



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND
ADMINISTRATION**

(Reference: [Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2024–25](#))

Members:

**MR J MILLIGAN (Chair)
MS F CARRICK (Deputy Chair)
MS C TOUGH**

PROOF TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

TUESDAY, 18 NOVEMBER 2025

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**Secretary to the committee:
Mr A Walker (Ph: 620 74843)**

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

Infrastructure Canberra	45
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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 2.36 pm

Appearances:

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

Infrastructure Canberra

Geraghty, Ms Gillian, Director-General

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

Kerkow, Ms Kyla, Executive Group Manager, Pipeline, Capability and Estate

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon, and welcome to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration for its inquiry into annual and financial reports for 2024-2025. The committee will today hear from the Minister for the Public Service, Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, and officials.

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

My first question is about the maintenance of local community facilities. We were talking before about tier 1, tier 2 and tier 3. Do you have the same thing with the community halls around Canberra?

Mr Khan: Thank you for the question, Ms Carrick. Rather than the tier 1 and tier 2 approach that we were talking about earlier, repairs and maintenance of our assets is informed by condition audit assessments that are undertaken, as well as a need to retain funding for any reactive works that may be needed at our premises over the course of a financial year. The annual allocation, which is \$10.85 million this financial year, is notionally split between planned works, so that we can schedule those over the course of the year, but we retain a portion of funding in order to do any reactive works that may pop up.

Reactive works are categorised when they are submitted by tenants. There are those that are urgent, which we seek to attend to immediately. They are typically any faults that go to the proper functioning of the facility itself—for instance, if the toilet is not flushing or if lights are not able to be switched on. There are priority works that sit underneath that. Those are not as urgent but are still important to be undertaken. And

then there are those that are reactive works that may need to be rectified but would not impinge upon the ability to operate the facility.

THE CHAIR: Can you provide a list of the community facilities or halls that are owned by the ACT government and maintained by Infrastructure Canberra?

Mr Khan: That is something we could provide to the committee on notice, with the agreement of the minister.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Yes; we will take that on notice.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MS TOUGH: I want to ask about the Gugan Gulwan building that opened earlier this year in Wanniasa which I understand was delivered by Infrastructure Canberra. What sort of feedback have you received from Gugan Gulwan now that the building is complete and it is in their hands?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I will start by saying that I visited after Gugan moved in. I went to the site a few times during construction. The early work around planning and design was done in collaboration with Gugan Gulwan and with people who were going to use the facility in the wider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Visiting the site shortly after it opened, I found that staff were really pleased with the way that it had come out. Recently, at the NAIDOC Family Day, I ran into a few Gugan staff. I asked, “How’s it going?” and they were very enthusiastic about it. The most recent announcement in relation to this facility was that it has become the first operational building in the territory to achieve a certified five-star Green Star rating under the Green Star rating tools. It has achieved the community objective and it has also achieved an environmental objective. We are really proud of that. Perhaps someone wants to talk about feedback from Gugan in terms of relationship management.

Mr Khan: I am happy to add to that. We have been working really closely with Gugan Gulwan as they have taken over the running of the facility. One of the elements that we worked really closely with them on is that they were previously in a multi-tenanted facility and they have now moved to a purpose-built facility that they were heavily involved in the design and planning for, and that comes with a change in their responsibilities as tenants. We have worked really closely with them. The lease arrangement is a 10-year peppercorn lease that commenced in March, earlier this year. We have worked closely with them to transition them into that facility and on what some of those receptibilities are. We have a great tenancy management team within Infrastructure Canberra. There has been a lot of direct building of relationships with the staff who are operating the facility. Regular site visits continue to build those relationships. And we ensure that they are aware of how they can contact us if any urgent or pressing matters evolve and where their point of contact is. Broadly, the feedback has been really positive.

MS TOUGH: So, going forward, Infrastructure Canberra owns the building, in a way, and manages that tenancy relationship.

Mr Khan: That is right.

MS TOUGH: Thank you.

Ms Stephen-Smith: The other thing is that the technology in the building is much more high-tech than in their previous facility. Infrastructure Canberra has also been supporting Gugan to make best use of that technology, and that will continue as well.

MS TOUGH: Thank you. During design and construction, how did you ensure that the project was responsive, not only to what Gugan Gulwan needed but also to the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community of Canberra?

Ms Stephen-Smith: There was a lot of engagement with Gugan early on in terms of where it would be, whether it would be a new build somewhere else or they would move to another existing facility and it would be fitted out for them or there would be a new build on the site. Even going back to how we wanted to deliver this project, there was a consultation process. It was a great outcome that we reached agreement about rebuilding on site. That is the site that the community is familiar with. There was community engagement, including with the support of the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs.

