ms Rule: The report does not exist yet. It is a little bit hard to put aside what it contains—

THE CHAIR: Thus the confusion.

Ms Rule: It may well contain, for example, some sensitive commercial information about the contracting arrangements that we have under the current maintenance schedules. It may not; I do not know. We would have to wait and see what the report contains, provide that advice to government and then government can decide.

Ms Berry: I will absolutely provide an update on the trial. That will absolutely occur, because that is an important part of communicating our policy direction.

MS BARRY: What evidence, if any, did you consider to demonstrate the efficiency and cost effectiveness of repairs and maintenance in that trial?

Ms Rule: It will be part of the report.

MS BARRY: I have a question on public housing maintenance. I recently visited a client who had been waiting for four years for some work to be done on black mould. I was there for 15 minutes, and I nearly passed out. This client has a disability. What is the role of the housing disability liaison officer in this instance?

Ms Rule: Housing disability liaison officers do not have a specific role in terms of maintenance, but they do have a role in terms of working with our tenants who have disability. One of the things they might do is raise requests for routine maintenance and things like disability modifications. It is possible that the disability liaison officer could be raising those maintenance requests, but it is not their responsibility to follow those through and to make sure that they are actioned, because they have a different role. The maintenance happens somewhere else. Ash, could you talk a little bit more to that?

Mr Balaretnaraja: The disability liaison officer has a separate role. However, our occupational therapists do report through to our disability liaison officer. The occupational therapists will make any recommendations around those types of modifications.

MS BARRY: How many recommendations have you received from your occupational therapists? I am happy for you to take it on notice about disability.

Mr Balaretnaraja: In what period?

MS BARRY: In the last financial year; that would be sufficient.

Mr Balaretnaraja: In the last financial year; I can take that on notice.

MS BARRY: Thank you. Where repairs are delayed by a complex legal process, whether it be strata or other issues, is there a mechanism for Housing ACT to move this client whilst that is being resolved?

Ms Rule: Yes, there is a mechanism where people can be moved due to maintenance issues. In terms of the client that you are referring to, we would be very happy, out of session, to get from you the details of that client and look into—

MS BARRY: I think I have sent it to the minister's office.

Ms Rule: Okay. We can look into that matter to see whether relocation is appropriate, to see what is happening with the maintenance requests and what reasons may exist for delays or otherwise.

MS BARRY: Thank you very much. Are you able to take on notice what relocations you have done and how many, if any, are still pending in the last financial year?

Ms Rule: What was the second part of your question?

MS BARRY: Where there has been an issue, if that data exists, what relocations have been concluded, and how many requests for relocations you have received.

Ms Valler: Is it relocations based on disability modifications over the last financial year?

MS BARRY: Based on any modification required.

Ms Valler: Any modification, yes.

Ms Rule: Yes, we can take that on notice.

MS BARRY: Thank you very much.

Ms Berry: Just to be clear on the particular tenant that you are talking about, you have written to my office, and we are responding to that. That is not taken on notice?

MS BARRY: No, I think that is okay. I am waiting for a response from your office. She has been waiting for four years to get that maintenance issue fixed.

THE CHAIR: Ms Clay?

MS CLAY: I am quite disturbed to hear about the increase in the public housing waitlist. I have a few questions about how we are making sure that we are building enough. We have the missing middle changes that are coming along, and they will offer quite a lot of opportunities for new development in established urban areas. Is Housing ACT contributing to that process? Do you have any projections of how much public housing that might unlock?

Ms Berry: We have a commitment to 15 per cent of public, community and affordable housing. There is probably a little bit of guesswork now before that process has even been worked through. Yes, if there is an opportunity then Housing ACT will certainly consider it.

MS CLAY: I hear that there is—

Ms Berry: For example, the direct sale of land to the developers at Kippax includes public housing.

MS CLAY: How much public housing is included in that?

Ms Berry: I cannot remember. I think it was 12.

MS CLAY: Can you take on notice how many dwellings there are and how many are public housing?

Ms Berry: Sure.

MS CLAY: I hear that commitment to 15 per cent public, community and affordable housing, but we are seeing on the ground that what that is looking like is two per cent at Denman Prospect, and 1.8 per cent in the ILRP. I am nervous to hear that the only contribution is to maintain the 15 per cent. I would prefer some indication of what the actual public housing unlocked will be.

Ms Berry: As I said, the numbers that you are looking at are a percentage of the entire build. We have made a commitment and are delivering on the 400 growth, as part of our growing and renewing program, which we are meeting, and a further target of over 1,000 properties between now and 2030. Whilst I note that you are seeing bits of it in the land release program, that is only part of the story of what Housing ACT builds, buys or has developed.

MS CLAY: Sure. Can you provide a breakdown of how much you are building versus how much you are buying, perhaps in—

Ms Rule: We can provide you with a breakdown of how much we have built and how much we have bought.

MS CLAY: Yes, that is exactly what I mean. Yes, can we get that?

Ms Rule: So that would be projecting backwards, rather than projecting forwards.

MS CLAY: Can we get that for maybe the last couple of years, like 2024-25 and 2023-24? And then, you must surely know what you intend to buy and build in—

Ms Rule: No we do not, because much of this is opportunistic. So for example, as I talked about earlier, when a property becomes vacant, one of the things that we do is look at the location of that property, the land holdings, the age of the property, how much other stock we have in that area, and we make a decision about whether we want to re-tenant that property or whether we actually look at it for sale or redevelopment. So those things are opportunistic. We cannot forecast those. We have a kind of open expression of interest process with the market, where developers will sometimes come to us and say, do you want to buy 10 townhouses? We do an assessment. We work with the Suburban Land Agency—

MS CLAY: That is okay. As there is no target going forward, maybe just give us the breakdown for the last couple of years; that might do it.

Ms Berry: Well, I just gave them to Mr Rattenbury before. For 2023-24, through the growth and renewal program, we have constructed 212. We have purchased 45. So it is a total of 257. In 2024-25, 180 were built and 33 were acquired over the last two years, a total of 213.

MS CLAY: Sure. I did hear those as you were reading them out. But my problem is I am trying to work out how we are going to build enough when it looks like, on those numbers, most of what you have done in the last two years to increase our stock has been building. When I am looking at what the government plans are for land release and in individual developments, we are only putting in tiny amounts of public housing. So how—

Ms Berry: Because you are only looking at the land release. You are not looking at the entire portfolio. And so I have just told today, the 356, which is in the pipeline of being built—are they all built?

Mr Cahif: They are being built.

Ms Berry: Being built.

Mr Cahif: They are in the pipeline across the program.

MS CLAY: Being built.

Ms Rule: So we know where we are going to build, for example.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, your point is, some will be on brownfields as well.

Ms Berry: Yes.

Ms Rule: Yes, exactly.

MS CARRICK: Do you go to auctions?

MR RATTENBURY: Sorry, just to help.

Ms Rule: Thank you.

MS CLAY: Yes, great. Can we get some details of where the pipeline ones will be?

Ms Valler: Yes, they will be salt and peppered across the territory. Can I add a little bit more advice? On average we see about a churn of 80 properties through the portfolio each month. So every one of those 80 properties will be assessed, whether we redevelop it, whether we sell it or whether we put it back to being reallocated.

MS CLAY: Yes. Have you engaged with CED on the missing middle and how you will be incorporating public housing in that when it comes online?

Ms Valler: Not to a level of detail, but I can take that offline. I can take that on notice and come back to you.

MS CLAY: Okay. We have two vacant blocks of land controlled by the Commissioner for Social Housing that might be suitable for public housing, I am not sure. There is one off Baldwin Drive in Kaleen, that is block 29, section 117, and there is another in Jerrabomberra Avenue in Narrabundah, block 12, section 34. I am just wondering if there will be a decision on whether they are suitable for public housing and if there is a decision that they are suitable for public housing, when construction would commence?

Ms Rule: We will have to take that on notice. We do not have that level of detail here about individual blocks today.

MS CLAY: Sure. It is okay if we get that on notice.

Ms Rule: I just remind the committee too that our standard approach is to try and not identify individual public housing locations for reasons that I think you all understand. So we will treat that with some sensitivity as well.

MS CLAY: Sure. We will do our best. I do understand. I—

MR RATTENBURY: I think the point of Ms Clay's question is that they are large sites that have a lot of potential.

Ms Rule: No, I understand. I get the need for the scrutiny and the sharing of the information.

MS CLAY: Yes. I also have a question about the money in the budget for public housing. On page 132 of the budget outlook, we have \$7.551 million of capital to progress a commitment of 455 new social housing dwellings. It says the cost is completely offset, as is the \$2.89 million for services. Can you tell me what that offset is?

Mr Hayward: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. The offset that has been referenced on the \$7.551 million was just an existing provision. So effectively the government has provisioned through a previous budget process some money, subject to

coming forward with another business case through this budget round. The case came forward and that money was released.

MS CLAY: So unspent ACT money from a previous budget, is that what I just heard?

Mr Hayward: Not unspent money, just the provision for future funding.

MS CLAY: Okay.

Mr Hayward: So effectively it says, subject to some further consideration of government, this money will be released for that purpose in the future.

THE CHAIR: Could you just clarify for me, please, was that money attached to a previous budget measure?

Mr Hayward: Yes, I think it would be, Chair. So that would have been announced through a previous budget measure and the budget outlook.

THE CHAIR: Yes. Could you please provide us some information on what budget measure that was?

Mr Hayward: Yes. Can I take that on notice?

THE CHAIR: Absolutely. Thank you.

MR EMERSON: What is Housing ACT's policy with respect to people who are squatting in public housing dwellings?

Ms Berry: Well, we prefer them not to be there. Look, it does happen and it is a challenge. If we know about them, then we can do something about it. When we do not know about them then obviously that is an issue for the tenant, or if there is no tenant, for the state of the property as well. I guess if you are aware of any, you can let us know offline and we will happily go and address it.

MR EMERSON: By go and address it, what kind of thing—if you are not going to—

Ms Berry: Well it would depend on the circumstance, I guess. We do not sort of rock on up with the riot squad or anything, but we would work with ACT policing about the individual if they were not going to leave voluntarily.

MR EMERSON: Usually people squat because they do not have somewhere else to live. Is there any process for engaging with people who are squatting to support them?

Ms Berry: Yes. We do not just kick them out. We are humans and we talk to them about putting in an application form—

MR EMERSON: Is there a specific policy or a procedure that—

Ms Berry: Well, part of our housing—

Ms Rule: No, there is not a specific policy document that I can provide you, but our standard practice is to work with anybody that we find who is in insecure accommodation, which may be through squatting or people that we know are on the street or whatever it might be, to connect them to homelessness services, to try and find them more stable and suitable accommodation.

MR EMERSON: I have had a squatter reported to me by a public housing tenant. It is a neighbouring property. They indicated that they had reported it to Housing ACT, and that Housing ACT's response was to turn the power off. Is that in line with your—

Ms Rule: I cannot talk to individual circumstances. I mean, it is certainly not our—

MR EMERSON: I am not asking. But is that in line with the expectations that you would have of a response to discovering a squat?

Ms Rule: It is certainly not our—we are not in the business of trying to freeze people out. It may well be that the power was turned off for some other reason, as in due course we were doing maintenance on the property or the property was—something else was happening. I cannot speculate on individual circumstances, but it is not part of our policy to—we try to lawfully remove people from ACT Housing properties and to link them up to more appropriate accommodation services.

Ms Valler: Yes. I think it is important to note that there is a lot of identification that has to go on in that. So I can appreciate the public may see somebody and make assumptions about those things, but Housing ACT works really hard to understand who that person is and if there are other services that could be provided, or if they are already a tenant and in the wrong address. I think there is a number of things that go on to be able to say somebody is a squatter or an unauthorised occupant.

MR EMERSON: I think in this case that did not happen. I will provide details offline, but I went and spoke with the people who were—

Ms Berry: I think that would be helpful. We cannot do a lot in a committee for an individual circumstance. So if you can provide the information then we can at least follow it up.

MR EMERSON: Thank you, Minister. In this case there was an Aboriginal couple who were squatting there. Is there any particular consideration given to First Nations people who are squatting or experiencing homelessness, given our commitments under the National Agreement to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in appropriately sized housing?

Ms Rule: So they are separate things. Again, with everybody who we encounter, whether squatting or in other insecure accommodation, we work with them to link them up with the most suitable accommodation service to meet their needs. So in the case of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family we would seek, if they wanted to, to be linked up with an Aboriginal service or a community service provider who can best meet their needs. There is not a different way that we treat those people. Like all of our tenants, and all of the people that we encounter who are experiencing insecure accommodation, we try to work with them to meet their needs as best we can.

MR EMERSON: Will you take any steps to—I mean, it certainly did not happen in this case. I have spoken with the people who are living there. They have not been contacted. Someone came and turned the power off the day after it was reported by the neighbour. He then spoke with them and provided them with some material aid, blankets and food, that sort of thing, and stepped in and did what he had assumed Housing ACT would do. Does that kind of report prompt concern on your part? Is this the kind of thing that you would—

Ms Berry: Well I think we have taken that on notice, and when you provide the information, we will be able to respond to that particular circumstance. As I said, it is very difficult to respond to it in a committee hearing without any of the information in front of us.

THE CHAIR: That is probably as far as we can get on that.

MS BARRY: My question is around transfer within public housing. In March 2025, there were about 915 applicants seeking transfer within public housing. It seems to me that the appropriateness of placement needs to be evaluated or looked at. Has there been any systemic evaluation of placement decisions to determine whether appropriate placement offers are being made?

Ms Rule: So for everybody who is seeking either placement in public housing or a transfer to another property, we look at their needs and circumstances when we consider what property we have available, whether there is a safety need, for example, or a location, or a number of bedrooms. For every tenant we have a set of criteria that we look at in terms of the type of property that they are eligible for and what we allocate to them.

