



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2026-2027

**(Reference: [Inquiry into Appropriation Bill 2026-2027 and
Appropriation \(Office of the Legislative Assembly\) Bill 2026-2027](#))**

Members:

**MS C BARRY (Chair)
MR T EMERSON (Deputy Chair)
MR A BRADDOCK
MR T WERNER-GIBBINGS**

PROOF TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

MONDAY, 3 AUGUST 2026

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**Secretary to the committee:
Mr J Bunce (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

Health and Community Services Directorate	1204, 1232, 1260
Education Directorate	1260
Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate	1295
Infrastructure Canberra	1295
City Renewal Authority	1307

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 9.02 am

Appearances:

Orr, Ms Suzanne, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Autism and Neurodiversity, Minister for Housing and Homelessness and Minister for Equality

Paterson, Dr Marisa, Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services and Minister for Gaming Reform

Pettersson, Mr Michael, Minister for Business and Industry, Minister for Arts, Creative Industries and the Night-Time Economy, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations

Stephen-Smith, Ms Rachel, Minister for Education, Minister for Child Development and Wellbeing, Minister for Finance, Minister for the Public Service, Minister for Health Infrastructure

Tough, Ms Caitlin, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for Community Services, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Women, Seniors and Veterans and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence

Health and Community Services Directorate

Arthy, Ms Kareena, Director General

Evans, Ms Jacinta, Executive Group Manager, Strategic Policy

Dolan, Ms Fiona, Executive Branch Manager, Commissioning Policy and Service Design

THE CHAIR: Good morning, and welcome to the public hearings of the Select Committee on Estimates 2026-2027 for its inquiry into the Appropriation Bill 2026-2027 and the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2026-2027. 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 contributions they make to the life of the city and this region. We would also like to acknowledge and welcome other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today's event.

This hearing is a legal proceeding of the Assembly and has the same standing as proceedings of the Assembly itself; therefore, today's evidence attracts parliamentary privilege. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of the Assembly.

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

We welcome Ms Suzanne Orr, the Minister for Disability, Autism and Neurodiversity, Ms Caitlin Tough, the Minister for Community Services, Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith,

the Minister for Education and Minister for Child Development and Wellbeing, Dr Marisa Paterson, the Minister for Health, and Mr Michael Pettersson, the Minister for Children, Youth and Families, and officials. Please note that, as witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth, as 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 now proceed to questions, and I will hand my first slot to Mr Cain.

MR CAIN: Thank you, Chair. To whom should I address questions about carers?

Ms Orr: Minister Tough.

Ms Tough: That would be me.

MR CAIN: Congratulations on your elevation to the ministry.

Ms Tough: Thank you, Mr Cain.

MR CAIN: As you would be aware, Carers ACT are about to, by 1 October, close their Hub disability day program and their support coordination service. What conversations have you, as the responsible minister, had with Carers ACT to help find out why these changes are happening, what the ACT's role could be and how their clients and affected staff are being managed?

Ms Orr: Mr Cain, the answer probably sits between Ms Tough and me.

Ms Tough: I am happy to start, and then—

Ms Orr: Yes, then pass it over to me.

Ms Tough: Yes.

MR CAIN: I am sorry; what did you say?

Ms Orr: It sits between both of us.

Ms Tough: It sits between us.

Ms Orr: We are both going to answer.

MR CAIN: Do you mean the portfolio is?

Ms Orr: No, the answer to your question.

MR CAIN: Okay, but the portfolio does sit squarely with Ms Tough.

Ms Orr: No, the portfolio does not sit between us. The answer to your question will be

found between the two of us.

Ms Tough: Yes. I am happy to start the answer. The carers policy sits with me, in my portfolio. My office has reached out to Carers ACT to arrange a meeting between us, to understand what has happened. I have already requested a briefing from the directorate about it. Personally, during the last week, I was really saddened to hear about the closure of the Hub program. I understand it is related to changes to the NDIS funding at a commonwealth level, rather than being directly funded through the ACT government. Given I am brand-new in this role, while waiting for my briefing and to meet Carers ACT, that is about the level of understanding I have at present, which is why I will hand over to Minister Orr for the disability side of things.

MR CAIN: In your carers policy role, obviously, you could speak to the background of what you are aware of about these changes. I am sure they would not have taken you by surprise.

Ms Orr: If I am allowed to get a word in, I can speak to a few things.

MR CAIN: Yes, sure.

Ms Orr: As Ms Tough has pointed to, the particular programs that have been referenced in Mr Cain's question are programs that are directly funded by the commonwealth government. The ACT government, whilst certainly aware of the programs, does not have a detailed knowledge of the contractual arrangements.

Following the decision by Carers ACT—noting that when that decision was made and announced, I did hold the carers portfolio—they did reach out to my office to advise of their decision, in light of the changes made by the commonwealth government. Certainly, they offered to meet with, discuss and answer any questions that the ACT government may have in regard to their decision. I responded, and put them in touch with Ms Tough, who had taken on the ministerial responsibility for the portfolio, shortly after that.

MR CAIN: When did they first reach out to you?

Ms Orr: Mr Cain, I believe I got the letter when they announced it publicly, but I will take it on notice and check the exact date.

MR CAIN: Thank you. Have you not met with them since this announcement in June?

Ms Orr: Yes, Mr Cain, I have met with Carers ACT a number of times.

MR CAIN: Since this announcement?

Ms Orr: Mr Cain, I will have to go back and check my diary as to the last time I met with them.

MR CAIN: Will you take that on notice?

Ms Orr: Mr Cain, I have already said I will take it on notice and find out. The letter I received in regard to the recent announcement came to me at the same time as the announcement. Carers ACT has a very good working relationship with my office and is in contact with them on a regular basis. I will go back and check my notes as to when was the last time that I formally met with them, noting that they are in the process of changing CEOs. I usually meet with the CEO, which I believe is an acting position at the moment. I will come back to you with a full record of what I have or have not done on this matter.

MR CAIN: Thank you. You should be able to confirm: have you met with them since they made this announcement back in June?

Ms Orr: Mr Cain, I will have to go back and check my diary.

THE CHAIR: She said that she has taken that on notice, Mr Cain.

MR CAIN: Okay. It is not that far away. As you would also be aware, Minister Orr and Minister Tough, in June, Carers ACT released an announcement expressing disappointment that carers were not acknowledged in the ACT budget. What is your response to those concerns, and why were carers—up to 58,000 carers in our community—not recognised in the ACT's budget?

Ms Tough: Noting that I am new to the portfolio, I am really excited to work with carers in the ACT and recognise the work they do. It is important that, in the ACT, our carers definition recognises foster and non-parent carers, which is not something that is nationally recognised as a carer. The ACT government does put a lot of emphasis on recognising and respecting carers. One of the first conversations I have had since taking this job has been a conversation around carers. That is why my office has reached out to Carers ACT, and I have requested briefings on changes at Carers ACT and caring more broadly. While I am getting my head around the portfolio, this is one of the things that I have flagged with my office that I want to work on.

MR CAIN: My particular question was—and Ms Orr may be better placed to answer it—why carers were not recognised in the recent ACT budget presentation.

Ms Orr: Mr Cain, I do not agree with your characterisation that they—

MR CAIN: It is certainly what Carers ACT have expressed.

Ms Orr: Mr Cain, if you let me finish my sentence, you will hear my answer. I do not agree with the characterisation that they missed out. What the budget highlighted was new initiative funding. We continue to work with Carers ACT, within their funding, as a core partner in the carers strategy, to deliver projects and programs that support carers. That includes looking at how we can develop the ACT carers recognition card and a young carer mentoring program. That work is separate to new initiative funding, given that there is recurrent funding under the carers strategy that can be prioritised towards that work.

MR CAIN: Do you disagree with this statement from 11 June by Carers ACT:

Carers ACT is disappointed that carers have been overlooked in the 2026-27 ACT Budget ...

Do you disagree with that statement?

Ms Orr: Mr Cain, I—

MR CAIN: Yes or no?

Ms Orr: No, Mr Cain; I think that giving a yes or no answer is disrespectful to carers, and I am not going to do that.

MR CAIN: I read their statement, Minister.

Ms Orr: You cannot direct how I answer my question, Mr Cain, so let me answer it.

MR CAIN: I can ask for clarity on an answer.

Ms Orr: I cannot get a word in edgewise, mate.

THE CHAIR: Mr Cain, can you allow a response, please? Allow a response.

Ms Orr: Mr Cain and committee members, it is fair to say that the ACT government and all of our officials who work with Carers ACT and carers across Canberra genuinely value and respect the work that they do. In the time that I have been in this place, I have seen a concerted effort to make sure that, in all the policy that we develop across government, in all the programs and in all the responses that we have put in place, the needs of carers are well understood and incorporated.

That is very different to initiative funding for single initiatives. Mr Cain, and committee members, I think it is crucially important in supporting, recognising and valuing carers, as it goes beyond one particular initiative. As to specific funding in the budget, as I have told you, we have recurrent funding there to implement the carers strategy. The first action plan for that strategy is concluding, and there will be a second one developed. That funding can go towards specific carers initiatives, including the ones that I have already mentioned, which is the ACT carers recognition card and a young carer mentoring program.

Those are the discussions we have been having with Carers ACT for several months now, in progressing those initiatives. They were election commitments. They were commitments that were campaigned for by Carers ACT, and they are ones that we will deliver. At the same time, we continue to value, recognise and respect carers across all of our work and programs.

MR CAIN: What is the recurrent funding that is available for this strategy?

Ms Orr: I will take that on notice and get the exact figures for you.

MR EMERSON: The Thriving Kids rollout commences on 1 October. Is that still the case?

Ms Orr: Yes.

MR EMERSON: The government's focus in the early stages will be on government-delivered services; is that right?

Ms Orr: That is our intention, yes.

MR EMERSON: Do you have a sense of how long that period will last, until you will focus more on community organisation service delivery?

Ms Orr: Mr Emerson, I would note that the government has, through the Assembly motion in the last sitting, undertaken to provide a road map by 1 September. That road map does need to go through our cabinet processes. In not prejudicing those, please bear with me while I answer your questions.

Certainly, in the first instance, the intention is to scale up and expand existing government services. That is certainly the most immediate—time-wise—response that we can provide. While Thriving Kids is to be rolled out from 1 October, it is an 18-month implementation period, so it needs to be fully implemented by 1 January 2028. We will look, through that period, to a range of programs, including those within the community sector.

As of 1 October, though, it will not be the first thing. Certainly, we have been having ongoing discussions with the community sector. In the previous budget we had funding for projects from the Disability Advocacy Caucus and National Disability Services to help with identifying, across the community sector, what services were provided, how they might integrate with what we are looking at with Thriving Kids, where there might be gaps, or where we could best build on what is available. That work is still being completed and, once that is completed, we will start to look at how we respond to it.

MR EMERSON: Going to the government services that will kick in, in a couple of months, I guess these are existing services which are potentially being expanded or reworked; is that accurate?

Ms Orr: Yes, Mr Emerson. That is in line with the nationally approved model for Thriving Kids. I am not sure whether you have seen it. I can try to get a copy and table it. If someone has a copy of it and can pass it to me so that I can table it, that would be great.

Ms Stephen-Smith: It is publicly available online.

Ms Orr: It is publicly available. We will see whether we can get you a website link. The model is there, and we do need to be consistent with the national model for Thriving Kids, and the national model does state that it is building on existing services.

MR EMERSON: Can you list, if possible, the relevant government services that we

are talking about?

Dr Paterson: I can give you an example from my portfolio. There are currently two publicly funded autism spectrum disorder diagnostic assessment pathways. CHS has a paediatric pathway operating under paediatric clinical governance through Enhanced Child Health Services. The Child Development Service has an autism spectrum disorder diagnostic assessment pathway, supported by allied health clinicians and telehealth-enabled assessment capacity. Part of this process is ensuring that we have a system that is easily navigated by people and families who are seeking assessments. We are currently considering whether further alignment of those two services to create an easier pathway for families for assessment could improve our services for the Thriving Kids model.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Mr Emerson, speaking in my new portfolio of child development and wellbeing, part of the reason for creating this new portfolio is to bring together early childhood education and care and child development services, which sat under Ms Berry previously, as well as child and family centres, and responsibility for early intervention policy and services. This is not everything that comprises the ecosystem that Thriving Kids will slot into. As Dr Paterson said, CHS also provides a range of services, maternal and child health services, as well as the Enhanced Child Health Services, which Dr Paterson talked about.

One of the conversations we have been having is about how we use this opportunity to better integrate the service system and make it more navigable. We also have, within the child and family centres, a really great opportunity to provide a hub for people to come together. They already exist in Gungahlin, west Belconnen and Tuggeranong, with a new child and family centre committed to in Molonglo as well, to make those spaces where all families feel welcome and to expand on the navigation that is available currently through the paediatric services in Canberra Health Services, as well as through our child and family centres.

Navigation is a key part of Thriving Kids—ensuring that parents and carers can get the supports that they need when they need them. One of the things that the University of Canberra has worked on in the Belconnen area is understanding the ecosystem of services and supports that are available for children and families. They found that dozens of supports were available, but they were really hard to identify.

Initiatives like A Village for Every Child in Belconnen have been previously set up to try to address those issues and ensure that we are reaching the children and families who might not necessarily engage, so that they seek actively to engage with services for a wide range of reasons. One of the challenges we have is making sure that we are meeting families where they are at. That is why early childhood education is such an important place to have those services, as well as universal services like child and family centres.

MR EMERSON: I want to jump back to the Child Development Service.

Ms Stephen-Smith: That sits with me.

MR EMERSON: It sits with you? Has that moved across with the portfolios that—

Ms Stephen-Smith: The Child Development Service, as I said, used to sit with Minister Berry under the early childhood portfolio, and it still sits in the child development and wellbeing portfolio. Child and family centres have been brought in as well, child safe standards, and the early childhood policy, which also sat with Minister Berry previously.

Ms Orr: Mr Emerson, one of the key components of the national model, and what we are looking to do here in the ACT, includes navigation as part of the service system. That goes to the wraparound supports and supporting carers and kin in navigating the early childhood development system for the needs of their particular little person. Going back to the points that my colleagues have made, that is a key link between the existing ecosystem and making sure that what is somewhat complex by necessity, given that there is a wide range of needs and responses that come from developmental delay, is more accessible and easier to navigate.

MR EMERSON: On the CDS model, I received a response to a question—thank you, Ms Orr—on this recently. This has been raised with me by a few parents. The existing model is that you are able to access that for six months—kind of like taking people towards getting a referral to the NDIS. That will change, and the minister acknowledged in her response that this model will change, and there will be additional early intervention therapy services available for children outside the NDIS. Of course, diagnosis will not be required to access Thriving Kids services, which is one of the reasons for the changes.

I am curious about what will be in place on 1 October; how will this model have changed in two months time, when these changes kick in?

Ms Orr: Mr Emerson, I think the important thing to acknowledge with the changes to the NDIS is that the early pathways program and access arrangements will not be changing until the full rollout of Thriving Kids. That is what the commonwealth government has said to us. If your question goes to whether the CDS should be re-augmented to provide services and supports that would currently be provided through NDIS by 1 October, the short answer is no. The longer answer is that that is part of the transition and it is accounted for in the timeframes that the commonwealth government has set for the NDIS settings.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Going to the point of your question, there are a couple of things, Mr Emerson. First, it remains unclear what the commonwealth's intention is in relation to their NDIS early intervention pathway. As yet, they have been unable to answer questions about that service that is currently run in the ACT by Each. The decision about that will shape where we end up having to move to. The second thing, in relation to the Child Development Service, is that a few years ago—probably about three years ago—the service was expanded to children aged 24 to 36 months and it provides more intensive supports. Ms Evans can talk about that, if that is helpful. That potentially provides a model for the expansion of services for children in other age groups.

The other thing, as Dr Paterson talked about, is that Enhanced Child Health Services and the Child Development Service are currently working together to understand what

best sits where. Currently, for an autism assessment pathway, what I have heard from Enhanced Child Health Services is that they will often see children without a diagnosis coming in with some developmental delay. They will provide support, and they have really changed their model to provide some warm support, while children are waiting to see a paediatrician.

If they require an autism diagnosis, they get referred to the Child Development Service; then they get referred back again. Obviously, that is not a very efficient pathway; hence the conversations that are happening between Child Development Service and Enhanced Child Health Services about where some of both the assessment and support services sit. Ms Evans could go to your point around six months, which I know was the original question, which we have not yet got to; apologies.

MR EMERSON: I will re-articulate it quickly. Currently, people are able to access the service for six months, then they are shifted onto the NDIS. I think I understand the point that that may remain the case in some instances, for someone who is likely to be eligible for the NDIS, but what is the shift that is likely for people who will no longer be going to the NDIS but instead will be supported through Thriving Kids?

Ms Orr: The access arrangements for the NDIS are currently before DRMC for consideration and require rule changes prior to those access arrangements being formalised. But that has not occurred. In answer to your question as to what the supports will be for people who would have previously accessed the NDIS but are not currently, that change has not occurred, so the supports stay the same as they currently are. The settings stay the same as they currently are.

MR EMERSON: Yes, I understand.

Ms Evans: You have asked about how we expect the first six months or so to go and how we will approach changes between the NDIS eligibility and ACT government services. With regard to where we are at with our planning, as the ministers have rightly pointed out, we are finalising elements of our planning based on the national model. What we do know already is that our Child Development Service in the ACT, in about 2022-23, uplifted its services to offer some implementation of services for children aged two to three. We already have a service delivery, which is both assessment and some service implementation, some supports, for children aged two to three.

Our intention in the first six months is to lean in on that existing service delivery, to expand that age for implementing services from children aged two to three, to across that zero to five age group. That, of course, will be staged. That is our phase 1. That will look at what the existing wait times are for families. That will look at children who would have been ageing out at age three, and it will look at whether they need continuing services or what their needs are. That is the very beginning point that we are working with, because that makes sense. That is where families are already accessing the service.

The other piece that we would be putting more energy towards, if you like, is what is known as navigation services, with families being able to either refer to our Thriving Kids webpage—which we already have up, and families and service organisations can

look at—or they will be able to ring a phone line, drop in at a child and family centre, ask their questions about their child’s development, and be given some assistance and, if necessary, some warm referrals, if you like, to where they could receive that assistance.

There is a whole range of community services that they could be referred to. We already know the ACT is well placed around things like paint and play, and free play groups. There is a whole range of things that families might find useful for them. But if that child’s needs are greater than that, we will start to look at the referral pathways into what we call targeted supports. We expect that to expand across an 18-month period, before we see any changes to NDIS eligibility.

MR EMERSON: I still do not know whether I have had an answer to the question of whether the six-month deadline is going to remain in place.

Ms Orr: The six-month deadline for the—

Ms Stephen-Smith: I think that is something that we will continue to work through, Mr Emerson. The reality is that the funding that will be available for Thriving Kids, which is intended to be an early intervention service—that is part of the purpose of it—will not deliver everything that we could possibly want to do to fill all the gaps in the child development system. We will have to work through what that looks like.

As Ms Orr has indicated, there are some decisions yet to be made in relation to NDIS access that will then influence what we have to do through Thriving Kids and through the rest of our ecosystem. I think the answer is that that decision has not yet been made, but we do not have an endless resource, either. As everybody has made clear, there are currently waiting lists for some of these services and there are restrictions on the time that children can access some of these services. That is likely to continue to be the case. It will, in part, be driven by the decisions that are made around NDIS access.

Ms Orr: Mr Emerson, going to your point, part of moving to the Thriving Kids model is that developmental delay can be an indicator of disability. Certainly, with children and younger people, it is difficult to diagnose at an early stage. You need to wait until a certain age and until certain things have presented themselves.

Moving to this model allows for functional needs assessment, as opposed to diagnoses, which means that you get support earlier. Part of it, and what will be critical, is that point of: when does it stop being an early intervention and where does it become more of an ongoing life support? That is what we are working through, through DRMC, regarding the interface with the NDIS and ongoing supports where it is no longer a developmental delay. There is a point in time when an ongoing disability, or other, needs supports.

MISS NUTTALL: You confirmed that the rollout of phase 1 of Thriving Kids would focus on government services, and that is because it is in line with the national guidelines. I am interested in why that does not involve community services at this point, given that in New South Wales it does, and they are also following the national guidelines.

Ms Orr: Every jurisdiction, Miss Nuttall, will be different, and they will be different in the way that they currently provide their services. One point of differentiation between New South Wales and us is that they have more than one city-state through which to deliver their services. In looking at the different approaches, my understanding is that New South Wales have gone out with an expression of interest. It does not necessarily mean that they will be rolling out all those services from day dot, but they are looking at what could be provided, and what could be put into building upon, from the government system that currently exists. For us, within our current ecosystem of supports, it was definitely clear that we had a good foundation there to build from, and that was the obvious place to begin.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Adding to what Minister Orr has said, it is important to note that every jurisdiction is starting from a different point, in terms of the services that are provided by states and territories, and those that are provided by the non-government sector and funded via states and territories. That has been part of the challenge in this conversation, in developing a national model built on a service system across states and territories that is quite different in different jurisdictions.

MISS NUTTALL: I am interested to know whether you plan to make the Thriving Kids implementation plan public; if not, why not?

Ms Orr: Miss Nuttall, this goes to questions that you have asked previously. As I have said previously, it is a document that we signed with the commonwealth. The publishing of it would have to be done in agreement with the commonwealth. My understanding is that it is not for publication. Certainly, I appreciate that you are probably after a level of transparency in that, and I am conscious of and am looking at what we can do.

Miss Nuttall, in looking at the implementation plan, having read it, and knowing what we have told you, it is consistent and, through our documentation and our testimony to date, we know that the rollout of Thriving Kids is directed by that implementation plan. If there is a specific question around it, you are welcome to ask it, and I will see whether I can answer it.

MS CARRICK: What process is being undertaking to identify the gaps in the early intervention services, and how are smaller community organisations, such as private ones, able to contribute evidence and raise concerns regarding service gaps?

Ms Orr: Ms Carrick, I would point you to the projects that we have underway, particularly the National Disability Services one, because that will gather feedback from the community sector and the community sector organisations, to input into Thriving Kids, and it will be considered by government.

MS CARRICK: How is that advertised? How do they know about it?

Ms Orr: I tell everyone that I come across. NDS has been out—

MS CARRICK: Is that an ACT government process?

Ms Orr: No. National Disability Services is the peak representative of disability service providers. Ms Evans might be able to add to that.

Ms Evans: The National Disability Services, ACT branch, are doing a piece of work. The ACT government has funded them—for \$90,000, roughly—and the title of their work is to prepare strategic guidance for the development of an end-to-end service system around children in the ACT. They have established a pretty wide network to advertise what their work is, and they have been running some stakeholder roundtables. After the first couple of roundtables, a few people said, “We didn’t hear about that.” They have gone back and looped back to the ones who did not necessarily know about the initial roundtables. Of course, even the best advertising in the world will not get out to everybody.

They held their focus groups in May, and 58 organisations participated in that work. That represented about 250 different touchpoints across our local service system, so we feel that we have some good coverage there. Their feedback to the ACT government, their final report on their stakeholder consultations, is due back in October.

MS CARRICK: Will that be made public?

Ms Evans: I do not know. I would have to ask National Disability Services about that. I would leave that for the minister’s discretion.

Ms Orr: I think that is a future decision. Ms Carrick, going to your point about what opportunities there may be, I would imagine that we will have standard tender processes, as we look to roll this out, particularly to the non-government sector. Again, given that we are still in the scoping and planning phases of that, decisions are still to be made.

MISS NUTTALL: The federal government announced that the federal government and states have agreed to spend \$4 billion on Thriving Kids, with a fifty-fifty split in funding; those are their words. Why is it, then, that the bilateral agreements show that the ACT is contributing \$37.3 million, and the commonwealth is only contributing \$26.1 million over the next five years?

Ms Orr: I will ask the officials, if I get this wrong, to correct me. My understanding is that the numbers you have quoted from the bilateral do reflect a fifty-fifty split in the envelope for funding. The difference between the amount that the commonwealth is putting in and what the ACT is putting in goes to the commonwealth commitment to provide part of their portion directly to states and territories to use for their services. The number that the commonwealth have there is the funding they are spending specifically on supports and services supplied directly by them, whereas the funding from the ACT is the funding that we will be administering, and it is made up of part of the commonwealth’s portion, as well as our own 50 per cent.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Can I add to that, Miss Nuttall? The commonwealth has publicly indicated that it will be setting up some navigation services for parents and carers, and that it will be funding three-year-old development checks that will be available through the Medicare part of the health system—from GPs and, potentially, nurse practitioners. I am not sure that the detail of that is available yet, but that was part of the early

announcement in relation to Thriving Kids. They are retaining a portion of their \$2 billion to fund the element that they are directly delivering.

MISS NUTTALL: I hear what you are saying, but the community is probably interested in understanding why, when the commonwealth is saying that it is fifty-fifty, we have accepted more like a 60-40 split.

Ms Orr: Miss Nuttall, we have not. Our contribution is 50 per cent of the funding envelope. A better way to think about it is that we will be administering more than 50 per cent. We will not be funding more than 50 per cent.

MISS NUTTALL: With the federal government contributions to Thriving Kids being divided—it looks like it has been divided—amongst states and territories based on population, given this, and given our historical challenges with modelling the ACT's population, I cannot imagine that there has been any modelling of the funding allocation on the basis of actual needs requirements. Disabilities are not always evenly distributed through populations. How can we be confident that this will be adequate funding to meet the genuine needs of our ACT people with a disability?

Ms Orr: Miss Nuttall, I would add to your analysis that the unmet need is also a factor in this, and being unmet means that it is somewhat unknown and difficult to quantify. Certainly, in looking at the funding that is there, that is the first iteration that has gone forward. It is fair to say that first ministers and treasurers will continue to haggle for the rest of eternity, or for however long the Thriving Kids agreements stay in place, over what future funding looks like, particularly as our understanding of need continues to become clearer. That will happen as a result of this program, because currently we do not have a way to know. I also have, and I am happy to table, a few copies of the Thriving Kids Advisory Group final report, which includes the national model, for anyone who wants to have it in front of them.

MISS NUTTALL: Yes, please; that would be amazing. I know that the funding has also been allocated based on the population data in the 2021 census, and I appreciate that the new one is about to come in. Not only is this outdated; the government has previously stated that, based on ABS revisions to their population estimates, it has undercounted the ACT's population for the first four years of the last five years. Would you say that the data on which we are basing our current estimations is under-representing the ACT's population?

Ms Orr: We have an understanding—and officials can certainly add to this, if they wish—of how many children we would be seeing in the ACT with developmental delay, through our various program supports and the early childhood development census that is undertaken. A lot of our focus has been on what is indicated by those. They provide, I believe it is fair to say, a more complete picture and a more reliable picture of what the need might be. We will continue to refine that, as we roll out service delivery, and as we see not just the hypothetical or the anticipated response but the actual response. Do officials want to add anything?

Ms Arthy: I can. Miss Nuttall, the questions you are asking go to the heart of federal funding arrangements between the commonwealth and the states, and there is a

common approach to how population share is calculated. In the past, yes, the ACT has certainly taken up with the commonwealth government the population statistics that are used. More detail of that is probably better directed to Treasury, because they are the ones who are doing the work around the federal funding agreement arrangements. It is certainly something that is very live whenever we go into any of these negotiations, to make sure that we get the best possible arrangements for our population share.

MISS NUTTALL: If you have that understanding as to how many children have a developmental delay, did that feature in the initial calculations, when we looked at signing up to Thriving Kids? Is that included in the population share estimation?

Ms Orr: I might pass to officials to answer this, noting that I was not in this portfolio in 2023, when the initial decision was made.

Ms Evans: No; in fact, the ACT percentage of people with disability or children with developmental delay did not figure in the financials. But where it does figure strongly is around demand management. That is the role that we now have to consider: what are the indicators of developmental delay, autism or, indeed, disability across our population going forward?

As the minister has rightly pointed out, some of that demand will become clear to us as we implement Thriving Kids. With some of it, we have been able to work with the existing Australian Early Development Census. We do know the number of children who are presenting in early primary school, in kindergarten, with a delay against one or more developmental domains. We know that information; that census has been completed now for a number of cycles. Using that information, we will start to extrapolate, if you like, the demand across our population.

MISS NUTTALL: If we are pretty confident, based on the assumptions going into the model, that we have underestimated the ACT's population share and the needs demand, why did we sign on to the bilateral agreement in the first place?

Ms Orr: Miss Nuttall, I do not agree with your characterisation that we have underestimated. We have been quite open about the fact that, in this whole process, there is an unmet need that no-one is able to quantify, and we are cognisant of that. I do not believe that equates to us necessarily underestimating or purposely underestimating. I think it is a reflection that there are unknown variables in this, and we will continue to work through those.

MS CARRICK: If you are able to extrapolate the demand, have you worked out what additional costs may be required to be invested by the ACT government in Thriving Kids and even Strong Foundations?

Ms Evans: We have considered, within the existing envelope and the money that the government has committed, how that demand would be managed.

MS CARRICK: So, if the envelope is low, that translates to a lower number of services?

Ms Evans: It will translate to services that will fit within that funding envelope, but, when we think about Thriving Kids, it is for children with developmental delay from a low level to a moderate level, so it is about managing what that looks like. What an evidence based response is to low and moderate service demand is the job we have ahead of us. We have not finalised that work. We know the approximate number of kids that we might see. We know that, for some of them, there will be a very light touch, because many kids respond to a small amount of support and families can do a lot of things with that support, and we will see how that develops over time.

Ms Orr: Ms Carrick, I can add to that. In looking at Thriving Kids, there will be supports which will be considered universal and available to everyone, and we will move up to more targeted supports. It will be based on a functional assessment of needs. It needs to be considered in the sense that there will be broad supports for everyone, and that could be information, it could be guidance or it could be having a drop-in session at CDS, for example, just to get the guidance and support that you need, particularly for carers and kin. I have heard this from a number of carers and parents in the feedback that I have received and in the roundtables that we have done in particular. Most have said they need support to know how to best respond to their child and to support their child. That is an area where they would like to see a lot more focus, and it is a focus of the Thriving Kids model. It is about getting the right supports at the right time, and that is going to look different and the intensity of that is going to look different, depending on where you are within the need.

Not every child who accesses Thriving Kids is necessarily going to need targeted and intensive therapeutic one-on-one supports. There may be other options available to them—for instance, attending a supportive playgroup or a therapeutic playgroup. It might be that their needs can be responded to through information provided to a parent, to understand food selection or being overstimulated and how to decompress when you are in that environment. It might be that they just need a parents group, where parents can go to have a cup of tea and time out, to make sure that they can still look after themselves when looking after their child. These are the wider considerations that are going into when developing an ecosystem of supports and building on what is already there.

