

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES AND
SOCIAL EQUITY**

(Reference: annual and financial reports 2002-2003)

Members:

**MR J HARGREAVES (The Chair)
MS R DUNDAS (The Deputy Chair)
MR G CORNWELL
MRS H CROSS**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

THURSDAY, 22 JANUARY 2004

**Secretary to the committee:
Ms J Carmody (Ph: 6205 0129)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents relevant to this inquiry which have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the committee office of the Legislative Assembly (Ph: 6205 0127).

The committee met at 2.01 pm.

Appearances:

Mr B Wood, Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, Minister for Urban Services, Minister for Police and Emergency Services, and Minister for Arts and Heritage

Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services

Ms S Lambert, Chief Executive

Dr C Adrian, Executive Coordinator

Mr M Hehir, Executive Director, Housing and Community Services

Ms M Sheehan, Director, Community Development

Ms H Fletcher, Director, Housing ACT

Ms B Maher, Acting Director, Housing ACT

Ms S King, Senior Manager, Community Services

Ms L Ford, Executive Director, Disability ACT

Ms R Hayes, Director, Disability ACT

Ms B Overton-Clarke, Director, Policy and organisational Services

Mr I Hubbard, Director, Budget and Finance

Ms P Brown, Senior Manager, Therapy ACT

THE CHAIR: Welcome, Minister and officials, to this public hearing into annual and financial reports. You should understand that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, protected by parliamentary privilege. That gives you certain protections but also certain responsibilities. It means that you are protected from certain legal action, such as being sued for defamation for what you say at this public hearing. It also means that you have a responsibility to tell the committee the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter.

You have been advised of the timing of various sessions. I propose to be draconian in sticking to those times, at the risk of being unpopular with some, but I'm sure I'll be popular with others. If questions are taken on notice, the committee would appreciate responses within five working days. Does five working days pose problems? I would hope not.

Mr Wood: We would not think so. We'll let you know if there's a problem.

THE CHAIR: That means that they should be with the secretary by the close of business on Friday, 30 January. It will be the responsibility of witnesses to check the transcript of proceedings to ensure that they meet any commitments that they have made regarding the provision of information or questions on notice. The secretary will email the transcript to all witnesses as soon as it's available, so you will not have to worry about searching for it. Minister, I invite you to make an opening statement.

Mr Wood: Thank you, Mr Chair. This is the first annual report for this department, which was established in July 2002. As you'd understand, time was taken to set it up, incorporating the disparate functions and integrating the various activities of the department. Many resources were deployed to ensure that this transition occurred as smoothly and as rapidly as possible. I think a great job was done in a very short period.

Immediately, attention was focused on staffing the department appropriately and setting up the administrative processes to meet the departmental obligations. A great deal of energy was channelled into the government's response to the board of inquiry into disability services, and that has been a continuing process.

The department was just six months old when the January 2003 bushfires struck. They had a very big impact on the government and this community and the department was no exception. All areas were affected. The executive director of Disability ACT, Lois Ford, who arrived in Canberra on the morning of the fires, faced the immediate departure of several key staff bound for the recovery task force. Similarly, Ros Hayes, director of Disability ACT, arrived in February and immediately lost a senior manager, Chris Healey, to the recovery task force.

In the weeks immediately following the bushfires, the evacuation centres were staffed by Housing ACT people 24 hours a day. Over varying timeframes, the department contributed 25 staff to the recovery effort, a large contingent of people. The fires clearly had a major impact on staffing and resourcing. Housing ACT had unprecedented pressures placed on it. In responding to the fires, the department was immediately responsible for all emergency housing, not just public housing, a mammoth task, and I'm proud of the way the department handled that challenge as well as every other.

Eighty-one of our properties were lost to the fires and 140 were damaged in some way or another. Immense effort was channelled into relocating and supporting tenants, rebuilding and repairing destroyed and damaged properties, and purchasing replacement properties. Hence, the fires were an extraordinary event that had a big impact on the department in its inaugural year as it was establishing itself.

The bushfires aside, it has been a challenging and productive year. There were many highlights. Important disability reforms continued—that is, the establishment of the Disability Advisory Council, five disability reform working groups, the access to government kit, the taxi subsidy scheme—and there was a solid focus on issues such as work force legislation, access and funding, standards and housing, and a strong client commitment focus, including risk assessments for those in our care.

Housing underwent significant advances: a very successful community linkages program and the acquisition of 270 properties, including bushfire-affected replacements, with a further 100 properties in the process of being purchased or constructed. We've expanded the range of housing options in community housing, accommodation for young people, women, older people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, in adaptable and accessible housing options and in expanded emergency accommodation options.

There has been a very solid response to the affordable housing task force report, and there is more to come. 2003 saw the establishment of a single therapy service for people with disabilities from birth to age 65. Despite staff shortages in the child health and development area, we have sustained an increased workload, though staff shortages continue to be a problem as we struggle to find staff.

The homelessness advisory group was established to guide and inform the homelessness strategy and the carers advisory group was formed to inform the carers policy. Community Services allocated over \$21 million in payments for concessions alone and

managed millions more in supported accommodation assistance program funding to community service providers. We progressed the redevelopment of one of Canberra's key community facilities, the Griffin Centre. Two Commonwealth, state and territory agreements were negotiated—the third Commonwealth, state and territory disability agreement and a new five-year housing agreement.

To conclude, the department's first annual report points to a very productive new year in a challenging environment and I commend all officers in the department. I think they've done a great job and we'll let you find that out.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister. Before we go to questions, I wish to convey the committee's appreciation of the work the officers have put into the compilation of this report. It's a very good report in terms of being easy to read and understand. I acknowledge also the briefing that the committee received from officers. I think that the mutual understanding that came out of it was particularly helpful. If nothing else, it has shortened the process. Certainly, we have a greater understanding of exactly what the department is all about and its aims and objectives.

Please understand that when we are looking at the annual report we are doing so in that context. It's a very good report and we'll be looking at issues in it which give us some concern or on which we want some enlightenment. Also, thank you very much for the org chart that was provided to us. For those of us who are not familiar with the ways of the bureaucracy, it was most helpful. For those of us who have trouble reading and like the information in pictures, it also helped.