MS BARRY: So no evaluation? The question I asked was has there been a systemic—

Ms Rule: Well I think I just said that we evaluate them against a set of criteria that—in terms of—

MS BARRY: So that is when they are placed.

Ms Rule: No, but also in terms of transfer.

MS BARRY: In terms of transfer? All right. So the 915, there has been an evaluation in terms of transfer?

Ms Rule: Yes, we look at their applications for transfer and the circumstances on which they are seeking transfer. Sometimes it is they need somewhere bigger, or they need somewhere smaller, as just two examples. So we work through what their circumstances are and therefore what we have suitable to allocate to them.

MS BARRY: Okay. Would you, and I am happy for you to take this on notice, would you be able to provide a table of how many applicants, the reasons applicants are seeking to transfer and how long it is taking that transfer to occur?

Ms Rule: I think we can provide disaggregated data on what the kind of trends are. I do not know that we can provide—we will have a look at what data we have available to provide you.

MS BARRY: Okay. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: So you are taking that on notice?

Ms Rule: Yes, taking on notice to have a look at the data that we have available.

MS BARRY: Do you give priority to tenants seeking to downsize, because we have heard comments, or lots of requests about downsizing from four bedroom, for example, to one bedroom or two bedrooms, waiting years? Is there any consideration given to that?

Ms Berry: I think it depends on the circumstances of the individual. Sometimes when a tenant—I am just talking very generally here—but there might be a situation where a tenant will ask for a single bedroom home in their existing suburb, and one just will not exist. So Housing ACT works with the tenants to broaden their horizons a little and have a look maybe in other suburbs and other areas of the city. Sometimes people will narrow it to just a suburb, to a few suburbs, or maybe just to one part of the ACT, and there just might not be homes that are suitable for them in the particular area that they have chosen.

Housing ACT tries to do very much a matchmaking service. So we try not to put people where they do not want to be, and we give people options about where they want to live that is suitable to their needs, as much as we possibly can within our portfolio constraints. So for the individual that you are referring to, if you have not already, provide it to my office and I can certainly follow up for them but—

MS BARRY: There are a few.

Ms Berry: Well, provide them all to my office. I would rather know about them—

MS BARRY: I think we have provided them to your office, yes.

Ms Berry: Okay, cool. Well then, we are following up on them. This is following your briefing the other week, is it?

MS BARRY: Yes.

Ms Berry: Yes. Okay. So we are following up on those individuals, and we will. But it is never a simple move from a to b. Tenants are human beings and have needs, just like the rest of us. We take into account all of those needs and try as much as we can to meet, with as much specificity as we can, the tenants' individual needs. There were 355-something transfers over 2024-25 for a range of different reasons I expect, but we were able to meet the needs of those tenants. How many on the transfer list?

Ms Rule: Somebody else might have that on hand straight away.

Ms Berry: How many on the transfer?

Ms Rule: So at 30 June 2025, 625 existing public housing tenants were seeking transfer: 33 of those have been approved for a transfer to downsize; 87 applications are for transfer with domestic and family violence identified as an issue; and we have decreased that waitlist of people seeking a transfer by 38, since 31 March 2025.

MS BARRY: Thank you. So that figure of 315 also includes people who want to downsize as well, is that right?

Ms Rule: It is all the people who are on the transfer list.

MS BARRY: Transfer list, so whether downsizing or transferring to a similar property of the same size?

Ms Rule: Just anyone who has applied for a transfer.

Ms Berry: It might be different in an urgent situation as well. A transfer will happen more immediately where tenants might need to leave their existing property for safety reasons for another property somewhere else. In those circumstances it will happen fairly quickly. It might not be their end-goal home, it might be an in-between home, just to keep them safe in those circumstances until we can find them something more appropriate.

MS BARRY: Thank you, Minister. I want to know how applications to relocate or transfer clients are made and who makes this decision?

Ms Newman: A tenant applies to relocate. So they will put in an application to transfer and that gets assessed by our assessing team, who will have a look at what their circumstances are, their bedroom entitlement and the suburb that they are looking at, or their region, and then they will go on the suitable list based on their needs assessment.

MS BARRY: Is this decision made in parallel to a new tenant, for example, say people looking at if a person wants to transfer, whether there is a new tenant that can take that property?

Ms Newman: Correct, yes.

THE CHAIR: Minister, you have asked that MLAs contact you if we become aware of individuals who are seeking transfers who have not received a—that is certainly something I have tried to do before as well. My concern is, should we have a system that is built on relying on MLAs to point out problems when in my experience these people have been trying, often for extended periods of time, and often they are reaching desperation stage by the time they reach out to an MLA?

Ms Berry: Yes, of course. I mean, in a perfect world, we would rather there were not any issues in our public housing properties, and in fact that we did not have any public housing properties. But we do, and sometime individuals may feel more comfortable approaching a local member and asking them for support and help in a particular way. So that is why I am happy to receive any of those incidences or circumstances to my

office, from anyone, because people just might feel more safe or have a relationship with local members within their community.

THE CHAIR: I guess the issue I am trying to get to, and I will use an example without identifying the person, of an individual living in a three-bedroom home with multiple children, ranging from about three years old to 18 years old. When I visited the home, it was absolutely infested with black mould. There were gaps in the wall I could put my hand into. The individual had been seeking a transfer for some time. The rear door of the house was no longer secure and they had concerns about the safety of their family.

They had been trying to find a way into a more suitable home. They had offered to participate in a program that would enable the government to build more homes on that property, but they had been frustrated at every step. That seems like a situation that should have been very high on the priority list, but it took an extremely long period of time and multiple contacts from my office before anything happened. I am only trying to understand, why is it that we are relying on MLAs to do that advocacy when there are such clear examples that urgently need help?

Ms Berry: Well, I do not think we are relying on MLAs, but I think it is the job of a good local member to be accessible to anyone in their community regardless of where they come from or their backgrounds, and so that is why I am happy to receive information from MLAs so that I can follow it up with Housing ACT or someone else. I cannot recall the particular circumstance you are talking about, Mr Cocks, but that is certainly not the circumstance that any of us would accept as appropriate and we would much rather a much quicker response. In the circumstances where there are delays, sometimes there are a range of reasons for that. Some of those are personal and would not be disclosed to anyone in any case, but as soon as I am aware of them I take them seriously and Housing ACT takes them seriously and we follow up with the tenant.

Ms Windeyer: Perhaps if I could add, in the last financial year there has been an increase in the number of households that have transferred and the number of people who have transferred. So in the 2024-25 period the number of households transferred was 355. In the period before that, in 2023-24, it was 266. So there has been a significant effort by ACT Housing to ensure that people who have requested a transfer, or who need to be transferred—that that is prioritised and takes place. Of that, the greatest number is prioritised in order to ensure the households and the people transferred are where there are priority and high needs.

Ms Rule: One of the benefits of the extra stock that has come online through the Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program is that it gives us options because in order to transfer somebody we have to have somewhere to transfer them to. I think you will understand that and so in having additional stock available we have had a lot more scope to be able to action those transfers than we have had previously.

MS CARRICK: My question is about youth homelessness and homelessness in general. Have you undertaken system-wide mapping of the needs for services across Canberra to ensure that there are places for youth to go near their networks and schools?

Mr Balaretnaraja: We have not undertaken territory-wide mapping. However, across the breadth of the territory there is a range of accommodation options when it comes to

youth. There is Youth Foyer in Woden, there is youth housing running in partnership with the Salvation Army in Narrabundah, and there is a range of other assets across the breadth of the south of Canberra as well.

MS CARRICK: How do you match a young person with the space so that they have access to their school?

Mr Balaretnaraja: In terms of—

MS CARRICK: I hear about young people getting accommodation in, say, Belco, but their schools are on the south side. How do you ensure that they are able to access their school?

Mr Balaretnaraja: When someone applies for public housing, on their application form they are asked to select the location. We would allocate them a location based on their preference.

MS CARRICK: What about crisis accommodation that might be for a shorter period of time while they sort themselves out? Is there any youth crisis accommodation?

Mr Balaretnaraja: There absolutely is youth crisis accommodation. At the moment, we have service providers that are contracted to deliver up to 126 beds for youth accommodation.

MS CARRICK: Are they across Canberra? What is the split by district? Can you take on notice the split by district?

Mr Balaretnaraja: I do not have a split by district on those 126 beds, but I can take that on notice.

MS CARRICK: Thank you. What about crisis homelessness services, not necessarily for youth? I note that, in budget statements C, on page 105, the proportion of homelessness services clients who are homeless or at risk of homelessness who achieve independent housing after support is 63 per cent, and it is 63 per cent through to the outyears, to 2028-29. Sixty-three per cent seems low, but I do not know what underpins all that. Why wouldn't it increase as we go towards the outyears—ways of getting clients into housing? Why is it 63 per cent and why does it remain at 63 per cent?

Ms Rule: Are we talking about strategic indicator 3 in the budget papers?

MS CARRICK: Yes.

Mr Balaretnaraja: That strategic indicator is about those who achieve independent housing. Not all of our homelessness clients will be able to achieve independent housing. Many of them will require tenancy and property management support for extended periods. Many of them will require wraparound supports for extended periods as well. That indicator is a target, but we are very aware that some people will never be able to achieve independent housing.

MS CARRICK: Should there be another target that picks up the other 37 per cent?

Ms Rule: I have said a number of times in estimates hearings of this committee that all of the strategic indicators for the Health and Community Services Directorate need review. It is part of the work of the establishment of the new directorate to ascertain whether these are the best measures. Just yesterday, I had a lengthy conversation with my colleagues in the Chief Minister's directorate around the wellbeing indicators and the framework. I have a particularly strong view if the Health and Community Services Directorate is not slotting in nicely to the Wellbeing Framework. We should be on the leading edge of that work. There is absolutely some work to do to improve those strategic indicators and our reporting against them.

MS CARRICK: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I need a quick clarification. This has been nagging at me throughout these hearings. Did you not review the appropriateness of the indicators before the budget was delivered?

Ms Rule: It is always part of the budget process. We were cognisant in this budget that we would be moving to a new era of a new directorate where those strategic indicators could take on a different complexion, because of the nature of the new directorate and the work that the government has asked us to do to bring together some of the services that sit within the HCSD remit.

THE CHAIR: As a function of the machinery of government changes, there was no opportunity to do that comprehensively beforehand? Is that what you are saying?

Ms Rule: We have not done that work yet. It is on the work program.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Sorry, Ms Carrick. I will let you continue.

MS CARRICK: No worries, Chair. Thanks. Regarding crisis accommodation for men, I do not think there are any in the south, so would it be viable to have a Samaritan House in the south? There are 13 beds for crisis accommodation, but it is always full, from what I can gather, so would it be possible to consider a similar thing in the south?

Ms Rule: We are always looking at the supply and demand equation and the rights of service models across the city. We work within the resources that we have available to us. Whilst it is of course hypothetically possible to have a service like that in the south, it is really a matter for discussion with government, in terms of supply and demand and the funding that is available to provide those services.

MS CARRICK: Is there demand for that sort of crisis accommodation?

Ms Rule: Often crisis accommodation is oversubscribed regardless of location. We work with a whole range of service providers to ensure that we provide the best services that we can within the resources that we have available.

MS CARRICK: Thank you.

MS TOUGH: Minister, the government has made commitments through the National

Agreement on Closing the Gap to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans can secure appropriate and affordable housing that is aligned with their priorities and need. Can you tell me how this is being addressed in the public housing space?

Ms Berry: I wonder whether anyone can talk to the work that we are doing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations.

Ms Rule: I can make a couple of brief comments on that. The Aboriginal Service Development fund is being used to support the development of ACCOs across a number of sectors. There are some “green shoots”, as I would describe them, in terms of housing ACCOs, but we are still working with the community controlled sector. Some of our existing ACCOs are also doing work on housing. We have a number of dedicated public housing properties for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans, such as the properties for older Aboriginal women in the north of Canberra. There are a number of specific initiatives, but we continue to work with the community controlled sector.

There is significant demand and interest in an Aboriginal community controlled housing organisation, but we are not quite there yet, in terms of that organisation being established and ready to go, but we are working actively with a number of organisations, including ones that are already here under the Aboriginal enhancement fund—I think that is the proper title—to help support the development of an ACCO in the housing sector.

Ms Windeyer: Three ACCOs have registration under the national regulatory system for community housing—NRS registration.

MS TOUGH: Those three are here in Canberra?

Ms Windeyer: Yes. Those are Yeddung Mura, SEARMS and Yerrabi Yurwang.

MS TOUGH: Wonderful. You said there were dedicated housing properties. Are they throughout Canberra? I do not want you to say where they are, just—

Ms Rule: Sure. There are a number of specific developments, including, as I said, a set of really lovely townhouses in the north of Canberra that are specifically for older Aboriginal women. We have a couple of those examples in our portfolio.

Mr Windeyer: There are also a couple of houses for transitional accommodation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are exiting the justice system.

MS TOUGH: Wonderful. So there is that link with the justice system for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?

Ms Windeyer: That is correct; yes.

MS TOUGH: Wonderful. Thank you.

MS BARRY: You mentioned that there are a couple of houses for transitional accommodation for First Nations people. What is the number? I am happy for you to

take that on notice.

Ms Windeyer: For those exiting the justice system?

MS BARRY: Exiting the justice system.

Ms Windeyer: We will take that on notice.

MS BARRY: Thank you. Would you also be able to take on notice whether that service is oversubscribed?

Ms Windeyer: Yes.

MS BARRY: Thank you.