MS CARRICK: Thank you.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Ms Carrick, you mentioned Strong Foundations. I just want to clarify that Strong Foundations is around public schools delivering a consistent approach to learning. It is not—

MS CARRICK: There is tiered support in Strong Foundations.

Ms Stephen-Smith: It is not really related to Thriving Kids. I mean, obviously everything is related, but it is not the subject of this conversation.

Ms Orr: This goes to one of the key nuances of Thriving Kids. Thriving Kids is providing additional supports and services for children with developmental delay and autism. It is not the whole ecosystem of supports. We will have a number of programs in place that will go to supporting little people and their families where they have a

developmental delay or a disability. We will continue to build on that broad ecosystem with Thriving Kids. It will be a component, but it alone is not the whole ecosystem.

MS CARRICK: Thank you.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Sorry if this was asked earlier. It is a question for the table. How will Thriving Kids, disability policy reform, child development services, health care and inclusive education operate as a coherent pathway of joined thinking, rather than the natural tendency to default to separate programs administered by different portfolios?

Ms Orr: I am happy to go first, and everyone can jump in, because, as you said, it is to everyone.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: As long as there is the same answer. That would be the only—

Ms Orr: Hopefully, because that would show the really joined and coordinated response we have. Mr Werner-Gibbings, Thriving Kids provides an opportunity and a catalyst for exactly that: looking at the broader ecosystem supports that are there, particularly within our mainstream services, and identifying where we can do better, not just more—perhaps putting a stronger lens over the services that we are already providing to respond to the needs of the Thriving Kids cohort, and seeing where we might have gaps that we might need to look at expanding, particularly against our understanding of best practice, which is always evolving. It is certainly something that we work across government on and, I think it is fair to say, work on as a cabinet across government. Certainly from my perspective, I can assure the committee that there is no shortage of enthusiasm amongst my colleagues for the opportunities presented by this initiative. The opportunities are there. I am constantly batting off helpful suggestions on where we could do more.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I would agree that we have had a collaborative approach across all ministers to date. Part of the reason—I think I mentioned this earlier—for bringing the child development and wellbeing portfolio together is to send a very clear message around our focus and priority for the wellbeing of children and their families, and recognising that children do not exist in isolation from their parents, carers and the wider community. All we can say to reassure you is that we have been doing this work collaboratively to date. We will continue to do this work collaboratively. And, as Minister Orr has said, Thriving Kids provides us with an opportunity to think about the broader ecosystem. It is a prompt to consider what best sits where, but also how the system becomes more navigable for parents and carers, which is something we have consistently heard about through our own services and also through the work the University of Canberra has done.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: That is all from me.

MR CAIN: This is probably for Minister Orr. Minister, since the 2025-26 budget announced a \$10 million package to strengthen the sustainability of the ACT community sector, and it is more than a year later, exactly how much of that \$10 million

has been committed, how much has actually been paid to community organisations, and how much remains unspent?

Ms Orr: Mr Cain, this particular initiative now sits with Minister Tough, under the community services portfolio. I believe officials will be able to provide you with the rollout of the boost funding and where it is up to.

Ms Dolan: You asked a question relating to the community sector boost funding. I am pulling up my notes. I apologise.

Ms Orr: While Ms Dolan is pulling up her notes, I would note that this boost funding is for a two-year period. My understanding is that, if not all, the vast majority for the first year has already been rolled out. The second year, of course, will be happening this financial year. Through this current budget, the government also has a commitment to continue that uplift—that \$10 million—so \$5 million per year will be added to the community sector funding envelope. We will, however, be undertaking a case-by-case analysis of other CSI contracts, which are the ones that this initiative applies to, to understand the specific needs of organisations and ensure that we are funding appropriately.

MR CAIN: Thank you, Minister. I have three particular questions about the actual dollars.

Ms Dolan: The \$10 million was allocated over two years—\$5 million each year. For the first year, the money has been allocated. All of it has been allocated on a tiering structure. Organisations with base funding of less than \$19,999 received an additional \$5,000 in 2025-26; organisations with base funding of \$20,000 to \$69,999 received an additional \$10,000 in 2025-26; and organisations with base funding of more than \$70,000 received an additional \$38,840 in 2025-26. We are currently going through the process of the allocation of this year's funding. That process is underway to ensure that the money is allocated on the same tiering structure.

MR CAIN: Could you provide a breakdown, by organisation and program, and obviously the past financial year and part of this current financial year, which includes the amount approved, contracted and paid to date?

Ms Orr: Mr Cain, we will take it on notice and see what we can come back to you with.

MR CAIN: What measurable improvements has the government identified as a direct result of this investment thus far, including any increase in service capacity, workforce retention or financial sustainability across the community sector?

Ms Orr: Ms Dolan can talk in more detail to this. But, as part of the funding, we have reporting and feedback mechanisms as to which services are using the funding and how they are seeing it meet their needs. This will inform further community reforms, particularly around commissioning, service contracting and delivery arrangements with the ACT government, particularly on the administrative side. I would just clarify that the community boost was to go to the pressures of administrative costs that services have been talking about, which would be increasing rents, increasing staffing costs,

retention of staff, development of staff, implementation of IT systems, and so forth. It was not for specific service delivery programs. That will continue to be done through our commissioning services. Ms Dolan, do you want to add a bit as to how we are working to further articulate and understand?

Ms Dolan: Thank you, Minister. As part of the funding boost allocation, it was a requirement for organisations to complete surveys to identify how the money would be allocated within the organisations and to provide information to inform future work in government. As the funding was allocated last year, organisations have contributed that information to government, as to how the money was allocated across different areas of pressures within their organisations—across human resources, information and technology, safeguarding premises, business development or fundraising. We have received that information.

We have also received really positive feedback from organisations about how the flexibility of that arrangement across those structures has enabled them to address costs within their organisations. That has been really positively received. We have not received information on that for this year, because we are still working through that process, but we look forward to receiving that information and reporting back in future.

MR CAIN: Basically, from what you have been told thus far in terms of outcomes, are you able to provide this committee with the responses from those organisations? It would be helpful to have a summary of the dollars and the assessed impact of that expenditure.

Ms Orr: Mr Cain, we will take it on notice and see what we can come back to you with, noting that the rollout of the boost is halfway through. We have not concluded consideration and feedback.

MR CAIN: Thus far, of course.

Ms Orr: We will also need to look at our privacy considerations, regarding what information we provide.

MR CAIN: Sure. I understand.

Ms Orr: We will take it on notice and come back to you with what we can.

MISS NUTTALL: I am hoping that it was partly due to a Greens motion earlier in the year that the community sector funding boost has been secured with another \$22 million over the next four years—about \$5.675 million per year. Will that be allocated through the same tier system or are you choosing a different way of allocating that fund?

Ms Orr: Miss Nuttall, the ongoing uplift, as I previously stated, will be considered on a contract-by-contract basis. Certainly, the shorter program, the boost of two years, provided us with an opportunity, given it was time limited, to take a particular approach—an ongoing one, though. To make sure that we are properly considering our financial obligations, we need to look at it on a case-by-case basis.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you. If you do not mind me asking, when will community organisations expect to receive this funding boost for the coming financial year?

Ms Orr: I will pass to Ms Tough and Ms Dolan. We are not monopolising answers. It is not actually my portfolio anymore.

Ms Tough: Thank you, Ms Orr. That is something I am working closely with Ms Arthy and officials on—getting my head around where things are at right now and working it out with the community sector. Exact timing is a matter for government, but it is something we are working through.

MISS NUTTALL: I am keen to ask about First Nations disability services, if that is okay. In the recent budget, was any funding specifically allocated to provide culturally safe and culturally appropriate disability supports and services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a disability? And, if so, how much funding was allocated and through which programs and orgs?

Ms Orr: Miss Nuttall, the government has a commitment to work with the Aboriginal community controlled organisation sector to develop capability to support people with disability, with the longer term ambition of having an ACCO that can focus on disability. Part of working with the sector to develop that capability is acknowledging that it is not a capability that currently exists within the ACT. We do not have a service provider that is specifically focused on disability, and developing that capability is something that the government needs to invest in.

We have work underway. I can get Ms Evans to run you through more of the detail. We are working with the First Peoples Disability Network to understand how the ACT can start to develop this capability and how we could not only look at establishing an individual ACCO focused on this but also look at better equipping existing ACCOs in their services and in providing support to people with disability. Hopefully, I have all that right. Ms Evans will, I am sure, correct me if I have not quite got that correct.

Ms Evans: That is right, Minister. Thank you, Miss Nuttall, for the question. As the minister said, we have been working with a peak body that is responsible for working for First Nations people with disability. Through that process, we have sought for them to provide us with advice on how best to support the ACCO sector, knowing that we are not always best placed for that. We are working with that organisation to achieve some mentoring for each of the ACCOs that may wish to move into the disability support sector and to give us some advice if we want to provide grants or anything—to give us advice on how best to culturally support that work.

Basically, the FPDN will work alongside us and with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disability community to build culturally safe and community-led disability services. Through the first contract that we have with them, we are going to support the implementation of the ACT Disability Strategy. In the first action plan, 3.1 is to support ACCOs to deliver culturally safe and inclusive services. That action is being picked up through this piece of work. They will work with us to develop a disability-inclusive and culturally safe training package for staff working in child protection settings. That is another piece of work that they will be doing under Next Steps for our Kids. We have

wrapped that together so that they can deliver on those two key pieces of work. We are working with them at the moment on their work plan and how we will communicate the next steps to the Aboriginal community.

Ms Orr: Miss Nuttall, I would also add that the Disability Advisory Council, the ministerial advisory council, is quite engaged in this work and we have connected them to input into the earlier stages. We also have complementary work in my other portfolio, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, through the subcommittee, looking at the ACT government's approach to supporting ACCO development. We will be progressing considerations that go to everything we have said through a range of initiatives, given the task that is there and that it is not a one-size-fits-all response. I would also note that, under the Thriving Kids program, there will be a specific consideration on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culturally appropriate supports, and we will be looking at working with the ACCO sector in delivering those.

MISS NUTTALL: Regarding those programs that you have outlined, is there specific funding attached for First Nations people with a disability?

Ms Evans: Yes. I realise I did not answer that specific question. There is \$1.456 million over four years for those two packages of work that I just outlined.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you. We are hearing from disability advocacy organisations that they are increasingly reliant on commonwealth grant funding programs to establish or expand their culturally safe disability support services for First Nations people. I am interested in whether you think our current funding streams for that are enough or if it might be a matter for future budgets to increase the funding once we have a better idea of what we need and how we need to work with people.

Ms Orr: Miss Nuttall, it is fair to say that, where needs are identified, there will always be opportunities for consideration through further budgeting. This is an area where we know a stronger response needs to be developed. I am talking more broadly—across the whole ACCO service and across service delivery. That is certainly something we continue to look at and progress. To answer your question, can I get a bit more clarity? When you say “organisations”, I am not quite sure what it is. That could be interpreted in a lot of ways. I am just not quite sure how to interpret your specific focus.

MISS NUTTALL: You said that you are working towards supporting the establishment of an ACCO with a specific focus on First Nations people with disability, but also broadly other Aboriginal community controlled organisations and community sector organisations that wish to be able to provide culturally safe programs.

Ms Orr: Miss Nuttall, to answer your question, I think we have covered it in the responses we have given. I would point you to the work that Ms Evans has outlined on the First Peoples Disability Network and our continued work through various programs and through the Closing the Gap initiatives to cover off on those. It is a very broad question that takes in a lot of things. I can give you the broad channels, as to where we are looking at progressing the work, but the specifics will really test the chair's indulgence.

THE CHAIR: Yes?

Ms Orr: No—I was just saying that we will be here for a while and I think the chair will not be happy.

THE CHAIR: That is okay. One more.

MISS NUTTALL: That is everything that I had on that particular line.

MS CASTLEY: I would like to ask about Gunners Place. Is this the right—

Ms Orr: I have no idea. This is a bit of a special one, so ask and we will see what we can do.

MS CASTLEY: Great. Is there money in this budget for a full-time youth worker to operate Gunners Place? That is what I am keen to know.

Ms Stephen-Smith: From an Infrastructure Canberra perspective, in terms of establishing the Gungahlin Community Centre and the youth hub, there has been a contract with a consortium, led by Northside Community Service to manage it. My understanding is that largely the same group of organisations that are currently running Gunners Place are moving into the youth hub adjacent to the new Gungahlin Community Centre.

MS CASTLEY: That provider has been advised that there is enough money for them to employ that full-time youth worker?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I am not able to answer that question. We will take that question on notice.

MS CASTLEY: Great. Thank you. That is all I have.

MS CARRICK: While we are talking about community centres, I want to know what is happening with the Woden Community Centre.

Ms Stephen-Smith: That is really not in this session. I am coming back later this afternoon for public service, though, Ms Carrick.

MS CARRICK: And that would be the right time?

Ms Stephen-Smith: It is probably not the right part of public service, but we can probably answer the question then.

MS CARRICK: I could try then. Okay. I think I have been trying for two weeks. Could I ask about any analysis you have done on current and future demand for supported independent living accommodation for young people with complex disabilities. Do we have enough, and where do they live?

Ms Orr: Ms Carrick, I will pass to officials to run you through it. Supported

independent living is primarily administered through the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the National Disability Insurance Agency. It is not a service or support provided by the ACT government. It would not necessarily be information we have at hand in any detail. I do not know if the directorate is able to add anything further.

Ms Stephen-Smith: We do not have all the details—no.

MS CARRICK: When it comes to new specialist schools for students with complex needs, has the government done any analysis around the future needs for specialist schools?

Ms Wood: There was an initiative in this year's budget to do feasibility work, looking at capacity of specialist schools and also the Flexible Education program, particularly Muliyan. That is work that we are doing to look at specialist school capacity, which would include looking at the capacity we need for the future.

MS CARRICK: I understand that there is a waiting list for the specialist schools.

Ms Wood: We talked about this at our last hearing. There are students who meet the eligibility criteria for specialist schools and are being supported in their local school, and there is a range of work we do with schools to ensure that they have the right support for students. We make sure those students have access to a place when a place becomes available. There is a range of factors that impact on that availability. As we get to the end of a school year, we re-assess what is available.

MS CARRICK: Will that end up in a long-term strategy and action plan for specialist education?

Ms Wood: The intention is to ensure that we have a plan for future capacity that is aligned with demand.

MS CARRICK: A lot of the specialist schools would like—and I think some have—hydrotherapy. Are there enough hydrotherapy services for complex disability needs?

Ms Wood: Some of our specialist schools do have that service. When we are looking at feasibility for future capacity, we will be looking at all the services and the facilities that those schools require.

MS CARRICK: Will that look at what the broader disability community needs for access to hydro across Canberra?

Ms Wood: Specifically, we are looking at the needs for students in education. We will not have capacity to look at the whole—

MS CARRICK: What about the broader disability policy sector? Moving on from education, is there a disability policy to look at hydro needs?

Ms Stephen-Smith: In terms of public hydrotherapy pool availability, that has generally sat with the health directorate. What we were doing at the time was replacing

a public hydrotherapy pool in Canberra Hospital with the new Tuggeranong public hydrotherapy pool. The responsibility for managing that subsequently switched to Sport and Recreation, to be consistent with the way that the Lakeside Leisure Centre contract is managed.

What we can say, Ms Carrick, is that we are all conscious of ongoing advocacy to expand access to public hydrotherapy services. From my perspective as education minister, certainly, if we were talking about the construction of any new hydrotherapy facilities as part of a school project, we would also be considering what the wider community need would be as part of that process, in the same way that school infrastructure looks at the development of gyms and other facilities that can be used by other groups on the weekend, for example. We would certainly be taking that into account. It might not be work that the education directorate specifically would be looking at in terms of demand, but, from a whole-of-government and cabinet perspective, any funding for such a development would take into account wider community availability and need.

MS CARRICK: What about in the context of Thriving Kids? There are providers that provide hydro services for children that have NDIS packages—for example, Water Wombats. Has there been an analysis of the hydro needs for Thriving Kids and the providers?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I probably have two answers to that. One of my portfolios is child development and wellbeing—a broad title. I was very pleased to visit Water Wombats just before the budget to let them know that they were receiving a grant from the ACT government to continue to support their services. I know how important they are. The children who benefit from the Water Wombats service have a wide range of disability needs. Some will be NDIS funded and some will not be. That will continue to be the case and they will continue to be one of the groups, alongside Arthritis ACT, Cerebral Palsy Alliance and others who will advocate in relation to the demand for hydrotherapy facilities. We visited the University of Canberra hydrotherapy pool, which Water Wombats uses on a regular basis. There is the service delivery element of that, in terms of the sustainability of a service like Water Wombats in the funding environment, and then there is an infrastructure piece that we would consider whenever we are investing in new infrastructure.

MS CARRICK: Thank you.

MR CAIN: Community organisations continue to advise that increasing demand is not being matched by sustainable funding. How many community organisations received an increase in recurrent funding through this budget?

Ms Tough: Thank you, Mr Cain. I will hand over to officials for that one.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I will just say, while Ms Dolan is coming to the table, that all community sector organisations that are indexed at the community sector indexation rate will have received an increase in funding that reflects the increase in the award wages that they pay and CPI. That indexation rate is made up of 20 per cent CPI and 80 per cent, the higher amount of the Wage Price Index and award wage increases.

MR CAIN: Thank you, Minister. You have touched on my second question which seems to be relevant. What proportion of the funding merely covers indexing and wage increases, and, hence, what—

Ms Stephen-Smith: That is the indexation that they receive.

MR CAIN: That is the only increase, is it?

Ms Stephen-Smith: No. There were quite significant increases in community sector funding in this budget, particularly in the area of domestic and family violence. All I was saying was that there is also an indexation rate. Therefore most, if not all, of our funded community sector providers would have received an increase in funding that relates to the increase in costs that they are experiencing. Then there is additional funding for a range of specific community sector organisations.

Ms Orr: Mr Cain, your question cuts across more ministers than are currently present. It might be best if we take it on notice and see what we can come back to you with, noting that it is not strictly listed as a topic against all of the various matters that are listed.

MR CAIN: I am happy for you to take that on notice. I note it is a broad question.

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

MR CAIN: I am particularly interested in whether there was funding above any indexing or wage—

Ms Tough: There was.

MR CAIN: It was covering wage increases?

Ms Tough: Yes.

Ms Orr: While we will take it on notice, if Ms Tough will indulge me—

Ms Tough: Yes—go for it.

Ms Orr: there is the indexation which is applied annually, and there is the funding boost that we have previously discussed. There was also funding that went to a range of programs and services. Ms Dolan might have something to add quickly.

MR CAIN: You may want to take on notice as well—because I note the time and I have perhaps had enough opportunities here—the new service capacity you anticipate being delivered by additional funding, if there is actually any additional funding above the index or wages?

Ms Tough: Yes—I am happy to take that on notice, Mr Cain.

MR CAIN: Thank you.

Ms Tough: Ms Dolan, is there anything you wanted to quickly add?

MR CAIN: Only if there is something very particular to what I am asking.

Ms Dolan: In response to one of your earlier questions, the 2026-27 budget included approximately \$327 million in contracts for community sector organisations. This is an increase from \$252 million in 2025-26.

MR CAIN: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I am just confirming that you are taking on notice the breakdown. Is that right?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I would note that this was, in fact, one of the things that was celebrated by the Greens and the community sector more broadly—how significant the additional funding for the community sector was in this particular budget.

Ms Orr: Mr Cain, I also point you to the discussion paper that we recently made available—the consultation that will be undertaken now by Ms Tough into community sector reforms, as to further indication of where the government’s policy is headed.

MR CAIN: Thank you.

MR EMERSON: I celebrated it as well.

Ms Orr: I think we all did. Everyone did a bit of a happy dance for that one. Take that as a comment.

MR EMERSON: Back to Thriving Kids, I am curious about direct engagement with the local disability community. I understand there will be a lot of consultation going on with service providers, peak bodies, and so on. What level of engagement has occurred with people directly affected by these changes—people with disability and their families and carers—for them to raise concerns, ask questions and shape the development of the services?

Ms Orr: Thank you, Mr Emerson. That is a really important question on the broader reforms. It is probably a timely reminder for everyone in this room and listening that at the centre of all of this is people, and that is certainly not lost on me, my colleagues or any of the officials who are working on this here in the ACT. What has been unique about Thriving Kids to date is that it has been tied up in very complex negotiations with the commonwealth government, including the first ministers health and disability agreements and the commonwealth working through the development of the national model, which we need to be consistent with. In informing those—and it was prior to

my time in the portfolio, so others may be able to talk to this—quite a lot of work was done at the commonwealth level, as well as, I believe, the ACT, in engaging on the higher level policy questions around shaping the direction, if not specific service design.

Certainly, in putting together the bilateral agreement, in the period between when the national agreement was signed and the move to the next step in those formal negotiations, I held roundtables where we could engage with not only the sector but also parents and disability advocates to guide, again, the higher level. I note that we had very limited time between the timeframes of those agreements and having to deliver on them. I am very clearly on the public record saying that, as we continue to progress the rollout of Thriving Kids, we will continue to find more ways to engage with the community, particularly around potential individual service design. Officials, do you have anything to add?

MR EMERSON: We need to focus on this particular period. Obviously, there is a lot of uncertainty. I think we all understand the context. The commonwealth has thrown you in the—

Ms Orr: When you get lemons, make lemonade—right, Mr Emerson?

MR EMERSON: Yes. They are also telling people it is going to be up to their local governments to determine how things are delivered, so people are asking us, as members: “Who do I ask my questions to? How do I raise concerns? When are we going to meet up?”

Mr Kelly: Thanks for the question. I reiterate Minister Orr’s comments about consultation being really important. What I would highlight to the committee is the extensive consultation that happened across the NDIS review, as well as through the Thriving Kids Advisory Group. Hundreds of people—almost thousands—contributed to the NDIS review with their experiences of the NDIS, including in the early childhood space. A lot of those findings have ended up informing the national model for Thriving Kids as well as the advisory group’s report into the national model.

I would not say that there has not been consultation to date. There certainly has been at that kind of national level. That has led to a national model. To some extent, the national model is what we are committed to under the bilateral agreement. We are committed to talking to families, particularly around what individual service components might look like. From the roundtables that Minister Orr held with families, we heard very clearly their concerns about the difficulty in navigating the system. We have also heard very clearly that the commonwealth language around “capacity building” did not sit comfortably with families, so they have asked us to use the term “confidence building”. We are now talking about services that build confidence in families, not judging them and saying they do not have the capacity or skills to support their children in their early development. As we get towards community-led supports, which are peer based or community based supports, obviously the needs of families and children are really important in how we design the parameters for those services.

MR EMERSON: In the period now, where there is uncertainty, the New South Wales government has a mailing list on their website about Thriving Kids that people can sign

up to. Allied health providers can express how they would like to get involved in making sure that what is set up works for them and the people they are servicing now. Why hasn't the government taken these sorts of steps?

Mr Kelly: Mr Emerson, we have appointed allied health providers to, in the first instance, the National Disability Services' consultation around Thriving Kids. As Ms Evans said earlier, that is reporting to us in October. There are channels for people to contact the Disability Reform Taskforce with their ideas and concerns, as well as through the NDS consultation process.

Ms Orr: Mr Emerson, I believe—and Mr Kelly can correct me if I get this wrong—the Thriving Kids webpage has a contact email too, so, should you have questions, you can direct them there.

MR EMERSON: I understand.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Only 80 per cent of learning plans for students receiving substantial or extensive adjustments are estimated to be completed. The new 2026-27 target is 100 per cent. What is the school-by-school recovery plan?

Ms Spence: I acknowledge the privilege statement. Thank you for that question. We have not met the target of 100 per cent in terms of our individual learning plan census. That is connected to new students arriving in the system. Part of our policy setting is to work with families around the individual learning plan. At the point of the census, some of those plans would not have been agreed with families who are new to the system. It requires time to work in partnership with families as the kids engage in the school. That small percentage at that particular point in time is more reflective of new students in the system rather than not having them completed for any other reason.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: It is not a systemic concern; it is the way that the dates work in the programs. You get up to 100 per cent post-facto and come around again?

Ms Spence: Correct. As new students arrive in the system, we have to work through it with our new families, and it takes several months to look at the adjustments and the goals that they need and to work with the families in partnership. It would fluctuate based on that new student information.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Does that have any impact on the school-by-school recovery plans or is it all wrapped up?

Ms Spence: It is an individual learning plan. It is about the way in which the schools work with those families as they enter the system. They have a responsibility under our policies to make sure that those ILPs are in place and agreed with the families. It is part of that policy process.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Thanks.

THE CHAIR: We are now on time. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your attendance today. If you have taken any questions on notice, please provide your

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answers to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*.

Hearing suspended from 10.30 am to 10.47 am.

Appearances:

Pettersson, Mr Michael, Minister for Business and Industry, Minister for Arts, Creative Industries and the Night-Time Economy, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations

Health and Community Services Directorate

Arthy, Ms Kareena, Director-General

Akhter, Ms Sanzida, Executive Branch Manager, Women, Youth LGBTIQ+ and Multicultural Affairs

Sabellico, Ms Anne Maree, Executive Group Manager for Children, Youth and Families Division

Saballa, Ms Melanie, Executive Branch Manager, Next Steps Reform and Strategy Implementation

Lapic, Ms Silvia, Deputy Executive Group Manager, Children, Youth and Families

Evans, Ms Jacinta, Executive Group Manager, Strategic Policy

THE CHAIR: We welcome back Michael Pettersson, as Minister for Children, Youth and Families, and officials. Please note that as witnesses you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth, as 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 now proceed to questions, and I hand my first over to Mr Cocks.

MR COCKS: Thank you, Chair. Minister, the youth portfolio was surprisingly difficult to analyse in the budget because, when it comes to a cohesive whole-of-government youth policy, there is almost nothing there to examine. It does not identify a current youth strategy, a distinct youth affairs output, a consolidated youth budget or any youth-specific accountability indicators. What is the government's current overarching policy document for young Canberrans aged 12 to 25 and where are its objectives and measurable outcomes publicly set out?

Mr Pettersson: Thank you for the question, Mr Cocks. I appreciate your keen interest in these matters, as shared by the government. The wellbeing of young people, particularly as envisioned in the youth portfolio, is particularly important. A lot of the larger portfolios across government interact with young people in a multifaceted way, each and every way and a very important way—for example, health and education—but the youth portfolio is quite tightly defined, which does not necessarily go to that whole-of-youth approach that I think your question is pointing to. Within the youth portfolio, as it sits, there is a range of grants and events that are administered by it as well as engagement and, I guess, representation of young people. But it is not necessarily the holistic young people approach that I think your question is looking for.

MR COCKS: As Minister for Youth, is there currently a whole-of-government youth policy or strategy in place?

Mr Pettersson: Has anyone got the previous strategy open?

MR COCKS: Minister, you just said “previous”. It sounds like you are referring to the

ACT Children and Young People's Commitment.

Mr Pettersson: Yes, I think that is the one I am thinking of.

MR COCKS: That previously provided some direction related to people aged 25 and under, but it expired at the end of 2025. Why has that been allowed to expire with no replacement, given the government had known its expiry date for 10 years?

Mr Pettersson: It is an interesting question. Strategies play an important role and they can be particularly useful. I am not particularly inclined to make executive announcements in this setting. I am interested to see where this line of questioning goes and any particular recommendations that the committee may have. This has not been a strategy that I have seen as an immediate priority for it to be replicated, reproduced or for new policy work to be done. There have been other policy matters that I think have been pressing with the resources available to me. I think there is probably a bigger picture question that the government has been grappling with in trying to have a more holistic sense of strategies rather than having a strategy for every single initiative, idea, policy area, potentially with larger, broader policies and strategies that cover a range of interconnected things that just need little individual ones.

MR COCKS: Minister, Labor committed, as I understand it, at the 2024 election to co-design an ACT youth strategy. But officials confirmed in August last year that you had not commenced that work. I can still see no evidence of a co-design process, dedicated funding, consultation papers, timetable or draft strategy. In October last year, weeks before the last commitment expired, your Children's Week statement indicated you had not even decided how to position the new strategy. It is now August 2026. Why has the government not released a plan to deliver the strategy that you promised two years ago? Is that no longer part of the agenda, given the comments you have just made?

Mr Pettersson: No. It is still, I think, a very important area of focus for the government. Expanding on the answers I have given already, this is an area of importance. There have been questions as to the allocation of policy resources in the development of a strategy. This is all taking place in the context of a bigger conversation about what the wider combination of strategies in a holistic sense looks like. There is an important role for the government to outline its future vision when it comes to youth policy and the interests of young people. That work has not commenced. I do not have a clear view as to what that looks like with the wider understanding of all of the broader strategy reconsideration that is happening.

MR COCKS: Minister, let me try one more time. As I said, you promised at the election nearly two years ago to deliver an ACT youth strategy. There is nothing in the budget to suggest that you will deliver it, and you have just said that no work has commenced on it. Your 2026 statement of priorities, delivered on 5 February this year as Minister for Youth, included not one mention of the promised youth strategy. Why is delivering a youth strategy not a priority this year?

Mr Pettersson: In government, Mr Cocks, everything is a priority. This is important and it is something that the government will turn its mind to at the appropriate time. This is a conversation that is taking place in the wider context of a broader reconsideration of the whole remit of strategies we have across government. I think it

is important that we have the right strategies and policies in place. I acknowledge that a lapse in potential coverage of a strategy may be a disappointment to some. I think that is entirely fair view to hold. It is something that we will seek to respond to and address in line with the election commitments.

MR COCKS: Minister, are you just hoping that youth are going to age out before you actually have to deliver on your promise?

Mr Pettersson: I think young people are going to keep coming, Mr Cocks. Baby-making ain't going out of fashion.

MR COCKS: The current ones are getting older and they are not seeing any progress on this from here.

Mr Pettersson: I guess I will take that as a comment.

MISS NUTTALL: Taking your point that the Children, Youth and Families portfolio is very clearly defined in administrative arrangements, in the same way, women, people with a disability and queer folks would expect there to be someone, I guess, driving the whole-of-government response to young people, it strikes me as odd that we would not have that mechanism. Minister, have you made any representations to the Chief Minister or to your cabinet colleagues to for the young people portfolio to have a whole-of-government and overarching element to make sure we are not missing core things that would impact the state of young people in the ACT?

Mr Pettersson: It is an interesting question. The short answer is, in terms of the representation, I have not made a representation of that nature. It is a constant tension in this place for some of these portfolios that they have large areas of interest that align with some of the traditionally larger portfolios like health. Education is a central one. When you engage with young people, either through YAC, the Youth Assembly or other forums, a large amount of those representations do relate to education.

I appreciate why there would be an interest in having youth, as a portfolio, have greater oversight and greater involvement than some of these other portfolios, but that is just hard due to the structure of government. Where you can kind of ease some of those challenges can be through effective lines of communication, good work relationships in these places and connections across directorates at the official level. I am pretty confident that a lot of that is in place, but we can always do better, and we will always endeavour to do that.