Mr Wood: Thank you for those comments. I know a lot of thought has gone into the way it's presented and we appreciate that. I know that Sandra and company will continue to work to make it even better.

THE CHAIR: I'm sure they will. I will open up the batting by talking about CHADS. I refer you to page 44 of volume 1. We couldn't quite work out a couple of things there. Under service provision, you talk about there being a decline in referral in the second half, but you also talk about there having been a continued increase in the past three years. Can you give us a bit of a handle on that? It seems to be almost contradictory, but I'm sure it isn't.

Ms Brown: I can shed some light on that. About four or five years ago we changed our method of taking new referrals by putting in a new intake system, plus we went to a needs-based service delivery model whereby people come in, have their needs met and are then discharged and if another episode occurs they come back in. We had a significant rise in referrals for a couple of years as a result of that change in the way we managed the throughput of our clients. That has now settled down a bit and we're getting a much more steady referral rate because the system has now set itself in place well.

THE CHAIR: When somebody comes back, are they counted the second time as a new referral or as a continuing referral?

Ms Brown: They're not a continuing client; they're a new referral for a new reason. They would come back and re-enter the service for an exacerbation of an old problem or probably a new set of needs.

THE CHAIR: As far as you are concerned, if they go away for a while they're actually fixed, and away you go again if they turn up again.

Ms Brown: That's right. If they come back with a new set of issues, then we deal with that set of issues.

THE CHAIR: I might have to have a bit of a think about that, but thank you for that. Turning to the reference to autism diagnosis on that page, you said that you assessed 60 people during the year. Is there a waiting list for that or are you satisfying demand?

Ms Brown: Yes, there is.

THE CHAIR: How big is it?

Ms Brown: Do you want today's figures or the 30 June figures?

THE CHAIR: No, 30 June; let's be consistent. I can see Mr Hehir sitting there and he hates us being inconsistent.

Ms Brown: As of 30 June last year, there were 93 children on the waiting list, with 10 assessments in progress.

THE CHAIR: About one and a half times the people that you're actually looking after, which is fairly significant. Has there been any growth between 30 June and now?

Ms Brown: Yes, there has. Today, the waiting list is 120, with five assessments in progress. The lesser number of assessments in progress has to do with people being on holidays and not available for assessment.

THE CHAIR: What's the reason for the waiting list? Is it just that you do not have enough people to provide the service?

Ms Brown: We're staffed to the level of funding that we're allowed to have for the program and we have put extra resources behind this through providing a multidisciplinary approach rather than just having the psychologists working alone on it. There has been an international and a national increase in the rates of autism and I don't think the ACT is any different from that. We're noticing the same trends here. There seem to be no reasons for that at the moment that anybody can identify, but it does exist and we're part of a much wider picture.

THE CHAIR: What do people do while they're on the waiting list? I know I'd go nuts, but what do the parents of kids like that do?

Ms Brown: We do offer them other alternatives and give them names of private practitioners that they can go to and have it done in the private sector. We do tend to try to manage the waiting list by seeing the younger children first because it's incredibly important for the children under 5 to be able to access the early intervention education programs and the appropriate services to minimise the long-term difficulties they can have. There is no waiting list, basically, for the under-5s at the moment, but the ones on

the waiting list are primarily older than the age of 5.

THE CHAIR: What is roughly the age at which people come and seek your help? When do they find out or when does it become enough of a problem that they think they can't handle it? Do they come in under 5 or around 5?

Ms Brown: Most parents would identify their child as not learning to speak properly or not communicating or socialising with people well around the age of somewhere between 18 months and 4 years. They start to notice their children are different and the primary reason for them accessing our service is not because they've been diagnosed with autism; it's because they're diagnosed with a developmental delay around language and communication and they would come in as a developmental delay problem from a paediatrician, a GP or a child health medical officer, and sometimes the childcare workers refer. Normally it will be through the period of time they're with us, in the early times, that we would start to notice that they may well be on the spectrum and we'd start talking to the families about a formal assessment.

MS DUNDAS: How long are people spending on the waiting list? You say that it is almost zero for children under five.

Ms Brown: Yes.

MS DUNDAS: How about those over five?

Ms Brown: The person who has been on the waiting list the longest, 16 months.

MS DUNDAS: Are they next in line to be progressed through or are there different categories, as with Housing?

Ms Brown: There are different categories. Children under five always take priority because of the need to access services quickly.

Ms Lambert: One of the things we've been trying to do in this area is to expand the way in which diagnosis can occur but still occur in the professional way that it needs to because it is a specialist exercise, so Pauline and her staff have been looking at multidisciplinary assessment to allow more staff to take part in the diagnosis of autism. As well as trying to recruit nationally, they have been working on accessing New South Wales services. We're trying to expand the capacity for diagnosis in other ways, given that the recruitment exercise is quite difficult. When I took over this department we were trying to recruit a psychologist and it took us considerable time to get one here.

MS DUNDAS: As to accessing New South Wales government services for assessments, is there an associated cost with that or is it part of the interstate agreements?

Ms Brown: There will be an associated cost. It won't be New South Wales government services. I've made contact with the New South Wales Autism Association, who do assessments, and I'm waiting for them to respond to my request for assistance in this area. There will be a cost associated with that.

MR CORNWELL: What association do you have with Family Services?

Ms Brown: Apart from the fact that we have some common clients and we work very well together with those clients?

MR CORNWELL: It's just that the output description states that children and young people at the age of 12 have a range of development problems, including physical, intellectual, communication and other functional difficulties. It's obviously a fairly broad range, but I'm just wondering if you have cause at any time to liaise with Family Services over such matters.

Ms Brown: Yes, we do in the sense that, if we have shared clients, when we're working with the clients we would let the case managers from the Family Services area know. Family Services don't deal with the types of issues we deal with; they deal with care and protection issues and abuse issues. But if we have common clients where they have referred to us or we have referred to them, we do have a lot of liaison with them and discuss with them what's happening with the clients.

MR CORNWELL: What would happen if you suspect it?