MR EMERSON: On the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, Ms Tough mentioned the commitment that has been made to increase the proportion of First Nations people living in appropriately sized housing. The latest data released last week shows that ACT and Tasmania are the only jurisdictions to have gone backwards on that metric. Are you confident that, by the next data report, that will have changed and we will be moving forward?

Ms Rule: This is for another outcome. It is not in this portfolio, in terms of Closing the Gap. To make some general comments on that—

MR EMERSON: Should Ms Tough not have received that response to her question? She asked about this specific indicator and received a response.

Ms Rule: She asked specifically about services that have been provided. To talk about the data in terms of Closing the Gap, our numbers are very small. Our outcomes under Closing the Gap can vary greatly. There is a lot of work going into housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, but I cannot predict what the data will do in the next report. Numbers in small jurisdictions—Tasmania has the same problem, as does the Northern Territory—can move around very significantly from report to report, because of the small numbers.

MR EMERSON: Thank you.

Mr Balaretnaraja: I have an answer to a question that Ms Windeyer took on notice. There are 10 houses in partnership with JACS or Justice Housing. There are a further two with Yeddung Mura.

MS BARRY: The other question was around how many clients you have and whether the service is oversubscribed.

Mr Balaretnaraja: I do not have the detail about the number of clients yet.

MS BARRY: All right.

MS CARRICK: Are they all dedicated to First Nations or is that for the whole—

Mr Balaretnaraja: First Nations—yes.

MS CARRICK: What is the number for all released from jail?

Mr Balaretnaraja: I do not have that information.

MS CARRICK: Can you take on notice how many are available for people coming out of jail?

Ms Rule: Yes.

MR BRADDOCK: I have some questions about maintenance. I understand Infrastructure Canberra is now managing the public housing maintenance contract with Programmed. Is that correct?

Ms Berry: Yes.

MR BRADDOCK: Has Infrastructure Canberra taken over that insourcing trial?

Ms Rule: Yes.

MR BRADDOCK: Does Programmed have a complaints policy—for example, if a tenant has an issue with maintenance undertaken?

Mr Balaretnaraja: The complaints policy that is currently in place with Housing ACT is the policy that will continue.

MR BRADDOCK: Could you please walk me through how a public housing tenant can make a complaint and make sure that it is followed up?

Mr Balaretnaraja: We touched on that a bit earlier. There are a number of different mechanisms by which a public housing tenant can make a complaint. They can engage with their housing manager. We have online accessibility. People can come to our central access point. People can call through our phone lines and also engage with Programmed as well. There are a number of different mechanisms by which they can—

Ms Newman: Mr Braddock, Programmed also have their own dedicated complaints team. A tenant can ring that. They go to specific repairs and maintenance complaints.

MR BRADDOCK: Do we have KPIs in place in terms of how those complaints are managed, to ensure they are followed up quickly and resolved?

Mr Balaretnaraja: There absolutely are KPIs in place in terms of response times for first-level and second-level reviews.

MR BRADDOCK: What actions does the territory take if those complaints are not resolved to the satisfaction of either the territory or the tenant?

Mr Balaretnaraja: There are also third-level complaints, but tenants are also allowed

to engage with the Human Rights Commissioner or the ombudsman.

Ms Berry: Housing or the government can take action, and in some circumstances there can be financial penalties.

MR BRADDOCK: How is the annual schedule of maintenance of public houses developed? Is ACT Housing involved as part of that, is that handled purely by Programmed or is that—

Ms Valler: It is a total facilities management contract, which means that Programmed manages that, but we work hand in glove to communicate what we need in the planned maintenance space.

MR BRADDOCK: I would like to understand how the funding envelope was figured out for that contract and whether any additional funding has been allocated in this budget towards property maintenance.

Ms Berry: Yes; there is funding available in this budget for maintenance.

MR BRADDOCK: Additional funding. That is the question I have, because it is hard to tell through all the of transfers and adjustments in the budget.

Ms Berry: I am sorry. Maybe I am misunderstanding your question.

MR BRADDOCK: There is a budget for maintenance. Has any additional funding been announced as part of this budget? Is there any increase in the amount for maintenance of our public housing stock?

Ms Berry: There is additional funding that goes towards the electrification program and the insulation program. That is additional funding for maintenance and upgrades of public housing properties. I can get the actual—

Ms Rule: Every year we have a conversation in the budget process with government about the quantum of funding for repairs and maintenance. We then work with Programmed on how that is allocated. Generally, it is divided into 70 per cent planned works and 30 per cent responsive works, based on the funding envelope that is available from year to year. That is an ongoing conversation with government through the budget process and then with Programmed as the service provider.

MR BRADDOCK: In terms of requesting maintenance, I wonder whether any consideration has been given to having an advocacy channel, where advocates such as Canberra Community Law, for example, can make representations to Programmed on behalf of tenants regarding maintenance.

Ms Rule: There are a number of advocates who already work within the systems available, whether it is advocacy to us or advocacy to Programmed, about individual maintenance requests.

MR BRADDOCK: So they are already able to do that under the current system?

Ms Berry: Yes.

MR BRADDOCK: Is there any sort of app or tool available for tenants to track the planned maintenance or requests for maintenance, so they can see the status of those maintenance requests and the work undertaken?

Ms Rule: We do not have an app to track those requests. It is not as straightforward as having reached the top of the list. It is not like a pizza delivery, where you track an order. Sometimes it relies on the availability of trades or it relies on negotiation with the tenant about when the repairs or maintenance may occur. Sometimes we need supplies to be available—a new oven, or whatever it might be, has to arrive. There is no standard. No one maintenance request is the same, so we do not have a mechanism to track individual maintenance requests.

Ms Valler: We encourage tenants to keep in contact with the tradesperson that they are working with or to contact the contract management team. There are a number of avenues available for that.

MR BRADDOCK: We have seen that the expectation of the community is the ability to quickly see where their job may be—whether it has been accepted and where it is sitting with a tradesperson. That is now a community expectation. Is the government able to meet that in any way, to be able to tell them, “Yes. A tradesperson will come on this date to work on that particular job”? How is that information being prepared and presented to the tenant?

Ms Rule: Again, they can contact us at any time to find out where their maintenance request is up to.

Ms Valler: And they can talk to the tradesperson. When they come, they might say, “I’m here to fix your tap. It might need a new part. I’ll be back next week.” They would either come back next week or say, “Here’s my phone number. You can call me for an update.”

MR BRADDOCK: Is some form of housing manager available, particularly for the larger housing complexes, to help manage this and be a point of contact for the tenant?

Ms Rule: Every tenant has a housing manager allocated to them.

MR BRADDOCK: But, where it is a large complex, does it make sense to have just one person for the complex to manage all the maintenance associated with it?

Ms Rule: It depends on the circumstances. The housing managers are allocated to the tenants, not to the properties. But they work closely together, and they work closely with Programmed. I have been out with those housing managers a few times to visit multi-unit properties, as an example. Programmed people have been on site. They all know each other very well and they talk to each other regularly. Every tenant has a housing manager.

MR BRADDOCK: They can call, but what about having someone there physically as well so they are able to talk to them?

Ms Rule: We do not have people physically onsite.

Ms Berry: Such as a janitor or someone who stays onsite? I do not know how many multi-unit properties we have. Is that what you are suggesting?

MR BRADDOCK: An embedded housing manager, so that they have a consistent person to talk to about the issues of the complex.

Ms Berry: Some properties do have people. Common Ground would have people. It is kind of leased out. A couple of others would have different community groups onsite.

Ms Rule: Broadly, we rely on our housing managers to undertake that role.

MR BRADDOCK: Thank you.

MS BARRY: Minister, I have been told by several contractors that they cannot tell clients that their repairs and maintenance can be performed because Housing ACT has knocked back the funds, and that subsequently an email has been sent. Did you or any Housing ACT staff send an email in this regard?

Ms Valler: Yes, that was raised with us, and we did speak with Programmed, who have notified their subcontractor base that that is not the case and that we should not be talking about budget to tenants in the first place. Yes, an email was sent from Programmed to the subcontractor base.

MS BARRY: Not from the minister or Housing ACT?

Ms Valler: No.

Ms Rule: Because it is a Total Facilities Management contract, Programmed manages that aspect of it, including their subcontractors. We do not manage that. Part of the contract is that they do that; therefore it would not be appropriate or normal for us to email those subcontractors directly. In fact, we do not even have a mechanism. We do not know who the subbies are that Programmed is using. It is their remit to manage that.

MS BARRY: There was not a conversation around contractors telling clients that they cannot perform maintenance because the funds were not advanced? Are you saying that—

Ms Rule: I think Ms Valler said there was a conversation, and Programmed did send an email, but the email came from Programmed, not from us.

MS BARRY: You said you have taken steps to address that; is that what you said?

Ms Valler: Yes. We have asked Programmed to communicate with their 80 subcontractors around that kind of information.

MS BARRY: Because it was not accurate; is that right?

Ms Valler: That is right. It is not accurate. It is a reimbursement contract, which means once the works are raised, they are paid.

MS CLAY: If the house that a tenant has is uninhabitable because it needs repairs, and Housing ACT has accepted that it is uninhabitable, can the tenant get a refund on that rent? Do they still have to pay rent for a home that has been allocated to them that is uninhabitable?

Ms Rule: We would not allocate a home to somebody that is uninhabitable.

MS CLAY: Some of us have constituents that have homes that are uninhabitable. Maybe they have been there for 10 years; I do not know. But the Housing ACT property that they are in is uninhabitable.

Ms Berry: I think I am aware of this particular circumstance, and I would have to take it on notice as a general policy question.

MS CLAY: That would be great; thank you.

MS BARRY: My question is around the participation grants. I note that it has doubled in 2025-26. Why have you doubled the grant if you expect that there will be no difference in the outcomes? The outcomes remain fixed at 70 per cent throughout the year.

Ms Berry: Because the program was oversubscribed.

MS BARRY: Has there been any audit or evaluation as to the participation grants and whether they are achieving their outcomes?

Ms Rule: The outcomes are that those grants are money for public housing tenants to participate in a range of activities, and an acknowledgement that sometimes our tenants need some additional help. As the minister said, the program was oversubscribed, so now we have more money to allocate to more people. It is not really outcome based. They either participated or they did not. It is a different kind of program. We are not planning on evaluating it because it is a relatively small amount of money that is about enabling community participation for our tenants, which, as I said, is a reasonably black-and-white thing: they either participate or they do not. That is the threshold of the program.

MS BARRY: You mentioned that the program was oversubscribed. At what point did the money run out in 2024-25?

Ms Berry: It runs out as the grants are provided. People apply for the grants and the grants are provided. With the number of applications received and the funding that was sought, it was more than what was available, so we doubled the program.

MS BARRY: What percentage of that was approved? What percentage of the grant application was approved? I am happy for you to take that on notice.

Ms Newman: Just to clarify, in the last financial year it was not oversubscribed. We

had 80 individuals across 64 households who received a grant. We did not have the uptake that we normally do in the last financial year, but we did expend \$29,152.

MS BARRY: If it was not oversubscribed—

Ms Berry: It has been oversubscribed.

Ms Newman: In previous years.

MS BARRY: In previous years, not in the last financial year? Thank you.

MS CLAY: ACT Shelter has \$201,000 per annum in funding. With that they need to be the peak body for housing and homelessness in the ACT. We have just heard that the public housing waitlist has gone from around 1,000 to almost 3,500, so there are obviously a lot of pressures and complexities in this field. Does the ACT government consider that that current funding level of \$201,000 per annum is sufficient for ACT Shelter to meet their function?

Ms Berry: Definitely, on this occasion, ACT Shelter, I am advised, still had money in the bank from a previous funding round that had not been spent on a project. We were aware that they still had funding available within their finances.

MS CLAY: ACT government took an assessment of that. Did ACT Shelter tell you about the excess funding, the surplus that they had not spent?

Ms Berry: I think there was a change in the CEO of ACT Shelter, so those decisions were made based on that information that we held on the finances of ACT Shelter. A new CEO is now there and has advocated for increased funding. That is fine. That is what they do.

MS CLAY: ACT Shelter have significantly less peak funding than most other community sector peaks, despite the fact that they are dealing with a problem that is increasing in scale. I think we heard that quite clearly during these hearings, and it is quite complex. Do you think there is a good case that they might need more funding that is more in line with other peak bodies?

Ms Berry: ACT Shelter works more in the policy space rather than direct representation, so it is a different kind of work as a peak body than other peak bodies might do. We need to take that into consideration when we are funding a service like ACT Shelter.

MS CLAY: Are you currently reviewing this? Are you looking at any particular factors as to whether you think there is a need to increase funding, or is this a—

Ms Berry: Not at the moment. This is the funding that has been provided as part of this year's budget. It is open to every organisation to advocate for increased funding in future budgets, and we will consider that, as we would in any other budget.

MS CLAY: Are you able to work with ACT Shelter on future budgets?

Ms Berry: We are able to work with any organisation.

MS CLAY: Great; thank you.

THE CHAIR: Minister, on this line, I want to clarify something. You said that, as a peak body, they are more in the policy space, if I understood rightly. Are not most peak bodies in the policy space?

Ms Rule: There are a number of service providers across the ACT in the community sector who do both service provision and advocacy, if you like—policy advocacy. Not all of them do that, and some do more of one than the other.

THE CHAIR: Are you suggesting that they do policy, and that is what makes them different, but they do not do other things? I am trying to understand—

Ms Berry: They might be questions for ACT Shelter rather than me, in assuming what their goals or strategy will be. My work with them in the past has been in the policy space more than direct advocacy. If that is a change of direction, we are absolutely happy to talk with Shelter about that, but my previous work and engagement with ACT Shelter have been in the policy space, which has been important for the work of government.

THE CHAIR: Is that different to other peaks?