MISS NUTTALL: In the context of this discussion, would you consider making representations to the Chief Minister to have youth established as a more overarching portfolio?

Mr Pettersson: Would I be interested? I have an open mind to it. I am curious as to the views of the committee and any recommendations they may make on that.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you.

MS CARRICK: If you do not have a youth strategy—and we have increasing mental

health issues in young people—how do you assess the needs of young people and how do you engage them in and connect them with their community?

Mr Pettersson: Can you repeat the question, sorry?

MS CARRICK: My question is: what assessment do you do of the needs of young people in order to ensure that they are engaged with their community and that their mental health and other aspects of their life, their demographic, is being looked after in their local areas?

Mr Pettersson: Okay. What assessments do we do through the youth portfolio? I would not describe it as “assessments” in a clinical sense, particularly when you make reference to mental health. The youth portfolio is quite effective at engaging with young people through its advisory council and its youth assemblies. One is more targeted and one is more open to the wider community. They do not necessarily undertake assessments; they are largely listening exercises and a place for advocacy. The views that we receive through those forums and other spaces are then fed wider into government, which would then hopefully be the basis of people that do have the responsibility for that service to take appropriate steps to respond to those concerns in the community.

MS CARRICK: Do you ensure that your youth advisory service has representation across Canberra?

Ms Akhter: In the Youth Advisory Council space, in the way we undertake the recruitment, it does represent the broader ACT community. Obviously, the age range is between 12 to 25, but it cuts across diversity, gender orientation, background, ethnicity—all of it.

MR EMERSON: I want to ask about institutional child abuse. There was a Treasurer’s Advance on 10 June 2026 for \$18.3 million to HCSC, specifically to Children, Youth and Families, CYF. One of the reasons listed was settlement of civil claims related to institutional child sexual abuse. Are those related to out-of-home care or youth justice settings, or both?

Ms Arthy: From memory, it is mainly youth justice. Are you aware of any others that were covered in that year? I will hand over to Ms Sabellico.

Ms Sabellico: In terms of the abuse claims for 2025-26, they are a combination of youth justice or those that have previously been in care or a combination of both.

MR EMERSON: Did the full \$18.3 million from the Treasurer’s Advance apply to this issue? Was it all in relation to settlement of such claims?

Ms Sabellico: No.

Ms Arthy: No, it would not be. It would also cover out-of-home care costs as well for child protection.

Ms Sabellico: I can provide more detail. In terms of the total funding, we have some

cost pressures in relation to about 18 young people who are in bespoke arrangements. They are children and young people with disability and require disability specialist services and a couple with some mental health conditions that require extra support and services as well. We had a number of matters relating to the intensive therapeutic order, and those costs are also covered in there as well as some alternative accommodation arrangements supporting families at different times that might need extra assistance and support, some sibling groups, and then some contingency funding. It covers a range of services provided by Children, Youth, and Families.

MR EMERSON: How much of the \$18.3 million was related to the civil claims related to institutional child sexual abuse, and what was the total expenditure on that in 2025-26?

Ms Sabellico: Mr Emerson, I do not think I have that here, but I will see if I can get it for you by the end of this session.

MR EMERSON: Thank you. Let's say "taken on notice", just in case you do not manage that.

Ms Sabellico: I will take it on notice, but we will try and get it back to you.

MR EMERSON: Thank you. In an earlier estimates hearing, the Government Solicitor said that institutional abuse claims had increased from around 20 per year on average and that had been steady to 46 in 2025-26. I think he has essentially concerned that it is going to remain elevated. A number of these related to children in care in Bimberi and also in Bimberi's predecessor. What is your understanding of that increase and what is driving it?

Ms Sabellico: My understanding is that there was a change to legislation which allowed for people to seek for their records as part of civil matters.

MR EMERSON: Have you done any analysis of the ACT government's exposure to further not only financial risk but also human risk in relation to this issue?

Ms Arthy: We monitor the costs of this very closely. We cannot give you any insight into the potential for future claims because they are up to the individuals putting their claim in. However, we do monitor very closely the ones that we have and particularly what the potential financial impact will be on the territory.

MR EMERSON: I put in a question on notice on 29 April, though it may have gone through the system a little bit after that. The answer was due on 7 June, but it is still unanswered. There were a couple of questions but one was:

How much has the ACT government paid in damages stemming from personal injury or abuse plans from current or former Quamby Youth Detention Centre or Bimberi Youth Justice Centre detainees, whether through settlements outside of court or otherwise, each year for the last five financial years? Can the minister provide the total legal costs incurred by the ACT government associated with the above claims broken down by year for the last five financial years?

This is now almost two months overdue. What is the reason for that?

Ms Arthy: Firstly, Mr Emerson, apologies. We try and get things back as quickly as we can. I will get some follow-up advice. I suspect we are seeking legal advice about what we can release and what we cannot, but I will confirm that and give you a better update about why the delay.

MR EMERSON: Okay; thank you. I have previously asked this sort of question in relation to other issues, like people getting hurt by tripping on cracked footpaths, and have received clear total amounts. I would think that that would be sufficiently kind of de-identified, so to speak, to not raise a legal issue.

Ms Arthy: Mr Emerson, I have just got advice through that we are seeking GSO advice about what we can say. But I will give this a priority to make sure we come back to you as quickly as we can.

MR EMERSON: In terms of provisioning for these kinds of costs moving forward, how is that covered in this budget? Is there an assumption within the budget that, with the increase from 20 claims per year to 46 in the last financial year, that higher amount is likely to remain over the forward estimates or to continue increasing? I would like to understand how CYA specifically has budgeted for this.

Ms Arthy: There are two ways that these claims are funded. Some are through ACTIA, because it is an insurable claim, and others through the Health and Community Services Directorate are funded from within existing resources. While there is no official budget line, we have an arrangement whereby we fund the claims and then, as you would have seen, through a Treasurer's Advance usually is when we get the top-up for the actual expenditure that we have made.

MR EMERSON: Okay. If you could perhaps take on notice how many Treasurer's Advances were received over the last five financial years that were received specific to settlement of civil claims or dealing with civil claims related to institutional child sexual abuse would be helpful and the total amount of the proportion of those Treasurer's Advances that was for that issue.

Ms Arthy: We may not be able to do the specific thing with the Treasurer's Advances, but I can certainly look at how much we have paid. I will get you the same answer. It may not be necessarily part of a Treasurer's Advance because, as you know, our directorates have been combined, and I am not sure that we will be able to have something that is sensible for you. But we can look at the amount that we have actually paid.

MR EMERSON: Okay, thank you. Even if we knew, "Okay, four out of the five last financial years there has been a Treasurer's Advance but we do not know exactly how much"—if you can provide that information—that would be helpful.

Ms Arthy: We will do our best.

MR EMERSON: Thank you.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: This is a sort of similar theme to last session. What is the

progress that has been made on the Next Steps for Our Kids strategy or initiative to date, from start to now? Are we on track? Is it going well or does more work needs to be done?

Mr Pettersson: I will hand to Melanie in a moment, but things are progressing really well. Through A Step Up and now to Next Steps, the ACT is doing what not all other jurisdictions are doing, which is reducing the number of kids in care. In other places around the country we are seeing their trajectory go a really negative way. That is not what we are seeing in ACT, due to a large coordinated effort over many, many years. There are, of course, bumps in the road, but we are continuing the work of reforming the system. As we transitioned away from the consortium to the new panel providers, there are some really, really exciting opportunities ahead of us here in the ACT. I will let Melanie take us through it.

Ms Saballa: Thank you, Minister. I appreciate the question. As the minister indicated, lots of work has been undertaken in this space, and I would be really pleased to share a progress update with you. As you would be aware, Next Steps for Our Kids is the ACT strategy for strengthening families and keeping children and young people safe. It has an important vision. It is a vision of a child and family system in which children and young people are safe, supported and able to thrive.

The other thing about the Next Steps strategy, is that it is long-term reform and it aims to shift the ACT child and family system towards earlier support for families, reduced reliance on statutory intervention and better outcomes for children and young people. Families are strengthened to care for their children and young people wherever possible and communities are partners in nurturing wellbeing, connection and belonging. Under Next Steps, safety and wellbeing are understood as outcomes that emerge from stable relationships, continuity of care, cultural connection and responsive systems that support children, young people and families over time.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination is a foundation and non-negotiable commitment under Next Steps. This recognises that over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in statutory systems is a critical and enduring issue. It requires sustained focus and active efforts in policy, decision-making, service delivery, monitoring, evaluation and shared accountability. Over 2025-26, there has been sound progress on the Next Steps reform program of work, and there are several key actions in that last financial year that I would like to share with you.

There has been ongoing collaboration through the ACT Aboriginal Children's Forum. Its focus is culturally safe services and developing shared practise tools in line with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle. There has been the delivery of the therapeutic residential care property initiatives—initiatives which have improved the housing stock used to deliver these services. This has resulted in enhanced safety and wellbeing of young people and staff. There has been the establishment of the Next Steps performance evaluation suite. This includes a monitoring, evaluation and learning framework and a performance management framework. Then we have had artwork created by the Gugan Gulwan young women's and young men's groups. The two paintings share the story of transition to adulthood and independence and the importance of connection with family, culture, community and country. The design elements from these artworks feature on resources that have been developed for care

experience for young people and young adults. This is part of the aftercare assistance initiative.

They are in the last financial year, and there are many more. Broadly, and as indicated by the minister, we have seen the implementation of more intensive family support, preservation and restoration models. We have established the Children, Young People and Families Panel to deliver more integrated supports. We have supported the ACT's first care and protection organisation-registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation. We have continued support for the development of ACCO involvement and leadership in the sector. We have implemented the Child and Family Reform Ministerial Advisory Council to elevate the voices of people with lived and living experience. Certainly collaboration across the service system has been a particular area of interest of the council. There has been a restructure of Children, Youth and Families Division, including practice frameworks, and this gives effect to the legislative changes to the Children and Young People Act. Then there has been investment in a range of direct services for children, young people and families.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Okay. You answered my next question. The minister spoke about the progress that has been going really and I wanted to know what tools you are using to monitor that and test it—and thanks for the answer. The first actions plan is going to be completed next year. So we have had the first sort of, “These are our priorities for the initial segment.” How are you working out what is next? Where is it going to go?

Ms Saballa: Thank you, and I am happy to respond to your question. The first thing to say is that Next Steps for Our Kids is an ambitious eight-year reform strategy. Due to the eight-year span of the strategy, the actions have been broken down into two separate four-year action plans. As you were indicating, Action Plan 1 is in the final year of implementation, and we are going to be working on a final closure report, expected in 2027. Action Plan 1 sets out the 18 priority initiatives and also 50 reform actions across six delivery domains to begin implementation of those foundational system changes. That is what we have been working on to put in place.

In terms of monitoring, in May 2025, the Next Steps team partnered with the Project and Change Delivery Team to commence a progress-tracking tool against the actions in Action Plan 1, and it is also a reporting tool. There has been a lot of very detailed work to develop that. The majority of actions and associated milestones are either complete or well progressed. As we are midway through the eight-year implementation of Next Steps, it is expected that some actions will require further work beyond the life of Action Plan 1. This is not unusual in large and ambitious reform. So there will be some recalibration and transition planning that will be required for any incomplete actions and there may be some actions that carry over.

MISS NUTTALL: I have a quick supplementary, if that is okay. You mentioned that there are improvements to housing stock under the current plan. What does that look like?

Ms Saballa: In the 2023-24 budget, the then Community Services Directorate was provided with capital funding of \$2.4 million to undertake renovations on existing therapeutic residential care properties for the purpose of improving work health and

safety conditions for young people and staff. To implement this, a project team involving Housing ACT, Children, Youth and Families, Mackillop Family Services—and they are the therapeutic residential care provider—and Programmed, the contractor, was established to work together to progress the programs of work. Renovation works were undertaken on 12 properties and commenced in March 2025. There was considerable planning in the lead-up to the renovations.

MISS NUTTALL: Are those complete yet?

Ms Saballa: They were mostly addressed by June 2026—so very recently. There continues to be work to address a couple of flooring defects in some of the properties. It is expected that these will be completed within quarter 1 of this financial year.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you. I am keen to ask about out-of-home care transition plans. We have been hearing from many young people in out-of-home care and from their advocates that they essentially feel like they are being set up for homelessness as they age out of care. We have heard that the transition plans—which in theory are great and meant to support young people leaving care—often actually do not take place in practice or, if they are largely considered a box-ticking exercise. Can you tell me why, if these transition plans are meant to set young people up well, young people are reporting that they are often non-existent or unhelpful?

Ms Sabellico: Thanks, Miss Nuttall, for the question. I will quickly talk about what the expected process is that we go through and then talk a bit more about the new aftercare program and how that might address some of the discussions that you are having with young people. Of course, if there are any details you would like to share, we are happy to also follow up in any matter.

Usually leaving-care planning starts at about the age of 15 for a young person in care. It is to start to have a look at what the next steps are for them as part of exiting the care. A lot of work then happens around family reconnection, if that work is required for a young person, in terms of being able to look at how we ensure that family is still a big part of their lives going forward. Some young people may remain with their carers, because they have built that relationship over time and they are part of that family. Others might move more into semi-independent living. So we start to have a look at well what the independent living skills are that they need. We start to have a look at budgeting and living and cooking skills and all of those sorts of things.

As part of that planning, we built up a process with our Housing ACT colleagues to look at head-leasing for young people that are moving into that space. We try to look at starting at about the age of 17, and then we fully support them while they are still in care around maintaining their rent, maintaining the property and also building on that so that, once they turn 18, if that is then going to be their home, we can transfer the lease arrangements through the community housing provider.

There are, however, some young people that need more than that. That is the purpose of the new aftercare assistance program. The funding that is being provided there really does support those that need more support and assistance—so those with medium, high or very high needs. That will also assist us to continue then to wrap supports around people as they leave care. We are embarking on that whole process this year to be able

to provide support for that—which is why I said that, if you have any details of young people who are feeling that it is not quite working for them, please send that through to us and we can have a look at what we can do under the new arrangements.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you. On that, who in the ACT government monitors the transition plans for individual young people? Do you have an active role in that? Who is involved? What is the regularity of the check-in from the government’s perspective?

Ms Sabellico: It is a mix of both. Children, Youth and Families has a division for any young people that we have a long-term case focus on. We have a team that does that for a small proportion of our young people. Most of the leaving-care planning sits with our panel providers of NGOs that deliver on the care arrangements. However, there is a process where, if there is a need for housing, it comes through to us to have those negotiations with our housing colleagues and then also the community housing providers post care. Any other supports that might require extra consideration is then done through the care team and we would jointly agree that process.

MISS NUTTALL: How would you then monitor how care plans are actually being implemented? Do you have a proactive responsibility there, or does it rely on the young person basically getting in touch with you directly and saying, “Hey, I don’t feel like I’m being supported here”?

Ms Sabellico: There is a requirement for an annual review for care plans to occur. Those annual reviews are also submitted through to the Public Advocate to ensure that that monitoring process is in place. But it is usually through the care team. If things have not progressed well, it is addressed in those forums, and our staff will raise with us if they feel that there is a significant gap. What I mean by “us” would be our clinical services area, which is headed up by our chief practitioner, or their appropriate executive to be able to then address it more around a different level.

MISS NUTTALL: Do you know whether young people have a right to be in their own care team meetings? We are hearing, incidentally, that this is not always happening in practice.

Ms Lopic: Children and young people can participate in care team meetings and, if there are instances where they feel that their voice is not heard, they can also bring a support person as well as an advocate. There is also the capacity for the Public Advocate and the Official Visitors, who do make representations regularly at care team meetings.

MISS NUTTALL: Does the ACT government have a proactive responsibility to monitor that and to make sure that young people are actually included in those discussions about their future and how their transition plan is going to be implemented?

Ms Sabellico: Yes. It would be the responsibility of our practitioners and their team leaders to ensure that all members are invited and we are not then to be able to provide the detail in terms of whether that is a personal choice or there is something else for a period of time that might mean it might not be the right time for involvement. Again, that would then need to be lifted up to a higher delegation.

MISS NUTTALL: If you were to get a cross-section in the ACT, would you be able to

tell us from the government's perspective how many transition plans are actively being actioned? How do you monitor that data? How do you collect and how do you express it?

Ms Sabellico: That is a good question. It is probably in a number of places for consideration. Firstly, it would be considered as part of contract meetings with the providers in terms of whether they are in fact following processes. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, we now have established tools to monitor for all appropriate decisions in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care. That was established and developed by our ACT Aboriginal Children's Forum. The other way now will, of course, be through the monitoring, evaluation and learning framework that will account for all of the requirements in terms of care plans, leaving-care plans, transition plans and other supports. So we will have a framework that will deliver that for us as well.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Do you currently have the number of young people who have a transitioning out of care plan? Do you have stats on that over the last two years, three years and five years?

Ms Sabellico: We would be absolutely able to give numbers for children over 15 with a care plan. I would need to go in to have a look specifically at the transition planning component. But we have a record of it all, and we could look to provide that. It might be just a bit resource intensive because of the way we currently account for it.

THE CHAIR: Would you be able to also provide how many children at in-care will require a care plan that has not already started at 15?

Ms Sabellico: In terms of the leaving-care planning part?

THE CHAIR: That is correct.

Ms Sabellico: I will take it on notice, and I will see what we can do.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MR COCKS: Minister, I want to go back to the discussion we were having around whole-of-government youth policy, to get where we are up to right up-front. The commitment for a whole-of-government youth policy as articulated in the previous 10-year commitment has expired. There has been no work, from what you have said, on work towards a new strategy, which was promised at the last election. From your response to Miss Nuttall's supplementary, it sounds like you have made no representations towards a whole-of-government perspective on youth policy and youth issues. Minister, is there anything which has been governing at a whole-of-government level youth policy since the previous commitment expired?

Mr Pettersson: Thank you for the question, Mr Cocks. The principles outlined within the commitment, I think, largely still hold. It is a commitment of government to implement a new youth policy. That work has not progressed yet. It is something that

will be done across government, in considering how best to structure the wide and large number of strategies and policies the government has.

MR COCKS: In terms of that previous so-called commitment, have you formally evaluated the impact of that commitment and, if so, was that an independent evaluation consultancy or in-house?

Mr Pettersson: I will turn to officials, but I do not believe so.

Ms Akhter: In the youth engagement space, the way we coordinate the youth engagement is through corroboration rather than a centralised framework. So, while a whole-of-government strategy will form a part of it—

MR COCKS: Sorry; at the moment I am asking about any evaluation of the previous 10-year commitment, as it was called.

Ms Akhter: Yes. I am trying to respond to the part about how we keep the engagement going with the 12- to 25-year-olds to understand how we are meeting the needs of that particular community, which also forms—

THE CHAIR: Sorry; he is asking specifically about the evaluation of the previous plan, not how you engage subsequently. The evaluation of the previous plan is the question. If it has not been evaluated—

MR COCKS: If it has not, then a “no” is sufficient.

Ms Akhter: I am not aware of any evaluation.

MR COCKS: Then I guess the question has to be asked: how can the government even start to develop its next youth policy without establishing what worked, what failed and what remained undelivered under the previous one?

Mr Pettersson: That is an interesting question, Mr Cocks. As you have gone to great lengths to point out, the government has not commenced that work yet. So I do not think that is the issue—

MR COCKS: I assume you are intending to, though, Minister?

Mr Pettersson: It is an election commitment that the government has made—I am sure it is like an election commitment the Canberra Liberals made as well—to young people in this city. I think it is important that we get these policy settings right for young people. There is a role for the youth portfolio to play. If you look through the actions outlined in the commitment, a lot of the responsibility for them sit in other portfolios. So I think there is some work and central kind of coordination that is required in making sure that that is considered in an appropriate way.

A lot of the principles and actions outlined in the commitment still remain valid and solid. The policy did have an expiration date of 2025. We will seek to have in place an appropriate youth policy in line with our election commitment. But, to the starting question, you asked whether there has been an evaluation and I said, “I don’t know”.

We can now confirm that there has not been an evaluation.

MR COCKS: Okay. Thank you, minister. Minister, those are really interesting observations about the previous commitment. Are you aware that the Youth Advisory Council in 2023 said of that commitment that it was:

... concerned that the ACT Children and Young People's Commitment 2015-2025 is ineffective in action, accountability, and implementation, with respect to the priority areas of implementing policy that enables the conditions for children and young people to thrive and advocating the importance of the rights of children and young people.

And that it went on to state it was “concerned that the existing commitment publication is merely words, with disingenuous intent”?

Mr Pettersson: Can I ask what the question is, Mr Cocks?

MR COCKS: I asked, are you aware of those comments from the Youth Advisory Council?

Mr Pettersson: It does not immediately spring to mind. Do you want to let me know where that was from?

MR COCKS: That was from the *2023 Youth assembly report*.

Mr Pettersson: Okay. Well, thank you for sharing that with the committee.

MR COCKS: Well, then—Minister Berry never seems to have addressed that statement. It was not addressed in the government response, and I cannot find anywhere it has been addressed in subsequent remarks. Does the government's continued failure to deliver a youth strategy show your 2024 election promise was also disingenuous?

Mr Pettersson: No, I do not accept the premise of that question. This is an important policy area that we want to get right. I think there are important principles and actions within the 2015-2025 commitment. We made an election commitment to implement a new youth policy. That is something we want to deliver. I acknowledge the frustration from some—I think, particularly here from you, Mr Cocks—that there is a lapse in that policy being in place. It is something that we will seek to address and respond to in an appropriate way.

MR COCKS: Okay. Minister, what specifically changed, then, after young people told the government its engagement commitments were “ineffective” and “merely words”, from that same report?

Mr Pettersson: I guess, in the timeline I am working off, the Labor party made an election commitment to develop a new youth strategy, so I think that is reasonably compelling, in comparison to others.

MR COCKS: I might try and throw you a bone, minister. Minister, what policies or decisions in this budget materially changed because of advice from the Youth Assembly or Youth Advisory Council?

Mr Pettersson: Could you repeat the question?

MR COCKS: What policies or decisions in this budget materially changed because of advice from the Youth Assembly or Youth Advisory Council?

Mr Pettersson: That is a good question. The Youth Advisory Council makes a range of comments, on a range of matters. Some go to ACT budget measures and ACT government policy; not all of it, but a decent chunk of it. A lot of the time, the views and advocacy of young people is largely already incorporated in the work and intentions of government. There are, of course, sometimes suggestions to change or tweak things.

The one that stands out, just in my mind, most prominently is I remember a recommendation, I think it was from the assembly, that they wanted to see more career counsellors in schools. That is not something that necessarily gets immediately actioned following an assembly, but it is something that goes into the consideration of government as we move forward. The government, of course, already has career counsellors in schools, but the broader point of a recommendation of that nature is that they would like to see more, or better. That is useful, and I am very confident that that is incorporated in how somewhere like the Education Directorate provides that service into the future.

MR COCKS: Well, that brings up an important question, minister. Why is Youth Advisory Council advice still not routinely published with a formal government response?

Mr Pettersson: Interesting question. The Youth Advisory Council has an important advisory role; not, I think, a forum that—Let me think about the best way to phrase this.

Due to the way that it is appointed and comprised, I do not think it should be seen as the be-all and end-all of youth representation and advocacy. I think there are potentially other ways that young people can have their views and advocacy expressed to government, that are more removed from the processes of government.

However, the YAC exists and does provide a particularly important role. It is provided with a large amount of resources that are not commonly available to other youth advocacy associations. So, there are differences in them.

Largely, I think, the work of the Youth Advisory Council is not shouted from the rooftops enough. I think there is tremendous benefit in people seeing the work that takes place; some of the work that they undertake.

They do publish some of their work, but happy to take on board any views of others if there are other things that can be made more available.

MR COCKS: Okay. Minister, in the last seven months, what have you achieved that would suggest youth policy is a genuine government priority, rather than just more words?

Mr Pettersson: Something that I have quite enjoyed doing, with stepping into the

portfolio, was increasing the frequency of youth assemblies. They were held every two years. I did not think that was appropriate. I think every young person should have as many opportunities as possible to engage with, what I think is, probably the most symbolic and representative forum for young people in the ACT—which is why it moved to annual Youth Assemblies, to provide more young people with the opportunity to engage and to do it more frequently. So, there is one for you.

THE CHAIR: Minister, sorry, I have just sat here and listened to you talk about many different things. You have talked about youth policy being important; talked about the coordinated approach and getting it right. What work have you done to ensure that there is a coordinated approach to youth issues here in the ACT? And when will the work for the youth strategy commence?

Mr Pettersson: Shall we break that into separate questions? What was the first one, Ms Barry?

THE CHAIR: What work have you done to date, to ensure that there is a coordinated approach, as you said, to issues affecting young people across portfolios? For example, have you made representations to the health minister about the fact that there is no oncology unit here in the ACT for children? So, what work have you done, in collaboration with other ministers that your portfolio cuts across, to ensure there is a collaborative, coordinated approach to issues?

Young people are the single most affected cohort of people in this country. In this state, we are seeing issues left, right and centre: crime, health, education, DV, and across. What work have you done?

Mr Pettersson: Thank you for the question, Ms Barry. I do not think that was the question that I asked you to repeat, but it is a good one regardless. As I made reference to in my answer to Ms Nutall earlier, it has always been a constant tension in this place for some portfolios that have potential overlap with other portfolios—and how do you get that balance right? Something that I do in my portfolio responsibilities is I meet with my colleagues regularly, where I raise matters within my portfolio. Central to a lot of those meetings are the interests of young people.

In recent times I have met with the former minister for education and made representations about a range of issues that I have seen evidenced in my portfolios, that are the consequences of decisions within the education portfolio. Similarly, I have done so for the health portfolio.

Now, there is no easy way to slice up the administrative arrangements but that we would have the Minister for Young People responsible for both hospitals and schools in the ACT. Now, I do not think that that is a serious recommendation or suggestion that this line of questioning would go to, but it needs to be put out front and centre that it is, I do not think, reasonable to centralise within the youth portfolio all services that young people engage with.

THE CHAIR: So where is the output? We know you have not evaluated the previous one. How do you know that the representations that you are making or the issues that you are addressing are actually producing outcomes for young people? Where is the

output? Where can we find it? If you do not think that there needs to be a coordinated approach to issues facing young people, how do we identify the outputs as a whole and say, “This is the whole-of-government. Ask this individual. This is what we have done to ensure that you have the best outcome.” How do we measure that?

Mr Pettersson: Well, there is a range of ways you can get a measure of how things are tracking across the city.

THE CHAIR: Particularly for young people.

Mr Pettersson: Yes. There is a range of data reporting that I would look to. I do not necessarily think they are all published within the youth portfolio but there is data commonly available whether it is RoGS, wellbeing indicators that speak to how we are progressing the ACT at a wider system level—

THE CHAIR: Individually, not as a whole. It is individually; education, health. But I am talking about it as a whole, to say these are the outcomes we have achieved for a young person as a whole. That is the purpose of the youth portfolio.

Mr Pettersson: Well, I understand that this is a consistent line of questioning. I do not, necessarily, take that assessment. As the minister responsible for children, youth and families, and to your question who is responsible for youth, we have just created a new portfolio sitting under the Deputy Chief Minister Rachel Stephen-Smith, who is responsible for child wellbeing. So, within that portfolio she would hold responsibility for developmental reporting. If you were to ask a question about “Are young people healthier?”, well that responsibility and reporting would come through the health portfolio. If you were to look at educational results or educational attainment, you would look to the education directorate.

THE CHAIR: That is exactly my point, but no one is putting—That is exactly the point. But a wholistic output of: how are young people thriving? How are they doing across all, as a wholistic output? There is nothing to point us to it. There are all siloed and individuals, and just scattered across.

You can see the frustration. Most of us here are parents; most of us here have young people in our care. So, it is quite frustrating to hear that the minister for young people: one, does not even know the outcomes of his last strategy; two, has not even commenced the next strategy; and does not know how outcomes, wholistically, are tracking. But anyway, in the interests of time, I will just move on.

MS CARRICK: Thank you, chair. I did have a lot of questions about that too, but we will move on. We have gone through a lot of it, so I will on to youth centres. Can you explain to me how you support the youth centres that we have in town?

Mr Pettersson: It depends on the youth centre, to be honest. Youth centres in the ACT may share the same name and title but how they operate and how they are funded can vary widely, so, I guess, is it a specific question to a particular one?

MS CARRICK: Well, what are the differences? Because you can support vulnerable youth in a youth centre, or you can support all youth—a place to hang out, play pool,

whatever. How do you support the youth through youth centres in the ACT?

Mr Pettersson: Probably the most direct and consequential support the government provides would be in the provision of leases for facilities. A large number of youth centres that immediately spring to mind in the ACT, the most prominent ones, are funded from the resources of the organisations that run them, which may then be supported through other activities of the organisation.

MS CARRICK: And so, do you have a look at what services you think that a youth centre should provide in their geographic area? Because they may have different needs in different geographic areas, so do you have a look at that and, through any mechanism or levers that you might have, ensure that those gaps in services are addressed?

Mr Pettersson: Gaps in services, or geographical spread?

MS CARRICK: Well, I mean, both. If you have a look at Tuggeranong, it may be different to Belconnen in their needs for young people, so do you have any assessment of the needs of young people in a geographic area and then talk to the youth centres about the gaps you have identified and how they might be addressed?

Ms Arthy: I am just looking—Minister, I am just trying to help you on this one. Ms Carrick, do you have any particular youth centres in mind? So, for example, the CIT Woden youth centre? Is that the sort of centre you are meaning?

MS CARRICK: There is a Woden youth centre, but I am not clear on the youth it targets. I suspect it is more vulnerable people, because it is run by Woden Community Service, who service more vulnerable families, and members in our community.

Ms Arthy: Yes, because we have the Youth Foyer at CIT Woden, which is underneath the—that is for housing.

MS CARRICK: Yes, but that is for accommodation for young people at risk of homelessness—

Ms Arthy: Yes, that is right.

MS CARRICK: —to keep them in education, so it is not a place where young people hang out.

Ms Arthy: Yes, okay. I just wanted to clarify what you were meaning. I am just checking: we do not actually fund the youth centres, that I can tell, unless Ms Evans can contribute?

Ms Evans: Yes. I am Jacinta Evans, Executive Group Manager, Strategic Policy. Our funding for youth centres is through our community sector colleagues, and through the work that we fund broadly.

So, as you have rightly mentioned, there is a range of different youth services provided through Woden Community Service and that includes things like a youth engagement team for children 12 to 25, or young people. They have got a Raw Potential youth

outreach program for children at risk of homelessness. They have got some nurse-led wellbeing clinics in that space, and some family case management services, I understand, under the Children, Youth and Family Support Program.