Ms Brown: All staff in Therapy ACT and the former CHADS are mandatory notification staff. If we suspect child abuse, we would make a notification to Family Services.

MR CORNWELL: And they do report on it.

Ms Brown: They respond to the notifications, yes. They will action our phone calls.

MR CORNWELL: And do your staff report, if they suspect?

Ms Brown: Yes, they do. They always discuss it with me first when they have an issue around that so that I'm aware that they're about to make a notification.

MR CORNWELL: You say here that the problem of autism appears to be on the increase and it is a worldwide trend. Are any studies being undertaken locally or nationally of this matter or is it that people are becoming more aware of the problem itself and recognising it?

Ms Brown: You're correct on that last point, yes; there's much more known about it now as a spectrum diagnosis rather than what was traditionally known as a child with autism. The spectrum disorders range from very, very mild to quite severe conditions. A lot more is known about it. Lots more health professionals and other people in the community, other professionals, are aware of how it presents and are much more inclined to look at it seriously as an issue earlier. There's a great deal of research occurring internationally into trying to find the causes of this rapid increase in the presentation of autism over the last 10 to 15 years. I'm not aware of major studies in Australia. There is some information being gathered on Australian demographics, but there's no common registration system or national database on it at the moment. But there's a lot of international research occurring.

MR CORNWELL: I suppose some things that previously were not recognised or not listed under autism now have been listed, which would increase the numbers.

Ms Brown: Yes, that's right.

MS DUNDAS: You do the assessments of children to see whether they have a spectrum disorder and you provide therapy services for them from birth to age 65, as you say. What liaison have you had with the department of education over their new assessment tool for disability support programs in schools and the amount of resources that will be allocated to each child?

Ms Brown: The new assessment tool in the department of education is around allocation of teaching assistant points and teaching assistant support for children in the classroom to assist with their educational programs. It has no impact on implication for therapy services that we provide, but we would work very collaboratively with the department of education in terms of managing all of the issues around children with autism.

MS DUNDAS: Can you expand on that for me? There are two separate tools, one for therapy and one for education.

Ms Brown: We diagnose the condition.

MS DUNDAS: But we're still talking about the one child and their life 24 hours a day. How do you liaise with the department and has that liaison changed because of the change in the assessment tool?

Ms Brown: No, it has not. The department of education had a slightly different assessment tool prior to the recent one that they'd worked on, but they were still assessing for needs and support in the classroom and we were still providing autism assessments separately. We work very closely with them on a number of fronts. The first is that I'm the Therapy ACT and DHCS representative on their special needs committee. I have been involved in all the steering committees and reference groups involving setting up the new assessment tool for the department of education.

We provide teams of multidisciplinary staff to work with children and teachers in all the autism and early intervention units and in the autism playgroup. The autism playgroup is at my site at Holder and there are still teaching staff, and the manager of the early intervention services is co-located with us on that site. We meet regularly with people from the department of education around issues to do with children with special needs in the schools. We have a very strong relationship with that department.

MS DUNDAS: A child could go through an autism assessment with your department and then need to go through a different assessment with the department of education for their educational needs; is that the process that happens?

Ms Brown: We would assess them for the diagnosis of autism and develop the treatment plan that would involve the therapy services component of their management. The department of education is responsible for establishing their educational plan.

MS DUNDAS: It's a completely different process. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I turn to volume 2, page 224. I refer also to page 93 of the same

document. I'm not sure, but it may be that there's a connection there. Note (d) to output class 1, output 1.4, talks about the below target outcome being due to underexpenditure of the staffing budget caused by difficulty in recruiting to vacant positions, but on page 93—attachment 9, recommendation 21—it is said that recruitment to all child health and development services positions funded under the allocations for early intervention programs has been completed. Are we all singing from the same hymn sheet here?

Ms Lambert: It's inconsistent.

THE CHAIR: Can you explain what those differences might be? Note (d) refers to difficulty in recruiting to vacant positions, but page 93 says that all the recruiting has been completed.

Ms Brown: We did at the beginning of the year, but we had a large turnover throughout the year. It's very difficult to get figures because of swapping from one payroll service to another, but we did have five age retirements early in 2003 and we had seven or eight people leave around Christmas 2002 and people going on maternity leave, long service leave and leave without pay. At the beginning of the financial year we had full staff, but we had significant changes through the year.

THE CHAIR: Page 93 is the end-year result that all of the recruitment has been completed, but the note at page 224 is about the effect of the whole year's staff movement.

Ms Brown: I would think so, and it does also relate to the early intervention end, which is the part of the program where we treat the under-5s.

THE CHAIR: Going back to page 224 and the quality effectiveness criteria there, you talk about the overall satisfaction of customers being 85 per cent for the previous year and 86 per cent now, a variance of one. I wish to make a comment there and then come back to it a little later when we tear into the whole-of-government thing, because the whole departmental or government thing is suffering the same thing, anyway. I was interested to see the variance is one and not a percentage figure. We'll come to that later when we've got better examples of it. Can you tell us some of the issues of concern? This is a result of your annual survey. What were the sorts of standout things in that survey that were said to be what could be done to improve things?

Ms Brown: Among the areas that parents responded to were that they didn't think that we had enough resources to meet their needs, they didn't think we could see them as often as we'd like to, they didn't think we could provide enough service into the schools as they would wish. It was all around the level of resourcing more than the quality of service. The survey was done in May 2003, just prior to and when the announcement of the change of departments came up, and there was a huge amount of anxiety from our families about the potential impacts of that on what was formerly the CHADS service in terms of potential changes to the level of servicing under a new arrangement. So I think it reflects a degree of anxiety on behalf of parents.

THE CHAIR: It is to your credit, I would suggest, that the principal grumblings are about not enough of an excellent service, rather than the fact that people have a problem

with service quality. That's heartening to hear. In the next level—teacher satisfaction with consultation by CHADS in relation to the management of children with developmental delays, et cetera—there is a bit of a drop there, a drop of eight. Actually, it's eight over 80 per cent, which is a 10 per cent drop. There is actually a porkie in the figure there; it should be 10 per cent, not eight. That's just a simple arithmetical extraction, but we'll come to that later.