Ms Berry: I think it is for some peaks. There are some peaks who will do direct advocacy. Are you talking about advocacy on behalf of other organisations or individuals?

THE CHAIR: I am talking about what the government funds these organisations to do. I think that the question was about what the funding of this organisation is, compared with others who are also categorised as peak bodies. I am not following the logic that, because they do policy, they are different from others.

Ms Berry: My experience, having worked with Shelter in the past, is that they have been primarily focused on policy, which is important; so they would do more policy work around homelessness and homelessness support and services, and less work in the individual advocacy space. That does not mean that they are less entitled than anybody else; I am just saying that is the work that they have been funded to provide, because that is the work they have done in the past.

MS CLAY: I think we have a lot of peak bodies that do advocacy in the community sector that are not primarily doing client services. I refer to ACTCOSS and Advocacy for Inclusion. There are lots of community organisations. We are trying to work out why this particular community organisation, which is doing advocacy for a particularly vulnerable group of people that is growing—we have just heard that it is growing—cannot make out a case that they need better, long-term, multiyear funding.

Ms Berry: They can make a case. I have said that. I am open to having discussions with them. There is absolutely nothing in the way of having a conversation with Shelter about their work and their priorities into the future. The government will then make a

decision about whether or not they would get increased funding. I would say that my work, certainly with the previous CEO and, I hope, with the more recent CEO, has been very positive. We have worked very well together in the past and I hope very much to work very closely with ACT Shelter now and into the future, as you say, in addressing this crisis.

However, I want to make the point that Shelter do have money in the bank. It is not that they have no money. There is money in the bank, so they are okay for the moment. But if they have other things that they want to do, for which they want to get increased funding, they can come and talk with me and the government through any budget process, as would normally be the case for any organisation. I am very open and happy to have a conversation with them about that.

MS CARRICK: The money in the bank will not go very far or last for very long. \$200,000 a year gets you one FTE; that is about it. It does not get you much. How can an organisation survive on one FTE? Where is the relief? There needs to be some relief for an organisation running on \$200,000. I do not know how anyone would manage on that.

Ms Rule: I would note that ACT Shelter is a membership-based organisation. It is probable—again, these are largely questions for ACT Shelter—that they have additional funding sources other than the money they receive from ACT government. Again, this is in a different portfolio area, but they would also be in scope for the other things that are happening around community sector organisations and funding more broadly. I think there is a range of things that are happening, but the money that they get from ACT government is probably not the only revenue that they have.

MS CARRICK: Membership funding is less than a thousand dollars. I am looking at their financial statements, and I cannot see anything else.

Ms Berry: I am sure ACT Shelter appreciates everybody's advocacy, and I have said that I am very happy to meet with them to discuss their aspirations. In this budget we have made a decision, based on their current and existing finances and on their work going forward, that this is the funding that we will provide to them. I am absolutely happy to talk with them. It does not mean they will get everything that they want, but I am happy to talk with them about that, and I am very open to having that conversation.

MR EMERSON: I want to ask about head-leasing arrangements with community housing providers. Can you provide an indication of what percentage of market rent our community—

Ms Berry: I am sorry; I am meeting with ACT Shelter next week.

MS CARRICK: With ACT Shelter? Excellent.

MR EMERSON: It might need to be a roundtable, by the sound of it. Could you provide an indication of what percentage of market rent community housing providers are required to pay to Housing ACT?

Mr Balaretnaraja: There is a really broad set of arrangements across the headlease

properties. We have approximately 700 headlease properties, and a broad set of arrangements. Generally speaking, they are at 33-and-a-third per cent market rent.

MR EMERSON: Is it the same rate for each community housing provider or is it determined on a case-by-case basis?

Mr Balaretnaraja: It is determined largely on a case-by-case basis.

MR EMERSON: Could you provide on notice a list of the rates charged to different providers?

Mr Balaretnaraja: We can provide a high-level—

MR EMERSON: Maybe a breakdown—10 per cent at this rate, 30 per cent at that rate, so you are not going into commercial—

Mr Balaretnaraja: Sure.

MR EMERSON: Has that been taken on notice?

Mr Balaretnaraja: We can take that question on notice.

MR EMERSON: Thank you. How is that percentage determined? Have you heard any concerns about the impact of the rate across different dwellings on the viability of local community housing providers?

Mr Balaretnaraja: The rate is determined on a case-by-case basis, so if we have the need for a headlease to take place and the service provider has capacity within their budget, we will work to establish the standard, which is 33-and-a-third per cent. Other circumstances occur from time to time which require us to look at the rate, or something that is less than 33-and-a-third per cent. We will look at it on a case-by-case basis, based on what is available within our budget, what is available within their budget et cetera.

MR EMERSON: How does that 33-and-a-third per cent compare? I understand that a Housing ACT dwelling that is directly managed would be at 25 per cent of income. How does that tend to sit, if it is a statutory income and it is converted into a market rate?

Mr Balaretnaraja: We charge the service provider 33-and-a-third per cent. The arrangements that they have with their tenants are separate to that.

MR EMERSON: You might expect that they would do the 25 per cent of income; it is up to them?

Mr Balaretnaraja: There is a broad set of arrangements in terms of the agreement between the service provider and their tenant.

Ms Berry: Community housing tenants also access commonwealth rental assistance.

MR EMERSON: If we are not doing a head-leasing arrangement, Housing ACT is

charging 25 per cent of income as rent to tenants directly. If you have a direct tenant in a public housing property, the fee is 25 per cent of their income; is that right?

Mr Balaretnaraja: That is for people who are eligible for the rebate; that is right. That is the vast majority of tenants—91 per cent of tenants.

MR EMERSON: Are receiving that rate?

Mr Balaretnaraja: That is right.

MR EMERSON: When that is converted into market rent, do you have a rough figure for what that equates to? You are doing income-based rental payments for public housing tenants. What does that equate to, roughly, as a comparison of market rent?

Ms Rule: The market rent is different for every property, depending on size and location.

MR EMERSON: No, I am aware of that. I am wondering whether there is an aggregate whereby we say, “We figure that if we charge 25 per cent across the board, we are charging around 30 per cent or 40 per cent of market rent.” I am not sure.

Ms Rule: We will have a look and see whether we can find it during the hearing, but in our budget statements you will find the amount of income we get from collecting rent. I do not know the number off the top of my head, but we will have a look and see whether we can find it while we are in the hearing.

MR EMERSON: Thank you.

Mr Hayward: Chair, I might be able to answer that question broadly now.

MR EMERSON: I am sorry if I am not being clear, in referring to lots of rates and percentages.

Mr Hayward: No, that is fine. In the annual financial statements that the directorate produces, it outlines the difference between the amount that we collect for those rental rebate eligible participants and what we would have otherwise charged through the market rent. We do show in the financial statements that delta.

MR EMERSON: As a total, an actual—

Mr Hayward: As a total dollar figure; that is correct.

MR EMERSON: There are a range of rates increases in the budget, including the new health levy. Under the head-leasing arrangements, are those new costs borne by the community housing provider or by Housing ACT?

Mr Balaretnaraja: I would expect that it would be borne by Housing ACT, as the owner of the asset, as opposed to the head lessee.

Ms Berry: We might take it on notice.

MR EMERSON: It might be one to take on notice as to whether that is passed on as an outgoing.

Ms Rule: Yes, we can confirm that on notice.

MR EMERSON: Thank you. In terms of the headlease properties or otherwise, are the rates increases reflected in Housing ACT's budget forecasts?

Mr Balaretnaraja: I think there has been a question taken on notice on this for the Treasury hearings.

MR EMERSON: Okay.

Mr Balaretnaraja: I understand that question should be processed and it will come back to you, Mr Emerson.

MR EMERSON: I could not remember whether it was taken on notice or whether I should ask it here.

Mr Balaretnaraja: It was, certainly.

MR EMERSON: The question then is whether Housing ACT has done any lobbying of Treasury regarding consideration of rates exemptions or rebates of any kind. Is that an ongoing conversation?

Ms Rule: I would not characterise it as lobbying. In every budget and for every budget measure, we have to submit our figures to Treasury regarding the costs, and they tell us how much money we are going to get. There is a bit of negotiation regarding how to reflect that in the budget statements. There are decisions to be taken by ministers in ERC and cabinet in relation to funding that is allocated, and where those cost pressures might exist. A normal part of the budget process is getting a balanced set of books for what our income is versus our expenditure, and rates are part of our expenditure in Housing.

MR EMERSON: Is that proportion of your expenditure indicated in the budget papers or is it something you could provide on notice—how much Housing ACT spends on rates in total?

Ms Rule: We will be able to provide the total amount that we spend on rates. Yes, we can take that on notice.

MR EMERSON: That would be great, and you have total expenditure, but the total and then as a proportion of all your expenditure; that would be really helpful. Maybe we can then do some lobbying on your behalf.

MS BARRY: You mentioned that 90 per cent of tenants are eligible for the 25 per cent rate.

Mr Balaretnaraja: Indeed. There is a subsidy which is connected to the rent rebate

which means that the majority of public housing tenants only get charged 25 per cent of their assessable income.

MS BARRY: With the other 10 per cent, what are they paying? If it is 90 per cent that are charged—

Mr Balaretnaraja: It is 91 per cent. They are paying market rent.

MS BARRY: They are paying market rent. Do you have a proportion of public housing tenants who can pay market rent but who are paying the 25 per cent? Do you do an analysis?

Ms Rule: There is an ongoing assessment of people's eligibility for the rebate based on income and, if they are no longer eligible, they are part of that nine per cent that pay market rent.

MS CARRICK: My question relates to page 111 of budget statement C. I was just wondering why the recurrent expenditure, like your appropriations, decline, and why your staffing budget just plateaus, given that there is a growing portfolio, a growing population and a growing need.

Ms Rule: I will let Mr Hayward find the exact numbers but I suspect that a lot of that is to do with the transfer of responsibility to Infrastructure Canberra. So there has been a large proportion of staff transfer from Housing ACT to Infrastructure Canberra. Some of the funding is reflected that way in the budget. So it is not that funding has plateaued; it is that it is just represented in different places in the budget statements.

MS BARRY: My question is around ceiling insulation. The minimum standard for ceiling insulation is due for completion in November 2026. As of September 2024, and you probably have updated figures, around 1,500 properties have received upgrades out of the 3,500 requiring upgrades. My question is, will all 3,000 properties be completed by November 2026? And if so, by what date is the expected completion?

Ms Valler: Yes, we are definitely working on that target. So to date we have had 2,570 properties that have been insulated, so that is over 70 per cent, and we are absolutely moving towards that 3,500 by November 2026.

MS BARRY: Thank you, and what is the cost of upgrades to date?

Ms Valler: I will take that on notice.

MS BARRY: I am happy for you to take it on notice. Where ceiling upgrades have occurred for Housing ACT properties, have all installations had an electrical safety inspection by a licensed electrician?

Ms Valler: Yes, that is part of it, yes.

MS BARRY: For properties that do not comply with the minimum housing standards, is that fact disclosed to public housing tenants where the property is offered to them when they move in?

Ms Valler: Sorry, can you ask that question again?

MS BARRY: So for properties that do not meet the minimum requirements, is that fact disclosed to housing tenants when they move into the property?

Ms Valler: I do not think so. You know, they are offered the upgrade. Some of them are open to having that done and some we need to work with a little bit closer, but I would have to take that on notice.

MS BARRY: Okay, so when they are moving in do you tell them that this does not meet the minimum upgrade requirement?

Ms Valler: Well, yes, they have volunteered for an assessment so they are aware that the insulation is being assessed, yes. Is that what you mean?

MS BARRY: Sorry, you said you were going to take it on notice?

Ms Valler: Okay, sorry. Do you want to ask the question again just so I get it absolutely right?

MS BARRY: That is okay. So my question is, for tenants who are moving into a property where the property does not meet the minimum standard, do they get to know that that property does not meet the minimum standard at the time they are moving in?

Ms Valler: Are we are talking about vacants now? Like, are you saying a tenant took—

Ms Rule: Yes, we are talking about allocations. So, on allocation do we tell them the property is not at standard? We will take that on notice.

Ms Berry: I mean, generally the tenant will probably visit the property and then go through the property with the housing managers or whoever and they can see the state of the property and whether it meets their needs, whether they are specifically told that the Vulcan heater that they have—

Ms Valler: Or the insulation—

MS BARRY: Sorry, it is relating to the insulation.

Ms Berry: Just the insulation.

Ms Rule: So if the property was in scope for this program to get insulation and had not yet received it, we would most likely look to install that insulation before the tenant moved in.

Ms Berry: In between, yes.

Ms Rule: So we look at whatever maintenance needs to happen to a house before we allocate it because it is much easier to do it when there is no one in the house than when it is tenanted. So we would most likely look to see whether we can install that insulation

before we tenant the property.

MS BARRY: So you have done it for every instance or—

Ms Rule: I said we would most likely look, because it depends on the capacity of the service provider and a whole range of things, including whether there are other things that need doing to the property. I am not going to give a blanket, you know, “In every instance we have,” but typically that is what we would do, is look to install it while the property is vacant.

MS BARRY: Can you then take on notice where you have not done the insulation by the time the person moves in?

Ms Rule: I do not think we will have that information without going into individual property files.

MS BARRY: Disaggregated data?

Ms Berry: I do not think we can do that either.

Ms Rule: I mean, we have given you already the number that are yet to have the installations done, that are still to happen, but I am not sure we will have the information available about where we have decided not to do it when a property is vacant without doing an analysis of every individual property.

Ms Valler: Yes, there would be no reason not to do the insulation if it is required.

THE CHAIR: Look, yes, I might just see if I can wrap this up. Could you maybe take on notice whether there have been any instances of individuals being allocated a property where the property did not meet those minimum insulation standards and, if there were, whether they were advised of the condition of that property?