My understanding is that, where we are paying our community sector organisations for those kinds of things, that they would take a wholistic view of the young person. So it is not just children with a specific need; any young person could engage with the youth engagement team, for example.

MS CARRICK: Yes, I appreciate that, and they do a great job but their primary purpose, I understand, is to deal with vulnerable families and people. They do not get funded to deal with the broader community and the broader youth in the area.

Ms Evans: Are you thinking more around general services for kids just to enjoy, rather than specific—

MS CARRICK: Yes, safe spaces for kids to come or just connect.

Ms Evans: I think they do have a safe space to hang out as part of the Woden services, is my understanding. But I guess it depends on whether young people are attracted to go there, based on their needs.

MS CARRICK: Yes. And so, what about other areas; Weston Creek, Molonglo? How do you support the young people in those areas?

Ms Evans: Similarly, through our community services contracts, but we could perhaps take it on notice to find out exactly where those services are located.

MS CARRICK: Yes, that would be good.

Ms Evans: Can do.

MISS NUTTALL: Ms Carrick, you asked about third spaces. I am wondering, has the government considered models like rec centres and things like that? Is it something you have ever looked at funding, or have you ever audited our infrastructure from a youth perspective to understand whether there is just simply enough “stuff” to do?

Because I know—I think it was the Children and Young People’s Commissioner who came up with the *More big kid swings* report, where they asked a bunch of young people, “Is there enough to do? What would you like to see?”

So, I suppose if any actions come out of that? Have you looked at what government might do to fund those third spaces?

Mr Pettersson: Interesting. No, there has not been a formal response to that from the commissioner. The issues raised in it are salient and important, however. Young people go about making their lives in our city, they need to have spaces to grow and discover who they are. And places that do not have an entry fee and do not cost money to hang out are central for that. I acknowledge that. I guess, I speak to this not with a profound insight through the portfolio, because it is not a planning portfolio.

The government—at least in my time at this place—does identify where there are shortcomings in availability for young people when it comes to things like youth centres. This was particularly pertinent out in Gungahlin, in recent times. I do not necessarily know what the genesis of that understanding within government was; what picked that up, whether it was representations from community, from members, whether it was a wider planning or desktop review of spaces. It is a salient question, and I do not know the answer.

MR COCKS: Minister, I think what a lot of us are struggling with is, I had always assumed that you had some sort of strategy when it came to youth centres and youth engagement and activities in general. Is there actually a strategy or document that sets out what you are trying to achieve with youth centres, and how you are doing so?

Mr Pettersson: I do not believe we have a youth centre strategy.

MR COCKS: Or a plan. Any sort of document that sets out what you are trying to do.

Mr Pettersson: I do not believe we have a youth centre strategy.

MR COCKS: Okay, thank you.

Mr Pettersson: If you would like to make a recommendation that we establish one, I would love to see the recommendation, Mr Cocks.

MR COCKS: I am sure the committee will have plenty of recommendations for you, minister. Now, I need to change direction a bit, and we will try to get a bit more specific for you, minister, because child protection files can contain allegations of abuse, family violence, histories, health information, court material and the identities of children, carers and reporters.

The directorate has published privacy statement says personal information must be protected from misuse, unauthorised access and disclosure, and ordinarily made available only to staff who needed to perform their roles. The Information Privacy Act also applies to some ACT government-contracted service providers and subcontractors.

Now, my office has previously been advised—and I believe you have been engaged on this as well—that an ACT-contracted legal provider allowed a secondary school work experience student to access sensitive child protection material. Are you aware of this?

Mr Pettersson: Mr Cocks, I appreciate the sincerity in asking that question. I just hesitate, before we proceed down this line of questioning, that we do not potentially identify any individual.

MR COCKS: I am working very hard to not identify the individuals, but it is important. Are you aware of this?

Mr Pettersson: No, I acknowledge the importance of parliamentary hearings. I just hesitate to engage on any individual matters, because there is the potential—

MR COCKS: Are you aware of any individual matters?

Mr Pettersson: I am briefed appropriately by officials, Mr Cocks. And I completely understand how frustrating it is, I just cannot engage on any individual matters in a forum of this nature.

MR COCKS: So, the question is not about an individual matter. The question now is, “Are you aware of any instance where a secondary school work experience student has been able to access sensitive child protection material?”

Ms Arthy: Mr Cocks, perhaps if I can come in here. The simple answer is, “Yes.” But I am quite reluctant to talk about any further detail because to do so, I think, we will divulge, so—

MR COCKS: I am not asking you for any detail on it. Just awareness.

Ms Arthy: I think that is probably as far as I can go.

MR COCKS: I would like to know whether the minister is aware.

Mr Pettersson: Mr Cocks, I am briefed appropriately by officials.

MR COCKS: Okay. So, I will take it, based on what I am aware of, as a “yes”. Could you please tell me: has this happened to more than one child in the system?

Mr Pettersson: Mr Cocks, with the utmost sincerity, there is no way to answer a question of that nature without providing identifying information or potentially providing information in relation to any particular case. So, I just—

MR COCKS: Minister, how many children have had their information accessed, through service providers and subcontractors, by people without authorisation?

Mr Pettersson: That is a different question. Let us see if we can give an answer.

Ms Arthy: I am just conferring with my colleagues here.

Mr Pettersson: Do you want to repeat the question?

MR COCKS: How many children in the system have had their information accessed by a subcontractor or contractor staff member, without an authorisation?

Ms Arthy: In order to answer that we would have to know—the simple answer is that we would not know what happens in an organisation that is external to the directorate. So, I cannot sit here and say that there are none; we just probably do not know about it. What I can tell you is that when we are made aware of it, we have very strict data breach policies in place and we do take quite firm action, because the privacy of people’s data is paramount.

I would further ask that if anyone is aware of even a concern about access from a particular provider, then we would like to know so we can take action.

But the data systems just are not there for us to be able to independently determine what a third-party provider does and does not do when it comes to this.

MR COCKS: Okay. What protections have you implemented to ensure this never happens again?

Ms Arthy: If I talk in general—and I can turn to Ms Sabellico shortly—and I am doing this from a system discussion, not in terms of the particular instance you are talking about. A lot of it comes down to education of the people who are handling our data—and I will hand to Ms Sabellico to go through the detail and the work that we have done in response.

Ms Sabellico: I will ask you to hand to Ms Lapic.

Ms Arthy: Sorry, wrong one.

Ms Lapic: I can talk to our workforce more broadly. As part of our foundational learning, we have very clear obligations around our data protection of private and sensitive information. So, from a workforce perspective internally, that is a clear data breach policy in the sense that is implemented and activated immediately. When it comes to our providers, they too have orientation around their obligations as information holders of private and sensitive information. When they come to care team meetings, initially, they too have obligations under the care team around private and sensitive information, as information holders. So, there are a number of different information sheets and training that is provided in relation to private and sensitive information.

When it comes to, more broadly across the sector, we have had information shared with our legal officers, as well, to remind them about their obligations under the information act.

MR COCKS: Now, I understand that the main protection from this sort of event happening is actually non-disclosure agreements. That is what has been put to me. In what way does a non-disclosure agreement protect from a person under 18 accessing and revealing that information?

Ms Lapic: Could you repeat the question?

MR COCKS: In what way does a non-disclosure agreement prevent someone who is under 18—and therefore the NDA cannot be enforced against them—from accessing and revealing information without authorisation?

Ms Arthy: I think, if I may, I do not think it is a question around the NDA. It is really, and again in this particular instance, it is practices involved with people who hold this information. We would expect that anyone who is a partner with us, holding this incredibly sensitive information, would have their own checks and balances in place to ensure that only the appropriate and authorised people can get access.

MR COCKS: How do you ensure that? What steps do you take to make sure your

contractors are doing this? And do you understand that, at the moment, what seems to be happening is that the privacy protections are just being used to prevent the family from actually getting the information about what has happened and what has been done?

Ms Sabellico: So, in terms of, generally, the process: every time we would share information with an information-sharing entity, we would clearly stipulate that it is up to them, then, in order to ensure that that information remains sensitive and protected, and that the responsibility is theirs as the information-sharing entity.

Now, when we then find out that information-sharing entities may have on-shared information, we immediately act and we remind them again of their responsibilities. And where it is serious enough, we would in fact then also send a letter requiring then for that entity to then undertake and present further training, development and review of their own processes to ensure that that information is stored, contained and not provided elsewhere.

MR EMERSON: I wanted to ask about a range of things related to youth justice. The draft youth justice strategic plan that is currently out for consultation—and thank you for the briefing on that—includes among its proposed actions, or future actions, exploring options to implement a throughcare program in youth justice settings, particularly at Bimberi youth justice centre. In the 2023-24 budget, the government provided the then Community Services Directorate with \$200,000 for the purposes of developing a throughcare program for youth justice. I have asked about this previously. I understand a consultant was engaged in the 2023-24 financial year to do that work. Where is that piece of work up to? What happened to it?

Mr Pettersson: Thank you for the question, Mr Emerson. That work was done. There was a consultant's report that was produced. I have laid eyes on it; it definitely does exist. It has been, I guess, useful and instructive in progressing the work for throughcare, which I am very excited to see that we have got further movement on in the budget.

MR EMERSON: So, that was back in 23-24, but the draft youth justice strategic plan identifies “exploring” options to implement a throughcare program as a future action. So, this just feels like a bit far away for something that a consultant already prepared a plan for in 23-24. Was there any use in doing that piece of work? Why are we still up to exploring, when we have already done this, now, three years ago?

Mr Pettersson: Well, the budget supports a throughcare pilot.

MR EMERSON: Will the piece of work that was already done be used to inform the throughcare pilot? Do you now need to consult and bring in a new consultant, perhaps, to develop a proposal for the throughcare pilot?

Mr Pettersson: Anyone like to give an update on our work?

MR EMERSON: You see what I am getting at, right? Like, I am not crazy, I hope.

Mr Pettersson: No, no, no. I think the line of questioning is a good one. Sometimes government procures work and it sits in the top drawer and is not utilised or put into action quick enough. I think this maybe falls into that case. There was a consultant's

report done and government, the range of decisions for whatever the reasons are during that time, did not further progress that work—but that is work we are progressing now.

MR EMERSON: Okay, the draft strategic plan, as I have said, lists exploring options to implement a throughcare program, but the budget identifies funding for a throughcare pilot program, as you have touched on, and we have got the consultant's report that is already completed. So, what is the timeline for this work, if we may in the future be looking at exploring throughcare options, but actually the budget says we are going to do a throughcare pilot program. When is the throughcare pilot going to start? And when is the full program going to be rolled out?

Ms Arthy: Perhaps I will hand to Ms Lopic to go through what the plans are.

Ms Lopic: There have been three identified FTE that are looking to start implementing the pilot program. If we are thinking about a timeframe, I would say that that is in the course of this next six months, as we start to consider what the model will look like, and start to orientate in terms of the program itself.

MR EMERSON: And the program duration? I am curious as to why it is a pilot as opposed to just a program.

Mr Pettersson: Evidence-based policy, Mr Emerson. You have got to pilot things before they have got an evidence base for it.

MR EMERSON: Of course. Well, you have got to engage consultants to develop up your pilots.

Ms Sabellico: And given that we do—

MR EMERSON: I guess the point is we have got one youth justice centre, right? There are not five different ones, and you are going to pilot it at one. There is the one centre.

Ms Sabellico: And I mean, it has been funded for three FTE. We will operate that model internally and start to actually look at what is going to work best for both sentenced young people as well as those on remand—because I do think it will need to look and feel different for the cohorts. We will also continue to work with our strategic policy colleagues in terms of the youth justice strategy and then, therefore, the implementation of that—and also taking on board the issues that arise from the Inspector of Corrective Services, the Public Advocate and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commissioner around how we better support people to exit Bimberi.

So, all of those things together will then combine to be able to put in place this program—which I think is called a pilot for the sake of the fact that it could change as we get more information; I do not think we are saying that it is a pilot and it will stop. It is really about, well, how do we best utilise the resources and then do the continuous improvement that we will need to do, from the raft of other areas that also have a clear view about what this looks like?

MR EMERSON: Okay, that is helpful. So, it is not a like 12-month pilot, it is an open-ended direction?

Ms Sabellico: Yes.

MR EMERSON: Great. How much of that \$4.79 million investment in Bimberi that is listed in the Budget Outlook is for the throughcare pilot—or throughcare program, which I will start calling it if it is open-ended.

Ms Sabellico: Sure. Of the total amount, \$541,000 was for the engagement of the three FTE.

MR EMERSON: Okay, that is the three FTE?

Ms Sabellico: Yes.

MR EMERSON: Okay, and they are within the public service, not contractors or anything?

Ms Sabellico: Yes.

MR EMERSON: Okay. Page 27 of the strategic plan lists: “Establish baseline measures to define the current state, set clear targets for the future state and develop supporting indicators to strengthen accountability and track progress over time.” This is in the section on monitoring and reporting. Will those indicators be ready before the final strategy, or is developing those indicators likely to become an action in the final strategy?

Ms Dolan: Fiona Dolan, Executive Branch Manager, Commissioning Policy and Service Design. It is likely that the youth justice strategic plan will be finalised and then we will progress into that work. One of the reasons for that is in recognition of the work we wish to do in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, in defining that reporting structure alongside our oversights body. So, we do not wish to predetermine exactly that structure without that codesign activity.

MR EMERSON: Okay. And then on page 21, focus area 4, it lists: “Explore work to review the process for assessing young people’s health care needs on entry to Bimberi and where this health care assessment should best take place.” Will those assessments include FASD screenings? This has been repeatedly raised as a real priority.

Ms Dolan: Thanks for the question, Mr Emerson. That is a very, very specific assessment, as you would be aware, for FASD. We are aware of a small number—less than half a dozen—assessments that have been requested through the Therapeutic Support Panel, which we have supported for children, going forward.

The intent would be that, as much as humanly possible, we would get to those assessments before children are actually engaged in the youth justice system; that we would not be waiting for them, you know, to be in a youth justice setting. And that is the value of the Therapeutic Support Panel, where it can engage with children and young people prior to any kind of engagement in youth justice settings.

So, I would not say that that would become a regular assessment, because of the level

of intensity and the intent of that kind of assessment, but it certainly is something that we are making provision for in other ways.

MR EMERSON: Yes, it has just been put to me that that would be a real asset at Bimberi. I take your point but so many kids are arriving there, having never had an opportunity to have such an assessment.

Ms Evans: That is true, Mr Emerson, but they also may not have had something like a speech and language assessment. There are so many assessments, so I think it is a matter for us to manage their—hopefully before they reach that youth justice setting.

MR EMERSON: Hopefully. Finally, the same page lists: “Explore better use of the Flexible Education Program and other pathways to support the young people exiting Bimberi.” We heard from the AEU in the community day hearings that the review of the Flexible Education Program in the ACT recommended a five-times increase in places. So basically, we are, you know, five times under what we really need, to service the level of need.

Are you, as part of this action, looking at the integration of Muliyan? I understand there is the school within Bimberi, but from a throughcare perspective: one, are you looking at integrating Muliyan there; and have you made representations through this consultation process to Education to ensure that the outcome of that review is a significant increase in the level of the number of spaces?

Ms Evans: I think Ms Wood, director-general of education, spoke briefly about flexible education this morning, and mentioned that a review has been done. We work really closely with our colleagues across education and health, and certainly they have engaged in workshops as we are looking at models of care for youth justice broadly. And the increasing numbers in the flex education program is a matter for Education, but I do understand that they are working to look at those spaces and how they might address the need.

Ms Sabellico: I was just going to quickly add that Children, Youth and Families will continue to engage with Education on an ongoing basis, in terms of individuals but then also the cohort, from Bimberi; and those on care orders in terms of ensuring that we have the right flexible education model for young people built into the education system, and we will continue to work with them.

MR COCKS: How many years of funding are dedicated to, or allocated for, the throughcare pilot program?

Ms Sabellico: It is identified in the 2026-27 budget, but the expectation would be that we will continue with the three FTE.

MR COCKS: That is what I am asking about. There is funding this year, but not yet for the forward years.

Ms Sabellico: The three FTE are built into our budget in the forward years; apologies.

MR COCKS: This is not a discrete item; it is built into it. Thank you.

MISS NUTTALL: Going back to fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, Minister, your recent update to the Assembly on minimum age of criminal responsibility said that government is taking steps to improve those diagnostic and disability support pathways, with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder now a clear system priority. How does that reconcile with your current approach to fetal alcohol spectrum disorder?

Mr Pettersson: The start of that answer is that fetal alcohol spectrum disorder assessment is very intensive. It goes for about a week.

Ms Evans: At least, Minister, yes.

Mr Pettersson: It is very intensive. It is not something that you put every young person through, willy-nilly. There is a tremendous shortage of the specialists that can perform these assessments. Even if you suspect that there is a likelihood of it, there have been system challenges throughout the ACT—probably throughout the country—for a long time, in getting those assessments for those kids. We do not think that is appropriate. As Ms Evans alluded to, we want to make sure that an assessment of this nature is done earlier, before someone ends up in the youth justice system.

The Therapeutic Support Panel is an important initiative that is better enabling us to get those assessments for kids that we think need them sooner. Some of that has already occurred for young people in the youth justice system. That is because the panel is still very new. We are hopeful that, with a medium or long-term horizon, we will be getting to more kids sooner, and we will not be needing to do the assessments in the youth justice setting. That said, this is a long, uphill battle, so we will do what is required.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My questions are on the minimum age of criminal responsibility. It is 12 months in, since the age was raised. Can you discuss or outline what has been done, achieved or missed over the previous year? What is planned and coming up to establish or ground this reform?

Mr Pettersson: Thank you for the question, Mr Werner-Gibbings. The question that stands out for me most is: what have we missed? Potentially, some stuff. We are still building the system. We are leading the nation on these reforms, so we do not have someone to look to, neatly, to copy their homework. We are still building these systems. That is not to say that we are doing a bad job of it. I actually think we are doing a very good job of it.

With the establishment of the Therapeutic Support Panel, as well as the Safer Youth Response Service, those two arms of this reform are doing a really good job of ensuring that, when young people do engage in harmful behaviour in the wider community, to other young people and maybe to themselves, that interaction with law enforcement is minimised through the Safer Youth Response Service. We then want to make sure that, through the Therapeutic Support Panel, ideally, we are getting to these kids as early as possible. But a referral at the point of interaction with law enforcement is not uncommon. It is about making sure that the Therapeutic Support Panel is able to provide the support that those young people need.

In particular, for young people, the cohort in question under MACR, largely, is going

quite well. The ACT, as a jurisdiction, is one of the safest in the country. We have incredibly low youth crime rates. We have seen a tremendous decline in youth offenders in the ACT over the past decade-plus. We have been on a really positive trajectory.

I acknowledge that, in recent years, as evidenced right across the country—it is not unique to the ACT—there has been a change in behaviour, when it comes to youth offending. We know that the response to that change in charging behaviour is to redouble our efforts in providing the support that some of these vulnerable young people need, and that is what we will continue to do.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: This is a first-in-the-country type of thing. Without a template or a road map for success, how will we know if success has been achieved? How are we evaluating the impact of raising the minimum age? Is it just numbers and statistics; is it intervention? What shows the success—or not? What are the indicators?

Ms Evans: We are in a procurement process at the moment to support an evaluation of the MACR service response. In the 2023-24 budget, \$200,000 was put towards that external evaluation. The intent is that we will look at how we have been travelling, broadly, with the service system. We also want to establish a number of baselines around where we are at, so that in 10 years, when we look back, we are able to say, “Okay, clearly, that’s how things have shifted in the service system.”

It is a fairly complex kind of evaluation, in the sense that so much happens with our population growth, and changes like that. We want to get this right and establish some baselines around the wellbeing of young people, and in terms of responses to raising of the minimum age. We will be preparing the scope for that procurement process. I do not have the exact detail of what you are requesting around data—what data points we will use—but that will be something that we will be working through this year.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: We will wait to see that. Would annual reports be too soon? It might be in the next estimates?

Ms Evans: It might be too soon for it to be publicly available, but it will be publicly available as a piece of procurement going forward.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: In 12 months time?

Ms Evans: Certainly, in the next budget estimates.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: How is this reform linked to the youth justice plan? How is it being made sure that the plan and the reform are complementing each other? There will be, I suppose, complexities and sensitivities in joining them up.

Ms Evans: We could certainly speak to that. If we look more broadly, I think the response has to be across the entire lifespan of children and young people. We are starting right back at the government’s commitment to “best start in first 1,000 days” and seeing that families are set up well. Thriving Kids is also a critical part of this—children getting assessed earlier and parents having the right information to make sure that their child is on a really good developmental trajectory.

We then need to look at kids who do not respond well or who are still struggling. After that, we have the Therapeutic Support Panel. There is this movement through that lifespan approach, and some complex supports through our education and health settings. That is how the early years, from my perspective, can unravel for families. What are the best early supports? Are they in place? We are doing all of that work at the moment. When there are some things that might not be going so well, we have things like the Therapeutic Support Panel, to provide support.

In terms of the connection between that and the youth justice plan, obviously, we are hoping that children do not have to engage in the youth justice setting, and that the numbers become smaller and smaller. That is the work that we are doing through Next Steps for Our Kids, and in a range of other ways. The reality is that, when a young person does have to engage with the youth justice setting, we will be looking at a really positive and therapeutic model of care for them. That is a piece of work that we have been doing recently, to make sure that our youth justice settings are supportive and therapeutic, so that, if a child does end up in that setting, the outcomes for them are as positive as they can be.

Ms Sabellico: We will continue to work very closely together to make that happen.

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 for a lunch break.

Hearing suspended from 12.23 to 1.15 pm

Appearances:

Stephen-Smith, Ms Rachel, Minister for Education, Minister for Child Development and Wellbeing, Minister for Finance, Minister for the Public Service, Minister for Health Infrastructure

Education Directorate

Wood, Ms Jo, Director-General

Spence, Ms Angela, Deputy Director-General

Moore, Dr Nicole, Executive Group Manager, System Policy and Reform

Attridge, Ms Vanessa, Executive Group Manager, Infrastructure and Digital Services

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

O'Rourke, Mr Matthew, Executive Branch Manager, Education Projects and Property Upgrades

Health and Community Services Directorate

Evans, Ms Jacinta, Executive Group Manager, Strategic Policy

THE CHAIR: We welcome Ms Stephen-Smith, the Minister for Education and Minister for Child Development and Wellbeing, and officials. Please note that, as witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth, as 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 now proceed to questions. I will hand my first question slot to Ms Lee.

MS LEE: Thank you, Chair. Ms Wood, at Thursday's session, you gave evidence to the committee about a desktop review that you undertook in relation to procurements, following the release of the Operation Kingfisher report. You spoke about how the desktop review focused on changes to delegates and the like. Was that the only thing that that review looked at?

Ms Wood: We are continuing to add to that review. That was what we had done by last week. We are looking at who was the delegate and whether that was aligned with the delegation in place at the time. We are looking at: did the delegate make a decision that was consistent with the outcome from the tender evaluation panel? Did they accept that recommendation?

MS LEE: Okay, so you are doing that comparison as well?

Ms Wood: We are doing that comparison, yes.

MS LEE: Who is undertaking that review?

Ms Wood: It has been undertaken internally.

MS LEE: As in by the Education Directorate?

Ms Wood: By the Education Directorate, yes. I will clarify that, actually. The records sit across Education and Infrastructure Canberra, so we are working on that together.

MS LEE: Okay, but it is done internally?

Ms Wood: Yes.

MS LEE: Do you have any concerns that it is being done internally, given that you confirmed last Thursday that there were senior Education Directorate officials who were now under investigation by the Public Sector Standards Commissioner? Why was the decision taken to do that internally?

Ms Wood: This is an initial piece of assurance. We can go further, and one thing that we have in place now is that our independent audit committee has oversight of our procurement compliance. That is a conversation that I can also have with the audit committee, to look at whether there is a further review of that.

MS LEE: Just to clarify, you said the independent audit committee?

Ms Wood: Yes, the independent audit committee.

MS LEE: I acknowledge that it is ongoing; have you identified, as a result of this desktop audit, any procurements that require further investigation?

Ms Wood: Not at this stage.

MS LEE: In terms of the criteria about, “This will need further review,” are there set criteria? If so, who set that criteria and what is it?

Ms Wood: At the moment we are just doing a review to assess the facts. Was the delegation in line with delegations, and was there a decision that was consistent with a tender evaluation panel? We have not set any criteria for any further work. That is all we have started.

MS LEE: Is there a timeframe that you are looking at to complete this initial audit?

Ms Wood: We should be able to finalise it within the next couple of weeks.

MS LEE: Will you be releasing the results of that audit? That is more of a question for the minister.

Ms Wood: Once we complete the work, we would want to brief the minister; then we can consider what information is relevant in public, if any is relevant to be public.

MS LEE: How far back are you looking, in terms of procurements?

Ms Wood: We have looked back to 2019, so that is before Campbell.

MS LEE: In terms of the one project that you said had identified Ms Haire as the

delegate, was she always the original delegate or was that changed, and who made that decision to change it, if it was?

Ms Wood: That is a further question that I have asked across all of them—whether there was any change in delegate and, if there was, what the reason was. We would have to take that on notice.

MS LEE: Okay. While you are taking that on notice, could you confirm when that change happened, the reason and who made that decision to change it?

Ms Wood: Yes.

MS LEE: Thank you. In terms of the desktop audit, the Kingfisher report talks about a desktop review that was undertaken by the Education Directorate, certainly in relation to Campbell and also Throsby. That is mentioned in the report. It looks like it was around 2021. Are you able to confirm the exact date? It is a bit hard to tell from the report.

Ms Wood: We will have to take that on notice to confirm the exact date.

MS LEE: Thank you. On page 283 of the Kingfisher report, the commissioner says, in relation to that desktop audit—and this is a direct quote:

Another obvious point was that the communications with Mr Ceramidas were not the subject of a written record, nor were they mentioned in Mr Green's Brief or by Ms Haire in her reasons for agreeing with his recommendation, so that a desktop audit—which is plainly all that was envisaged—would not elicit these facts.

What assurances can you provide to the committee and the broader community that the desktop audit that you are undertaking now will be able to identify any further concerns with procurements undertaken in the Education Directorate, given that a previous desktop audit did not identify them?

Ms Wood: Ms Lee, a desktop audit, by its nature, is looking at what is documented, so that is our starting point—to look at what is documented.

MS LEE: Yes, which I think is the commissioner's point.

Ms Wood: Yes. The further assurance we can give the community is about the change that we have made on a range of fronts in relation to management of procurement, in line with the whole-of-government reforms in 2022 and adopting the guidance, the resources, the tools and the training that came from the whole-of-government reforms.

With the further structural change that came in 2024, with the moving of tier 1 and tier 2 projects into Infrastructure Canberra to have end-to-end responsibility, on which we worked constructively with them, as a client for those projects, it does bring that high level of procurement capability for those large projects. There has been a lot of change that has definitely strengthened procurement consistency, probity and compliance in Education, and I am happy to provide more detail on those changes.

MS LEE: A number of other school projects were mentioned in some of the text message exchanges that we have seen contained in the report, including Throsby, which was the subject of a desktop review around that time. That was mentioned in Operation Kingfisher. There was also a mention of Molonglo—is that subject to the desktop review?—along with Garran; I think you have already taken that one on notice.

Ms Wood: Yes, I have taken Garran on notice. Molonglo is still in the future.

MS LEE: Okay.

Ms Wood: There has been no procurement for Molonglo at this stage.

MS LEE: That procurement process has not started. That will be done by Infrastructure Canberra?

Ms Wood: Yes. It is still probably a little way off.

MR EMERSON: Total public school enrolments have declined each year, year on year, since 2021, while independent and Catholic school enrolments are growing each year. Why is that happening?

Ms Wood: Dr Moore can take you through the data. There is a range of factors, and they are different for different stages of schooling—primary school, high school and college.

Dr Moore: It is a great question. There are a number of factors and, as Ms Wood said, it changes across sectors. I will take you through what that is looking like. The first thing we look at is population changes—the birth rate, which we often refer to. In primary schools, from 2025 to 2026, there were 289 less children enrolling in the ACT, but we see an additional 239 students enrolling in Catholic education, so we are seeing a shift there, in terms of affiliation or parent choice. That is leading to a decline in public school enrolments.

That picture changes as we move into high school and senior secondary. In high school, we see an increase in enrolments across all schooling sectors—government schools, independent schools and Catholic schools. The biggest increases are in the independent sector, with 140 students. In large part, almost half of that growth is because there was a new Connections High School that opened this year, and those enrolments are going to that school.

When we get into the senior secondary years, there are an extra 304 students overall. That is the population, moving through. We had that peak, back in around 2020 or 2021, moving into the older year levels. What we are seeing in senior secondary is that 81 per cent of the increase is going to government schools. That affiliation or parent choice factor differs across primary school and into high school and senior secondary.

MR EMERSON: That is a great analysis. What is your understanding of why parent choice—the language that you are using—is the way it is at the primary school level?

Dr Moore: It is difficult to say. Obviously, parents make choices for a range of reasons,

and a lot of the time they are choosing, say, a Catholic school for religious and personal beliefs. Also, it might be because of the reputation of the school in their area, as to why they are making those choices. I could not speak on behalf of parents, of course, but something that we are interested in is that change from primary school and into the higher school years. I do not have the details on it, but I believe Catholic education may have changed their enrolment policies over recent years so that, if you want to go to a high school, you need to be enrolled in the earlier years, in primary school, so parents might be choosing that choice earlier than they may have in the past.

MR EMERSON: You are seeing a small amount of growth at the high school level and solid growth at the college level, so parents who chose the public system early on for their children are, I suppose, washing through, as they get older. But parents who are choosing a schooling system now, for the first time, are more often choosing independent or Catholic schools, when their child goes to kindergarten, than public schools.

Dr Moore: I think some of that would be the population growth that we have talked about, and that is moving through. There are certainly a number of students who move from the non-government sector into the public sector, particularly in secondary, for those college years, so it is a combination of those movements.

MR EMERSON: Is the government concerned about the drop at the primary school level? You said there are multiple factors; I understand that. Is there analysis going into this? Of course, the government is responsible for the One Public Education System, so you want families to be choosing it as much as possible. I noted the new minister's comments, basically, to that effect over the weekend, which were very welcome. What analysis is going on to look at the causal factors here, and are there reforms planned in response to those, to attract more families back to the public system?

Dr Moore: Certainly, foundational reforms in early literacy and numeracy are a significant part of that. My colleagues could talk to that in more detail. The birth rate is significant, and it is important, because more than half of that change relates to birth rate. That is, obviously, outside our control. Where families are choosing sectors, obviously, we are supportive of choice, but we would love them to choose public education first, so we need to make sure that our schools are able to deliver that service to our community.

MR EMERSON: Could you talk me through the birth rate point again?