It is said in the notes that there was a 26 per cent return rate, compared with a 17 per cent return rate for the customer satisfaction survey. It's not clear to us how a small number of responses with very low satisfaction rates can skew the results, which is what you've said in note (b). It seems a bit defensive, perhaps. If the response rate is so low, what's the validity of these kinds of surveys in measuring quality? Is the response rate really going to be a valid measure for you, or is there any way we can improve the response rate? How do you see that?

Ms Lambert: Certainly, we look at response rates like that and think about how we can do things differently. We have been engaging in that conversation. I'll let Ms Brown talk in a bit more detail about that, but that is an issue for us and we need to look at different ways of doing it and perhaps have a different way of interacting with the schools. Sometimes it's timing, the time of the year when you do something, particularly with schools—for instance, towards the end of the year, which is when I understand you've traditionally done this, and so on. We've looked at these from our first year of operation and we're now endeavouring to address them in different ways. Pauline is working closely with Education around this as well to try to find a way to get a response rate.

Ms Brown: This is the second year in a row when we've had quite a low response rate to this and quite a poor result. Initially, we used to send it out to all of the special needs teachers and classroom teachers who had been involved with us in managing children with disabilities or developmental problems in the primary school system. As a result of the poor result the first year round, we then went through a process of sending the survey to the principals with a letter asking them to distribute them in the school and we also sent it out to the classroom teachers. We've done a different way of distributing it to schools this year in terms of who it goes to and that hasn't changed the poor response rate at all.

From discussion with some of the principals and people from the special education area, I think it will be to our advantage to run it in October or September, but I wouldn't want to get too much earlier than that because you wouldn't get an impact from the teachers in terms of their full year view of the world. So we will probably change the timing again. I'm also going to have some discussions with the department about whether they've got some other ideas about how we might get a more appropriate response rate to this survey.

Ms Lambert: I'll also be meeting with the special school principals, with the executive director of education, in the new year to talk about some of these matters and to work out different ways to get feedback from them.

THE CHAIR: I have a funny feeling that we've discussed this issue before and you were telling us about problems with it before.

Ms Lambert: Yes, it was in the budget estimates.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that; I'm not going silly. Ms Dundas has a few questions. I welcome Mrs Burke to the hearing; it's nice to see her come along.

MS DUNDAS: I want to move on to disability services. We don't have a lot of time to deal with this very important area. I'd like to start off with a quick question about individualised funding. Individualised funding and individual support packages were talked about as one of the major recommendations of the Gallop report. You note on page 27 of volume 1 that there was an evaluation of individualised funding and that the recommendations of this report will be acted upon. Can you tell us what those recommendations were and where you will be progressing with individualised funding?

Ms Ford: Yes, there were 24 recommendations in that report, under five areas: recommendations for us as a department, recommendations for service providers, recommendations for people who access and use an individual support person, a recommendation for brokerage agencies and then just some general recommendations. The majority of those recommendations related to the way in which the funding mechanism for individual support was distributed. For example, where a brokerage agency provides an individual package of care, the agency works with people to source the types of services and support they need and then the people use those supports. In many cases, people have up to five services being delivered to them in a week. They have to manage up to 15 people coming through their home in any one week and train workers to work with them as an individual, which is entirely appropriate. But people felt that there must be a better way of getting some of the more generic services that are perhaps not so specialised. An example of that for us as funders was to look at being more flexible in the way that we work with services so that services themselves can have a flexible response.

MS DUNDAS: What is the difference between the individual support packages and the individualised funding?

Ms Ford: They're one and the same.

MS DUNDAS: They are one and the same; so you're still continuing with the individual support packages but they're being continually reviewed and updated, and hopefully over the next financial year the focus of how those support packages are delivered will change to be more flexible and have a greater involvement of brokerage agencies or a lesser involvement.

Ms Ford: Hopefully, a lesser involvement of brokerage agencies and a greater involvement of the people that have a package and the services from whom they purchase their services. So we're working a lot more with the services to get the services themselves to be more flexible in their response.

MS DUNDAS: Will the individual support package program continue?

Ms Ford: Yes, the individual support package program will continue. But it is important to recognise that the individual support package program is one way of funding services for people with disability, so it will continue as one way.

MS DUNDAS: Okay.

MRS BURKE: I have a very broad question on the access to government strategy. Page 27 it states that the Disability Advisory Council, with assistance from Disability ACT, developed an audit kit. Can you expand a little on the uses of the kit and tell me how the kit is, hopefully, being successfully used to identify the problems of people with disability?

Ms Ford: Certainly. The access to government strategy, as you know, was launched on 1 July and we are currently working through the process of setting out the practical implementation of that strategy across all government departments and, in particular, working on the plan for our own department to look at how people with disabilities get access to the whole range of government services, from information, to access, to education, to employment and physical barriers to access to government.

MRS BURKE: So you've identified the issues for this plan. What's the time line in regard to the plan and then full implementation across the department?

Dr Adrian: That kit has been provided to all agencies—

MRS BURKE: They've all got that now?

Ms Ford: Yes.

Dr Adrian: All agencies have that kit. We're working closely with agencies, and all agencies are required to produce an action plan against that kit or to be using that kit by June this year.

Ms Lambert: We are also working to provide government agencies with services to undertake their access audits as well, so looking at a process working with procurement solutions. It is quite specialised knowledge and it is quite specialised expertise in some regards, so we are endeavouring to get, if you like, a panel of people who can provide audits as well so that they are audits of a high standard.

MRS BURKE: Where will you draw that panel from, Ms Lambert?

Ms Lambert: I'm not sure; we'll have to tender for that panel, of course. I understand the tender will be let within a month.

MS DUNDAS: In relation to the medication practice project and the risk assessment analysis, both mentioned on page 26, has the new medication practice project been fully implemented?

Ms Ford: Ms Hayes will answer that question.

Ms Hayes: No, not as yet. We have just completed the finalisation of the policies and recommendations following the evaluation of the trial and developed the training materials for staff to implement the new policy. That training will start within the next month.

MS DUNDAS: Has there been a need to reassess where that project is going, considering recent events, specifically in relation to the death of the young man with autism after he was released from hospital?