Ms Rule: Again, we do not have a centralised data source of that information. We would only be able to get that information by looking at each individual property.

THE CHAIR: So you do not know which properties do not meet that standard?

Ms Rule: No, we do, but you are asking about the—so we know which properties are in scope for the program. We know which properties have already had the insulation installed. We know—

THE CHAIR: Sorry, it is not about the program, it is about the standard. It is about the minimum insulation standard.

Ms Rule: Again, I do not think—but you are also asking us about at what point do installations happen; and what are tenants advised, when; and how many times have we not done an installation. We do not have that data.

THE CHAIR: No, no, sorry, that is not quite what I am asking.

Ms Rule: Okay.

THE CHAIR: It is about whether the property complies with the minimum insulation standard. Unless I completely misunderstand, when a private tenant rents a property they are required to be told whether it meets or does not meet that standard.

Ms Rule: Yes.

THE CHAIR: I am trying to find out—and I think this is where Ms Barry is going—when public housing tenants are allocated a property, are they also afforded the same information?

Ms Rule: So I think we already took that question on notice, yes.

THE CHAIR: Yes, okay, and whether that has happened at any time was the other half that I was trying to get to.

Ms Rule: That is the part that I am not sure we will be able to answer without looking—

THE CHAIR: If you can do your best?

Ms Rule: We will have a look and see what information we hold in that regard.

MS TOUGH: I am just wondering how many insulation upgrades have been completed in the last financial year.

Ms Valler: Financial year? So the program to date is—

MS TOUGH: Or the program to date works too, yes.

Ms Valler: Yes, program to date is 2,570 but I cannot say how many we have done in 2024-25 but, you know, it is going well.

Ms Berry: Yes, we are nearly there.

MS TOUGH: Yes, and what year did the program start?

Ms Valler: Yes, two years ago.

MS TOUGH: Two years, yes. Yes, easy.

MR EMERSON: Does Housing ACT make less money when we headlease a community housing provider? I have had a look at that figure, the delta, the gap. So 42 per cent on average is what is being received in rent compared to the market rent and we are charging headlease providers 33 per cent. It might just be a simple yes or no.

THE CHAIR: I think that is related to a previous question.

MR EMERSON: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Perhaps given the timing, is someone able to just take that one on notice?

MR EMERSON: I just thought someone might have it on the top of their head—

Ms Berry: No, I do not think it is an easy yes or no.

MR EMERSON: —like, “Yes, this is financially worse for us to use head-leasing arrangements.”

Mr Balaretnaraja: We can take that on notice.

MR EMERSON: Okay, sure. Sorry, I thought—

Ms Rule: But I would just say quickly, we do not use head-leasing for financial reasons.

MR EMERSON: No, no, yes.

Ms Rule: We use head-leasing arrangements because it is better for particular program needs, rather than financial needs.

MR EMERSON: Better for certain tenants, sure. No, I know. Yes, that is why I am asking, I suppose. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Well, 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:

Berry, Ms Yvette, Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation

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

Pettersson, Mr Michael, Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations

Health and Community Services Directorate

Rule, Ms Catherine, Director-General

Sabellico, Ms Anne Maree, Deputy Director-General, Children, Families & Strategic Reform

Bogiatzis, Ms Vasiliki, Executive Group Manager, Inclusion

Thompson, Ms Melanie, Acting Executive Branch Manager, Support Services for Children

Evans, Ms Jacinta, Executive Group Manager, Strategic Policy

Saballa, Ms Melanie, Executive Branch Manager, Next Steps Reform and Strategy Implementation

Grace, Ms Alison, Executive Branch Manager, Youth Justice and Adolescent Services

Kanellopoulos, Ms Maria, Chief Practitioner, Executive Branch Manager, Clinical Services and Practice Assurance

THE CHAIR: We welcome back Mr Michael Pettersson MLA, now in his capacity as Minister for Children, Youth and Families, and Ms Yvette Berry MLA, now in her capacity as Minister for Education and Early Childhood. We also welcome Dr Marisa Paterson MLA, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence. I recognise that Dr Paterson will be here for only the first 30 minutes of this session. 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 directly to questions.

MS BARRY: I thank ministers and officials for attending today. My first question is around accountability indicators in table 25, output 3.3. Can you explain why all but one of your indicators remain unchanged year on year?

Ms Rule: In general terms—and I have said this a number of times in hearings—all indicators across the Health and Community Services Directorate are under review. It is on the work program as part of the establishment of the new directorate. A number of the measures are now getting dated and do not really reflect the key things that we need to measure going forward in the new directorate, with some more contemporary programs. They have not been changed for a number of years and need to be updated. That is on the work program for the new directorate.

MS BARRY: Thank you. I appreciate that it is work that is currently being undertaken.

For example, the minimum age of criminal responsibility is a quite new program. Have you considered the changes that this would make? Have you considered how it would impact on CYPS, for example?

Ms Rule: Not as it relates to the strategic indicators at this point. As I said, they are all under review. We have a number of other ways of measuring. We look at operational performance, if you like. This is just one set of indicators in the performance of the programs that we are responsible for. There are a number of other ways in which we measure. There are a number of other data points that are relevant. For example, every day I get a report on the number of people in Bimberi. It includes the key demographics of young people in Bimberi and whether they are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders. There is a whole range of data points. That is really the point that I am trying to make, and this is just one set that we will review.

MS BARRY: Thank you. I hope that, in that review, you consider population growth and cost-of-living pressures—the impact on CYPS. I feel that these things should already be factored in because they are live issues. I would expect that an indicator would be for longer term—

Ms Rule: I agree. For example, the total number of children and young people for whom I have parental responsibility under the Children and Young People Act is fixed in these statements at 805. That does not reflect the fact that the growth in the number of children in out-of-home care has been very flat. As a proportion of the population, it is actually going down. You can measure these things in different ways. A raw count of numbers like that does not actually tell us whether we are doing better or worse in out-of-home care than we are aspiring to do. There is some work to do on those.

MS BARRY: Thank you.

MS CARRICK: We have health and wellbeing indicators. We talk about preventative health and we talk about mental health, loneliness and people's wellbeing. What are we doing to ensure that our different demographics, including youth, have something to do in their local communities to ensure that they have a sense of belonging to their communities, which is good for their mental health—that kind of preventative stuff? It is also in light of the fact that they will soon be barred from social media. Do you have a youth strategy to keep young people busy and engaged in their communities?

Ms Rule: We have a number of initiatives related to youth. We have the Youth Advisory Council whose role is to do exactly this sort of stuff—to advocate and advise government on things that young people in Canberra need or want. We have Youth Week. A range of activities happen around Youth Week that are all about community connection. We have a number of things in our individual portfolio areas that are relevant. I know that my colleagues in other directorates, such as the Education Directorate, as well as Sport and Rec, also do a lot of work on activities for young people. It is much broader than just what we do in the Health and Community Services Directorate. We undertake a number of initiatives in terms of the engagement of young people.

MS CARRICK: We have a recommendation from the Youth Coalition to co-design a new strategy with both young people and youth organisations that supports a whole-of-

government and community approach to support youth wellbeing. Is that being undertaken? It would also include a review of existing ACT government youth engagement mechanisms. Do we get together across portfolios on youth things and what can we do to support them?

Ms Bogiatzis: I am happy to take that question. I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. Within the Health and Community Services Directorate, we have a very small Office for Youth Engagement. It has just three FTEs. They work to bring young people together through a range of mechanisms to hear about their concerns and issues and also understand how we can make sure that policy in the ACT government is responsive to their needs and circumstances. One of the ways in which we do that is by working with the Youth Advisory Council, which brings together a diverse range of young people to share with the government their priorities and their concerns—the things that are important to them. We take policies or issues that we particularly want to consult with young people on to that council to develop them. That is the process. Also, every couple of years or so we bring together the ACT Youth Assembly. The Youth Assembly is a great opportunity to bring together young people aged between 12 and 25 to discuss youth issues and propose solutions directly to the ACT government.

MS CARRICK: What have the Youth Advisory Council and the forum that you have just mentioned said, and what has been implemented?

Ms Bogiatzis: Every Youth Assembly that convenes brings together their findings. Some initiatives that have been delivered have been informed by the Youth Assembly. An example of that is MindMap, which is an ACT youth mental health portal. That was launched in October 2021 in response to Assembly recommendations on youth mental health navigation. It was co-designed with young people. That is one thing. The other topic that was of particular interest some years ago with the Youth Assembly was around consent in relationships. This is something that came from the Assembly, and then the Youth Advisory Council took that on and delivered a consent booklet that they could share within their community. Another is the Young Workers Advice Service, which is a free and confidential service that was established to support young workers in the ACT—workers under the age of 25—on employment rights. It provides advice on wages, entitlements and workplace conditions. The service is run by Unions ACT, as a peak union council in Canberra.

MS CARRICK: When social media bans come in, how do we bring young people together, out of their houses, to do things? In Weston Creek or Woden, they could go to the skate park. What other amenities are there? Where would I, as a community leader, go to find young people outside of skate parks?

Mr Pettersson: That is a really good question. I appreciate that you are looking to a whole-of-government response to deal with some of these issues. That is not necessarily the central role of the portfolio for children, youth and families. Officials have spoken to some of the entities that already exist, such as the Youth Advisory Council and the important role that it plays. It generates a work program of its own initiative but also responds to consultation from across government. That is largely responsive. It is incumbent on government to take a whole-of-government approach to it. I am largely confident that most directorates are reasonably attuned to the needs of young people. Some of the issues you have highlighted are broad and complex. It is increasingly clear

that social disconnection and isolation are real and prevalent problems in our community across all age cohorts, but they are particularly experienced by young people. The solution to that is not straightforward. It will require all-of-society engagement and maybe changing the shape of this city to better foster connection.

Regarding how we engage young people in light of a social media ban is an interesting question. I largely suspect young people will always find a way to connect and engage, whether that is through social media or another forum or entity. Young people are inherently curious about the world and want to interact with each other. Quietly, I suspect they will find a way around the social media ban very quickly. I am not entirely sure that this line of questioning is entirely fruitful, but the issue raised is important. As a government, we take it seriously. In the small components of this portfolio that are responsible for supporting young people, we do everything we can.

MS CARRICK: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: You are not the lead for whole-of-government engagement across this issue—across the needs of young people in a broad sense? Is that correct?

Mr Pettersson: The portfolio provides a range of services. It has an advocacy role and it facilitates a range of functions. The needs of all young people are not directly handled through this portfolio. For example, the health services a young person needs are primarily addressed through Canberra Health Services. A certain cohort of services are provided in this portfolio, but it is not the entire remit of services that young people engage with.

THE CHAIR: Do you have a policy role that brings together a whole-of-government perspective for children and young people, or does that sit with someone else, or is it just not done?

Mr Pettersson: You could probably identify, based on who is sitting at the table, that multiple ministers are responsible for the interests of children and young people across the ACT government. Does it neatly sit within one portfolio? You could look at some strategies that exist and seek to bring together, cross-government, the interests and actions required by government to support children. But holistically, going to Ms Carrick's line of questioning, we want to support—

THE CHAIR: So no one minister is the coordination point for whole-of-government policy on children and young people?

Mr Pettersson: I am the Minister for Children, Youth and Families. I have the Minister for Education and Early Childhood next to me.

THE CHAIR: Yes. So that would be two ministers, not one minister. I think we have the answer. Miss Nuttall, do you have a supplementary on this one?

MISS NUTTALL: Yes. It may be that I just did not catch it—and I think Ms Carrick asked the question, so full credit to her: is there a plan to develop a youth strategy?

Ms Rule: Not at this time. That does not mean that we will not. We are always, through

the Youth Advisory Council, engaging with young people about the best ways to represent their needs. We have not yet undertaken that work. We may in the future. We have a number of other documents. There is a commitment to ACT's children and young people that expires this year, so it may well be that, beyond this year, we will look at what the best framework might be.

MISS NUTTALL: Beautiful. Given that we have just had a conversation about whole-of-government coordination on the wellbeing and rights of children and young people, can you see where a strategy may be of benefit?

Ms Rule: Yes; I can. What we know about developing strategies like that is that they can be useful to a point, but it is actually about the initiatives underneath that we deliver that make a real difference to the lives of children and young people and their families. It needs to be a mix of both of those things. A strategy is not the answer to all of the problems. That is the point I am making.

MISS NUTTALL: It is not the silver bullet, and funding helps too. In terms of initiatives for young people and their representation, we have heard talk of a youth parliament, separate to the Youth Assembly. Does the ACT government have any connection or any facilitating role on that?

Mr Pettersson: The executive does not. I understand that there is a connection or a relationship of some nature with this parliament, so, by definition, yes. Our energies are largely focused on the Youth Assembly that we coordinate.

MISS NUTTALL: That is helpful to know. Thank you. Other groups that we have certainly found really helpful to refer to include the Children and Young People Commissioner's Young Influencer Network, which provides feedback on a fairly regular basis. Do you, as government, ever make use of their services?

Mr Pettersson: I meet frequently with the commissioner. I assume that the advice and guidance she provides to me is informed by those interactions. I have not met specifically with the people you make reference to, but it sounds like an interesting connection to make.

MISS NUTTALL: Absolutely. We often find that young people's wellbeing and engagement in our work is drastically improved if they are facilitated to engage. Previously, the Children and Young People's Commissioner flagged that it would be great to have resourcing for an extra FTE in her office to work with young people to engage with Assembly processes and develop young-people-friendly terms of reference. Have you had conversations with her about that? Have you turned your mind to the merit of such resourcing?