Dr Moore: Yes, sure.

MR EMERSON: You mentioned that the primary school figure is down 2.1 per cent in the public system; it is up 0.3 per cent in the independent system, and up 2.6 per cent in the Catholic school system.

Dr Moore: They were numbers, not percentages.

MR EMERSON: Yes, those were percentages.

Dr Moore: I am sorry, yes.

MR EMERSON: You have given numbers, which is fine, but I am trying to understand why the birth rate is differentially impacting the different school systems.

Dr Moore: I think it is just that the birth rate itself means there are less children, so that is 289 less children in the community. But there is a—

MR EMERSON: Across the whole system; is that what you mean?

Dr Moore: Across the whole system, yes. There are 239 additional children going to Catholic schools, and an additional 18 students going to independent schools. Certainly, we are seeing the population change impacting public schools, but we are also seeing that affiliation or parent choice moving into those, particularly Catholic education.

THE CHAIR: Was that 289 less children a year?

Dr Moore: Yes, from 2025 to 2026, so it is quite a significant drop in the—

THE CHAIR: Drop in the birth rate.

Dr Moore: It is the birth rate population changes. It is basically children in that age cohort going to school.

MR EMERSON: Basically, all the children that dropped off, compared to the previous year, were in the public system?

Dr Mooer: Yes. It is not one-for-one. It is not specifically those children, but as a total number—

MR EMERSON: What is the government doing to get to the bottom of it, and what is the government doing about it? Separate to that, because we know about the reforms that are underway, we can speak about One Public Education System, Strong Foundations and so on. What I have been struggling to get is an actual commitment that the government is concerned about this and wants to change it. I would like to know whether that is the government's position. Does the government want to reverse the decline? It is not just in the last year; you have provided a good analysis of that. It is the last five years, every year.

Ms Stephen-Smith: As I said, Mr Emerson—you referenced the article over the weekend—it is very much the government's view that public education should be an excellent choice for parents, and it should be excellent enough to be the first choice for all parents and carers, no matter what their background is. There will always be reasons that parents and carers will choose a non-government education—for faith reasons, for reasons of their own family history and connection with that school, for reasons to do with the needs of a particular child. I know families who have one child in a public school and one child in a non-government school, because of the different needs of their children. Our ambition, absolutely, is to ensure that our schools are excellent and could happily be a first choice for every family in Canberra.

MR EMERSON: That is good to hear.

MS LEE: Do you keep data about the families that move their children, either halfway through or whilst they are in primary school or high school, to a non-government school? Do you keep data on that, as opposed to the initial enrolments?

Dr Moore: The data we have is through the student movement register. It is a requirement for schools to report student movements. That is whether they are moving schools within the public sector or within the Catholic system, for example. We have that data. It is in the data system, because we use that to identify where children are not enrolled in schools. If they have un-enrolled, and they have not re-enrolled somewhere else, it is child safety measure. We do not have it in a format where we analyse it to look at reasons, because we use that student movement register specifically for child safety, and making sure that we are tracking individual students. We have not used it in the way that you are—

MS LEE: You might have pre-empted what I was going to ask you, which is: what are the reasons that people have given you for moving their children? I note that there are some generic reasons about why people might make a choice, but I am talking specifically about people who move in the middle of the year. There has to be a reason. It also ties in with, and I think you have mentioned, one of the reasons that people might be coming back is because of the Strong Foundations.

On the flip side, have you had—even anecdotally—feedback that parents were concerned about the lack of teaching, explicit instruction, which is one of the reasons why they moved? We saw a huge increase in the Catholic system after they released Catalyst. That cannot be a coincidence. I have heard it. You must have heard this as well.

Dr Moore: It is not asked; it is not a data field that is asked in the student movement register, because that is not the intent of the register. We know about the movement, but we do not know the reasons why, in that sense.

THE CHAIR: Are you looking to ask? That is really important information.

MS LEE: It is important.

THE CHAIR: I moved my son because he needed additional support, which we were not getting. Do you ask? I was not asked why.

Dr Moore: The challenge with our method of data collection for the student movement register is that it is about child safety. The legislation tells us what we can ask within that. We do not currently have that mechanism. It would be something that would require us to go to those families at the point of un-enrolling. There is a requirement for families to tell us where they are going, but it does not go, in the legislation, to asking about why they are moving. We might know, when there have been challenges for that family, but it is not a dataset that we collect at a system level, currently.

MS LEE: Sure, but if you want to achieve the aim that the new minister has set out quite clearly, it would be really important to know what the issues are as to why children are moving, so that you can have a good insight into what it is that has made parents

decide that it is not the first choice for them.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: I have a question on the interesting use of choice, because choice is not something that is universal. Not every parent in the ACT has the opportunity to choose which school system their children go to. They are excluded through cost. You mentioned that the Catholic education system is being more stringent in who it is allowing in, so there is a school choice, but parent choice is not universal, often. It is a universal school choice—and government schools educate everyone, regardless. Do you have numbers of how many students came back to the public education system through being removed from the private education system over the past five years?

Dr Moore: Do you mean through expulsion, for example?

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: That could be a reason.

Dr Moore: We do not hold that data. A few years back, we tightened the legislation around the use of expulsion.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Because it was being used too freely by the non-government system?

Dr Moore: I would not say that it was being used too freely. I do not have evidence to back that up, but it was ambiguous in the act around when it can be used. In the public education system, we cannot exclude children in the compulsory education age. We have a human right to make sure that every child gets an education. In the non-government sector, there was ambiguity around the use of terminating contracts, which is another way of finishing an enrolment.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: It is a euphemism.

Dr Moore: It can be for other reasons; for example, it could be parents not paying fees—quite legitimate reasons, for example. There are reasons why a non-government school can expel a student, essentially, which is now very tight in the legislation, where it has to be to do with a safety issue. We do not collect the data or understand how many students that would be, but we have certainly done what we can, on our part, to tighten up the legislation, so that the grounds by which you can exclude a student who has been enrolled in your school are clear.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: I am interested in what sort of handover process there would be for an ex-student who was no longer at this school, who is no longer attending this school for really significant behavioural problems, perhaps, but we need to make sure that this person has the opportunity to be educated. Y school says, “This is the reason, and this is what we found difficult.” Does that happen?

Dr Moore: Again, it is part of what we tightened up in the legislation. When a student has been expelled, they have to provide reasonable access for that child to counselling support, which is intended to support that transition. It does not always work that the school that they are leaving is best placed to provide that transition support, because sometimes the relationship has broken down.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Does the receiving school get that insight?

Dr Moore: They can do. We have information-sharing arrangements where we can get information from the school around what the student's needs might be, particularly if they have complex needs. That does happen. Essentially, it is the school requesting information from the prior school, to support them to be prepared and able to support the needs of that student.

MISS NUTTALL: Going back a bit, separate to the very laudable goal of the public school system being the system of choice, do declining enrolments eventually threaten the viability of public schools to stay afloat, given that we are funded per head for loading?

Ms Wood: The work of the public school system resourcing review has looked at the sustainability of our system as a whole and the sustainability of our schools. We have a small reduction in funding off the back of reductions in enrolments, but, in the scale of our system, it is still a small reduction. The work that we are doing as part of the one public education system reform, to respond to insights of that review, is to explicitly look at sustainability at a system level—how we ensure that schools are sustainable and able to operate within their budgets. A big part of that is looking at the functions and services that could be more effectively and efficiently delivered centrally versus the core things that schools need to deliver.

MISS NUTTALL: Does it look at student retention as part of that? Is that an explicit part of the school resourcing review?

Ms Wood: The resourcing review noted the data on enrolments. It did not go any further in that analysis.

MISS NUTTALL: That is helpful. Thank you. The public school resourcing review told us what needs to change in the communities, in looking for confidence in how that change is going to be delivered. This review was released more than two months ago and the government has accepted the majority of its recommendations, which is great. When can schools and families expect to see a clear implementation roadmap outlining the priorities, sequencing and timeframes for the one system reforms, beyond how the \$9.3 million is being divided into three pools this year?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I will start, Miss Nuttall. I will not speak for very long. In last week's hearing, Ms Wood said that work is currently underway to bring together the implementation roadmap for the school resourcing review with the Strong Foundations work, in order to deliver an integrated implementation plan. I will hand over to Ms Wood to talk about the timing of that.

Ms Wood: The timing is to bring that together by September, to be able to show a really clear roadmap for our schools, our stakeholders and the community about how we are going to progress those reforms in a way that has impact but is also sustainable, noting that, for things that we want to implement in schools, we have to be ready for the start of a school year. So that sequencing becomes really important. We need to sequence in a way that works for the operational environment in schools.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you. On community day, ACT parents advised that Ms Berry had established a reform partners group to support implementation of the one public education system reforms. Minister, I am interested in whether this continues under your leadership. If not, what mechanisms will the government use to work with key education stakeholders as implementation progresses?

Ms Stephen-Smith: We discussed that in my regular weekly meeting with the directorate this morning. We will absolutely consider that. One of the questions was about how often I would like to attend those meetings. I am keen to, at least initially, come to those meetings. Dr Moore can talk a bit about how it is going to work. The first meeting had been scheduled for Friday, but, for obvious reasons, that has been postponed, but it will continue.

Dr Moore: The reform partners group certainly will be rescheduled to fit in with the minister's availability. The reform partners group will also be our key mechanism for engagement on all of the reforms. As has been mentioned, we are trying to bring all of the reform work together so that it is a cohesive and sequenced implementation plan. We will be using the reform partners as our key engagement mechanism. We will be making sure that they receive monthly updates on how their reform work is going, so that they are really well-informed, and we will be working with them about the best way to engage their members. A lot of the groups—ACT Parents, for example—need time to engage with parents on the issues that we are bringing to them. A quarterly meeting with the minister will be an opportunity for the minister to hear directly from our key stakeholders about how the reform implementation is going.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you. While that is happening, how is the Education Directorate ensuring that decisions about reform policies are informed by the lived experiences of students, families, educators and school leaders, alongside the internal advice and data?

Ms Wood: One of the things we are conscious of is that all the contributions that staff across our schools, students and others made to the review itself gave us a set of principles to help guide our operating model. We are really conscious that, as we make decisions, even now—even before we have a full roadmap—these decisions are consistent with the direction that the review and the government response has set out for us. But we have other ongoing mechanisms to bring those voices in. In particular, for students, there is the Minister's Student Congress, which is convening soon. It is a really important place to hear from young people in schools about their schools, their experience, and areas where they want to see additional focus.

MISS NUTTALL: Awesome. Do you mind me asking what the mechanism will be for taking students' voices on board through that Student Congress? Is it happening regularly enough, and are you discussing it? It is a big document for anyone to read through, but have you found a way to distil that so students can really engage substantively on the issue?

Ms Spence: I acknowledge the privilege statement. The minister's congress has been operating for some years. A student working group is the lead for preparing the minister's congress annually. I had the privilege of visiting the Student Voice Working

Group last week on behalf of the minister. They are working together around key themes—key issues that are important to them—and then consider what they mean in terms of our reform work. The Student Voice Working Group also reports annually to our Executive Governance Committee, producing an annual report based on issues that are important to them, but also considers what that means for the work that we need to do as part of the broader one public education system reform. The minister’s congress this year, due to significant demand in attendance, is being split into two sessions. It is scheduled for early September. We will have a dedicated primary schools day and then a dedicated secondary schools day. Part of that engagement is about the way that the Student Voice Working Group works with all of the students across the system to bring forward what is important to them and bring the different policy positions to life, which then informs the loopbacks to our Executive Governance Committee and, of course, our new minister. That is part of that process.

The establishment of the Student Voice Working Group has also provided a new mechanism. Line areas that are doing different pieces of work can go back to the Student Voice Working Group and test with them various policy positions and seek feedback from them with regard to the pieces of work that are ongoing. One example of that recently is around review of the Safe and Supportive Schools Policy—a really big policy piece around how we support wellbeing, engagement and safety in our schools. They provide input into what it means for them and insights into how they see this working on the ground.

MISS NUTTALL: Bringing that all back in, how will the government publicly demonstrate that the one public education system reforms are improving outcomes for students, families and school communities and rebuilding confidence in the ACT public education system?

Dr Moore: Certainly part of the planning of the broad reforms is looking at what success looks like and how we measure it. At the moment, we are in the program planning stage to develop the implementation roadmap. Following that, we will be developing what the evaluation plan or approach will be for this reform. We already have two evaluation frameworks, for Strong Foundations and the Inclusive Education Strategy. If we were to bring these together, we are looking at a one public education system evaluation. That is essentially how we will be measuring impact on students, schools and our workforce as well.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you.

MS CARRICK: The resourcing review talked about some disadvantaged schools—that not all public schools are equal—so will there be some short-term actions to support disadvantaged schools prior to the whole rollout of the implementation?

Ms Wood: Ms Carrick, one of the things that we are doing early, because we need to, is setting school budgets for 2027. The resourcing review gave us some advice about what we need to do with school budgets but also said we need to review the whole methodology for school budgets, which is a student resource allocation. That is a quite technical piece of work which we need some external expertise to help us do. But, before we do that, looking ahead to 2027, we are taking on board what we heard from the resourcing review about where the pressures are for schools. We are looking at that

in the context of the methodology we use for school budgets for 2027—looking at what we can do to address some of those pressures for next year, ahead of the bigger funding review.

MS CARRICK: Some schools have trouble getting teachers for whatever reason—their reputation or whatever—so how are you addressing that sort of pressure: getting teachers into the schools that need them prior to the full rollout?

Ms Wood: Part of our process is that we are looking at school budgets, but school budgets are ultimately about people and having the right staff in the schools. We have a range of ways in which we are going to work with schools on the particular challenges they are facing—for schools that are facing particular challenges around attracting the teachers that they need. We have a range of processes that we are working through on that. We have senior staff from the Education Support Office in the centre who will be working with schools, one-on-one if needed or with groups of schools with similar challenges, so that we can make sure that they have what they need for 2027.

MS CARRICK: Thank you.

MS LEE: Minister, there are the findings of the resourcing review. I am not sure whether you have had a chance to digest all of that—in how many days—in three days of being the education minister.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Something like that.

MS LEE: It was damning. You cannot sugarcoat it; it was damning. It revealed very deep and very systemic failures within the ACT education system: a system plagued by confusion; a central office growing faster than schools; a workforce under immense strain; inequality between schools; and rising safety concerns. But it also talked about a widening disconnect between schools and the central office—it was described as an “us versus them” culture—and reforms frequently being introduced without adequate resourcing or support. Does this concern you as the incoming minister? And what are your plans to ensure that you can rebuild trust, strengthen collaboration and ensure that this work and the implementation of it is done in a fully collaborative way?

Ms Stephen-Smith: One of the strengths of the review is that it is warts and all. It was very clear, in examining everything that it needed to, about getting to the bottom of the opportunity to improve our education system. I do not know that I would describe it in the way that you have. I would say that it has provided a strong platform for us to understand the challenges we face that have built up over not just years but decades as a result of a number of policy decisions in relation to school autonomy. Some of those were, frankly, taken under previous governments, including the Carnell government, and have played out in ways that were not necessarily expected, combined with different types of pressures that have occurred over time, as well as demographic changes. It was really timely to ensure that we were looking at that range of issues in detail and getting very frank feedback from all stakeholders to develop a platform for reform.

Reform, in any large system, is not easy and requires the evidence base that brings everyone together. Sometimes it requires a bit of a burning platform for all stakeholders

to agree that reform is, in fact, required. One of the challenges in these large systems is that you often have people who are very wedded to the status quo as well as people who want change. Without bringing all that together in a very transparent way and having those frank conversations with all of the stakeholders, it is actually very difficult to get agreement on the path forward.

The review has laid that really positive platform, alongside the Strong Foundations work, to say, “Now we know what the challenges are.” We probably have more agreement among stakeholders than people necessarily thought we might have. Now is the opportunity for people to work together to deliver the changes, but it is not going to be easy and it is not all going to happen overnight. Having been health minister for seven years, I am very conscious of a big system taking a long time to change. There are lots of vested interests. People will have different views about changes that may or may not be possible in the short term or the medium term. They may be desirable or may not be desirable. All of that takes time to implement. But my commitment is that we are up for the challenge. We now have a strong platform for reform and we will continue to engage all of our stakeholders in that process and will listen to all of the voices.

MS LEE: Leaving aside rewriting history, can I confirm—because you raised Strong Foundations as well and Ms Wood referenced the collaborative implementation, and it was also raised last week—your assurance to the committee and to the broader community, especially parents, that the implementation of Strong Foundations will not be pushed out as a result of the new collaborative and joint implementation process? Parents are very concerned about that. It is not just parents. Many stakeholders have raised their concerns about the lack of oomph attached to the implementation of Strong Foundations as a result of the reform—that it is going to be pushed out even further.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I will hand over to officials in a moment. I think that there is actually a high level of complementarity and cohesion between the Strong Foundations work and the recommendations of the review, particularly in relation to supporting teachers and educators with a stronger central resource base, more professional development support and support to do their jobs, taking the pressure off them and enabling them to bring their whole self to the classroom rather than having to focus on more administrative work. Those two things are actually very complementary. I will hand over to officials to talk through how that is going to be managed, but I would say the base answer is no, I am not expecting that to be the outcome.

Ms Spence: Strong Foundations is a core component of the one public education system reform. When you think conceptually about the two, they are about increased consistency in the way that we deliver education. With regard to Strong Foundations specifically, we have delivered many pieces of work through the first phase, and, in terms of the impact, we are starting to see strong engagement and impact across many schools, which I can talk about. We recognise that our way of communicating that more broadly to the community needs to be improved. The story about how that is being implemented in our schools is probably an area that we have to work on. But, to give assurance to the committee around the impact, when I look across the different streams of work, our schools, in terms of change, are reporting that they are implementing the policies and the practices aligned to the guides that have been developed. We are talking about 78 per cent of our schools, noting that we have not started work with our

secondaries and senior secondaries at this stage.

I have talked previously around the number of schools that are implementing the new practices that have been introduced as part of Strong Foundations. Again, we are at the 78 per cent mark in terms of those practice changes in our schools. For literacy and numeracy, it is not as high. However, in terms of engaging with what they look like and what needs to be done, they are very aware of what the changes need to be. We will have all of our schools implementing year 1 phonics and PAT assessments—progressive achievement test assessments—this year as part of the changes to our assessment schedule, in line with the new policy.

We have high levels of engagement across all of the professional learning that is being offered in multiple streams around explicit teaching, school improvement, and understanding how to implement the policies. Accelerator Schools is one of our key improvement strategies. I talked previously about Try, Test and Learn. Part of our Accelerator Schools Project is taking on board an initial cohort of schools that work with an external expert, Dr Simon Breakspear, around how to implement explicit teaching as part of the school's priority. The pilot sought to get 20 schools. We took on an extra nine because there were so many eager to engage in that, and we are already seeing a transition to scaling for next year. In 2027, all of our schools, at some point, will need to engage in that improvement work to embed explicit teaching, regardless of whether that is in literacy or numeracy. Certainly, we have multiple pieces of work going on. Our schools are engaging strongly across multiple streams of work, and that will continue as part of the broader one public education system reform.

MS LEE: Thanks, Ms Spence.

MR BRADDOCK: Knowing the significance of this reform to the Education Directorate, I am interested in the directorate's internal taskforce for implementing the one system reform. Who is doing that work? Are you doing that internally or are you engaging consultants?

Ms Wood: The core capability for that implementation taskforce is coming from internal resources. In the budget measure to support implementation, there was some specific investment in particular technical capabilities, in the finance and in the people areas. There was also some specific investment to allow some external expertise for some of the more technical issues, but core planning and delivery is coming from internal resources. It is a reprioritisation of work—for example, in our strategy and policy areas and in our business improvement and project management capability—to ensure that there is a focus on bringing this whole reform together.

MR BRADDOCK: Who are the consultants you are bringing on board?

Ms Wood: That is for future consideration. There is some funding that we can use for particular pieces of work. Part of the planning work that is happening between now and September will identify where there are areas of work that require some expertise that we do not have—work that is more technical. For example, the review of the funding methodology under the student resource allocation is something we would expect would need some external expertise, or, if there is a particular piece of work that needs to be accelerated because it is a critical enabler of other streams of work, we could

consider a consultancy. Primarily, it is through internal resources.

MS CARRICK: Following on from Ms Lee's questions about tiered support, you talked about year 1 phonics and PAT, and tiered support trials this year for implementation in 2027. This is a question about the tiered support and how that is going this year. What is being trialled and what will be implemented next year?

Ms Spence: The Coordinated Supports for Students trial, which is the multitiered systems of support trial, is being implemented in four primary schools. The trial is focused on the way in which we need to implement the framework consistently across our schools. Part of that trial is to work with the schools to look at the datasets that need to come together to help inform tiered interventions—where the supports are coming from and how they are available as part of a tiered intervention approach. In terms of strong implementation: what resources, tools and training will be required to support the broader scale issue?

The trial that is currently underway is using a three-dimensional framework that brings together academic, behavioural and engagement data so that we can bring data together to make the most effective decisions around when a young person might need any kind of tiered intervention, and to make sure that the tiered intervention is what they need. Often we identify young people in an academic space and say they might need tiered academic intervention, but, when we look at, say, attendance data and they have really low attendance, they may require something different before we can do the academic intervention. This pilot is really helping us bring all of this information together so that we can support more consistent delivery across the broader system. Full implementation is planned from 2027—probably somewhere in term 2 or term 3—so that we can get all of the professional learning and resources ready and do the training required to support a broader scale of that particular coordinated system of support.

MS CARRICK: Will they have a toolkit of different forms of tiered support? The intervention is fundamental to make sure people do not slip through the cracks. This is really fundamental. What sorts of tiered supports will be available to schools?

Ms Spence: Part of the implementation of Strong Foundations was the investment that we provided to schools. We provided a grant allocation and did quality assurance over numeracy and literacy intervention programs. Schools were able to purchase different programs in what I call the tier 2 space—small-group intervention that they can use consistently across the system, knowing that it is aligned to the evidence base. Part of the pilot is to look at those quality-assured intervention programs that have been supported by the directorate and the way in which they can be implemented. Schools have already received the money for those programs, and we have just started bringing in the rollout of the money for our secondary schools. They are ready to go when we start scaling into the secondary school space as well.

MS CARRICK: Thank you.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: I have a question about the school resourcing review. There were findings and then recommendations, and there will be a rollout in the implementation. In the next couple of years, what will the implementation look like for school communities? What can communities expect?

Dr Moore: One of the important things to keep in mind is that it is an interim response. There are a number of activities that we will be doing, and many of them align with the work that has already been discussed around Strong Foundations. There are also responses around things like business systems and infrastructure, where the initial work is to do further feasibility studies to understand the business systems that are needed. Some things will not have a direct, immediate, on-the-ground impact in the first year, whereas other things, like the work that Ms Spence has just spoken about, will certainly be rolled out. They are actually well-progressed. That is the work we are doing now to develop the roadmap, or the implementation plan, so that we will be able to clearly articulate to schools and to communities: “What can you expect in 2027, and what can you expect in 2028?” We do not have all of that together quite yet.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: So it might be a question for next estimates or annual reports.

Dr Moore: Certainly. We are aiming to have that work together for September.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Thanks. This might be a very quick question. In *Budget outlook*, on page 253, there is a spending line of just over \$55 million for transportation of other students. Who are those “other students”? And where are they being transported?

THE CHAIR: That is an interesting question.

Ms Wood: Mr Werner-Gibbings, we may need to take that on notice. We do not have—

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

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Thank you very much.

MISS NUTTALL: There is probably a bit in here about the one public education system, but I am specifically interested in understanding how this starts to weave into Thriving Kids. And I am wondering if you can tell me, from the perspective of the education minister, what your directorate is doing to support the rollout of phase 1 of Thriving Kids?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Thank you very much, Miss Nuttall. I have taken on education, as education minister, and also the separate portfolio of child development and wellbeing. As I think we said in the earlier session, there is the rollout of Thriving Kids in partnership, and in some cases within early childhood education settings and primary schools. It is for zero to eight years olds. The commonwealth has said that one of the areas of focus is getting supports in places where children and their families already are, in the environments where they live, learn and play. Clearly, the Education Directorate and particularly the early childhood sector and the primary school sector are going to be absolutely foundational in delivering an integrated Thriving Kids service. Dr Moore can talk about the way that the directorate has been involved in the broader conversation. I think we talked earlier about the fact that it has been a whole-of-government conversation to date, and it will continue to be.

Dr Moore: There is a whole-of-government executive authorising committee across the directorate's governance group that the Health and Community Services Directorate has established, and we are represented on that group. That gives us the opportunity to understand what is happening in the Thriving Kids landscape as it is evolving, so we certainly understand the timeframes and the phasing that is being planned. We have been working with the Health and Community Services Directorate to define and articulate the interface between our universal service offering in ECEC, early childhood education and care, and the schools.

We know that, as the minister has mentioned, we have very high rates of children in early childhood education and care. The sector sees a lot of those children, so we have a great opportunity to identify child development needs or concerns early. That is a core part of early childhood education as well. Part of the Early Years Learning Framework is to understand developmental needs. They are looking at those things constantly as they are engaging with children. It is not an add-on to their role; it is a core part of what they already do. We see real value in supporting that workforce to engage with children to do what they are doing everyday anyway, but to also be able to link families to Thriving Kids services where there is a developmental need.

There is some work happening at the commonwealth level as well. The commonwealth hold responsibility for a lot of the implementation in early childhood education and care settings. They have just started consultations with us around what that will look like. As we move into the schooling sector, which is very much in our control—there are services that we deliver—we look at the role that our educators might play in helping families understand what Thriving Kids is about and how to connect with Thriving Kids services. A warm referral type model is part of that ecosystem of support that the minister mentioned.

We see the Thriving Kids navigation type roles as being really key to working with our educators and our workforce around the needs of children in the school setting. We have a range of particular professional groups within our Education Directorate, such as our inclusion coaches in Tuggeranong, our allied health workers, and our school support staff, who are all working with families as well. What we are really looking at is how we can understand what their role can be in helping families to connect with Thriving Kids, and then what we need to do in terms of supporting them with capability and awareness information that they need to provide that support.

MS NUTTALL: I am sorry to interrupt, but I am aware that we are a bit pressed for time. What explicit steps are you taking to support the teaching workforce in the short term? I appreciate you seeing a role for them in terms of providing warm referrals, but does that look like time off for extra professional development? Is that a definition of their responsibilities that means we are not adding more to their existing workload without taking anything off?

Dr Moore: We are definitely very conscious of workload. One of the few things that we fed into the conversations from the very beginning is that Thriving Kids or Foundational Supports cannot take away from educators' role in educating. What we are really looking at is: what is the work that educators do every day anyway in understanding the children that they are working with and engaging in families, and how can we give them the information they need to connect them with supports? That

is something they do now, but we definitely see that the opportunity that Thriving Kids presents is really significant. We know that a lot of the complexity in those early years is because children need early intervention support, so there is a real benefit for our schools and our workforce to connect children and families with those early intervention services, which will ultimately have a workflow benefit because we are better meeting the needs of children.

MS NUTTALL: Are there concrete actions under that?

Dr Moore: There are a couple of components. In terms of the workforce training element, there is some investment that the commonwealth is leading in that. We are yet to know the details of that. Once we know what the training will look like, we will obviously need to factor that into how we roll the training out. We had experience with that recently in the child safety space. We have been supporting our preschools, for examples, to roll out the child safety training that was introduced nationally. We will have to look at that for our schools as the Thriving Kids training is developed. We do not have the detail yet to know exactly what that looks like.

MS NUTTALL: Speaking of detail, is there an explicit plan that the directorate has completed or is completing on the intersection of Thriving Kids and ACT schools, noting you have the one system reform and the Strong Foundation plan due by September? Is there a similar implementation plan for Thriving Kids specifically?

Dr Moore: Not specifically. There is the whole-of-government plan. We are working with the Health and Community Services Directorate and Canberra Health Services on one plan rather than siloed plans for different directorates.

MS NUTTALL: Thank you.

MS CARRICK: What will be the impact on schools with Thriving Kids finishing at eight years old?

Dr Moore: It is a concern for us around what happens to children once they turn nine. Thriving Kids is about early intervention, though. So it is not intended as a long-term therapeutic intervention. Our understanding at this stage is that if children are needing longer-term support, that is likely to be an NDIS package. But we are yet to really understand the levels of support, because Thriving Kids is intended to be in that lower level of support—the idea being that, if you get early intervention, you do not need that long-term intervention. I think the thing that we will need to watch for is, in the interim, those children who are nine and have not had that early intervention. I think over time, it will work its way through, but we are going to need to monitor what that looks like for children who will not have had early intervention or have not been referred to early intervention.

MS CARRICK: Or cannot get NDIS.

Ms Stephen-Smith: At the national level, that conversation about nine to 21 has been part of the broader conversation around Foundational Supports. The supports for children and young people were really starting with zero to eight when it was part of the Foundational Supports conversation prior to the minister's announcement about

Thriving Kids. There certainly has been a recognition among disability ministers, health ministers and, I am sure, education ministers about the need to support children and young people right through that journey. But there is also an intersection where some of the work that is happening in child and youth mental health as well, where, with some of those children and young people, issues are emerging later, in sort of the late childhood early teen years, will be picked up through those settings. There is a really legitimate question about what is next for those and what supports are in place for those children and young people, and I think it is legitimate to say that that is a concern across all states and territories.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: I have a question about the inclusion coaches that you mentioned in Tuggeranong. None of my children have come home talking about inclusion coaches. Are they now in all the schools in Tuggeranong? What are they doing? How has that work been received?

Ms Spence: Great question. Currently, we have our inclusion coaches in 11 of our Tuggeranong schools.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Primary schools or all schools?

Ms Spence: It is a range of schools.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Is it designed to be across the Tuggeranong schooling system or is it just Tuggeranong primary schools inclusion coaches?

Ms Spence: It can be high schools and colleges.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: All right, yes.

Ms Spence: Part of the trial was working with those individual schools around what their needs were. A coach may be a couple of days in one school and a couple of days in another school or they could be full-time in one school alone. As part of the work that they have been doing across those schools, they are obviously working on specific projects relevant to their school as part of the trial but also probably considering what they are learning through that and how that might then benefit the rest of the system.

The types of things that they are doing is supporting schools more intensively around the introduction of the student adjustments matrix, which I talked about previously, and the way in which schools need to design their processes so that they can make sure that reasonable adjustments are being provided. They are working with teachers directly and school leaders around building their understanding of that. Another example is around mentoring support at one of our high schools and one of our primary schools and the ways in which we do direct mentoring support with teachers around how they implement adjustments in their classrooms.