Ms Hayes: No.

MS DUNDAS: Issues with his medication haven't—

Ms Hayes: We don't have the outcome—

MS DUNDAS: I don't want to go into too many individual cases, but have you seen a need to reassess how that program is going, how the evaluation went or how the trial will be actually implemented?

Ms Hayes: No, not as a result of those incidents.

THE CHAIR: The last question relates to page 219, output 1.1, disability policy, planning and services, quality and effectiveness. I was a bit unsure of what I was reading because it refers to service providers implementing the national disability service standards and it gives the measures of 100 per cent and 95 per cent. It refers us down to a note which says that the result reflects actual reporting by service providers. Does that mean that 95 per cent of the service providers reported to you about what they'd done or that 95 per cent of them complied with the national disability service standards? In other words, where's the statement of whether they've achieved the standard or not? Can you enlighten me a little bit, please?

Ms Hayes: Yes, I can. It is a self-assessment process that they do against the standards and these particular results come from a contract audit that was conducted. We went through all elements of the contract, including their requirement to meet the national standards, and requested them to let us know their compliance level with that. That's where 95 per cent of them said they complied.

THE CHAIR: So 95 per cent of them said they complied with it and the other five per cent put their hands up and said, "We fess up; we didn't do it".

Ms Hayes: That five per cent constitutes three services. Two of those services are very small services who receive around \$1,000 in funding. They only produce a newsletter; the standards are not really relevant to them because they're not providing hands-on services to people with disabilities. The other service is one that we are currently working with and reviewing why it is not meeting the standards.

THE CHAIR: Do you do spot checks? Let me tell you that, if I were self-assessing, I would be sticking my hand up and saying, "I do it," because I'd just take advantage of you because you look like I could get away with it.

Ms Lambert: Appearances are very misleading, then!

THE CHAIR: How do you check it from time to time?

Ms Hayes: This is part of the work of one of the reform working groups. The quality reform working group is particularly looking at a quality framework, which will include the standards and will look at what the audit mechanisms for the standards should be, which will continue to include self-assessment but would more than likely recommend some form of external audit process as well.

Ms Ford: In relation to your question about spot check audits, the sector development support team, which is largely responsible for interfacing with the non-government organisations in our department, have a minimum of two face-to-face contacts with large departments in a year, and with small organisations a minimum of one. However, through the process this year of contract audits, funding agreements and again now going out to discuss with agencies about funding agreements, that would be a minimum of three to four contacts a year with most of the larger agencies that are delivering direct services to people. So we feel confident of the delivery of those services. We also get a lot of feedback. We field over 200 calls a week in our department, and of those 200 calls at least 50 per cent would be from the public, from people who use services or people who are affected by disability. Within that, we field any calls—and to date we haven't had any—about any services that are not performing, so the level of anecdotal satisfaction with services I would suggest is reasonably high.

Ms Lambert: Is that 200 calls into Disability ACT?

Ms Ford: Into Disability ACT.

THE CHAIR: With that, we will conclude the session for CHADS and Disability ACT and thank you, officers, for your attendance and for the help you've given to the committee on the compilation of the report. It has been great.

We will now turn our attention to the whole of the department. Can you give us a little bit more information on what's going on with regard to page 55 of volume 1, the review of statutory oversight and community advocacy agencies, please?

Ms Lambert: I'll go back to the beginning and just add that my minister is not the responsible minister for this—it's the Chief Minister—but I'm comfortable answering the questions because I've chaired the committee. There was a significant consultancy started in April last year which continued until towards the end of the year. A report was produced and that report is now out for consultation. The consultation finishes on 15 February and then government will provide a response. There was an extraordinary amount of consultation, in fact, as the report was developed. I think over 200 people and 50 organisations were involved in the consultation process. The report has gone out with four options and we will get feedback on that report by the 15th and then government will prepare a response.

MS DUNDAS: Will the government response—and to a certain extent the consultation process—take into account recent reports that have been released, including the report from this committee recommending a commissioner for children and young people, as well as the economic white paper recommending a commissioner for small business, as part of where it's going, as they would be independent bodies?

Ms Lambert: The intention of the response is to be comprehensive in relation to all

reports that have been produced.

MS DUNDAS: Even though they weren't included in the initial four recommendations?

Ms Lambert: Clearly, if you're looking at a model such as the models that have been presented, you will have to look at other commissioners that have been suggested since the original project was scoped.

THE CHAIR: On page 57, under the future directions segment, it is said that a whole-of-government process to manage client cases which require a multiagency response will be finalised. Page 165 also has a reference to that. Can you tell us where that's at?

Ms Overton-Clarke: Yes, certainly. The project was convened last calendar year and we got together a large number of high-level officers across the different departments, particularly the human services departments, and have put together a proposal for an executive working group to manage complex cases. The office of the Management Assessment Panel and the health and education departments were all on it and the recommendation is that, for complex human services cases that need closer cooperative working together across government, there will be this level committee convened at appropriate times.

THE CHAIR: Does your department have lead agency status?

Ms Overton-Clarke: We've led the project, yes.

THE CHAIR: Do you envisage leading the working group as well?

Ms Overton-Clarke: Yes, we will initially. Who convenes it really depends on whose case is spearheading that particular department, but certainly the secretariat and the ongoing management of it will come through this department.

THE CHAIR: For its successes or otherwise, in terms of annual report reflection, we will look for it with some anticipation in future volumes of your tome. On page 83—I think there's a reference on page 129 as well—you talk about the fraud prevention strategy and public interest disclosure. Having commented about that recently, I'm just wondering, when you talk about the event, is the allegation of fraud and the public interest disclosure the same event or are they different events?

Ms Overton-Clarke: They can be one and the same; it depends on what the public interest disclosure relates to. Are you asking about the specific instance?

THE CHAIR: Yes, that will do for starters.

Ms Overton-Clarke: Yes, they are the same—and that is possible under the legislation.