Mr Pettersson: The commissioner has not raised that issue with me. I cannot speak to others. I would observe that the idea being suggested for further resources to support young people to better engage in civics and understand our democratic process is a very good one. It has been recommended by countless forums, entities, organisations and individuals. It is one that I am keenly aware of and, in a general sense, very supportive of. In general, it is hard for young people to engage in our democratic processes, whether that is through the structure of them or a lack of understanding, so any action

undertaken to improve that is very good.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: At this point, I will check: are there any questions for Minister Paterson before she has to head off in about 10 minutes?

MS BARRY: I have one question. I will put it on notice. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Dr Paterson, we can let you go.

Dr Paterson: Thank you very much, Mr Cocks.

THE CHAIR: Ms Tough, we are up to your question.

MS TOUGH: Thank you, Chair. I am interested in how the government is continuing to support vulnerable children and families, particularly in areas like early intervention programs.

Mr Pettersson: That is a wonderful question. I have some officials who would love to speak to that.

Ms Rule: I might throw to Ms Sabellico to outline some of the changes that we have made in relation to our reforms in Children, Youth and Families, including child protection—ones that focus on early intervention as opposed to crisis-point intervention, which has been a hallmark of the system. We can give you a bit of an overview of that.

Ms Sabellico: As Ms Rule said, we have been undertaking quite a significant reform across our Children, Youth and Families division. It has been two-pronged. One looks at what we need to do in terms of implementing the Next Steps action plan, which is a broader cross-government strategy. I will hand over to my colleague in a moment about that. The other component is about how we look at changing the way in which the division of Children, Youth and Families works. We have responsibility for things like child safety, out-of-home care and youth justice. We have been embarking on a reform program. We are about 18 months into a five-year reform program. Part of that has been driven by changes to our legislation. In the legislation now our key principle is to look at early support for families. We have really challenged ourselves in terms of what means from a child protection and child safety perspective.

We have undertaken changes to the way we look at practicing our models of service delivery and also the way we manage reports that come in. We have invested more substantially in what we call our family services model, which is for our Family Response and Engagement team. They are situated at our front end, along with the intake, where the reports come in. Primarily, that is about how we divert families from going into the child safety proper area. We are seeing great success there at the moment. We have a First Nations Family Response and Engagement area as well and, from that, we have seen about a 33 per cent decrease in substantiations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, in terms of listed children, because we are looking at working with families to sustain children at home. That work has been very

successful in being able to achieve that. Another focus is that, if we do need to bring a child into care for a period of time, it is for a very short period of time. We have already seen, in 18 months, about a 35 per cent reduction since 2020 in median days that an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander young person has been in care. Those reforms are really seeing results.

We have also undertaken some work in looking at engaging and building our community sector, in terms of delivery of what we now call Sustaining Families packages. Those are again around diversion from child protection or child safety. We now have a range of providers that have Sustaining Families packages in place. They provide intensive family support and preservation services to sustain children and families and also restoration to help get them back to families really quickly. We are changing the whole nature of the way the child protection system works and we are seeing significant results from that.

MS TOUGH: What are some of the pathways for families to get those early supports?

Ms Sabellico: In the way the system is currently set up, we would receive reports from other directorates as well as community providers. As they come through, they are considered by our Family Response and Engagement practitioners. They would say, “We think there is an opportunity here to work with the family.” They might need some in-home support. They might need case coordination to look at how we can support them to ensure that children are getting to school and those sorts of things. Do they need something like a cleaner to assist once a week? There is a lot of practical support, as well as support in understanding good child-parent interaction or what they need to do to provide support for their child who may have some behaviours of challenge—how they work with that and respond appropriately. There is a raft of ways. We do that now across both our services and the range of providers that we have in place. I will see whether Melanie has anything that she wants to add in terms of the broader Next Steps reform program.

Ms Saballa: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. As you all may be aware, Next Steps for Our Kids is the ACT strategy for strengthening families and keeping children and young people safe. It is an eight-year reform strategy for the ACT government. There are a couple of things I could add to Anne Maree Sabellico’s summary. One of the things about the Next Steps strategy is that it envisages a future where children and young people in the ACT are safe, strong and connected and are living their best life. It is built on the principles of early intervention, cultural safety, child-centred practice and enduring relationships. As Ms Sabellico explained, under Next Steps we are implementing a more intensive family support preservation and restoration model. That investment is shifting from tertiary interventions—the more statutory and costly interventions—to earlier support for families via internal reform, as Ms Sabellico outlined, and also the establishment of the Children, Young People and Families Panel. This includes continued and expanded investment in earlier and targeted family support services to ensure children and young people can live safely at home.

I want to add to the point about referrals. As Ms Sabellico explained, Sustaining Families is one of the service packages that is being delivered by providers. While the key referral pathway is from Children, Youth and Families, families or community aid

services can directly refer into these services. It means families can access the support that they need prior to engagement with the child protection system. Of course, we have universal services available to families in the community. I am thinking of the child and family centres which offer a welcoming soft entry for families to engage with a range of supports.

There are two more things I want to add. One of the things that we have progressed is Yerrabi Yurwang as a preferred provider on the Children, Young People and Families Panel. Yerrabi is supporting many families through family preservation, restoration and intensive family support services for children in care and at risk of entry into care—that is, preventative and diversion intensive family support. The final point to add to this early intervention discussion is that, in July 2024, amendments to the Children and Young People Act 2008 expanded the role of the director-general to support the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children, young people and families, with a focus on early intervention and family centred responses.

MS TOUGH: Thank you.

MS BARRY: I have a supplementary across all the responses that you have provided. Chair, I crave your indulgence. My first supplementary will go to you, Ms Sabellico. You mentioned that there is currently a decrease in the number of ATSI children coming into CYPS's remit. Has there been any consideration of embedding kinship care principles in CYPS decision-making?

Ms Sabellico: Yes. As part of our reforms, we are clearly also embedding all aspects of the child placement principle for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Part of that is acknowledging that children are always better off with family. Therefore, if they need to come into care for a short period or longer, the first priority should always be kin. As part of that, we have a family group conferencing team and staff that look at family findings, so that we can look at an array of family arrangements that we may have available to us to work with the family to support the children. That is absolutely part of our hierarchy of decision-making, and that is embedded in all of our legislation, policy and practice guidelines.

MS BARRY: Thank you. I have one more for you and then one for you, Ms Saballa. What role do ACCOs play in ATSI children placement decisions?

Ms Sabellico: We have established Yerrabi Yurwang as our ACCO under the Children, Youth and Families Panel. Our ACT Aboriginal Children's Forum brings together all of the providers under the panel. We have embedded cultural clauses into all contracts. They talk about the cultural capability and uplift of services and our expectations. Those clauses were developed and signed off by the Our Booris, Our Way Implementation Oversight Committee. They are now embedded. And we are using the Aboriginal Children's Forum as a way to look at how we appropriately get consistency around interpretation and application of those clauses. We have had our first meeting and have the second coming up fairly soon. The first meeting looked at how we audit our practices to make sure that we are all achieving the outcomes we are expecting to see, including consultation with ACCOs at those points.

I have regular contact with the CEO and her deputy as well in terms of discussing any

matters that we need to look at in having broader consultation. Over time, we will look at how the ACCO also comes in to support some of the front-end decision-making. At the moment, we have our First Nations team, and that is fully Aboriginal-led. They are the ones who look at consulting with who they need to in order to consider all matters on a case-by-case basis.

MS BARRY: Thank you. That is really useful. You mentioned Next Steps for Our Kids. My question is around the evaluation for that. My understanding is that, 18 months into the program, you developed an evaluation framework. I want to understand how you mitigate for the risk that the evaluation framework will essentially be skewed towards what the program is currently achieving, not what it was set out to achieve.

Ms Saballa: I am writing it down so I can think through the response, because it is a really good question. Thank you very much. I can respond to it now. We are looking at the evaluation of such significant reform under Next Steps for Our Kids. The predecessor strategy, A Step Up for Our Kids, had a really strong focus on evaluation. That has been very useful foundational work for us. We are in the process of procuring external expertise to come in and develop the evaluation strategy, the outcomes framework, the performance management framework and the accompanying service level agreement for Children, Youth and Families.

To your question, as I understood it—the evaluation of the program and making sure that we evaluate what we set out to achieve—there will be such benefit in having an external evaluation framework established in consultation with key stakeholders that we will then use as the basis for our evaluation work.

MS BARRY: Thank you. Why was there a decision to not embed the evaluation framework at the start of the program? Why was that not considered?

Ms Saballa: We did not want to rush that process. There have been a lot of priorities that we have been focusing on in standing up the first pieces of work under Next Steps for Our Kids. It is work that we are focusing on now. But a great deal of work happened previously that will be able to inform it.

Ms Sabellico: Ms Barry, it is not that we have not started to embed it. In contracts, we have very clear key performance indicators, but we have also put into those contracts the need for all our panel providers to participate in the development of the evaluation framework going forward, with the expectation that the performance management part of that will be a live review process. So, instead of having an evaluation report midway and then a retrospective look at what has or has not worked, we will be able to use it as an ongoing piece of continuous improvement—a data dashboard that we can look at far more regularly so that we can see how we make any changes that we might need as we go along, because we should be able to see that through our performance management processes.

MS BARRY: I am sorry, but how do you have KPIs if you do not have an evaluation framework to really show the effectiveness of your KPIs?

Ms Sabellico: We have an outcomes framework that is used. That defines the KPIs,

and we will now look at working across both the government and the non-government service delivery as part of the performance management framework, which is a key piece to the evaluation.

MS BARRY: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Just to clarify, I think the heart of Ms Barry's question was about how you will make sure the evaluation will address the original underlying objectives, rather than evaluating this as implemented, which of course runs the risk that any changes between original policy and implementation get lost.

Ms Rule: I am not sure I follow exactly what your question is in there, Mr Cocks.

THE CHAIR: It sounds like after implementing the program is when you are developing the evaluation framework. Most programs seem to get modified to some degree into what is implementable. How are you making sure you are evaluating the actual original objectives and taking that into consideration rather than just, "Well, this is what was implemented and this is what it achieved"?

Ms Rule: The Next Steps policy has some very clear policy objectives, and they are the objectives against which we will evaluate the success of Next Steps as an initiative, if you like—a whole set of programs. What we are working through at the moment is the best way to do that. As you know from our conversations about strategic indicators, just counting things or ticking a box as to whether something happened or not is actually not necessarily going to tell us whether we have achieved those objectives.

THE CHAIR: I think that is the heart of the question.

Ms Rule: That is where we are engaging with the stakeholders, with other parts of the sector and with academics about the best way to look at whether we have achieved the objectives. How do you best measure those? Because what you are essentially trying to measure is: have we done better for the young people and the families who come into contact with our system? Some of those are very long-term measures. So working through what is the best way to evaluate those things is a piece of work that we are doing now, noting that Next Steps is a long-term strategy. This is not a one- or two-year initiative; this is a long-term strategy about reforming the system.

THE CHAIR: It sounds like the evaluation framework will be tied back to those original policy objectives.

Ms Rule: Absolutely.

THE CHAIR: That is, I think, what we were looking for.

MS BARRY: My next question is around the Best Start Phase 1 Action Plan 2023-2025. Action No 23 of the Best program relates to improving connections between maternal, children and family health, the Child Development Service, Child and Family Centres and Community Paediatrics. Can you tell me about the progress on the initiatives and what further developments we would need in this budget cycle?

Ms Evans: Thank you for the question, Ms Barry. I am going to take a minute to get some notes up, but what I can say is that we have worked through the phase 1 action plan, and there are a number of actions that still require a little bit to complete them. But, across government, it has been a valuable opportunity to really focus in on what is needed for families across those areas that you have already described. We realise that, for many families, some very simple things would make a difference for them and their children in those first thousand days. The phase 1 plan is actually completed—or the timeframe for that—and we are working on the phase 2 action plan at the moment.

MS BARRY: What information is available on the phase 1 plan in terms of outcomes?

Ms Evans: I am just checking my notes, because I cannot remember whether we have published it yet. Can I come back to you in a minute, Ms Barry? I will not hold up the committee while I just quickly find that detail for you.

MS BARRY: That is no problem. The next question I have is whether parents can opt out of these arrangements. I imagine that there are considerable risks to women who are experiencing domestic and family violence, so that option would be useful.

Ms Evans: The Best Start plan is fairly broad. It does not go specifically to domestic and family violence in that way—and we obviously covered off on a whole range of programs that do support women who need that kind of specific support. The intent of the Best Start plan is to give parents a really good understanding of small things they can do to make a difference for their child's development in those first couple of years. So the specific needs of people with domestic and family violence are not necessarily picked up in that Best Start plan.

MS BARRY: Sorry; I was not clear with the question. The question was around the protection of private information and whether parents could opt out of the program considering that leaking their information in a domestic and family violence circumstance might be of significant concern.

Ms Evans: Of course. In developing the plan we did not use anyone's personal information.

MS BARRY: Okay; thank you. What platform will be used to share this information?

Ms Evans: My team has just sent me a note to say that we are still continuing with phase 1 at the moment and so it has not been published as final. We have not published that update but we certainly will be doing that. There are a couple of areas that need further activity, and we continue to work on those. We will expect to see that phase 2 will pick up and continue with some of the work that is in phase 1. But we certainly will make it public when we get to that point.

MS BARRY: Thank you.

MR BRADDOCK: I have a question about youth foyers. Firstly, what is the current timeline for the tender process for the youth foyer in Woden?

Ms Rule: That is a Housing question, Mr Braddock. So that was in the previous session.

But it will make you happy to know that we did answer those questions in the previous session.

MR BRADDOCK: My apologies. I came in halfway through that session, so I obviously missed that one. How involved will the ACT government be with the new Youth Parliament.