Another model was around the use of tiered intervention programs, as we have talked about previously. At one of our high schools it was around the use of a secondary tiered intervention literacy program and how to implement that for young people in high schools who required extra literacy support. We have got how to better use assistive technologies in schools and the way that you use assistive technologies as part of a

reasonable adjustment. That has been a focus in another school. The list goes on. There are multiple different projects.

One of the things that is really important to us is what we learn from what has been happening in Tuggeranong and how we consider those projects and use what we have learnt through that to then scale at a broader system level. Consistency in the way that we do this across our schools is critical as part of the One Public Education System reform, and the work that we are doing now is to consider that at scale.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Thank you.

MS LEE: Minister, successive Education Directorate annual reports highlight the increasing incidents of violence in our schools. In fact, the latest one says:

Based on reported incidents, the most significant risk to health and safety of workers in ACT public schools continues to be occupational violence in the form of verbal or physical aggression by students or parents.

In fact, the resourcing review also paints a really worrying picture, describing some of the staff who said that they felt like they have been used as punching bags or bodyguards in instances. The AEU evidence to the review itself said, “Current response mechanisms are both dangerous and irresponsible.” Minister, how much funding has been allocated in this year’s budget to address violence in schools? What do you need to do that is different? Clearly, as the evidence shows, what has been happening is not working.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I will hand over to officials to talk about the funding, because it is not necessarily a specific line item in this year’s budget that we would be talking about in responding to occupational violence and risks of occupational violence for our teachers and learning support assistants and others in schools. I think one of the things that we need to do in that early intervention space is to ensure that children and parents are getting the support they need to be starting school ready for school and having the capacity to manage their behaviour.

What we have seen in the Australian Early Development Census data over recent years is a decline in the number of children who are starting school ready for school. That is going to be a significant focus but also ensuring that, for those children who do present a risk of behavioural challenges, there is early intervention and support for those children rather than waiting until the occupational violence risk has eventuated. Having said that, I will hand over to officials to talk about the funding and how that is going to be managed. There will be some changes seen in the way that that support is provided into the 2027 year.

Ms Spence: Thank you. The decision of government this year was to invest an extra \$40 million in targeted investment based on need, and a proportion of that money is to support young people that have been identified as part of an occupational violence risk assessment. The extra investment is approximately an additional \$15 million to support that. We have information around the total quantum of money that is being invested there that. I do not know if Ms Callaghan can come up and provide more detail. Probably the piece of work that we are undertaking at the moment is how we better meet the needs of young people who present with really complex behaviour and

consider that as part of the broader needs-based funding allocation.

As we transition our needs-based funding allocation from a medical diagnosis to a social model of inclusion that is actually about imputed or diagnosed disability, what we are learning is that a large proportion of young people being identified through occupational violence risk assessments present with imputed or diagnosed disability. So we are trying to do the work to bring those two budget allocations together to better look at how we support young people to engage safely in education. Ms Perkins can talk more about some of the work that we are doing moving forward, and we could also give a better breakdown of that money should you need that.

MS LEE: Yes. You mentioned \$40 million, which is an additional \$15 million, and you said that it is going to be targeted support for those who need it. But what does that support look like? Is it a specific program? Is the money attached to the student? What is the way that it is actually delivered?

Ms Spence: The way that it is currently working is that we conduct a risk assessment that is about the impact on an adult and then look at what the hazards are. If a young person is identified as part of that process, we actually go through and do an analysis of mitigation strategies that we can implement. They might be environmental mitigation strategies, they could be training for staff or they could be extra support for young people in terms of extra resourcing for staffing.

MS LEE: Like LSAs or something?

Ms Spence: Like LSAs, in some cases. They could be teachers, depending on the way in which the risk assessment has come out. A part of the process that has been introduced is, at the end of 2025-26, to bring that information together with disability information to better understand the kinds of supports that are required to help a young person engage safely in education. Different decisions are being made now in terms of internal support—such as allied health, for example, so that we can better meet the needs of young people—and the resourcing that may be required to support the school.

Through 2026, we have been using that information. We have been looking at the school's budget and the ways in which they can do that in their own budget. If we need to provide what we call upwards adjustments in terms of funding, we provide extra funding to schools to be able to implement those mitigation strategies to better meet the needs of the young people but also what is required for the adult that is being impacted through that particular occupational violence identification.

MS LEE: Obviously, there is a cohort of students who are at that risk level that you have identified that require further support, but there also must be a cohort that are not necessarily in the camp where they need that additional LSAs but they have engaged in antisocial and violent behaviour as well. Has the ACT government considered a program like Classroom Mastery, which obviously has been trialled in the Catholic system here—and they have seen some good results? If not, why not?

Ms Spence: As part of the work moving forward, we are currently scoping what a trial could look like. It is not necessarily that program, but we certainly know that the investment in our staff is critical to the way in which we better meet the needs of young

people that present with really complex behaviours. A part of that commitment is to do some initial scoping work around how we need to bring the different expertise together to support our schools. We are only in the initial design phases of that work, but that certainly is a piece of work that is currently underway.

MS LEE: Is the trial that you are looking at in terms of an external type of program? Is it internal? How many schools are you thinking about? Is the recently highlighted article about the Berry Street Education Model in a Western Australia school a consideration? That has been in the media as well.

Ms Spence: That is a really good question. One of the things identified through the One Public Education System is the inconsistency in the way programs are being developed and implemented across our schools. There are schools currently implementing the Berry Street model. We have the Positive Behaviour for Learning framework. So there are different things that are happening. On this particular area of work—and we have not made decisions yet—we are working with partners at the University of Canberra to really think about what is going to work best. We have not identified schools as yet. Again, we are in the very early stages of design. A part of that work is to consider what is the program; the capability; the ways in which we are going to measure the impact—because that is one thing that we know we need to do better; and the people that we will need as part of that in terms of a multidisciplinary team of allied health experts and behaviour experts that will be able to support that. So I cannot answer all those questions yet because, again, we are in the early scoping and design stages, and we do not have answers. But this is about supporting a more consistent approach across all of our schools as part of the work moving forward.

MS LEE: Would you mind taking on notice the schools that are currently using the Berry Street Education Model?

Ms Spence: I could take that on notice. We will do our best to gather the most accurate data available.

MS LEE: Thank you.

MS CARRICK: I have questions about inclusion coaches, the trial and the different strategies. When it comes to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, with the inclusion coaches and the tiered support that you mentioned as being part of that strategy, how do you identify the needs of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, the types of tiered support that they might need and ensuring that it is culturally safe and that their needs are met through the education system so that they are not slipping through?

Ms Spence: That is a really great question. There are quite a few layers there. With the inclusion coach pilot, I think one of the things you are talking about possibly is the multi-tiered system of support and the implementation of that. One of the investments we made as part of Strong Foundations to be able to do that work better was to invest in data quality. What we learnt through the review was that the access that our school and the system have to information around individual cohorts of students was lacking and therefore we had to make an investment. Part of the work that we have done in the early stages of Strong Foundations is to improve the data that is available that allows

us to cut different datasets now around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. That was a critical piece of work that needed to be done.

Obviously, the second part of that is to consider our commitments under Closing the Gap, the Jumbunna review and a whole different pieces of work and consider what that work means moving forward in how we better support our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and the way in which they engage and succeed and meet their potential. We know, based on our data, that this is an area that we absolutely need to improve. So the work that we are doing to work with our community around how to do that best now that we have that data available is the work we are doing as part of One Public Education System and the consistency in the way in which we implement that moving forward.

Ms Wood: I would just add that, as part of One Public Education System government investment, there was specific funding for a new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community body to work with education—an independent body that we can bring the community voice and community priorities into. We are in the early stages of working with community on what that could look like and working with the Elected Body as well.

MS CARRICK: I have some questions about early learning centres. We have not-for-profit ones and we have private sector ones. Where we have more private sector ones coming into the market, how do you ensure that the not-for-profit ones do not lose patronage, or customers or kids, and therefore struggle financially to be viable?

Ms Wood: Mr Moysey can speak to how we regulate the early childhood sector, including where there are new providers coming into the ACT. I think Mr Moysey can speak to the capacity of our sector at the moment. We have an oversupply, probably at a net level, but that does not mean there is always an early childhood centre where someone needs it. So Mr Moysey can break that down for you.

MS CARRICK: I did see that review about it, Molonglo did not have a not-for-profit, I do not think, and I know in Whitlam they are going to co-locate there. How do you ensure we keep the not-for-profit ones in the market?

Mr Moysey: It is an issue that has been discussed nationally as well. There is a conversation about that in the ACCC report that was commissioned some years ago. The New South Wales parliamentary report also takes up some of those issues in relation to what the ACCC discussed. I think it is also mentioned in the Productivity Commission report. It is an issue that regulatory authorities around the country are grappling with in the sense that workforce stability means workforce continuity, which means workforce development. Where there is movement, it does disrupt the continuity of the workforce. When you have providers choosing to trade in services—as I think I talked about last year—that affects the trajectory of the service. Stability is a factor in the quality and it is generally correlated.

I think since 2016-17, there have been points where we have checked in how the sector is going in the ACT in terms of the market. It is a market-based sector; so trading is lawful. The issue is the due diligence that we would expect providers to do and the interplay of the development system—where buildings are built or land is owned—and how that interplays with the choices of where a provider can go. There are

commonalities between eastern seaboard cities and the ACT, where the choice or the financial ability of a provider to choose where they go and how the physical infrastructure is set up is a challenge.

Coming back to the ACT, we put some settings in a couple of years ago where we are pretty definitive about, “Have you done your due diligence in relation to choices about purchase of a service?” One of the challenges we found with providers who are not familiar with the ACT who wish to purchase in the ACT is understanding the number of children is not an understanding of the children where you are. So we ask providers to consider, “What is the AEDC telling you about the area you are in and what is the nature of the workforce at the moment?” A range of providers have not paid attention, for example, to what the workforce census data is telling, which is that we generally hire above the enterprise agreement—that we generally pay above that. That is all about the dynamics we saw post COVID. So we do ask those questions. Our expectation is that, when providers purchase, they have that understanding.

There is oversupply. That report that you are talking about, I think it was tabled this year or the last year, talks about the benchmarking around occupancy and talks about the challenge of workforce—and workforce is everything.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I would just add, Ms Carrick, in relation to how the ACT government supports and works with not-for-profit early childhood centres that we do, through Infrastructure Canberra, through Places and Spaces, have a number of facilities that are occupied by not-for-profit early childhood education providers. So we do support them in that way. We also partner with them through various initiatives. For example, with the three-year-old initiative for more vulnerable children and families getting access to three-year-old preschool education early, we will generally partner with not-for-profit organisations rather than for-profit. So we do work collaboratively to support the not-for-profit sector where we can, recognising that, by and large, the sector is driven by some decisions at the commonwealth level as well in terms of funding.

MS CARRICK: I guess that is where I was trying to get to. You partner with the not-for-profits for places for vulnerable children. Do you fund the full cost of those places? Does the ACT government fund the full cost of them?

Dr Moore: We do. The way we do that is we pay a per day amount. It is an amount that has been set by government but based off the report on government services on the cost of delivery per day. That amount was increased in 2025 based on advocacy from the sector that the amount had not kept up with the cost of delivery. That was actually increased to \$14,688 per day per child for that program.

MS CARRICK: How much?

Dr Moore: Sorry; \$14,688 per child for the placement for the year. That is covering the full cost.

THE CHAIR: I thought you said per day.

MS CARRICK: We are not used to going, “That is so generous”. The not-for-profits

cut even at 85 per cent occupancy because of a lot of oversupply of childcares around and the for-profit ones drop down to 60 per cent occupancy or something. We want to have these not-for-profits scattered around the community so that they can provide for the vulnerable children in their area. You do not want parents to be travelling too far to get their child into wherever their NFP is. How do you ensure that you can keep them scattered around, even if their occupancy rate comes down and they are struggling to provide those services?

Dr Moore: We sanction the place for the children at the beginning of the year so that we can place them as they come into the service. We ask the services each year how many places and we work with them to come up with a number. So, in areas where there are fewer not-for-profit services, we will generally try to get more places within a service. That is a benefit to the service, because it means that those places are funded, and then we can place the child as they arrive through the year. It is a combination of working with the service to identify how many places they can make available for the program and how many places would be helpful for them for us to purchase if it is in an area where there is a demand. We know that, across the territory, we have services in most areas, but there are particular areas where not-for-profit services are lacking, like Molonglo, as you mentioned.

THE CHAIR: And in Belconnen, too.

Dr Moore: Some parts.

THE CHAIR: Yes, there is a black hole.

MS CARRICK: If a not-for-profit says. “Our cost of service is actually more than that \$14,000 per year,” are you responsive to that? If their costs are higher than that then they are going backwards.

Dr Moore: That is the cost per child per year. That is based on the Report on Government Services, which looks at the average of what it costs to deliver early childhood education and care to a child for a day.

MS CARRICK: In the ACT or nationally?

Dr Moore: In the ACT. Yes, we look at that. All of that is taken into consideration in terms of the per child amount. What it does not take into consideration, which I think is where your question is going, is if they do not have enough children. But what we are doing in this program is purchasing places for specific children. So it is not taking into account low occupancy rates in the rest of their cohort; it is particularly focusing on the children we are placing.

MS CARRICK: I guess the issue is that, if their cost of delivering per child is higher than your \$14,000 and they do not have the occupancy rates from other children coming through to cover it, do you check in with them to ensure that their financial viability is sustainable so that you can adjust if it is too low?

Dr Moore: We cannot adjust service by service based on other market factors. We are really just funding the cost of the program. So the answer to that would be no.

Ms Wood: I would add that the recent increase in funding per place is a reflection of feedback from the sector about costs. There was a step up in the funding that was provided based on that feedback about real costs for providers.

Dr Moore: That was just over \$2,000 per child. So it was a significant increase.

MISS NUTTALL: The demand and supply analysis that the directorate did found that the supply growth was being shaped by provider investment decisions and commercial opportunity rather than need. I recall that, at the time, Ms Berry said that the government was committed to doing more to support not-for-profit early childhood education and care centres given “the imbalanced provider mix”. What will the Education Directorate do to achieve this commitment for the rest of the term and has any funding been provisioned for that in this budget?

Ms Wood: Miss Nuttall, one important thing is the priority we give to not-for-profit providers for early learning centres on our primary school sites. That is an important policy setting that we are seeing delivered for Strathnairn and Whitlam recently. As the minister spoke to, it is not the opportunities through Infrastructure Canberra for rent arrangements et cetera; it kind of requires all the levers across government, of which education is one part.

MISS NUTTALL: Are you considering planning interventions as a policy option for regulating that “imbalanced mix”? If you have for-profit providers looking to move into a space because it is commercially viable but they might be the third provider in that particular area, you worry about the sort of workforce strain and that destabilisation. So are you considering planning controls at this stage of the game?

Mr Moysey: We do not intervene directly in planning controls, but we have tried to be as clear as possible for anybody coming into the market or anyone who is here to do their due diligence before signing a lease or signing on the dotted line, because a lot of the preparation for the land is already done. We have a very close relationship with the planning colleagues who do that work. As a matter of course, whenever there is an early childhood proposal, we will look at that development application. For complicated sites, there has to be a pre-approval that has to be maintained. So there can be a significant period of time between when a development application is approved and the actual building of something. Historically, we have been caught in the challenge of somebody coming into purchasing something and then years later, when they go to get a service approval, we find that actually that it is not actually consistent with the what the standards require. So we expect that the providers do that work.

It is very difficult when bigger providers look at what do they think the rate of return will be in cities like ours. So we are trying to get them to do due diligence on a number of fronts. We also, for some of those issues that have been raised in the past, do interventions in transfers if we are not confident that the due diligence has been done. Sometimes a big provider will buy a service and organise a transfer with the proprietor, as we saw in the Genius cases. There is a lot of tension around that because it does not work the same way that property relations work. There is an assumption that the property relations will follow suit. It does not; it is actually a separate approval.

MISS NUTTALL: Are you satisfied that the strength of your relationship with the planning department and Infrastructure Canberra is strong enough to avert adverse consequences with for-profits coming into areas where they are just not viable?

Mr Moysey: I think we already have. It is just not available, because we have those conversations that say, “Here is the due diligence and here is the guide”. It is a challenging space.

MISS NUTTALL: But you are satisfied that you are averting those issues most of the time. Good to know; thank you.

THE CHAIR: Just quickly, going back to early education funding again, is there funding in the budget to expand the free three-year-old preschool to 600 hours by 2028? If so, how much money was committed?

Dr Moore: There is not currently. That is an election commitment for this term of government and it has not been brought forward at this point. It would be subject to future government decisions.

THE CHAIR: Does it mean then that you are scrapping the initiative? Are you still going ahead if it is not continuing?

Dr Moore: Absolutely. We are doing the policy and modelling work right now. We have obviously yet to brief the minister on that, but I imagine it will come forward.

THE CHAIR: How would you meet the target that you have already set if there is no current funding? How are you going to meet that target?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I think you said in your question, Ms Barry, that the election commitment is by 2028. We have another budget to go, and so we can bring it forward in next year’s budget.

THE CHAIR: Okay; so it is coming forward in next year’s budget?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I am not going to say it will definitely come forward and it will definitely be funded in next year’s budget. But we have not moved away from that election commitment.

MS CARRICK: Is it a goal or not?

THE CHAIR: It would have to, though, for it to be by 2028.

Dr Moore: The current program is 300 hours. That is funded in the budget. So it is the expansion to 600 hours that is not yet considered.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MS LEE: I want to talk about school infrastructure. I know there was a bit of discussion about it last week. I have a couple of questions on school infrastructure, Minister. One is in relation to Lynham High School gym, which currently has in the budget, in budget

statement F on page 25, \$5.7 million allocated for the refurbishment. The Standing Committee on Social Policy—and I am sure Mr Emerson may have some supps on this—have found that upgrading the existing Lyneham gym would be an “inefficient and inappropriate use of public funds”. Minister, are you still going to proceed with the update despite the clear evidence that was provided during that hearing from the school community, local residents and the finding of the Assembly committee that it represents poor value for money?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I received an initial briefing on Lyneham in June, but I will hand over to officials.

MS LEE: Is your voice actually getting worse?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Quite possibly, yes.

Ms Wood: We are proceeding with the upgrade of the Lyneham gym. That has been through a procurement process. It is currently at the stage of contract negotiation with a company to deliver that upgrade.

MS LEE: The question was: why are you doing that despite the fact that there was overwhelming evidence that refurbing was not going to cut it?

Ms Wood: Our assessment has been that refurbing the gym provides a suitable facility for the school. I understand the school community would like to see a larger standalone double gym. In all these decisions that we are making about infrastructure, we are having to balance needs across the system and ensure that there are suitable facilities at all schools. There is always an opportunity for future investment in other facilities, but at this point in time we are proceeding with the upgrade of the existing gym.

MS LEE: All right. So, given that it is going against all of the public commentary that it is not going to cut it, will you commit to releasing the business case for why you are going with a refurb?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I am not in a position to commit to releasing a business case which would be part of the budget process. But I will take the question on notice in relation to what we can release, given the significant amount of public comment about this matter.

MS LEE: Yes, there is, and you would know; it is your electorate.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I must admit, I very rarely get representations in relation to this matter as a local member.

MS LEE: Well it must be just to me and Mr Emerson then.

THE CHAIR: It is just you two.

MS LEE: Yes, it must be us. Just as an aside, as you mentioned that it is going under contract negotiations now, is that procurement being undertaken by the Education Directorate or Infrastructure Canberra?

Ms Wood: Infrastructure Canberra.

Mr O'Rourke: We have undertaken that procurement. It has not quite run its course yet, but we are nearly at the end of it.

MS LEE: Great, thank you. And in terms of Majura—another school in your electorate, minister—the budget outlook details funding for the modernisation, which is at \$18.7 million, and there has been a concern raised a number of times—I do not know if you have not had the same level—

Ms Stephen-Smith: I have definitely had a lot more feedback in relation to Majura.

MS LEE: You have definitely had this one? Yes, I have definitely had the same, in relation to the revised scope of the project. When was the last time that you or the directorate met with, or were briefed by, or provided the briefing to the school P&C in relation to the project?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Well, unsurprisingly, I have not yet met with the school P&C in relation to the project. I will hand over to the directorate.

Ms Wood: Ms Attridge can speak to engagement with the school and school community.

Ms Attridge: Thank you, Ms Lee. Vanessa Attridge, Executive Group Manager, Infrastructure and Digital Services. We have been working closely with the school themselves, the school leadership, the P&C and the board to keep them updated and informed about progress to deliver the upgrades at Majura school. This is also a project that Infrastructure Canberra are leading and, to date, engagement with the P&C and board over the last six to nine months has typically looked like us attending P&C and board meetings together, to represent both agencies that are involved in the delivery. Those P&C and board meetings, I think, have been attended at least once a term throughout 2026.

And we have also been providing very regular newsletter updates for the Majura school newsletter, possibly as regularly as monthly—fortnightly?—several updates a term, to provide them with information about where the project is up to. And they have asked us to include even the most granular updates that might not be particularly exciting but show some of the milestones and administration activities happening behind the scenes, that demonstrate progress towards the construction.

MS LEE: Okay. In terms of the procurement process itself, where is that up to?

Mr O'Rourke: Okay, so there are several elements to that project. The first procurement is currently underway, and that is for the new library component. We are currently out seeking contractors' responses and that process, again, is probably several months to run.

MS LEE: Okay, no worries. And do you know how much that project part of it is worth, out of the \$18.7 million?

Mr O'Rourke: I would have to take that one on notice. As I said, there are several packages there.

MS LEE: No worries. Great, thank you. And just going, generally, in relation to toilets. That is what we get a lot of feedback about as well—about substandard toilets in some ACT government schools—and it has been the subject of many Assembly inquiries, and AEU raising it as well. What data does the directorate hold in relation to the status of toilets? What information are you working from, to ensure that you are providing maintenance that is adequate, for toilets?

Ms Attridge: Ms Lee, there would be a whole range of information that is captured by the directorate in relation to bathrooms and toilets and the status of those, including regular repairs and maintenance activities; or proactive preventative maintenance; data around repairs that have occurred; planned works that are intending to be delivered at schools like Majura, for example. So, it would look different for every school in terms of the information that is captured overall.

MS LEE: So, does the directorate have a proactive maintenance schedule that will capture all schools when it comes to toilet maintenance and upgrades?

Ms Attridge: I think we would need to take the detail of the question on notice.

MS LEE: No worries. And just finally, you talked about the PQS, Ms Attridge, last week, and you mentioned that it still has a few months to go, in terms of finalisation. Minister, back—almost to the day, actually, two years ago—on 1 August 24, I asked your predecessor, Ms Berry, about the PQS—or she was asked. And she said:

The PQS will be progressively incorporated into future asset condition audits of ACT public schools. Subject to recruitment outcomes, this is planned to commence for a small number of schools in Term 4 2024, with staggered implementation of asset condition audits for all public schools commencing in Term 1, 2025.

Given, again, as I say, the answer that we received this estimates hearing is that it is still a few months away, what has taken so long? And again, I do not need you to repeat the answer that you gave last week. I am just saying, what is taking so long, especially given that this is a question that has been asked for a number of years now?

Ms Wood: Well, I think the answer we gave last time, without repeating it in a lot of detail, was that, actually, the challenge turned out to be one of scope; that the property quality standards work was so comprehensive that, actually, it was not ultimately going to be feasible to implement in that form. So, the work we have done most recently is about re-scoping that to be a very practical tool rather than something that is so comprehensive that it would take a lot of work to keep it up to date, which would mean it would not actually be as useful as we need it to be.

MS LEE: Okay, so are we sure we are not going to be here next estimates, asking the same question?

Ms Attridge: Yes, Ms Lee. And I can add that the condition assessment program is underway. That is a three-year rolling program and, to date, 63 school sites have had a

condition assessment. And a condition assessment would include detailed analysis of the bathroom facilities and whether they are in working order, all those things.

MS LEE: All right. Thank you.

MR EMERSON: I just wanted to go back to the original question about the gym. Ms Woods, you said that you understand the community would prefer a double gym. I think that has been made clear. But one of the clear concerns raised through the inquiry was, in fact, that key members of the school community, including the principal petitioner and, I believe, the head of the P&C said this is actually a waste of money; that upgrading a gym that is not the right size would be a waste of money and they would rather see that money spent on other projects like Majura primary or at Dickson college. And one of the findings or comments, I suppose, from the committee was that there was a concern that the purpose of proceeding with the project nonetheless was to be able to fulfil an election commitment that no longer aligned with community expectations, given the evidence that it had heard. I do not know if it is a question for you, Ms Wood, or for you, minister—I do not want to test your voice; sorry about that.

Ms Stephen-Smith: No, no, that is okay.

MR EMERSON: But I do not know that we have seen a response to that concern? Because it is a pretty grave concern for public funds to be used in a way that seems to serve an election commitment, as opposed to the preferences and needs of the community over the long term.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I think there probably is a difference of view about that conclusion. I will hand over to officials to talk about it a bit more, but the reality is that this is the current—this is the indoor space used for gym activities for Lyneham High, and something does need to be done about a facility that, I understand, probably has not had much upgrade since I was there. So, I will hand over to Ms Attridge to talk a bit more about the, maybe, contrary view around the value of this particular upgrade.

Ms Attridge: Thank you, and I appreciate the gym upgrade to the existing space is a different outcome to what a double gym would have provided. The intent of the upgrade, though, is to improve and contemporise the existing facilities and bring them up to a more contemporary standard so that they can continue to be used by the school—and also by the community, outside of school hours—in facilities that are improved and look very different to the way they do at the moment.

Some of the issues that the upgrade will address as well respond to priorities identified by the school and some of the school staff, around some administrative and staffroom spaces for school staff that are adjoining the gym at the moment; improving the change room facilities and bathrooms that students use regularly throughout the day there; and to provide a general uplift throughout the interior of the gym so that it is more contemporary and up to date.

MR EMERSON: Based on government policy, in terms of the equitable distribution of resources and the upgrades of school infrastructure, is the school community right to be concerned about an upgrade to a gym that is too small, and unsafe because it is too small? And the clear evidence we heard throughout the hearings, is that the runoff space

at the edge of the courts is not sufficient to be safe. Then Minister Berry said that the government would not rule out a new double gym in the future.

Is the school community right to assume that this level of investment in a gym that is too small to be safe probably puts them, then, toward the bottom of the list of getting a future investment in school infrastructure, given the level of spending, because that is how government distributes its resources equitably?

Ms Attridge: I cannot pre-empt or predict future decisions of government, but I would reject the suggestion that the upgraded school gym will not be safe. There is limited runoff area available around the perimeter of the gym. However, the school manages that risk in the way that sports activities and physical education takes place within that space.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: This is basically on school infrastructure as well. We are talking about future opportunities for spending. What is the framework for how schools are identified, and what is identified at schools for upgrading or improvements or being looked at?

Because on the eye test, all the Tuggeranong high schools, in outdoor infrastructure, are under-served compared to the closest one in a different electorate, which is Melrose. So yes, that is five to one. What is looked for, and how is the framework decided?

Ms Wood: Mr Werner-Gibbings, Ms Attridge can speak to our current strategic asset framework, but I would note that the public school system resourcing review did make a recommendation about a modernisation pipeline, and our planning for long-term investment in schools over a more extended period, like a 20-year period. So, part of the work of the “one public education system” is to kind of get that asset upgrade, the more substantial upgrade pipeline kind of developed, including what would be the criteria for how you prioritise that investment. But Ms Attridge can speak to the current framework.

Ms Attridge: Yes, and business cases are developed in line with the ACT Capital Framework.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Who develops the business cases?

Ms Attridge: Sometimes the Education Directorate develops business cases. Some business cases are developed collaboratively between Infrastructure Canberra and the Education Directorate—or they could be developed by Infrastructure Canberra, for tier 1 and tier 2 capital projects.

In terms of the way we prioritise, and, as Ms Wood said, we will be doing a whole lot of work in this space in developing our school modernisation pipeline. As part of that, we will also need to publish some more information for the community and for schools around how that process will work and what the modernisation pipeline will incorporate.

The ACT infrastructure plan for education identifies some education capital projects that the government has committed to and has invested in delivery of. It also foreshadows indicative future upgrades and potential education infrastructure projects.

And as well as those, we invest in school upgrades through the asset renewal program. The asset renewal program has an established prioritisation criteria that allows us to rank projects against each other in relation to a number of different categories that allow us to assess things in particular, like any associated risk or safety matters that might lead to a higher ranking priority order of a particular project.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Thank you.

MS CARRICK: This is about school infrastructure; new schools. We have a five hectare site near Garran hospital, the old Woden Valley high school site. Minister Berry said that we could not look at different options for that five hectares, you know, could not do amazing things there, because we need a new high school there—because one was demolished, now we need a new one.

But Melrose is half out-of-area. So, what analysis has been done or is being done to determine the demand for a new Woden Valley high school? And when will that be complete, so that we can determine whether we need this school or not—because it is stymying looking at other options?

Ms Wood: Ms Carrick, we are always looking at projections of enrolment, looking at population, and have a methodology that helps us determine what the future school demand will be. And that includes looking ahead beyond the current—you know, what we know is coming, enrolment-wise. So, that work is happening with the planning area, as part of the whole-of-government consideration in Woden, and that just remains an ongoing process. I am not—I will have to take on notice what timeframe there might be for decision-making about that.

MS CARRICK: That would be good because as I say, it is stymying us looking at other options for that site, and it is five hectares right next to the hospital. It could be used for wonderful things.

Ms Stephen-Smith: It currently is used for wonderful things; parking for our incredible health staff.

MS CARRICK: Yes, but you are going to give us a new special car park, at the north end of the hospital so they do not need that.

MR EMERSON: I wanted to ask about child developmental vulnerability. Families ACT have put out a great report where they have done a kind of breakdown of what is happening specifically in the ACT. I am sure you have received it. It is called *Child developmental vulnerability in the ACT*. It is a great name for a report. Inside it is an analysis of the 2024 Australian early development census.

I wanted to ask about the government's understanding of some of the data in here, because I was quite surprised. Of course, we know that socioeconomic status has been the main driver of child developmental vulnerability, but the ACT has the second highest rates in the country, which puts a question mark around that already. But it provided a breakdown of some of the suburbs that have seen the biggest increase in child developmental vulnerability, and some of Canberra's wealthier suburbs are among

them.

So, Turner for instance saw an increase of 16.4 percentage points since 2021. So, that is a massive increase—from 6 per cent up to 25 per cent or something like that. Or that might be Redhill; from around 4 per cent up to 25 per cent. So Turner and Redhill, these are well-off areas that have massive increases in child developmental vulnerability. I would love to know if the government has any idea why?

Ms Evans: Thanks for the question, Mr Emerson. The ACT government is currently working through a report that Nous have been doing for us on the drivers of AEDC outcomes in the ACT. We have known for a number of years that the outcomes are really disappointing, in terms of what a strong community we have and yet our children are not necessarily starting school as developmentally ready as we would like them to be. And the trends are across, basically, all demographics. So, it is not limited to areas where we might expect to see that sort of vulnerability.