THE CHAIR: I just wanted to finish this one off because I know one of our members had a bit of an interest in this. I'd just like to let you know that with occasional questions I ask if I look at you somewhat vaguely it is because another member has asked me to ask the question. TMP Worldwide were contracted to recruit senior officers in Disability ACT at a cost of \$70,356 and that was managed by Strategic Policy and Organisational

Services.

Ms Lambert: That's not this instance.

THE CHAIR: No.

MS DUNDAS: That's not an allegation of fraud, no. We've moved on.

THE CHAIR: I would never accuse Bronwen Overton-Clarke of fraud, Ms Lambert. We go too far back for that and she knows too much about my past. I refer to the item on page 102.

Ms Lambert: Okay.

THE CHAIR: I just wanted to know how many senior officers were actually recruited on your behalf by TMP Worldwide.

Ms Lambert: Can I just say that TMP works with us in those processes, so there were three—two executive and one senior manager.

MS DUNDAS: To flow on from that question—this is specifically in relation to public housing, but while we're doing general contract questions—I also noted under contracting, as opposed to consulting, numerous instances of recruitment and employment of contract staff as well as numerous small engagements. They range across a number of organisations, be that recruitment or actually putting on temporary contract staff. Are we looking at a normal level of either temporary staff or recruitment of staff for the department or has something special happened this year so that you just had to do a lot of recruitment and have a lot of contract staff?

Ms Overton-Clarke: My understanding is that it's not abnormal; a lot of the contract staff are casual staff for the housing manager casual replacements. Some contractors were engaged for the affordable housing task force process and there are also some areas where we would have had people taken offline for bushfire—

MS DUNDAS: Yes, I was going to ask that. Was this part of the backfilling for—

Ms Overton-Clarke: Some of it was, yes.

MS DUNDAS: You said in your opening statement that 25 staff went.

Ms Overton-Clarke: Twenty-nine at one time or another; that ranges between staff permanently there—there were a relatively small number of staff throughout the whole year there—and others who filled in and came back.

MS DUNDAS: So it's not an abnormal level, but you don't expect it to be that high next year.

Ms Overton-Clarke: We would hope it wouldn't be.

Ms Lambert: It's very important to provide relief staff for front-line services and that's

part of the issue. It's also an issue in Disability. While Lois and Ros have left, we've worked really hard to work on more permanent employment of staff rather than casual staff, but there will always be a little of it when you have front-line staff that you must replace.

MS DUNDAS: I'm sorry that Ros and Lois have left, but can you explain a little bit further, because for disability policy, planning and services there were two quite expensive contracts for relief disability support officers that went out?

Ms Lambert: That actually is a normal—

MS DUNDAS: That is abnormal here.

Ms Overton-Clarke: No, that's a normal—

MS DUNDAS: That's normal?

Ms Overton-Clarke: Yes. There are permanent staff engaged through the department and then there is a casual pool through, in this case, two companies who supply those casual staff.

Ms Lambert: But we have moved to change that and I'll invite Ros to come back and tell you about the changes that have occurred, because I think that's important in showing that we're trying to move away from a reliance on relief staff, to have more permanent staff.

THE CHAIR: Music to my ears!

MS DUNDAS: That was definitely an issue focused on in Gallop in terms of staff knowing clients.

THE CHAIR: A responsible thing to do, too.

Ms Hayes: One of the crucial priorities for me in managing this service was to try to stabilise our staff and to reduce our reliance on casual and relief staff as far as possible, so we have engaged in the recruitment of additional permanent staff and decreased our percentage of casual staff that are utilised. That's a trend that has commenced but has still some way to go, I think, before we get to an end point. We will always require a percentage of relief staff, just given the fact that we have approximately 300 disability support workers. It is a field where there is a turnover; we have to replace people who are sick and on leave of various kinds, of course, so there will always be a need for relief staff, but we hope to get that down from around 20 per cent to eventually around 10 or 12 per cent; that's our aim.

MS DUNDAS: Is that the aim for the next financial year, or how long do you think the project will take?

Ms Hayes: We won't achieve that in one year. I think at the moment we're tracking at about 17. I hope that that trend will continue downwards.

MS DUNDAS: Thank you very much for that.

MRS BURKE: I have a couple of quick questions on the theme of staffing and training. I have an interest in some of the introduced training measures, which I'm very pleased to see. We'd start probably with ACT Housing's use of national competency standards, which starts on page 91 under Housing and goes over to page 92 under Disability ACT. The aspect of that whole range of training has certainly changed. Training packages are in place, as well as national competency standards and recognition of current competency and prior learning. Given that I think some of the new focus on housing would have to be on delivery, particularly for the area and regional managers, has that been on-the-job training? Have you had to exclude people? How have you covered those bases? There seems to be a fairly big churn; that's all. How is that training program working? What's the status of it, what's the uptake and how are we doing with it?

Ms Maher: The certificate IV program that we've undertaken was started at March of last year. Currently, we've got 89 staff progressing through that process. It is intensive; there are significant days of training where staff are required—

MRS BURKE: So they're taken offline?

Ms Maher: They're taken offline to undertake that process. The program was to run over 18 months. As at today, of the 89 staff that commenced, six have managed to go right through the program, and we're very proud of that. But there is significant more work to do. The program also includes having assessments of staff in the field, so that is ongoing.

Ms Overton-Clarke: Can I just add, too, that as part of the delivery and design of the program, the whole issue of backfilling and ensuring that service delivery staff were maintained was part of the development of the program. So they are some of the reasons why it has also taken quite a long time, because it was important to develop it with very much the needs of the clients in mind, ensuring that service delivery was always kept at the forefront.

MRS BURKE: What's the time line? You have six out of 89.

Ms Maher: It was an 18-month program from March of last year.

MRS BURKE: With Disability ACT, in terms of the moves and recommendations under the Gallop report in terms of upskilling, we're looking at the whole area of taking people from temporary to more of a full-time role. How is the training? Where are we up to? Same question.

Ms Overton-Clarke: We're developing a proposal, which we will put out to the market within the next few months, which is actually for the whole disability sector. As you've said, it is along competency lines and probably certificate III, possibly certificate IV, and the whole concept of it is to develop the non-government sector as well as the government sector. We recognise, however, our large stake in the market and that we need to show leadership, so we expect that the take-up will be primarily in the first instance in the government sector, but we will encourage the non-government sector to also come in as sort of pilots in that.