Ms Rule: The Youth Parliament is an initiative of the commonwealth.

MR BRADDOCK: So the ACT government will not have any involvement in that?

Ms Rule: It is possible that at some point they may reach out to us to ask us to be involved. But, as far as I am aware, that has not happened yet.

Mr Pettersson: Just to clarify: which Youth Parliament are you referring to?

MR BRADDOCK: The ACT Youth Parliament.

Mr Pettersson: As in the one, I think, by YMCA? Are you referencing that one or are you talking about the ACT Youth Assembly?

MR BRADDOCK: Yes.

Ms Rule: Sorry; I misinterpreted.

Mr Pettersson: No, that is all right. That was touched on earlier. So you have done yourself a dirty twice here.

MR BRADDOCK: I am going to give up at this rate.

Mr Pettersson: The short answer on that one is that I understand there is a relationship through the Assembly and they are providing some assistance or facilitation. The executive, I guess, are more focused on the Youth Assembly.

MR BRADDOCK: Okay. Thank you.

MISS NUTTALL: I am interested in asking about Bimberi and young people's experience in Bimberi, if that is okay. Can I confirm what screening you do in terms of disability when young people enter Bimberi?

Ms Rule: We do some general health screening when young people enter into Bimberi. But, on entry into Bimberi, we do not typically do screening for disability. It is a general health screening that would take into account that young person's disability, but we do not screen for disability per se. It is not a mechanism where I would expect undiagnosed disability to typically be identified.

MISS NUTTALL: Are there mechanisms throughout a young person's stay at Bimberi where there is opportunity to diagnose them with a disability?

Ms Rule: When young people are in Bimberi they are often connected to health and

other services for the first time in a long time. It may be that there are supports through Justice Health and other mechanisms that we look to put in place for young people with disability. So it is possible.

MISS NUTTALL: I am interested—probably just because of my background—whether there is an intent to screen for ADHD, as something that can continue to affect you wherever you are and that you would have particular needs for.

Ms Rule: Again, it is not part of our standard process to screen young people in Bimberi for ADHD. But, through the health services or possibly through the connection to education that they receive in Bimberi, it may be that they get referred for other things if ADHD were suspected in that process. But it is not part of our standard sort of health offering, if you like, at Bimberi to screen people for ADHD.

MISS NUTTALL: If, by virtue of being connected with health services and education services, pick up on a disability, what accommodations can be made as you go to meet the needs of young people in the centre?

Ms Rule: It depends on the nature of the disability. But we do try to make sure that we accommodate the needs of all young people in Bimberi. That can include particular disability, health, mental health and other supports. But it really is an assessment on a case-by-case basis about what that young person might need.

MISS NUTTALL: If they come to you with something and say, for example, “Hey, I reckon I might have ADHD. Can you help me with that?” how long does it tend to take to get in a professional that might be able to work with them?

Ms Rule: The health services are provided by Justice Health, not by the Health and Community Services Directorate. So I do not think I could give you an average sort of timeframe as to how long it would take to respond. It is also important to note that the majority of young people in Bimberi are on remand, which means they can cycle in and out quickly. So we do not necessarily have them with us in Bimberi for a long time. So connection to those services in a way that can lead to those sort of more complex health needs being dealt with is not necessarily something that will happen in Bimberi, but we do try and make sure that people are connected to supports that they might need upon exit from Bimberi.

MISS NUTTALL: Forgive me; I am not familiar with the extent of case management you do when you are supporting a young person that has left, whether that is on remand or not. Do you continue to facilitate, I guess, support for them with their health needs or their disability needs through Children, Youth and Families?

Ms Rule: I might ask Ms Grace to talk a little bit more about that aspect of work with the young people.

Ms Grace: So your question was about young people upon their release from Bimberi, whether that be following remand or from sentence?

MISS NUTTALL: Yes, and throughcare.

Ms Grace: A lot of those young people who go onto a community-based order, whether that be bail, a good behaviour order or similar, are supervised by Youth Justice and Adolescent Services through their case practitioner, and their care team will continue to support that young person through referrals but also some of those practical supports to make sure that they can get to those services, working with their families to make sure that they are aware of referrals that may have been made while they were in custody or things that might benefit them within the community to help those things to happen.

MISS NUTTALL: Noting that oftentimes, especially when you are accessing services that are public, they have a long waiting list, are the care teams able to advocate on behalf of the young person to get support when they need it?

Ms Rule: It depends on the circumstances of the young people and the service for which they are needing support. As I said earlier, we try to make sure that those young people are connected to the best support to meet their needs, but it does not mean that we can fast-track them through some service systems.

MISS NUTTALL: On needs, you very kindly accommodated us for a visit back in autumn. It was already pretty cold, and I can imagine the challenges in winter. I have heard that young people are really feeling the cold, especially in their units. What measures do you currently have in place to keep young people in Bimberi warm?

Ms Grace: Young people are provided with a uniform while they are in Bimberi. That includes winter pyjamas. It also includes tracksuit pants and jumpers. We have been looking at different, warmer options as well, such as fleeces. Young people can have access to additional doonas and blankets within their room as well and turn up the heating.

MISS NUTTALL: Are there any restrictions on their access to requesting blankets? Is it dependent on supply? Is it dependent on behaviour at all? If they request it, are they given a blanket 100 per cent of the time, or extra doonas?

Ms Grace: The only restriction would be if Health have made recommendations that the young person would need non-rippable bedding.

MISS NUTTALL: Are you able to facilitate them staying warm in that case?

Ms Grace: Yes, we can. We can provide them with warm pyjamas and we can provide them with extra bedding, but we need to make sure that the young people are safe.

Ms Rule: But we would never deny people access to the things that they need on the basis of their behaviour.

Ms Grace: No.

MISS NUTTALL: Or in general, I am assuming?

Ms Rule: In general, yes. We are not punishing them further by making them cold.

MISS NUTTALL: I understand that numbers change day to day, but how often are you

close to or over capacity at Bimberi?

Ms Rule: We are not over capacity. Over the last few years, we have not been over capacity. We are running at the moment somewhere between 20 and 30. In this week we have been closer to 20 than 30, but the numbers do go up and down quite considerably day to day and week to week.

MISS NUTTALL: Is there a threshold that you track for close to capacity that sort of raises an alarm or a particular threshold where you go, “This is not ideal”?

Ms Rule: Ms Grace can talk to the capacity at Bimberi and how we manage that.

Ms Grace: We look at operational capacity on a daily basis. We need to look at the number of young people that we have in our care at the time and also the number of staff that we have available. We have a number of about 21 that we like to look towards to see whether we are over that number. But it is still a daily assessment of the number of young people and the number of staff that we have to be able to facilitate the centre on that daily basis.

MISS NUTTALL: If, for example, there are not enough staff to meet the ratios or support that number of 21, what does that mean for young people’s wellbeing in terms of being able to get outside, access programs and exercise some autonomy?

Ms Grace: Young people attend school each school day, and that looks at the number of staff for education and the programs that we have available for the day. We take into consideration the visits that young people might have and what health services are being delivered on the day and then we facilitate as much of that as we possibly can.

MISS NUTTALL: Is there a minimum threshold that you meet in terms of, for example, number of hours outside or in education et cetera?

Ms Grace: We have a minimum requirement of two hours of outside access to activities such as physical activity and also outside time. That is offered to the young people. On a rainy day, as you would appreciate, they do not often take that up. But it is a requirement that young people receive a minimum of two hours of outdoor activity each day. We also try to ensure that all young people have access to as much education as possible. That program is facilitated each day to make sure we can maximise that access.

MISS NUTTALL: As much access to education as possible is good but, when you are in compulsory schooling, there is a set six hours a day. Are there those sorts of set requirements? I am interested in how much education is considered “nice to have” when you are doing staffing ratios, for example.

Ms Grace: Our ideal would be to have all young people at education all day, but we need to consider each day how many teachers there are, how many staff that we have to facilitate those programs and the mix of young people that we have at the time.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you.

MS BARRY: Going to Miss Nuttall's question around assessments, I am trying to understand the role that Therapeutic Support plays in referrals on mental health supports for young people.

Ms Rule: Young people in Bimberi?

MS BARRY: In Bimberi, yes.

Ms Rule: The Therapeutic Support Panel do not typically work with young people in Bimberi just because they are in Bimberi. They have a caseload of young people that they are doing work with. Sometimes those young people spend some time in Bimberi. But there is not a role for the Therapeutic Support Panel just because a young person is in Bimberi. Does that make sense? Did I explain that?

MS BARRY: Yes, it makes sense, but I would consider that there is a role for the Therapeutic Support Panel for young people who are experiencing mental health, whether or not they are in Bimberi. Are they actively undertaking that role whether or not the young person is in Bimberi or specifically for young people in Bimberi?

Ms Rule: The role of the Therapeutic Support Panel is defined in the legislation as it relates to the raising of the minimum age of criminal responsibility.

MS BARRY: Yes.

Ms Rule: So they have a specific role and they have a specific caseload that they work with. For many of those young people that they work with, absolutely that includes having a role around mental health.

MS BARRY: Okay. Thank you.

Mr Pettersson: Would you the chair to come up and provide some more information on the role of the TSP?

MS BARRY: I think I can put whatever additional questions I have on notice, if that is all right. I am just conscious of time. My next question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood. Since commencing this role, there have been significant concerns raised with me around self-harm for children and suicide rates as well. I was just wondering what additional early intervention resources you have put into ACT schools as a result of this in the budget.

Ms Berry: It is not really this part of the committee inquiry.

MS BARRY: It is not?

Ms Berry: No; that would have been better in Education. You can put it on notice.

THE CHAIR: Are you happy to take that on notice for her and—

Ms Berry: Me? I thought she would put some questions through, if she wants more questions asked, for Education.

THE CHAIR: Are you happy to put those through on notice then?

MS BARRY: Yes, I can put those through. I have one more question, if that is not for this session. I note that the Child Development Service provided more hours of service in 2023-25 than anticipated, which was partially explained by increased complexity. But the estimated hours that they provided for 2025-26 is the same. Can I assume, for this, that there is increased complexity? How are you expecting to resolve it?

Ms Berry: Yes, I think you can assume that there is an increase in complexity. That is definitely what we have been learning, which explains, in a lot of ways, the increase to applications for assessment. But, with the additional funding and the add to the age of the child to do the assessments, that is picking up some of that slack, I guess, that some of those people that might have been waiting for assessments can now get those assessments through the Child Development Service.

Ms Bogiatzis: Minister, I am happy to expand on that response. In the 2024-25 financial year, the Child Development Service did in fact expand its offering—we call that the expanded service. We have been funded to provide longer-term therapeutic early intervention services for children aged 24 to 36 months who have or at risk of developmental delay. One of the reasons why this funding came through is because the Child Development Service is seeing an increase in complexity of the children presenting to the service. Further to that, the extended service, in being able to provide that longer-term intervention, is really able to do that earlier support and that earlier response when that complexity is presenting in that age group.

MS BARRY: Specifically to autism assessments, do you provide that assessment in a format that would support referral to NDIS?

Ms Bogiatzis: Yes, Ms Barry. The Child Development Service continues to provide free autism assessments to children up to the age of 12 years in the Canberra community. The autism assessments are delivered in different ways—through telehealth, face to face or hybrid ways, where we bring together multidisciplinary supports to do that. The autism assessments provide that assessment that then can be used to support an NDIS package process.

MS BARRY: What supports do you provide to the families if an assessment requires an NDIS application?

Ms Bogiatzis: Thank you, Ms Barry. I will pass to Ms Thompson to talk that through.

Ms Thompson: Children coming for an autism assessment go through an assessment process and, as Vasiliki mentioned, there are three different pathways that children receive that assessment. What is provided is a very comprehensive report that meets the guidelines of NDIS to ensure that, when children come through our service and are going to the NDIS to apply for a package, NDIS have all of the information that is required. Within that report is a whole host of recommendations and information for parents about how they can best support their child and information around support services as well that they can access.

MS BARRY: What qualifications do you need to be able to conduct that assessment under that service program?

Ms Thompson: the qualifications differ depending on the assessment that is happening. For a single diagnostic assessment, it is a clinical psychologist and, for a multidisciplinary assessment, which is where you will have a psychologist and usually a speech pathologist or an occupational therapist, we establish a multidisciplinary team. They are the qualifications that are required.

MS BARRY: We know that GPs would be able to conduct autism assessments—

Ms Thompson: I do not think they can.

MS BARRY: I thought it was coming on that GPs would be able to.

Ms Rule: It is under consideration, but we do not yet have that program in place.

MS BARRY: Has there been consideration given to how that would affect this assessment? Is there some cross-work happening?

Ms Rule: There is clearly unmet demand in terms of these types of diagnoses. My understanding of the measure for GPs to be able to diagnose is that it gives more supply, if you like, to meet that demand. So it would perhaps alleviate some of the pressure on the Child Development Service. But it is just more supply, is the kind of answer to the question.

MS BARRY: What are the linkages between the assessment and the development of behaviour management plans for ELCs or schools?

Ms Thompson: In terms of the provision of reports that are provided to families, as part of the process, if a child is in an early childhood education care setting or a school, we seek input from the school or the early educator to ensure that the information that we are being provided is as accurate as possible across the settings that the child is engaging with. In the provision of the report to the family, there are recommendations in there that families can take to their school, and schools can contact our service if they have any queries around that.

MS BARRY: So you do provide that to the school?

Ms Thompson: Yes, definitely.

MS CARRICK: Where a child has development concerns, assumedly that is identified by the school or the childcare or the parents. Years ago, there used to be the early intervention units. Do we still have those early intervention units or are there places that you go for intervention?