So that report—Nous is actually just bringing that to a close, and we will be able to provide some information on the outcomes, and whether that report does uncover anything that we did not already suspect.

But I can say that the way the cycles have gone for AEDC over the past 10 years or so would easily point to the lack of early intervention services that have resulted from the changes after the NDIS, and we note that Thriving Kids is hoping to fill some of those gaps.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I think this is a primary driver for the specific focus that I am going to have for the child development and wellbeing portfolio. As Ms Evans can attest, something I have been banging on about for many years is the need to bring these services together and invest more. And we have, over time, invested more through the Best Start for Canberra's Children, the First Thousand Days strategy, through Set Up for Success, and the three-year-old preschool initiative, through the expansion of the Child Development Service early intervention program, and through things like the establishment of A Village for Every Child, in Belconnen, which has seen an impact.

I absolutely accept what you are saying around some of the evidence of where there have been challenges, but we have also seen some evidence of really good practice—and particularly in Belconnen where the University of Canberra has worked with organisations like A Village for Every Child and has done some different things about getting out into the community to meet parents where they are at, including in shopping centres, to support them. They have also seen some evidence of positive impact on AEDC outcomes.

So, we do have some pretty good evidence about what works. One of the interesting points that you made, I think, Mr Emerson, about not just in low socioeconomic areas is, I think, understanding the impact of very busy family life, and ensuring that we are providing better support for parents. The world has changed, and most parents are only going to have a small number of children and they may not have grown up in large families; they may not have been an older brother or sister or whatever, and seen other kids and cousins growing up around them.

How we lean into ensuring that parents are very well understanding what developmental milestones look like; how they can support their children to meet those milestones; the importance of things like reading to your children—all of those things, I think, are areas where we can do more work.

That is not about, necessarily, global developmental delay or emerging disability; it is actually about pretty fundamental parenting skills, attachment, early literacy and numeracy, that parents have a big role in, where I think—because children do spend so much time in early childhood education and care—that that balance has changed around what the role of parents is, and what the role of parenting is.

I think that is probably an opportunity for us to kind of look, not in a way that we are lecturing or dictating to families, but understanding families' experiences around that. And even things like screentime; understanding families' experiences and the way the children are being supported at home as well as in their early childhood education settings.

MR EMERSON: That was going to be my question. We are out of time, so I will make it a comment, but that is really encouraging to hear. I have not seen much from the ACT government around things like screentime, whereas Victoria is introducing, as of the start of next year, some really clear limits throughout different age groups, like: maximum 90 minutes a day from year 3 to 6; very limited use, preschool to year 2; two hours a day in high school. And we have got national guidelines which I, as a parent, had no idea about until recently. I think most people have no idea.

You know, I just really hope that we are looking at this because there is a great chance that that is a big part behind drivers in well, in a few jurisdictions, is massive screentime and, I guess, just a lack of awareness of the impact of that on kids' development.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Yes. Great comment.

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 proceedings for a short break.

Hearing suspended from 3.18 to 3.31 pm

Appearances:

Pettersson, Mr Michael, Minister for Business and Industry, Minister for Arts, Creative Industries and the Night-Time Economy, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations

Stephen-Smith, Ms Rachel, Minister for Education, Minister for Child Development and Wellbeing, Minister for Finance, Minister for the Public Service, Minister for Health Infrastructure

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

Starick, Ms Kate, Deputy Director-General, Economic Development

Comacchio, Ms Teresa, Acting Executive Branch Manager, artsACT, Economic Development

Infrastructure Canberra

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

THE CHAIR: Welcome back to the public hearings for the Select Committee on Estimates 2026-2027. We welcome Mr Michael Pettersson, the Minister for Arts, Creative Industries and the Night-Time Economy, and Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith, the Minister for the Public Service. Please note that, as witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth, as 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 now proceed to questions. My first question is around community arts facilities. You probably get this as well, Minister. Local artists have written to us, expressing their concerns about the lack of medium-size venues for artists to perform in. How many local community arts facilities does the ACT government manage? Forgive me if you have published this somewhere online.

Mr Pettersson: I am sure we will have that number.

Ms Comacchio: have read and understood the privilege statement. The ACT government manages 13 community arts facilities across the ACT. There are leases with eight arts organisations to deliver programs within those arts facilities, and some of them are vacant. Nissen hut is one example; there is also the former transport depot, which is under a licence agreement.

THE CHAIR: With that vacant one, why is it vacant?

Ms Comacchio: I think it is currently hired out, particularly to school groups and community organisations, but it is not run by arts organisations for delivering programs.

THE CHAIR: How much has the government spent in the last few years on building new local arts facilities?

Ms Comacchio: I would have to check that figure. In 2026-27, there are no new funds for building or capital works for those arts facilities. In the last few years, there certainly

have been. If you could give me a specific timeframe—

THE CHAIR: I would say in the last three years, five years.

Ms Comacchio: The biggest one is the Gorman Arts Centre and the refurbishment that is happening there. There is \$12.8 million invested in upgrading Gorman, which is going very well. We are currently in stage 2 of delivery of that program. Stage 3, which is the finalisation of the refurbishment, will be delivered before the end of 2027.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I would also note, in terms of new investment, that the Gungahlin Community Centre will operate as a hub in Gungahlin for a range of arts activities. Of course, that only recently opened.

Ms Comacchio: Tuggeranong Arts Centre, and the upgrades that were completed there, is another great example of investment in arts facilities, including the upgrades to the theatre at that facility.

THE CHAIR: We are hearing these concerns that there is not enough, or it is not large enough. Have you heard these concerns, and what are the capacity expectations of the people that are asking you to provide—

Ms Comacchio: I have heard it anecdotally. The main capacity has probably been around the 400 to 450 audience mark. It is feedback that we have heard, particularly as we have undergone consultations on the arts policy. That was the most recent feedback.

THE CHAIR: With the 13, what is the largest capacity, currently?

Ms Comacchio: I would have to check that. Can I take that one on notice?

THE CHAIR: Absolutely, yes.

Mr Pettersson: I feel like we are talking past each other. At the start of your question you referred to medium-size venues; is that for performance?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Pettersson: Most of the arts facilities that we are talking about here are arts centres, which do not necessarily have performance spaces as their main function. When you are talking about seating capacity of 400 to 500, not all of those are community arts facilities; a range of them exist in different settings or with different operating models.

THE CHAIR: You are saying that not all facilities that are for performance are actually arts facilities, amongst the 13 facilities that you currently manage; is that right?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I think it is the other way around. Not all arts facilities are performance facilities.

THE CHAIR: All right.

Mr Pettersson: To expand on that, with theatres, for example, Canberra Theatre is not

on the list that we have just given you. Erindale Theatre, for example, would not be an artsACT facility, either. Those are probably two of the more common places that people go to when they think of larger performances.

THE CHAIR: That goes to my next question. Is the lyric theatre a performance venue? That is just a theatre; is that right?

Ms Stephen-Smith: It is a theatre, yes—large.

THE CHAIR: Do you agree that it would be difficult to say that the government is getting the balance right between investing in local facilities and large projects like lyric theatre and the arts precinct?

Mr Pettersson: There are lots of different views on this. I acknowledge that there are a variety of views. On balance, we do have things appropriately set, here in the ACT. I would say that the biggest gap that we have had, as a city and jurisdiction of our size, is in that higher, large-end performance space. We have not had a venue that can provide a space for the larger touring companies, which is a gap. I think it is something that many in the Canberra community want to see filled. However, I acknowledge that not everyone shares that as a priority. For some people, investment in smaller community facilities is more in tune with what they want to see. I think the answer is: it is a bit of a mix.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I would add that, in terms of performance spaces, it is not just ACT government that manages performance spaces. The universities will also have performance spaces. The national institutions will have performance spaces. We have a role to play, but we are not the only ones who have a role to play.

THE CHAIR: Thank you; that is useful.

MS CARRICK: We are talking about arts facilities. When is your arts asset needs analysis coming out, given that the whole of the Murrumbidgee electorate does not have one; you do not have one facility in that electorate?

Ms Comacchio: With the arts asset needs analysis, we engaged Lockbridge to commence that work in October 2025. We are now finalising the report that Lockbridge has provided, and we undertook extensive consultation on that. We issued a survey that received over 200 responses, which is a good, strong response from the sector, and there were also 25 face-to-face stakeholder meetings to understand what the demand is for facilities, the supply, and how existing arts facilities are currently being used.

MS CARRICK: If you meet with the stakeholders, they are not in the electorate, so how did you cover the electorate?

Ms Comacchio: It is important to add that this work will also be projecting demand out to 2065—looking at population growth and looking at the current state in creative spaces; also, based on projected population growth, whether there are any gaps in creative spaces across the ACT.

MS CLAY: I want to add to the question that I think you have taken on notice for the

chair about the capital works investment in the 13 community arts performance spaces. Can you add in information about how much capital investment there is in the other arts performance spaces—Canberra Theatre, for instance? Can you put that information in there, too?

Ms Comacchio: Yes, I can. As the minister was saying, some of those spaces are privately run, so we would probably only be able to provide capital works for ACT government venues.

MS CLAY: Can you do it for the ones that you have?

Ms Comacchio: Yes.

MR EMERSON: I want to ask about the impact of the delay of the Kingston arts precinct on organisations. Arts organisations that I have spoken with who are set to be housed at the Kingston arts precinct have been budgeting and applying for government funding on the assumption that they will move over to peppercorn leases, with shared facilities and resources at the precinct. Have you had any concerns raised with you about the impact of the delays to this project on the viability of arts organisations in the meantime—those that have committed to moving there?

Ms Comacchio: Since the announcement in the ACT budget, we at artsACT—or Economic Development more broadly—have met with each of the arts organisations that were flagged to be the founding organisations of the Kingston arts precinct. There certainly have not been concerns raised about the viability of any of those organisations, resulting from the staging of the precinct. We have certainly been meeting with them not only one-to-one, but as a group. We held a forum with them in June. All of those founding organisations have still expressed interest in being part of future plans for the precinct. They certainly have not raised any concerns about their own viability.

Ms Stephen-Smith: A number of those founding organisations are already resident on the Kingston site. M16 is in one of our facilities, and I think it is already on peppercorn.

Mr Khan: M16 is in the Lifeline centre. They are currently on a reduced rent arrangement in that building. Also, there is Canberra Contemporary. They are not in one of our buildings; they are in a building managed by the NCA. However, they are on supported rent as well. Craft + Design Canberra are located in the North Building, in the city, and they are also on a reduced rent arrangement at this point.

MR EMERSON: Will the government look at flipping those reduced rent arrangements to peppercorn leases in the interim? Obviously, reduced rent is great, but they are still forking out. These organisations are not able to afford much and, ultimately, it pulls from artists; they cannot provide free space. Is the government looking at that?

Mr Khan: That would be subject to a decision of government. A decision that has been taken to date has provided confirmation of those funding arrangements, as I outlined, to the end of this calendar year. We are conscious that that is coming up, so we are preparing a briefing for relevant ministers in the cabinet to consider next steps.

MR EMERSON: It has certainly been raised with me as a concern, that it might mean

some of them do not make it to the end point of what they are really stoked and excited about, at the Kingston arts precinct. Is it the case that the government is still guaranteeing peppercorn leases then? Is that what is on offer at the Kingston arts precinct?

Mr Khan: Again, the current decision of government has been on that basis. As part of the staging of delivery of the Kingston arts precinct, we are confirming each of these arrangements and acknowledging the fact that they have consequential impacts. The timing of the decision that government had already made to the end of this calendar year reflected previously considered timing for this project. We are conscious of our role in terms of providing advice and getting clarity of decisions, so that that certainty can be communicated.

As my colleague mentioned earlier, neither artsACT nor Infrastructure Canberra have had concerns about viability raised with us. Through some of those briefings, in sessions that we have had with these impacted organisations, the need for certainty has been clearly emphasised to us. We are very conscious of that, and we are undertaking the necessary steps to get that clarity, so that we can afford that to the stakeholders.

MR EMERSON: If we accept the argument that if an organisation was expecting this precinct to be open—I do not know when the original opening date was, but it was prior to today, and it gets shifted back a year, a year and a year, I get that. For them, they are thinking, “Gee, that’s another year where I’ve got to fork out,” whether it is \$40,000, \$50,000 or \$100,000; it is a significant amount. It would seem fair to give them peppercorn leases, where the government has the power to do so, in the interim. In those conversations, what timeline have you provided to organisations when they have asked when they are going to be in this new facility?

Ms Comacchio: We have not been able to provide them with a timeline at this stage.

MS CLAY: Minister, I have sent up a concern about viability for one of those organisations, so I am hoping that landed with you in April. It was a request for peppercorn. Has that arrived with you?

Ms Stephen-Smith: In April?

MS CLAY: Yes.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Was it a request by an existing tenant for peppercorn lease; is that what you are—

MS CLAY: M16.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Yes. It would have been referred to us, and those are the conversations that Infrastructure Canberra—

MS CLAY: I would revisit that carefully, because I think they are looking at viability, and I think they have flagged it. I do not know about the others. I will note that this project has been around since the start of the century and one organisation has already pulled out. I share Mr Emerson’s concerns that if this is delayed, it may not be a goer

at all, for the organisations remaining.

Ms Stephen-Smith: We will certainly dig out that correspondence, Ms Clay, and that will be considered in the context of the briefing that Mr Khan was talking about, with respect to future leasing arrangements.

MS CLAY: Thank you. Minister, I would like to have a chat about the licensing arrangements for our arts organisations. I have one particular example, but I think this is a common experience for quite a number of them. ArtSound has been on a month-to-month arrangement for more than three years, and that gives them a huge amount of uncertainty. Why is the headlease for the Manuka Arts Centre and the associated sublicence arrangements that lapsed in December 2022 still unresolved now?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Infrastructure Canberra has been going through a process with those lessees that were on peppercorn leases, other than arts organisations. That process is just about finalised and there is, as Mr Khan said, a conversation with arts organisations about future licensing arrangements, which Mr Khan can talk about a bit more.

Mr Khan: We acknowledge the holdover situation and the uncertainty that that can create. As the minister has just referred to, we have been going through a process of updating our peppercorn licences, excluding those relating to arts facilities. That work is nearing completion. It is the government's intent to issue the head licences for each of the facilities on holdover, and the minister has provided a letter of comfort to these organisations, in an attempt to end some of the uncertainty.

Part of the time it has taken to compile the necessary documentation relates to the asset registers required for the head licences and capturing all of that information for the purposes of the lease. There are a number of pieces of equipment that are located in each of these facilities. My understanding is that, across the 13 facilities, there are over 1,300 assets that need to be captured and identified for the purposes of the head licences, in order for them to be complete, and that work is underway.

Once we have completed the process for the existing peppercorn licences, our intention is to move straight into finalising these head licences. In parallel, we are finalising the asset register work, with a view, hopefully, to concluding that process by the end of this calendar year.

MS CLAY: Do you expect all of these licences to be renewed and made permanent by the end of 2026?

Mr Khan: They will not be made permanent; they would be offered—

MS CLAY: Sorry, long term.

Mr Khan: Yes.

MS CLAY: Do you expect them to be renewed and have long-term licences in place by the end of 2026?

Mr Khan: That is the timeframe that we are working to, Ms Clay.

MS CLAY: Can you take on notice for me how many organisations are in this situation, and confirm that you expect all of those will be resolved by the end of this calendar year, or tell me if there are some exceptions for particular ones?

Mr Khan: I am happy to take that on notice.

MS CLAY: Thank you.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: I understand that responsibility for arts facility maintenance transferred from artsACT to Infrastructure Canberra last year.

Mr Khan: Yes, that is correct.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: I have been approached by arts centres who have advised that, although their leases allow the territory to require a contribution of up to \$500 towards repairs, artsACT did not routinely apply that provision, but since September last year, Infrastructure Canberra has been charging the arts centres for the first \$500 of maintenance call-outs, which, for Tuggeranong Arts Centre, is expected to have a \$10,000 negative impact on their bottom line. Is funding from one department covering the costs of another, in terms of the artsACT funding given to Tuggeranong Arts Centre being used to pay Infrastructure Canberra the first \$500—in a circle—and is that reducing service delivery for the arts centres?

Mr Khan: The application of the first \$500, as part of any call-out fees, is, as you identified, something that is captured in the leasing documentation itself. Of course, if those charges were not happening previously and are now being applied, I can understand, from the perspective of organisations, the impact that that might have. It is important to acknowledge that these are cost recovery charges. These reflect the costs of undertaking a call-out to send someone onsite to rectify whatever the issue might be.

The intention is not for the application of that to diminish service delivery, but I completely acknowledge that you are talking about a finite resource, and that there is one pool of funds that can be used for the delivery of services and for the payment of these types of call-out fees. The application of the call-out fee, as it is captured in the licence, is not intended to diminish, as I say, what that service delivery looks like. But it is not within our purview—in appropriately maintaining the facility, the consideration is not where the funding source might come from; it is a reflection of the funds that are required to undertake the call-out activity. I hope I have answered your question.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: I certainly understand the intent, that it would not, but if there is a \$10,000 negative impact on the bottom line for an arts centre, there probably would be, regardless of intention. Public schools, for instance, do not pay rates to the government and then benefit from rates, using public infrastructure.

MR EMERSON: Housing ACT does that.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: ArtsACT money goes to Tuggeranong Arts Centre, which is then spent back with Infrastructure Canberra, on maintenance and stuff like

that, when it has not been the case previously. Is assessment being done on the impact of this change in approach? It is a change in directorate and management, so there is a change in approach. Are there measures that could be considered to mitigate the impact or ensure that it is not diverted to cover maintenance costs?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I would say, before I hand over to Mr Khan, that this is a common feature across, particularly, our peppercorn leases. One of the things that Infrastructure Canberra has been seeking to do, across all our community organisations that have peppercorn leases with Infrastructure Canberra, is to align them with consistent lease provisions. There has been significant diversity in practice across different directorates and different leases that were signed at different times. It is about trying to bring some consistency.

I understand the argument that you are making, Mr Werner-Gibbings; at the same time, the same argument can be made for a number of our community sector organisations that are funded out of the Health and Community Services Directorate, for example, that are in buildings managed by Infrastructure Canberra and that have peppercorn leases. I understand the point that you are making and that it might be a change in practice. I will hand over to Mr Khan to talk about any conversations with arts organisations about that. I make the point that there is a broader policy issue there.

Mr Khan: Thank you, Minister. I would add that part of this is about education and communication with tenants, and understanding not only their obligations, but also our responsibilities, in terms of what we provide. To that end, particularly with arts facilities, in May this year, artsACT and Infrastructure Canberra met jointly with representatives of organisations within the arts facilities to address some of these concerns and outline what some of these costs go to, how that service works, and our own roles and responsibilities within government—what sits with artsACT and what sits with Infrastructure Canberra, in our role of managing the facility and providing leases under the facility.

There is an exercise there for us in the harmonisation of both documents and approach, as the minister touched on, and in working collaboratively with the users of these buildings to understand their rights and responsibilities, and so that they understand our responsibilities, in terms of the delivery of that service on behalf of government.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Part of your question was around this idea that the funding may be circular, with what ArtsACT funds then going to Infrastructure Canberra. It is also important to note that we are not the only source of funding for those arts organisations. They have other sources of revenue as well, and we fund them for specific program delivery and some parts of their operations.

MS CLAY: Ms Carrick and I would both like to talk about the Woden community centre.

Ms Stephen-Smith: This is the right hearing.

MS CLAY: Finally! That is great. In July 2024, Minister Steel announced that a four-storey community centre would be built on Callam Street, next to the new bus interchange, near the Woden Youth Centre, and that the work would commence in 2026.

But the budget has changed that decision. There will not be a built centre anymore. We have been told that it will be delivered through a commercial lease of a fit-for-purpose space in the Woden town centre. Why did government move away from their commitment?

Ms Stephen-Smith: There are a couple of reasons. There was a design tender that went out and that came in with every response to that being above the budget. That was already going to cause delay. That tender process had to be ceased because there was no tender within the budget capacity for that stage of the work. Also, in considering that site on Callam Street, currently, it will be quite hard to develop, with everything else going on around there.

My view, when I came into the portfolio, having been in charge of the Woden community centre project way back in 2018, and the original design work for that, as minister for urban renewal, was that we needed to get on with this project and find a way to deliver a community centre for the Woden community as quickly as possible. Infrastructure Canberra came to me with a proposal to look at a leasing option. I will hand over to Infrastructure Canberra to talk about that, but I am really confident that it will deliver an outcome that will meet the needs of the community more quickly.

MS CLAY: It was meant to meet not only the needs of the Woden community centre, but also the broader need for a community space. Is that going to be covered now, in the new arrangement?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Yes.

Mr Khan: Yes.

MS CARRICK: Can you tell us about what the commercial lease is? I know you will say that it is commercial-in-confidence, but do you have a site? Have you procured something with someone?

Mr Khan: We went to the market and sought proposals for both solutions, leased solutions in an existing building or in a new building, and used that information to inform the options that were provided to government, as the minister touched on. That process yielded the outcome that it did, as the minister just stepped through. We are now undertaking negotiations as a result of proposals received through that process. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on those in a public forum, as they are commercial-in-confidence negotiations that we are undertaking at this point, with a requirement to take the draft decision back to government for its consideration.

MS CARRICK: Are you able to say whether it is a new build or an existing building?

Mr Khan: Yes. The decision taken by government was to pursue an option in an existing building.

MS CARRICK: How do we know that, in the future, you will not decide that you do not want that long-term lease, as happened with Access Canberra? Not having a government building creates uncertainty going forward. You might want cost savings, like you did with Access Canberra.

Mr Khan: We are talking about a long-term lease, as part of this building, as part of the delivery of this service for the community. That will include options. At the point of those options, I imagine that government will consider whether it is exercising those or not. But the initial lease is intended to be a long-term one, to provide certainty from this point until whatever period of time that may be, so that the service that it provides is a community centre.

There is a benefit as well in that being long term, in that it will support the expenditure of a fit-out for that building's purpose to be as a community centre. We are very conscious, in our negotiations, that that gives greater certainty of investment to provide the types of services that are intended to be captured, as part of the scope of what is to be delivered as a Woden community centre.

MS CARRICK: We do not know what the scope is. There is no consultation. We are just being asked blindly to have faith. We do not know where the site will be and whether it will create activity in the heart of the town centre. Why are we in this situation, yet again, where we feel like the government is riding roughshod over the top of us again?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I will ask Mr Khan to talk a little bit to the scope of the requirements for the expression of interest that went out, in that request for proposal.

Mr Khan: Thank you, Minister. The scope we have consulted on with Woden Community Service in particular, as one of the key organisations and users of the future Woden community centre—

MS CARRICK: But they do not know where the site is or what is going on.

Mr Khan: The location will be in the Woden town centre. We have been clear on that. The fact that I am not identifying one building specifically reflects the fact that we are in commercial-in-confidence negotiations. But once we are in a position where we are able to talk about the building itself, it is absolutely our intention that we work closely with Woden Community Service in particular, as well as other community representatives, about the fit-out and delivery of the scope that we went to the market with.

MS CARRICK: Will it have active fronts? Is it in an active area? Town centres are big places. Does it have active fronts, and will it contribute to the street life and the activity of the town centre?

Mr Khan: Again, I am not able to comment on specific locations at this point, as they are commercial-in-confidence negotiations.

Ms Stephen-Smith: What I would say, Ms Carrick, is that Infrastructure Canberra, in developing the Gungahlin Community Centre, worked really closely with community organisations in the Gungahlin region about what was required in that building. I recognise that it was built from the ground up; but, in terms of entering into a lease and doing the fit-out work to create the spaces there, and the types of spaces that will be required, it would certainly be my expectation, as minister, that the same kind of

engagement with arts organisations and local community organisations, as well as with Woden Community Service, would be entered into. It would be about saying, “Do we need a wet arts area? Do we need a dry arts area? Do we need a dance space? Do we need this? And how do we fit it out internally, within the constraints that we have?”

There are always constraints, in terms of cost and build. If we were building something new, we would have been quite constrained. It is a matter of looking at a decision made six years ago and a cost that we would have had in mind six years ago for a new build, versus, given the escalation in construction costs, what we would be able to deliver for the same amount of money today. There will always be constraints, but, in my view, as minister, there will always also be engagement with the community to say, “Within the constraints we’re working in, how do we make this work as much as we can for everyone? How do we make it a great community space for everyone?” That is exactly what they did with Gungahlin, and that is exactly what I expect in Woden.

MS CARRICK: It is not just what the internal fit-out is; it is having the right infrastructure in the right spot. You can put it somewhere in the back lots, and it does not have the same impact as something that has got a lesser fit-out but is in a good spot that activates the community in the desire lines, where they are walking past and where you are trying to build the beating heart. This could activate the town square and the CIT Plaza. It could be a really great thing, but if it is not centrally located, it is just not going to be the same.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I guess, Ms Carrick, also, if you look at where Gungahlin Community Centre is, it is not in the centre of Gungahlin. It is a beautiful building. It is exactly what people wanted. It will be activated. There are constraints within which we work. The Callam site is not in the centre of the town centre.

MS CARRICK: The Callam Offices are

Ms Stephen-Smith: The Callam Offices site is on the other side of Callam Street from the main town centre, the CIT, Woden park and the town centre.

MS CARRICK: There is the Cosmopolitan Building, and they just sold a building right in the middle of the two public spaces.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I understand the point that you are making, but I would also say that, if we built a standalone building there, it would not be activating the town centre in a place where people would otherwise be walking past. It would have, in fact, been quite isolated. That was part of my thinking: “We could do something here. It would be more expensive than we had originally planned. It would be harder to construct than we had originally planned, because of the decision we have made to vacate Callam Offices that was required for a multitude of reasons. Therefore, actually doing something more in the town centre would make more sense, if we could find a lease space that would meet our needs.”

MS CARRICK: We have just vacated the Cosmo building.

THE CHAIR: We are way past time. If it is all right, we will wrap it up here, unless the minister had anything additional that she wanted to add?

Ms Starick: Chair, if I could just correct the record, please, on the number of arts organisations: there were 13 arts organisations that transferred from artsACT to Infrastructure Canberra. There are other buildings where arts organisations are in. We took that question on notice, and we will come back, but just to correct the record today.

MS CLAY: And you will come back with the whole list?

Ms Starick: We will come back with as fulsome a list as we can produce. Thanks.

MS CLAY: Good on you. That would be great.

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

Short suspension

Appearances

City Renewal Authority

Gillman, Mr Craig, Chief Executive Officer

Ramsay, Ms Jennifer, Executive Group Manager, Enabling Operations

Dance, Ms Victoria, Executive Branch Manager, Urban Design,

THE CHAIR: Welcome back to the public hearings of the Select Committee on Estimates 2026-2027. We welcome the Office of the City Renewal Authority. Please note that as witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth, as 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 now proceed to questions, and I throw the first slot to Mrs Morris.

MRS MORRIS: Thank you, Chair. I have some questions relating to the antisocial behaviour audit that was commissioned by the City Renewal Authority. The audit recorded 612 incidents over 22 days and observed people leaving and avoiding affected areas of the CBD. Is the authority concerned about public perceptions of safety in the city centre?

Mr Gillman: I will start. I have read and understood the privilege statement. Perceptions of safety are really important, and we do actually measure that through a perception survey every year. The city centre is regarded through that, and that is statistically valid. I think the sample size is something along the lines of 700 people in Canberra and the region. That survey shows us that 67 per cent of people feel that the city is safe, which is a relatively high metric. It is not a challenge.

However, for our purposes, that audit is important for us to understand how we plan and make safe our events in the city and to make sure that we are appropriately resourced to deliver those events and have the right capability at the events during the day. That was the purpose of that piece of work. I should mention that of those 600, approximate, incidents, most events of antisocial behaviour recorded in that report resulted from more than one incident. So, there might be public drinking and shouting in the one event.

MRS MORRIS: In the one incident.

Mr Gillman: They classify them differently. They are all collected.

MRS MORRIS: So not separate incidents—yes, okay.

Mr Gillman: Yes.

Ms Ramsay: I guess I would just add that they were limited to certain spaces, so it was not representative of something that happens across the city. It was designed as an observational-only, non-interventional study to understand how we could deliver an event safely in the city centre.

MRS MORRIS: So why did you decide to undertake that study in the first place?

Ms Ramsay: It was done because we look at delivering events in a space, and we wanted to ensure that we had really considered all aspects of how to deliver an event, so that is why we undertook the audit. It was not designed to provide information about antisocial behaviour in itself.

MRS MORRIS: Okay. And do you have local businesses within the precinct who raise safety concerns with you? Did that feed your decision to undertake that study?

Mr Gillman: That did not feed our decision to undertake that study, but certainly we get feedback from businesses about their perceptions of the city.

MRS MORRIS: And what kind of feedback is that?

Mr Gillman: People who are small businesses, or businesses in the city, are in the city all day, every day, so they observe the city very differently to someone who is visiting it, and businesses will always want more cleaning, more police presence et cetera. They will always want that.

MRS MORRIS: So that is a consistent theme that you are hearing—that they would like an increased police presence and more cleaning?

Mr Gillman: You could say that about Dickson; you could say that about Gungahlin; you could say that about Tuggeranong. That is just part of the feedback—

MRS MORRIS: But that is what you are hearing in the city?

Mr Gillman: Everywhere.

MRS MORRIS: Yes, Canberra-wide.

Mr Gillman: But within that, in the city, the police have undertaken recently a very visible response, which has been very well-received, so the police do respond and work with us.

MRS MORRIS: Yes. And since that study in 2024-25, have you undertaken any other audits to follow up those concerns?

Mr Gillman: No specific audits to follow up those concerns. As I said right at the beginning, we have done our perception survey. I am pretty sure that occurred after the audit.

Ms Ramsay: February.

Mr Gillman: Yes, February this year. That is certainly afterwards. We do that across all of the precinct and get that perception data.

MRS MORRIS: And is that something that you would routinely seek to do?

Ms Ramsay: We do the annual sentiment survey every year. We have done that since

the agency started in 2017. But the place-based audit was a one-off audit that we undertook for internal purposes. We have published it, and it is available now to see.

MRS MORRIS: So that just measures over time how safe people feel?

Ms Ramsay: Yes, and how much trust people have in the precinct and how they feel about it.

MRS MORRIS: Thank you. How much does the authority spend on security for events in public places?

Mr Gillman: We operate through an events provider: Dionysus. They are the ones who have put together the security contracts for the events that they put on, so I do not have that information.

MRS MORRIS: Are we able to get that information on notice?

Mr Gillman: In the budget proposals from Dionysus, we would have that as a line item. I am just checking.