MRS BURKE: I suppose certificate III would be the minimum; hopefully, we're going to be raising the standards to certificate IV. Is that the emphasis?

Ms Overton-Clarke: That's right, but there are, of course, different levels of staff as well, and part of it is not to put people off, if you like, by giving them unachievable targets. So the market will come back to us on how that's best replicated—whether it's actually a certificate IV that people can exit at different points, or whether we put it out as a III or a IV.

MRS BURKE: You say you're developing a proposal. When did that start and when is it likely to finish? We need the implementation, don't we?

Ms Overton-Clarke: Yes, that's right. It's within the next two months that it's going out to the market for implementation in this year.

MRS BURKE: I have a quick question in regard to page 55, under organisational support services. I hope that user-friendly websites have been developed. It refers to the redevelopment of Housing intranet site to improve accessibility to information. That's intradepartment, obviously.

Ms Overton-Clarke: That's right.

MRS BURKE: What is that actually going to do in terms of making things better for you?

Ms Overton-Clarke: It's policies and procedures for the Housing staff, for both the front-line staff and for the back end; but primarily, of course, it's for the people working with clients. We have one already. We're ensuring that the relevant information from across the rest of the department is included in that intranet for the public housing site. So, as well as upgrading it, we're ensuring that different parts of the department are incorporated.

Ms Lambert: The other thing I would add to that is in terms of the information that's on there. I'm leading a process with the housing managers in the department and we are looking at what information they want. So, while we're determining that from the policies, there's also a bottom up process that I'm chairing as we move through in this financial year.

MS DUNDAS: This is a discussion that the minister and I had previously. The department has a percentage of total staff identified with disabilities of around 2.24 per cent. What is the department itself doing to improve its workplace accessibility for people with disabilities? I'm not talking about the access to government strategy; I understand that's about the department dealing with external clients. I am actually talking about how the department is looking at its own processes to encourage the greater employment of people with disabilities.

Ms Lambert: We went to great lengths when we established our office, after some time when the department was established in Moore Street, to make that building—even though we don't occupy all of it, obviously—as accessible as possible. For instance, we

identified one disabled toilet on the bottom floor as you came in. We've now just put one on the second floor, because we do have many people come in from the community and work with us. That's standard practice for us.

Mr Wood: At quite a cost.

Ms Lambert: I can't remember the cost.

Mr Wood: It was pretty heavy.

Ms Lambert: About \$30,000, I think.

Mr Wood: It was a fairly serious project.

Ms Lambert: We are doing that. We are not, of course, responsible in the end, as a department, for the whole-of-government employment policy, but through Ms Overton-Clarke, in her role on the HR council, that has been made a priority and there is whole-of-government work going on which we will, of course, tap into. We have sat and listened to people about the barriers that they have in terms of access, and we have compiled a list for Ms Overton-Clarke to talk with the HR council about some of those barriers and how they might be dealt with. Some of it relates to selection practices. I don't know whether it's high or low on the autism scale, but for someone with Asperger's who is very highly functioning quite a few of the selection procedures don't work. So we're doing quite a lot of work at that point.

THE CHAIR: I refer you now to volume 2, page 15. Under the services line, you talk about improving the police and criminal justice response to violence against women and a commitment to have community education and to continue to provide training to the AFP, but the departmental progress says this is an organisational and an AFP decision. Does that mean that, if the AFP just don't want to play ball with you, that's the end of it; thanks for coming?

Mr Wood: No, the AFP is very cooperative. The minister is very helpful.

THE CHAIR: And, rumour has it, is the best police minister since 1989. How can we have that as an answer to departmental progress?

Ms Lambert: I understand Ms Sheehan is coming as well, but I think the answer is that we don't actually initiate that part of the process; that's my understanding of that response. It's not our primary responsibility; is that right?

Ms Sheehan: The community services area of the department funds a number of services that provide support to women who've experienced violence, including rape crisis. The rape crisis service is involved in a broad program which involves the AFP and works very closely with the AFP on these issues. So when we say that it's an organisational and AFP decision, what we mean is that we're very supportive of the work that our funded organisations are doing with the AFP, that those organisations have chosen to proceed in that way and we certainly endorse that.

THE CHAIR: Perhaps another phrase might have been a bit helpful.

Ms Sheehan: Yes.

THE CHAIR: It sounded to me like you were at the mercy of the whims of the AFP which I wasn't terribly fussed about. I'm grateful to be educated on that one. Thank you.

Ms Sheehan: Perhaps I could add there that we did receive a presentation from the rape crisis service of the homelessness advisory committee, which is overseeing the development of the homelessness strategy, on the great successes that they'd had by working closely with the AFP. They'd succeeded in increasing the number of perpetrators of domestic violence who had been prosecuted, and more than that they had increased the number of perpetrators who had pleaded guilty, thereby reducing the adverse impacts on the recipients of violence of having to go through the trial process. So the relationships are very strong between the AFP and the domestic violence crisis services.

THE CHAIR: Yes, encouraging results. I think you might have an interest in the next question on page 17, of the same tone, about options for women. In the second series of blocks you talk about the performance indicator there being a decrease in waiting times for women escaping domestic violence and percentage of allocations given to women escaping domestic violence. Can I suggest that the phrase in the first bit there, decrease in waiting times for women escaping domestic violence, might be better explained another way? I invite you to do that. It seems to me that there's a decrease in waiting times at home while they're waiting to escape from it. I think we can explain that a tad better. It says that that's the indicator, but it doesn't give us any indication as to whether there has been a decrease. can you give us some pointers on that one, please?

Ms Sheehan: The first thing to note is that as part of our consultations, both as a public housing provider and as a funder of homelessness services, it's been raised with us in both of those capacities that women escaping domestic violence have had problems entering public housing if they have a prior debt with Housing. The reason for that can often be because the person who's perpetrated violence against them continues in the property while they're forced to flee. The government announced in December that a new initiative for people escaping domestic violence would be that a debt with public housing would not longer be an impediment to re-entry into public housing. So we will now be measuring the effect of that policy. It's not compulsory for women to declare that they're escaping domestic violence when they present to public housing. They can volunteer that information. So we will be able to establish a base line of the number of women on the waiting list who declared that they were escaping domestic violence and see the impact of that decision that debt will no longer be a problem.