Ms Bogiatzis: The place that you would go is the Child Development Service. The Child Development Service provides screening, assessment, advice and referral for children from birth to six years. That is really where there is a concern about their development. Families can also be referred into the Child Development Service, like

you said, from someone else in their life that is concerned or could make a referral in, and the Child Development Service offers drop-in clinics.

MS CARRICK: So where are they?

Ms Bogiatzis: Geographically?

MS CARRICK: Yes.

Ms Bogiatzis: They are all across Canberra.

Ms Thompson: I am happy to answer that. The Child Development Service offers drop-in clinics across our three allied health professions. We offer occupational therapy drop-in clinics, speech pathology drop-in clinics and also physiotherapy drop-in clinic. We deliver those services across the three CFCs and also onsite at our Holder service, where the Child Development Service operates out of. In addition to that, we also provide assessment and review appointments for families across those four locations. The intention of that is to ensure that families can access services in their local region.

MS CARRICK: I imagine there would be a lot of parent that would be wanting to access speech pathology. Are there delays in accessing those services that you have mentioned?

Ms Thompson: Currently, we have full capacity of our speech pathologists, which is really exciting for us, given the workforce challenges that we know exist within allied health. Currently there is, I think, a two- to four-week wait.

MS CARRICK: That is not too bad. Everyone talks about more complex cases. What is more complex these days? What sorts of things might be more complex?

Ms Thompson: The complexities that we are seeing for families that are coming through to our service are psychosocial complexities. I think there are complexities for people in terms of stress and pressure around cost of living. There are complexities around people's access to information relating specifically to their child. Sometimes there is overwhelm of information for parents. Sifting and wading through that can be really confusing for families. So we provide a really safe place for families to have those conversations around child development, milestones and what sits within normal ages and stages. We are also seeing greater complexity in the behaviours that are exhibited by children—an increase in anxiety, in particular.

MS CARRICK: How do you connect with the schools and the teachers that are having to manage the children in the classrooms where they might disrupt? How does that integration work?

Ms Thompson: The schools, as we have described, can refer into our service. We offer a service for zero to six-year-olds. So schools can refer into our service, and we will work with the parents around provision of information and also building parental capacity, if children come through for an assessment. We have really good relationships with schools, where we, with parental consent and family consent, of course, share that information with schools so that there can be consistency.

MISS NUTTALL: Just on early childhood education and care settings, I have heard from the sector that it is sometimes difficult to get allied health support for young people in care. What sort of outreach do you do to early childhood education and care settings?

Ms Thompson: With early childhood education and care providers, we annually go out directly and talk to services about what we do and drop off pamphlets and brochures to ensure that they are aware, so they can share with their families the kinds of services that we can provide and the pathways in.

MISS NUTTALL: It is encouraging to hear that. Do you receive feedback that there are enough people working in the Child Development Service to meet the needs of parents who would want to come along?

Ms Thompson: Yes.

MS CARRICK: With your case management systems, how do you ensure transparency in case management—not just necessarily the system, but in case management—and the decision-making process?

Ms Rule: Are you talking about in child protection?

MS CARRICK: Yes. Assumedly, there are cases in the Child Development Service too?

Ms Rule: The Child Development Service is an assessment and support service. The out-of-home-care system or child protection is a statutory system where we have decision-making authority over particular things. I do not think they are quite apples and apples. I can talk to you about the out-of-home-care system.

There are, for very good reasons, significant restrictions on the sharing of information under the Children and Young People Act, because maintaining confidentiality around those very sensitive matters and not identifying young people who are in care unless there is a reason to is a core principle of what we do. But we do have a number of mechanisms in terms of oversighting and reviewing decisions. Part of the Next Steps reform was to appoint, for the first time, a chief practitioner. The chief practitioner's role is to look across the casework that we are doing to ensure that that casework is being in a best practice manner.

We have a number of levels of decision review. We have a significant number of agencies who oversight: the Child and Young People Commissioner, the Human Rights Commission, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Young Persons Commissioner. There is a whole range of ways in which people have statutory roles in oversighting the decision-making that we are undertaking in the out-of-home-care system, and those are embedded within the legislation.

MS CARRICK: Would the Official Visitors have that sort of right?

Ms Rule: They do have a particular role, especially as it relates to young people in residential care and in Bimberi. So, yes, they are one of the oversights that we work

with under the Child and Young People Act.

MS CARRICK: The Jumbunna report has just out, and it talks about systemic racism. Have you thought about that in the context of child and family services?

Ms Rule: Yes. We have a significant amount of work underway in child protection around overrepresentation, working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and working with the Our Booris, Our Way implementation oversight committee on improving the way in which we do child protection work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. Ms Sabellico shared some data earlier that shows real promise in terms of the number of families that are being kept together and not coming into the statutory out-of-home-care system. We have done a lot of work already on ensuring that we are providing best practice to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families under the Children and Young People Act.

Ms Sabellico: I would just add that one of the key principles of our reform was about how we apply a systems approach to the elimination of application of conscious and unconscious bias in our decision-making. We have, in fact, set up case discussions groups where we have our Aboriginal staff leading the conversation about any matter that relates to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, particularly in terms of anywhere we are needing to take emergency action. They challenge and test the thinking around, that from a cultural perspective with our staff. It provides opportunities for live learning, development and building capability in that way as well.

Any other key point of decision, where we are looking at changing case direction, there is also requirement for that to occur. We have built those systems in place in order to continue to keep on challenging the application of what could be conscious or unconscious bias. It is far better to have a collective approach to looking at decision-making, rather than single point, which is kind of what was happening before our reforms.

Then, of course, we are also making sure that, in embedding our approaches to the way in which we undertake our casework with families, we have the capacity to do group supervision and ability to be able to look to make sure that everybody is open to objective critique around what they doing. Of course, that is one of the reasons why we looked to embed our clinical services and practice assurance area, which is led by our chief practitioner.

MS BARRY: Do you work with ACCOs like, particularly, Winnunga?

Ms Sabellico: We work with any and all ACCOs that work with our families. They would be part of care teams where they are involved. We work significantly with ACCOs that have been Care and Protection Organisation registered in order to be able to bring them into some of our systems, because they would then be able to have some of that sensitive and protected information shared as part of that accreditation.

MS BARRY: So does that include Winnunga?

Ms Rule: They are not registered as a provider, but we do work with them in terms of the health needs of individual young people and families. As Ms Sabellico said, we

work with any of the ACCOs that provide support, but there is a particular role for the ACCOs that are registered as Care and Protection Organisations under the legislation.

MS BARRY: It may be that you are not able to provide the information, but do you have the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers working in CYPS? Do you know what that number is? How many have you got?

Ms Rule: We have 41.

MS BARRY: What is their workload?

Ms Sabellico: We have done a lot of work in having a look at what sorts of roles and positions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff could undertake across the board, because we know it is a really challenging thing to be a frontline worker in a child protection system. We have a number of our staff in our First Nations team, and they are expert practitioners as well in their own right and that is where they choose to be. We also have other positions like family finding roles, kinship care support roles and cultural plan quality assurance roles—all of those sorts of things—to be able to ensure that we have our Aboriginal staff in very key positions. We have a number of senior Aboriginal staff now in leadership positions, and we have also looked to supplement for Aboriginal staff in our clinical services area as well, so that we are getting a view from all different aspects of applying our practice frameworks.

MS BARRY: You may not be able to tell me—so maybe take it on notice—but what is the workload, in terms of numbers, of a non-Aboriginal staff, for example, who works in CYPS compared to an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worker?

Ms Rule: We would only be able to produce that data for people who are doing case management. As Ms Sabellico said, there are a number of different roles that our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff undertake, and case management is just one of those roles.

MS BARRY: Can we do it for case management? It is just to see how much—

Ms Rule: We can certainly give you a range, in terms of where to where. We will take that on notice.

MS TOUGH: Ms Rules, you mentioned the chief practitioner. I understand the chief practitioner first started in the role in September, and they are our first chief practitioner in the child protection and youth justice services work. I am interested in what the chief practitioner's work has been to day and any tangible differences families and community should expect to see in the coming year.

Ms Rule: Ms Kanellopoulos is our Chief Practitioner, so I welcome her to the table to talk about what she has been doing.

Ms Kanellopoulos: Thank you. Good afternoon, everyone. I am Chief Practitioner for Children, Youth and Families and I also hold the title of Executive Branch Manager of the Clinical Services and Practice Assurance Branch, also within Children, Youth and Families. I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. Thank you for your

question. You will have to excuse me because I am losing my voice.

The establishment of the Clinical Services and Practice Assurance branch, which we fondly refer to as CSPA, and the appointment of the chief practitioner, as you mentioned, in September of last year brings us in line with other states and territories in a senior level appointment of a position and branch with a focus on contemporary practice, continuous improvement, leadership development, broader capability development, stakeholder engagement and support in the delivery of high-level service offerings for the children and young people and their families that receive a service from Children, Youth and Families.

During the establishment period, and now as the appointed inaugural Chief Practitioner, work has been undertaken to establish the Clinical Services and Practice Assurance Branch, with a primary focus on capability and workforce development, again, as I have mentioned, practice and clinical service support offerings, the continuing work of Melaleuca Place, which is our therapeutic recovery centre for zero to 12-year-olds, with a focus on expanding services to include a number of clinicians that undertake the Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics, also known as NMT or brain-mapping work.

That is a modality of assessment that provides important information about a child's brain development in response to trauma and adversity and how this presents in behaviours, particularly in education settings and in home settings. This information is particularly important for carers and for educators. This important information is shared with educators and helps develop plans for children in terms of their therapeutic plans—not in the therapeutic panel sense but in terms of their therapeutic plans otherwise.

The branch has looked at practice guidance, including a heavy focus on how we have incorporated practice guidance to include the legislative reforms that have taken place, case reviews and analysis. It also includes complaints, compliance functions of some of those oversight bodies that Ms Rule spoke to previously and reportable conduct investigations in terms of kinship carers.

MS TOUGH: You said “brought us in line with the national”. How did the ACT fit before your appointment, if this is something that is happening nationally?

Ms Kanellopoulos: The appointment of the inaugural chief practitioner in the ACT brings us in line with all the other states and territories, as I said. Now all states and territories have a position of chief practitioner or equivalent. It is very exciting that a community of practice has formed amongst that group across the nation, and that includes New Zealand. That community of practice meets on annual basis in person and quarterly online, and is looking at developing key areas of focus in order to achieve national consistency in practice. Some of those areas include reunification practices, technology in practice and family-based care. The appointment of this position just gives us a dedicated role and a branch to support broadly across not just child protection but also youth justice—so across the work of Children, Youth and Families. A large component of that work is community engagement as well.

MS TOUGH: You mentioned brain-mapping for trauma. I have not heard much about that before. You said it works well with how children then engage with education and also at home. So how does that work, really? It is just really interesting.

Ms Kanellopoulos: It is very interesting, I agree. The tests need to be administered by psychologists. There is particular training and review of that training and the ability to undertake those assessments under the certification requirements. That is a series of psychometric tests that really does show—for the nerds in the room that might be aware of a brain—you the brain, right down from the brain stem up, and gives you a really clear indication of how a child presents in terms of chronological age versus behaviours that might be commensurate with what we would expect to see from children who have experienced adversity and trauma in early childhood.

What we do now about the beautiful brains in children is that they are really able to adapt and heal. So targeting the right therapeutic interventions and really targeting the work that not just the clinicians in Melaleuca Place do but also the work of our practitioners, kinship carers and professionals that work with children every day and how we target those interventions, just to make sure that we are getting the most out of healing and the recovery.

MS TOUGH: That sounds wonderful.

Ms Kanellopoulos: It is a Very exciting thing.

MS BARRY: I want to find out quickly how HCSD supports the ACT Children and Young People's Death Review Committee.

Ms Rule: I sit on that committee. I think I am called an ex-officio member of that committee and attend all of those meetings. We also provide the secretariat. The secretariat sits within HCSD and works closely with areas of the directorate that provide the data. We provide support in an HR sense and in an IT sense and in briefing ministers. We have recently gone through a process to appoint members to the committee, kind of handling the business of government, if you like, around appointments. We handle all of that. So we provide, if you like, the administrative support to the committee as well as me sitting on that committee.

MS BARRY: Is there an increase in the workload of the committee? If yes, is there a provision in the budget to address the additional supports that would be required?

Ms Rule: I do not think there is. The main workload of the committee is to produce the child death review report, and so that work remains static. I think where there is potentially some increase in engagement is with other jurisdictions and with researchers and the like who might want to seek engagement with the committee. But I do not think there is a pressure in terms of the workload per se. That certainly has not been raised with me and I do not think the committee has raised it with the minister either. But if there was, then we would have a look at it.

MS BARRY: I think in late 2023 the committee undertook to do a review into influenza and its impact on children and young people. What proactive steps have you taken to understand the trends, if any?

Ms Rule: My understanding is the committee did some work on that and provided some information to the health minister. But I will have to take that on notice in terms of the

details.

MS BARRY: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee—

Ms Sabellico: Excuse me, Chair. I do have an answer to Ms Barry's question about the caseload, if I could answer that now. On average, across our child protection practitioners, their caseload is about 10. For the First Nations team, at the moment, it is 12, but we are in the middle of undertaking recruitment, because, as that team's workload grows, we have continued to increase the resources to support for that.

MS BARRY: Thank you.

Ms Rule: Chair, may I just clarify one other piece of the evidence about GPs. GPs cannot diagnose autism, but there is a pilot underway for GPs to diagnose ADHD.

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*. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank our witnesses, who have assisted the committee through their experience and knowledge. We also thank Broadcasting and Hansard for their support. If a member wishes to ask questions on notice, please upload them to the parliamentary portal as soon as possible and no later than five business days from today.

The committee adjourned at 4.59 pm