This project transitioned from the Community Services Directorate to Infrastructure Canberra. The Community Services Directorate and the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs in particular were responsible for a lot of that early engagement. Maybe someone from Infrastructure Canberra could talk about engagement with the contractor through the project. We have heard from Gugan that the contractor who built the building was really respectful and worked closely with them around ensuring that the building met their needs.

Ms Geraghty: Thank you, Minister. I could probably provide a bit more information on notice, given that we inherited the project. Projects was the delivery partner. They did an outstanding job on the building. It is a beautiful building. It has won a number of awards. Certainly, the way they built it and the consultation they undertook during construction ensured the community felt that they were very much engaged. They did lots of walk-throughs and things like that throughout construction. Is there anything more that I could provide?

MISS TOUGH: No. That is all good. Thank you. I appreciate it.

THE CHAIR: It is a terrific building.

MR EMERSON: I want to ask about the building at Wakefield Gardens. I am wondering what the next steps are. Do not worry—I am not going to ask what is going to happen now. Where we are up to with remediation, safety and, presumably, demolition? Is there a timeline?

Ms Kerkow: Thank you, Mr Emerson. There are two concurrent processes. There is the demolition or remediation of the site and the consultation, which recently closed, on the future of the site. In terms of demolition, that procurement is out to market. It closes on 20 November. Once we have the contractor appointed, we hope the DA will progress in early 2026. We anticipate that remediation will be completed before the end

of the financial year—that is, in the first half of 2026. That is obviously subject to the DA process and the timeline that takes.

In terms of next steps, we have just concluded the community consultation. It finished on 7 November, so the next steps for us are to complete the listening report and summarising everything that we heard. Over 191 people engaged with us in person at our pop-ups at the Ainslie Shops, and there were 187 responses through the YourSay platform, so there was a big and broad response to this. We will be preparing that listening report with a view to having it published by early December.

MR EMERSON: What is done in terms of the demolition? Is that able to proceed independently of what might be done next?

Ms Kerkow: Yes. Based on the structural engineer's report, the current structure needs to be demolished. We have been working with Heritage as well, in terms of what remediation looks like for the site. The building will be demolished and the site will be made safe. It will effectively be a blank slate, and discussions will start as to what will be next.

MR EMERSON: Part of those, I assume, will be tree considerations—whether some will be retained and potentially, as part of development thereafter, some may be knocked down and regrown, but that would be done separately to the remediation that you are describing. Is that right?

Ms Kerkow: Absolutely. My understanding is that none of the trees should be impacted by the demolition works. We are working closely with Heritage to make sure that, if there is any impact, we are taking appropriate measures to remediate or replace.

MR EMERSON: That is great. Thanks for your work on that.

MS BARRY: I have a question around the cost of hire of community facilities. Do you know what the cost is for hiring EPIC?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Places and Spaces in Infrastructure Canberra does not manage EPIC. It is managed by Venues Canberra, in the Chief Minister's directorate.

MS BARRY: What facilities are available for people to hire? Is that for you or Infrastructure—

Ms Stephen-Smith: Major venues are managed by Venues Canberra, but the smaller community facilities, of which there are 140 or so—

Mr Khan: The total number of facilities that we have leased out is just under 250. They are under different leases, but there are also those that are available for hire as community venues.

MS BARRY: What is the average cost?

Mr Khan: I would have to take that on notice. It varies between facilities, and there are different arrangements as well in terms of direct hire from government or through a

non-government organisation running the facility.

MS BARRY: Thank you. Would you also be able to take on notice whether there are other additional costs—say, for electricity, water, gas and all of those things?

Mr Khan: Yes; we can take that on notice.

MS BARRY: Thank you. Is the Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre new?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Yes.

MS BARRY: What is the plan for that? At last estimates, I asked a question around the dated facility. Are there any plans to update the facility?

Mr Khan: Thank you for the question, Ms Barry. At last estimates, you had specific questions around some maintenance issues within the centre.

MS BARRY: Yes.

Mr Khan: Subsequent to the hearing, we sought to rectify those with the users of the centre. In terms of longer term planning, as I touched on earlier, there are the operating costs of running the facility. I think the questions that were asked at the previous hearing were more about that, in terms of ensuring they were maintaining the standard that we expect for the provision of services to the community. When you ask about broader plans for the facility—

MS BARRY: Do you have a plan to upgrade the facility, for example? It is quite dated. If you go there, the carpets, for example—

Mr Khan: Any significant capital upgrades would be a future decision for government. The funding that we have available goes to the operation, repairs and maintenance of the facility as it currently is, as opposed to any significant upgrades.

MS BARRY: Is there any plan for an upgrade?