Ms Ramsay: I should have said that I have read and understood the privilege statement. I am sorry I did not say that earlier. Yes, we could provide a percentage breakdown of what is spent on security as part of that. I do not have that off the top of my head, but it is a portion of each event. As you would expect for any event, you would spend money on security for that.

MRS MORRIS: Okay, thank you. Are you concerned at all about the potential long-term impact that antisocial behaviour could have on the activation of our city centre?

Mr Gillman: I think the most recent data we have on that would have been Winter in the City, where we had 31,000 people attend, with approximately 800 to 1,000 people at every event—families, children. So, it certainly has not impacted that perception pool. People turned up for Winter in the City. There was an event that went well into the evening. It was very well-attended and very successful, so I do not see that story impacting those families' perceptions.

MRS MORRIS: Outside of special events, though?

Mr Gillman: When you come into those special events, you experience the city and you experience it firsthand, and that influences your branding and what your view of the city is and whether you will come back. I think every one of those people had a very pleasant experience in the city and would come back.

MR BRADDOCK: In terms of that audit, another committee received evidence that it was an undercover security guard who conducted that audit, and I understand you later came out and tried to clarify the situation about that. Can you please tell me exactly whether it was an undercover security guard assimilating with those groups or not?

Mr Gillman: It was absolutely not an undercover security guard assimilating with people who might be perpetuating antisocial behaviour in the city. It was an

observational audit—observational only, no interaction. That record was corrected in a letter from myself to the committee, and I understand it has been corrected by the witness.

MR BRADDOCK: Okay, thank you.

MR EMERSON: I wanted to ask about a couple of things in relation to Winter in the City. My kids and I made it along this year. I saw you there, Mr Gillman, so thank you very much. Circus Oz was great. Last year the CRA spent, I think it was \$32,000—but you can correct me if I have got that wrong—to lure people into the city using social media influencers. Was that repeated this year?

Ms Ramsay: Yes, we used the social media influencers again. I think we had about 13, and we saw an improvement in reach and audience and cost per engagement.

MR EMERSON: Compared to last time?

Ms Ramsay: Yes.

MR EMERSON: Okay, great. Were they just better influencers or what was the—

Ms Ramsay: No, it is building on the success of the previous campaign. It is true that campaigns get better over time.

MR EMERSON: Okay, so perhaps more familiarity meant people were more receptive to the content, as opposed to the content necessarily being better.

Ms Ramsay: Yes.

MR EMERSON: What was the cost of that for Winter in the City this year?

Mr Gillman: We will take that on notice.

MR EMERSON: And why wasn't The Forage included this year in the same way it was last year?

Ms Ramsay: We had hoped that The Forage would be included this year; we did talk to them about it. It was a really successful part of the previous Winter in the City event. It did not align with what they were doing this time. I know they successfully delivered it in Belconnen, which looked amazing, and we would talk to them in the future about any opportunities to undertake that event again. That said we still felt that the Winter in the City event was really effective: it brought over 30,000 people in over the cold school holidays, and it generated more than \$2 million in economic impact for the city businesses. Also, a lot of the city businesses got involved this year. We did a lot of work to really help share experiences like wintry offerings and to help amplify the messaging that the businesses wanted to get out as well. So I think we certainly had an increase in businesses participating this time.

MR EMERSON: Cross-promotional type of stuff.

Ms Ramsay: Correct, yes.

MR EMERSON: Okay.

Mr Gillman: Mr Emerson, I have got that number now. It was just over \$34,000 that was spent this year.

Ms Ramsay: On security?

Mr Gillman: No, on the content creator promotion—so that is all fees, advertising and management costs.

MR EMERSON: All right, thank you. A little bit more on the engagement with The Forage. I had understood that they were eager to do it again because of how great it was last year. What were the barriers there? How did that break down? Not that what happened at the weekend was not fantastic.

Ms Ramsay: We did invite them to participate. We did not have funding to cover supporting that event as part of the delivery. We had not paid in the previous year, and we did not have an increase in funding to attract them in at that point, so we did not reach agreement on that. I do not think that means we will not be able to work with them in the future, though, because we believe it is a really great event and had worked really well the previous time.

MR EMERSON: Were there any other issues—like with the construction that is going on? Were you looking at doing the same model as last time where they were right there providing food with—

Ms Ramsay: Are you meaning in terms of impacting The Forage?

MR EMERSON: Yes, with where they could be located, because last time, they were right there—

Ms Ramsay: No, we were able to facilitate where they were going to deliver it. We had looked at the footprint, and we were going to adjust it. We would hope that Winter in the City would expand into the newly upgraded Garema Place next time. That is our plan. But we did not have any problems with locating a spot for them.

MR EMERSON: Okay, so it was going to be in the same spot as last time?

Ms Ramsay: I think it was going to be slightly more down towards the *Canberra Times Fountain*. That is my recollection. It was certainly in that City Walk area.

MR EMERSON: Yes, okay.

Ms Ramsay: It had not been finalised because we had not agreed it.

MR EMERSON: Okay. I think that is actually it for me on that. I have got other things I would love to ask about, but we will see how we go.

THE CHAIR: Mr Braddock?

MR BRADDOCK: A question about Dickson section 72. Your 2026 statement of expectations commits the CRA to commence place-planning, to identify long-term strategies and improve connectivity of public transport hubs. When will this work start, given we are now in August? What sort of community engagement is proposed as part of that work?

Mr Gillman: That is a really important piece of work for us because it is a large piece of land in that space. If you think about Dickson, Dickson is changing enormously, with a really substantial residential population moving in, and actually moving in quite quickly, and that is to the surrounding areas as well. There's the Yowani development; there is the foreshadowed racecourse development; there is the Tradies development. This is a substantial change, so we will be taking this quite seriously.

We are finalising a procurement for that team as we speak, so it will be in the coming weeks that that procurement will be finalised, and then the work will commence. There will be a substantial component of community consultation as part of that, in part because we will need to do a pretty rigorous needs analysis for what Dickson actually needs to provide that whole catchment area to the north. So that is a substantial piece of work that will take approximately a year to complete. Victoria?

Ms Dance: I might jump in. I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. While that procurement is being finalised, we have also undertaken some preliminary project activities. That has included some internal visioning work, preparation of a communication and engagement plan, and early due diligence investigations. That will help inform that project direction as procurement is finalised and awarded.

MR BRADDOCK: Yes. I also understand there is a large block within that section that is owned by the Salvation Army, which has been unutilised for an extended period of time. Has the CRA had any discussions with the Salvation Army about its intention for that site?

Mr Gillman: There have been some discussions with the Salvation Army. Also, the Suburban Land Agency and the City and Environment Directorate, I understand, have had discussions with the Salvation Army about that site.

MR BRADDOCK: Okay. Have City and Environment spoken in terms of compliance action, given the site is unutilised at the moment—in terms of ensuring they are meeting their lease conditions?

Mr Gillman: I am unaware of the nature of those discussions, and any activity in that space would be a matter for CED.

MR BRADDOCK: Yes, thank you.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: City Hill. The design of City Hill has been considered several times over the years, including as recently as—well, this year, really. I have heard there is no funding provision for actual changes to its design or form, so what then is the purpose of the City Hill precinct project? And, as a follow-up: is there a

possibility that nothing changes, as has happened with other proposed designs previously?

Mr Gillman: We are funded to undertake master planning activity which we have commenced. The City Hill environment, a little bit like Dickson, has changed enormously and is changing enormously. There are new office buildings going in. There is new residential being planned as part of a divestment process that we are presently running. There is more residential going in in the cloverleaf across from the QT. So the changing nature of the surrounds of City Hill cause that green open space to be even more important, probably, than it was at any other time.

And I might just correct that it was as late as last year for the ideas discussion. This is the next stage of master planning, so this is being done sequentially and logically. And before we have done any master planning, it would be impossible to estimate what a capital cost might be of any future changes to projects. This is a process you go through before you start to do the design and before you seek business case funding in the future. Victoria?

Ms Dance: I might talk a little bit to the master planning process. We are building on the ideas exhibition, and we have around \$676,000 which was allocated to us in the financial year 2025-6. Since that time, we have worked pretty quickly to try and build a deliberative engagement process, which includes a people's panel, and we are going through that process to deliver the concept master plan. We are also working with four suppliers, and they include transport planning, heritage, a First Nations consultant, and Oculus, our landscape architect and lead on the project. As we have that, we will be able to understand what the needs are for a business case and supply that business case with a good cost estimate.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: So, the possibility of nothing much changing is lower than it has been previously?

Mr Gillman: We are undertaking a rigorous process to develop from the ideas through to master planning, and then there will be further design work before we can consider a capital cost. Master planning, by its nature, may be staged. Sometimes these things are looking to the future, and there is an immediate scope of works that might be considered, but we just will not know until we have done the master planning work.

MRS MORRIS: Thank you. I have some questions on Acton Waterfront. Where is the project currently up to?

Mr Gillman: The project is currently slated for release to market—so this is the neighbourhood project. The actual development piece is slated for release to market this financial year, now that we are one month in, and we are on track for that. The park is presently under construction; Ngamawari is presently under construction. That will be complete in time for the opening of the new light rail, so in 2028 the park will be complete.

MRS MORRIS: And is that currently running on budget?

Mr Gillman: Yes.

MRS MORRIS: Okay. The estate development plan, has that work been concluded?

Mr Gillman: We are planning what the estate could and should look like at the moment, and that will be finalised by government in the coming months, and then we will proceed to market. I am just a little bit limited in how much I will say on that because it is quite commercially sensitive.

MRS MORRIS: Will that be released once that work has finished?

Mr Gillman: What will be released will align with our communications and engagement strategy. Before Christmas last year we did quite a comprehensive community engagement process on what our vision and perception of the place would be. That was the subject of the YourSay campaign that finished up in November last year, and our vision has not departed from what was consulted on, except to address some of the feedback received through the consultation process.

MRS MORRIS: Have I got it right that the estate development plan will be finalised in the coming months before the end of the year?

Mr Gillman: Not an estate development plan that would be lodged with the planning authority; that is not what we are planning to do. Our developer will do that at a point in time, should it be a successful release. But I think it is no secret that the proposal that we consulted on did require an amendment to the National Capital Plan for that area, and that is purely a matter for the NCA to consider the merits of, and then they will determine whether that amendment is meritorious. The feedback we received on the vision and product we put forward was supportive. Assuming the NCA agrees to pursue an amendment, which is a matter entirely for them, that will be the next round of consultation that will occur on Acton Waterfront.

MRS MORRIS: Are you able to give me a rough timeline for—

Mr Gillman: That is solely in the hands of the National Capital Authority. They are not being belligerent; they are being very cooperative and engaged in discussing it, but that is a matter for their board and for the chief planner over there.

MRS MORRIS: Okay. When do you expect the first residential sites will be released?

Mr Gillman: According to our program, we will have a partner on board in late 2028 for whatever that first stage actually looks like. Then it will be after works approval, and according to their program, and then, obviously, construction.

MRS MORRIS: Thank you. How much has the government spent on the Acton Waterfront site to date?

Mr Gillman: The total site?

MRS MORRIS: Yes.

Mr Gillman: That includes Henry Rolland Park; that includes the lake reclamation;

that includes the interim park, which was required to allow the lake reclamation to be engineeringly stable, and the new park as well. I would have to take that on notice, going back that far.

MRS MORRIS: That would be great if you could come back on notice.

Mr Gillman: Yes.

MRS MORRIS: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Ms Carrick?

MS CARRICK: Turning to page 165 of budget statements B, which is your operating statement, can you tell me about the grants and contributions income. Is that the levy?

Ms Ramsay: Thank you for the question. That is not the levy. That is goods received free of charge from other areas of government, including legal advice, procurement support, project support from Infrastructure Canberra—those types of expenses.

MS CARRICK: So where does the levy sit?

Ms Ramsay: The levy is paid to ACT Revenue. ACT Revenue provides it to government; government then appropriates it to us as part of our appropriations. It is included in the appropriation. If you would like to see how much the levy is, it is actually included in the budget outlook on page 170, I think, under revenues, and it is \$2.64 million annually.

MS CARRICK: \$2.64 million annually?

Ms Ramsay: Correct.

MS CARRICK: Okay, thank you. I thought it was something like that—I thought that was a bit low. So you receive, I would say, for 2029-30, \$19 million, and two of that is the levy, and you get around \$16 to \$17 million a year in the appropriation?

Ms Ramsay: Yes.

MS CARRICK: Thank you. That is just to clarify, because people will often say, “The levy pays for a lot of stuff,” but it is \$ 2½ million compared to about \$16 million or \$17 million in appropriation.

Mr Gillman: In our total appropriation, which covers a range of other things—yes.

MS CARRICK: Yes, no worries. Thank you. With your equipment that you have—you have stuff for your events like picnic tables, umbrellas and a big room full of stuff you can use out in Garema Place and City Walk?

Mr Gillman: Those are our assets. The stained furniture out there is our asset.

MS CARRICK: And do you have other assets that you use? If you are not using your

assets, and they are in a big storeroom somewhere, do you lend them out to other parts of Canberra if you are not using them for events?

Ms Ramsay: They are used within our precinct. They are funded by the levy, which is specifically required to be used within the precinct. We do not actually have a lot in storage. Most is currently in use in the precinct. Something I can think of is the Christmas tree, which is in storage. We still have some old lanterns that are in storage. We do have some picnic chairs, but they are brought out most weekends into the Haig Park markets. So most of them are just out in the precinct, and we do not lend them to other areas outside the precinct. They are utilised as part of our place experience and marketing action plan.

MS CARRICK: Okay, thank you.

Ms Ramsay: I just need to correct something I said. When you asked about the grants, I included Infrastructure Canberra as one of the goods received free of charge, but that is not it. It is the other ones; it is legal and procurement advice.

MS CARRICK: No worries, thank you.

THE CHAIR: I have a question around the single, select consultancy contract worth around \$975,000 awarded to Lockbridge for business case and commercial advisory services. In question on notice No 1179, it was indicated that only Lockbridge could provide that service, and I am just wondering whether they are actually the only ones who can provide business case and commercial advisory services in Canberra. I also just looked at the website, and the contract has gone up to \$1.5 million, so I want to understand what the big variation is in the contract.

Mr Gillman: It was not a direct source contract—the \$900-odd thousand. I cannot remember the exact number of it, but it was an open tender process. It was a subsequent stage of work that was sole-sourced because of all the prior knowledge that Lockbridge had, having worked on the project for some period of time. There is an exemption under the procurement act which allows for that. That is the reason for that extra \$400,000 being added to their contract value. That was the subject of probity and legal advice at the time. It was not the original contract, and at the moment we have not expended beyond the original contract value; that is uncommitted capacity that we have retained.

THE CHAIR: Just for my benefit, so the original contract was for \$975,000 and that was through an open tender process? Is that right?

Mr Gillman: Correct, yes.

THE CHAIR: Okay. Is the \$400,000 a variation or is in addition? How did the \$400,000—

Mr Gillman: For transparency purposes, it was treated as a direct source procurement.

THE CHAIR: If it is a direct source and it is a continuation of the work, why was not it done initially?

Mr Gillman: Because of all the knowledge that Lockbridge had gained and, if a new consultant were to come on board, they would have had to invest in and develop, and that would have caused considerable inefficiency, but also extra cost. That was the reason that it was determined that Lockbridge were best placed.

THE CHAIR: The question I have is: why was it not part of the initial tender process?

Mr Gillman: Sorry; I misunderstood.

THE CHAIR: That is okay.

Mr Gillman: I will take that on notice and will come back. But we did not know what paths we would be taking in subsequent business cases after doing the first piece of work. So it was subject to significant uncertainty. But I will take the proper answer on notice and come back to you, Ms Barry.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. In the last five years, how much contract has been awarded to Lockbridge?

Mr Gillman: I will have to take that on notice.

MR BRADDOCK: Section 116 of the City Notifiable Instrument 2026/173 has the maximum number of dwellings on the site anticipated to be 742, which includes 55 community and 55 affordable housing dwellings. Was the CRA consulted about the number of community and affordable dwellings to be provided on that site?

Mr Gillman: Yes, we were as part of the development of the Housing Supply and Land Release Program.

MR BRADDOCK: Do you know why no public housing dwellings were included in the housing targets for that site?

Mr Gillman: That was consulted with Housing ACT at the time as part of the development of the Housing Supply and Land Release Program.

MR BRADDOCK: I will try to rephrase the question. Was there anything from CRA that was preventing public housing to be on that site?

Mr Gillman: The determination of the housing mix, affordable community or social, is a matter for government policy around the Housing Coordinator-General at the time. CRA did not block, if you like, any decision around social housing; that was a matter for Housing ACT, the Coordinator-General.

MR BRADDOCK: How many public housing dwellings has the CRA delivered over the last six years within the Civic/Acton area, not just on this site, but everything that you have been responsible for?

Mr Gillman: There have been no public housing dwellings delivered as part of that program, and that again is in consultation with Housing ACT.

MR BRADDOCK: How do you set the sale prices for the community and affordable housing dwellings?

Mr Gillman: We do not set the sale prices. The ones that we have are affordable Built to Rent in their nature and they are set according to the policy of the Housing Coordinator-General and government. There are income thresholds and then there are affordability thresholds around income to rent ratios, and that is how that is calculated. There is an annual program to reset those rents, but also an annual program to ensure that those in the dwellings are still eligible according to the income thresholds. We do not run that. A community housing provider would typically run that process.

MR BRADDOCK: Okay; thank you.

MR EMERSON: I want to ask about the budget measure. I can see that there are key projects, upgrade connections, amenities and safety in the city precinct and there is \$9.3 million over four years for the delivery of those projects. How is that funding going to be used?

Mr Gillman: We have started paving and lighting and experience upgrades with Garema Place, and that is the first part of that work. That work will continue out as far as the interchange and then down City Walk and through Petrie Plaza. You may have noticed we have done some modest demolition of structures in Petrie Plaza. That is part of those works. Those works really focus on paving, lighting and safety. That includes decorative lighting—to build those out. We are also in the process of considering plans for Cooyong Street, Alinga Street and the balance of City Walk down to the casino. They are in much earlier stages, and the money you refer to is for construction.

MR EMERSON: Of those works as well?

Mr Gillman: City Walk down to approximately just before the Canberra Times Fountain and from where we have got the works at the moment through to the interchange that is all funded for construction.

MR EMERSON: Are you able to provide a breakdown. I am happy for it to be on notice, if required, for that specific breakdown of the \$9.3 million.

Mr Gillam: Some of it I will not be comfortable to provide, because it is the subject of a live procurement process—because we are breaking it up into different stages. Mr Emerson, I am happy to break down within that frame. We just do not want to release some information at this point in time.

MR EMERSON: Okay. In some of those works, you would recall the strangely placed rocks. That raised some concerns. How did that come about? Were they supposed to be put in a garden bed or were they supposed to be put upright and they were put horizontal instead?

Mr Gillman: At the risk of opening up a debate—

MR EMERSON: Within the CRA?

Mr Gillman: No; not within the CRA. They are back. The way that occurred was that it was a construction defect from the contractor—and these things happen. They were not installed according to the design. They were not big enough. There are a couple of reasons that they should be there. Where those rocks are placed is permeable paving, and it is not trafficable; you should not be driving vehicles over it. So they are put in there to deter vehicles damaging the paving. Now that they are now properly installed at the right height, they are actually seating opportunities as well.

MR EMERSON: They are not too sharp?

Mr Gillman: No. Think about your bush walk, and you find a nice rock.

MR EMERSON: You find just the right rock, yes.

Mr Gillman: Yes, find just the right rock. We spent a bit of time finding the right rocks. They are back for that purpose. The locations were also consulted with the Ngunnawal people, and that was part of their placement there as well. So, they are back and they are sitting proudly at typically 450 millimetres, which is a desired seating height.

MR EMERSON: Great. I will go test one out and report back on the smoothness and the height. In preparing for the question around the allocation of the \$9.3 million, we were looking for what the plan is for the First City Precinct, and then we found a document that was published in 2019 called “The City Precinct Renewal Program Snapshot”, which uses data from 2016. Is that the document that is currently being used to guide decision-making?

Mr Gillman: Is that the 30-year vision you talk to?

MR EMERSON: The top says “City Renewal Precinct Program Snapshot”, back from 2019 and then there is a map with the 10 different unique places and one precinct. It has the Northbourne corridor—

Mr Gillman: And some metrics around dwellings and employment. We do still track performance against that plan. There are elements of it that might be superseded and no longer relevant. But, broadly, we are implementing those plans. We all have to fill out our form in the coming days for census. When the census is published, we will then be looking at that to get that macro data around employment, residence et cetera. So we do still track against those metrics and performance.

Ms Ramsay: I would just add that the last time we tracked it we were exceeding in terms of population dwelling and employment outcomes in those areas from the last census.

MR EMERSON: In terms of what guides the CRA and its work, in that document there are loads of key government strategies that are touched on. I am not sure if you have found it. It is page 5. It has the Dickson Group Centre Master Plan, the City Plan, ACT Transport Strategy, City Action Plan, City and Gateway Open Design Framework, Dickson Place Plan, Haig Park Place Plan, City Renewable Authority’s Sustainable Strategy, ACT Burning Strategy, Braddon Place Plan and the City Renewable Authority 2018-2025 Strategic Plan. Are any of those no longer things that you have to worry

about? How do you coordinate everything? Do you have an updated strategic plan since that 2018-2025 plan?

Mr Gillman: Yes, we have just published an updated strategic plan. It is available on our website from last financial year through to—

Ms Ramsay: 2030.

Mr Gillman: Yes, 2030. That is available on our website. As part of our development of businesses cases, we map all the relevant strategies, Mr Emerson, that you talked about, such as sustainability strategies and transport, because these things do change over time. We update through any business case process where we are seeking, for example, the funding for City Walk construction. Those all get updated as we go through that process.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: I have a question about the pilot program that I think the CRA was running that covered construction fencing in the city centre with largescale art canvasses. There is one in Petrie Plaza, next to Central Social.

Mr Gillman: Yes.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Has this pilot program concluded?

Mr Gillman: No; it is still available. The licences for the artworks have all been extended. The way that program works is that we license that artwork for the developer and they just have to print their hoardings as they would for any development. You can mix it up with branding. As you can see, the one in Petrie Plaza had done so. They have got their own branding on the developer as well as the artworks themselves. It was also on the Garema Place Hotel fencing.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: The program has been extended; so funding is available to continue it?

Mr Gillman: Yes; the licences have all been extended with the artists.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Have you had any discussions with other directorates about expanding it to other areas of Canberra?

Mr Gillman: We have made them available to the Suburban Land Agency as well.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Do you have any information about whether or not the installation of the art canvasses led to a reduction in graffiti incidents or any other form of vandalism on the fencing? If not, beyond the obvious and I think appreciated atmospheric improvement, what have been the outcomes of the program?

Ms Ramsay: We do not have any specific data to support that. But, anecdotally, there is less graffiti on the artwork where the hoardings are.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: All right.

Mr Gillman: But it is not empirical; it is anecdotal.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Yes; all right.

MRS MORRIS: In response to a question on notice, QON number 1184, it was advised that the original contract with Dionysus was sitting at around \$4 million and then has grown to around \$15 million, through a series of extensions and variations. What year was Dionysus first engaged by the CRA?

Mr Gillman: I do not know the year they were first engaged. But I should say that that increase in contract value is the result of a couple of things, including some options that were available in the contract to extend the term of the contract but also an expansion in our events programming. The vast bulk of the Dionysus contract is actually passed-through expenses for events programming—for example, putting up the stage in Petrie Plaza to host Winter in the City. They are staging contractors. That is what they do when they get paid. So the vast majority of Dionysus contract is actually those passed-through contracts to pay for Circus Oz et cetera. Jen, do have a little bit more specific answer.

Ms Ramsay: I guess the only other to mention is that, whilst they are listed as variations, they were options to extend, and it was included in the original procurement that we would plan to extend the contract.

MRS MORRIS: Okay; thank you. Could you come back on notice when they were first engaged?

Ms Ramsay: February 2023 was when they were first engaged with this contract. They had previously been engaged under a different contract.

MRS MORRIS: It would be good if you could come back with that.

Ms Ramsay: Okay, yes.

MRS MORRIS: I am also keen to know how many times that contract has been extended with them?

Ms Ramsay: There have been four extensions.

MRS MORRIS: On the current contract?

Mr Gillman: Options.

Ms Ramsay: Options, yes.

MRS MORRIS: And on the previous one?

Ms Ramsay: I do not know that one.

MRS MORRIS: If you could take that one on notice, that would be great.

Ms Ramsay: Yes.

MRS MORRIS: Thank you. After how many extensions does the City Renewal Authority consider it appropriate to retender the contract?

Mr Gillman: They were options that were predefined in the contract. So they will conclude and we will be approaching market in the next year.

Ms Ramsay: There is no further extensions there. So we are going back to market.

MRS MORRIS: No further extensions?

Mr Gillman: There are no further options to extend. They will expire and we will go to market before that time—

MRS MORRIS: When does that expire?

Ms Ramsay: We have to go to market before the end of this year. It is sometime within the next 12 months.

MRS MORRIS: It would be good if you could come back on notice with an exact date.

Mr Gillman: Yes.

MRS MORRIS: What is the total value of contracts that have been awarded to Dionysus?

Mr Gillman: Over both contracts?

MRS MORRIS: Yes.

Mr Gillman: We would have to take that on notice, because we will have to add in the value of the previous one.

MRS MORRIS: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I have a really quick question around the options. I think the issue here is that a \$4 million contract has been ballooned out to \$15 million. When those options were included in the contract, did you anticipate or did you project that that contract would be extended for that amount of money?

Ms Ramsay: Yes, that is why we included in the original procurement the options to extend. We did re-assess the contract and determined that the existing agreement represented better value for money than going back to the market.

Mr Gillman: Ms Barry, we did not presume that we would exercise the options. That was subject to the performance of the contract and the outcomes achieved. That was evaluated before the options were exercised.

THE CHAIR: So you exercised the options that were in the contract based on an

evaluation of the work that had already been done?

Mr Gillman: Yes, to that point in time.

THE CHAIR: Was there any point where you went, “This is probably a lot of money to keep extending,” although the options were there but the amount was not? Was there any time where you went, “Maybe we need to go back out to the market?”

Mr Gillman: No, that was evaluated and determined on the contract performance. We went to market with the options to extend. The basis on which the market looked at that procurement was that this could be a long-term contract because the options could be extended. So it is quite appropriate that that was the basis of the procurement. Subject to the evaluation of their performance, the options that were drafted intentionally were exercised.

THE CHAIR: Pardon my ignorance; procurement is not my strongest point. But the options did not include the amount; it was that there would be options—is that right?

Mr Gillman: Yes. There was an option to extend for a period. The amount cannot be known, because we commission the event program every year with a different budget. We budget the event program that Dionysus put together every year, and that will determine the amount that has to flow. Most of it just flows through Dionysus books. I have mentioned the stage installers. If we have a run of bigger events programs in one year then the contract value for that year is also higher.

THE CHAIR: Yes. So, for each of the options, the amount gets allocated to that specific option and then you go back and evaluate it. Is it done every time that the offers are extended? Do you evaluate and then go back?

Ms Ramsay: An assessment is undertaken, yes, before any extension.

THE CHAIR: In each option?

Ms Ramsay: Each option.

THE CHAIR: Interesting. Thank you. We have 10 minutes left.

MRS MORRIS: I can chuck another couple in.

Mr Gillman: Just while Mrs Morris is assessing that, when I referred to the Acton Waterfront consultation, I said it concluded in November; it actually concluded in December. I was one month out.

MRS MORRIS: It was pretty close. The budget provides around \$39 million for City Renewal Authority capital works in 2026-27. Can you give me an overview of what that money is going to deliver?

Mr Gillman: That is largely, this year, made up of works in Ngamawari. That is the biggest single line item in that program. There is also the Dickson shops upgrade, where the stormwater asset is incredibly aged and needs to be replaced. There was no point

doing an upgrade of the pavement and surfaces if the stormwater still caused pooling and flooding. That is a significant program for next year as well.

MRS MORRIS: Would you be able to come back to the committee with a breakdown of those costs?

Mr Gillman: Sure.

MRS MORRIS: Thank you. Has any funding been allocated to providing relief to businesses that might be struggling with the impacts of light rail construction?

Mr Gillman: To date, we have undertaken a range of grant processes for those businesses that are adjacent to light rail construction works. We have had a program of in-business grants. There was K-Pop, at Mooseheads, Jazz, at Molly and various others.

Ms Ramsay: About \$200,000 was provided in terms of business activation grants to help businesses activate inside their business. This was an idea that was proposed by the City Centre Marketing Improvements Levy Advisory Group. The businesses who advise us on how we expend that levy talked about the importance of activating inside businesses. We had always looked at activating the public realm, and we took that on board and it has been delivered really well. We have had excellent feedback around it.

We have done it in different stages. We did one when there was the Multicultural Festival—and they did multicultural type activations. We did one last winter. Some of the businesses were saying that they were struggling during winter, so we did some then. They were well received. We have been working with Infrastructure Canberra, who has funded some and we have delivered them. That was done recently during the winter period. It is a really good model. It is mainly funded out of the levy, but it has been a really good model.

MRS MORRIS: Okay. How much has been allocated for that business relief in the current financial year?

Ms Ramsay: For this year or for next year?

MRS MORRIS: I am keen to actually know how much was provided for the last financial year and then how much has been allocated for the current year.

Ms Ramsay: I think it was about \$200,000 in business activation grants. We also have another \$200,000 in terms of place-making grants, which is slightly different. Anyone can apply for those. So I think it is about \$200,000. I can confirm that.

MRS MORRIS: I am happy for you to come back on notice for last financial year and then allocated for the current.

Ms Ramsay: Yes.

MR EMERSON: I have a very quick question on Dickson. Is the skatepark going to happen?

Mr Gillman: In section 72?

MR EMERSON: As part of the Dickson Place Plan.

Ms Dance: The place plan was a preliminary piece of work that summarised community aspirations for Dickson, recognising that there is a number of people who are keen to have skate infrastructure in Dickson. At this stage, we were funded to undertake the shops revitalisation and that, as you probably understand, did not have a lot of room for a skatepark. It is quite a tight, confined shop. We also delivered the Dickson Streetscapes Concept Master Plan. The streets are not really the right place to put skating infrastructure. We may consider that as part of a broader program of works in Dickson at a future date.

MR EMERSON: I asked City Services about this, but there is a mystery about the half pipe that used to be near the pool there and has now gone. Was that you guys that took that away?

Mr Gillman: It was not us.

MR EMERSON: Thanks. They took it on notice, so we will see what we learn.

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your responses today and I thank all of the 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 a question on notice, please upload it to the parliamentary portal as soon as possible and no later than five business days from 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*. This meeting is now adjourned. Thank you very much for your attendance today.

The committee adjourned at 5.05 pm