Ms Stephen-Smith: There is not at the moment, but we are continuing to engage with our tenants right across the facilities that are managed by the ACT government. In the context of the entire North Building, there would be a bigger conversation than just around Theo Notaras, in terms of the future of that building and who would be responsible for any upgrades. Craft ACT is located in the same building. There are Legislative Assembly activities as well, and there is CMAG. There is potentially some future opportunity to look at the building as a whole, in the context of wider community facilities, but I know that the Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre is a heavily used and much loved facility. We would also consider getting feedback from the tenants and the community. There is the Health and Community Services Directorate, and the Office for Multicultural Affairs works out of there a lot and has a lot of engagement with the community groups that use Theo Notaras. That would inform any future decision-making about any work that needed to be done there. We have done work there in the past. I cannot recall the details, but I know some work was done a few years ago.

MS BARRY: You are not getting any feedback from—

Mr Khan: No. I might slightly reframe my answer, Ms Barry. In engagement with HCSD, who support us in sub-tenanting the facility to some of the multicultural groups that the minister referenced, as well as organisations like Craft ACT, we are always receiving feedback about how we can improve the quality of assets or could upgrade them, but nothing that would make it different to feedback we more broadly receive about assets that we have within our portfolio.

MS BARRY: Are you also responsible for booking the various rooms? I understand that community organisations hold various rooms in the building. Is that you?

Mr Khan: I do not believe so. For the Theo Notaras Centre, no. I believe that HCSB do that for us. For the benefit of the committee, I will confirm that.

MS BARRY: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I have a couple of questions about proposed community facilities. In Whitlam, there was to be a community facility at the Whitlam shops, but that tender did not go ahead. I do not really know why, but perhaps it had something to do with the builder or tenderer not wanting to take on a community facility at the shops. What is happening with the Whitlam community centre? Whitlam is between William Hovell Drive and the river. It is quite a big community and it would be good to have a community centre there.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Infrastructure Canberra's responsibility and my responsibility in this portfolio relates to existing community facilities that are managed, and Infrastructure Canberra is responsible for project development once a project has been determined to go ahead. I am not aware that the ACT government has made a decision to invest in a community facility in Whitlam. If that were the case, that would be brought forward as a business case. If it is a question of what is required of a developer in a town centre, that would be a question for Planning or SLA, the Suburban Land Agency. It is not a question for Infrastructure Canberra.

THE CHAIR: What is the status of the community centre in Woden?

Mr Khan: The work is underway to provide further advice to government around the different options for delivery of the Woden community centre. There is the option for the government to directly build it, but they are also investigating options around co-location of other public services with a community centre and site appropriateness for that, as well as the potential opportunity to lease space over a longer period of time within the town centre that would provide the same community amenity as was being sought through a direct build. We will provide that advice to the minister to inform any future decisions that the government has yet to make.

THE CHAIR: Is that code for you are considering the Hellenic Club development or the Scentre Group development?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I think it is fair to say that, knowing that those developments are on the table and that the Hellenic Club is required to develop some community facility

space as part of their approvals, and that Scentre Group has publicly indicated that part of their planning would include some community facilities, that is obviously factoring into the government's considerations, but no decision has been made in relation to that. As Mr Khan said, I am yet to get advice in relation to what the next steps of that process are.

To provide some context, this has been a long and drawn-out project. As you will be aware, Ms Carrick, the original planning for that site is between Callam Street and Callam Offices—I was involved in that as Minister for Community Services way back—and there was an expectation that there would be integration with Callam Offices. We have talked before about the fact that we had to vacate Callam Offices. There are now no Woden Community Service staff in Callam Offices. We do not believe it would be appropriate to try to refurbish for that purpose. That means that the design, which relied on that connection and the fact that other people would be able work close by in Callam Offices, does not have the same consideration anymore. That has been part of our thinking, as well as the fact that, when we went out for a detailed design tender, we did not get anything back within the funding envelope that was available.

THE CHAIR: What is the plan for Callam Offices?

Ms Stephen-Smith: This is Gillian's favourite subject, so she really wants to talk about Callam Offices!

Ms Geraghty: Regarding Callam Offices, we are currently doing a number of due diligence investigations. We have had a series of meetings with Heritage. Kyla, would you like to add more information to that?

Ms Kerkow: Yes. Thank you. We are doing due diligence to consider the best future use of the site. We are working really closely with both the Suburban Land Agency and ACT Heritage to develop an updated conservation management plan for the site. At the moment, while the office space is untenanted, the car park is still being utilised by the ACT government. It is currently actively used. We are undertaking feasibility studies to determine potential options and costs for future use.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. We will have to wrap it up there. 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 adjourned at 3.00 pm