THE CHAIR: I assume you'll see the impact of that as the years go by now that the service providers and the sisters are aware of that.

Ms Sheehan: We imagine that we will see it immediately because there are women in all of our women's crisis services who have not previously been able to come back into public housing because of the debt issue. So we're expecting an immediate impact where those women will be able to re-enter public housing.

Ms Lambert: But to answer your question, we have met with groups such as Toora,

which convenes a meeting of the women's services, and have talked with it about this. These issues were raised with me when I first started meeting with them.

THE CHAIR: I think it's a great initiative. Thank you very much for that.

Ms Lambert: The other initiative that the minister announced was that he would be establishing a debt review committee and that debt review committee would be able to look at public housing debt and apportion the debt, which is very important in the cases that I just raised where the debt comes with a woman because of a relationship where there is violence. Once the debt is apportioned between the man and the woman, in some cases debt will be waived as well. So that's further support that will be given to women escaping violence and we should see the benefits of that in the public housing system.

THE CHAIR: So the circumstances now include domestic violence as a justifiable reason for waiving a debt.

Ms Sheehan: That will be the decision of the committee, but that's certainly the reason that the minister made that announcement.

THE CHAIR: Do you put it amongst the criteria now?

Ms Sheehan: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Excellent.

MS DUNDAS: When women are accessing public housing to escape domestic violence and they have a property they're fleeing from which is technically in their name—they're not former public housing tenants but have a sizeable property that they can no longer live in—is that taken into account when assessing whether they should be eligible for public housing or what level of rent they'll be paying?

Ms Maher: In the circumstance of domestic violence, assets and those situations are viewed quite sympathetically. Generally, the client will declare an interest in a property. That information is known to housing and if and when that property is sold we look at what the financial implications are at that point in time.

MS DUNDAS: But it isn't necessarily a barrier.

Ms Maher: No.

THE CHAIR: I have a couple more questions but will put them on notice. We'll now restrict ourselves to volume 2, financial information. We will break for afternoon tea at the end of the financial information section and then we'll have community services housing. On page 153, the reduction in capital injection, I understand that there is to be a 50 per cent reduction, but I could not see a note to that effect. Perhaps you could let us know why that was, please?

Mr Hubbard: I'll just have a look in the amended budgets on page 161.

MS DUNDAS: I guess the question on page 161 is: did the supplementary appropriation

include a new capital injection?

Mr Hubbard: That's right.

MS DUNDAS: What was that capital injection for?

Mr Hubbard: Because in a sense the capital item is a new capital item each year. So a capital injection was provided as a refurbishment for the Moore Street building. That's essentially what that is.

THE CHAIR: Is that because the funds weren't expended? What was the reason? You're going from a low figure to a 50 per cent higher figure. I can understand the way you've presented it here, but it doesn't tell me what happened, unless I'm misreading it.

MS DUNDAS: The money came in for a supplementary appropriation, which took the amended budget up to \$3 million, but the expenditure was only about \$1.5 million.

Mr Hubbard: I'll just have a look at it.

THE CHAIR: I'm happy for you to take this question on notice.

Mr Hubbard: Yes, I will take it on notice, because there are some variations.

THE CHAIR: Feel free to do that if we have caught you wrong-footed. We don't want to put you on the spot.

Ms Overton-Clarke: I can tell you the amount that was spent out of that money.

THE CHAIR: If the answer to the question is that it was because the moneys weren't spent, I'm really more interested in what they weren't spent on rather than what they were spent on, because it's such a large figure.

Ms Overton-Clarke: That amount was provided for the fitout of 12 Moore Street. If you look at page 114 in volume 1, you can track that. So, about four or five lines down on the far right, \$1,145 million. The amount that was provided was \$1.2 million. Of the remaining amount, as Colin said earlier, we've spent approximately \$30,000 on the toilet and a number of small other items have been expended in this financial year, 2003-04.

MS DUNDAS: The table on page 114 does say that \$1.2 million has been provided for the Moore Street fitout, but page 161 has the figure at \$1,235 million. Are you just rounding because this is the colour version of the report?

Ms Overton-Clarke: Probably, yes, I would imagine so.

Mr Hubbard: Can I just explain why it totals \$3 million?

THE CHAIR: Yes, go for it.

Mr Hubbard: The original capital injection was for the Griffin Centre. That was provided in the year before.

MS DUNDAS: So that's the \$1.9 million.

Mr Hubbard: The \$1.9 million is the Griffin Centre. It is funds for a different centre.

THE CHAIR: There's the explanation. The explanation is the main bulk of it is because of the delays of the Griffin Centre, ergo, you've got to carry it over. Okay, there is no need to respond to a question on notice. Thank you very much, Mr Hubbard.

MS DUNDAS: Under each of the output classes on page 219 onwards, you've added the note that the figures are different due to funds provided to cover additional costs and salary and wage increases due to new enterprise bargaining agreement. Obviously the enterprise bargaining agreement covered each output class of the department. Is it possible to get a further breakdown of how supplementary funding from the bushfires was utilised by each of the output classes?

Mr Hubbard: Yes, and I think they're actually in here. If you just give me a moment I'll find them for you.

MS DUNDAS: It's just because the same note is stuck at the bottom of every output class and obviously it applies differently to every output class.

Ms Lambert: Yes, that's right.

MS DUNDAS: I'm just trying to find those variations.

Mr Hubbard: Yes, the total was \$205,000, which came through an appropriation.

MS DUNDAS: That's \$205,000 across the department?

Ms Lambert: For the bushfires.

MS DUNDAS: Yes.

Mr Hubbard: And it's represented as extraordinary revenue. You'll see in the accounts on page 161 that it's termed extraordinary revenue. Across the whole of government we were asked to represent all bushfire funds in that way in the accounts. So the total of funds coming to the department was \$205,000, not including public housing.

Ms Lambert: Would you like a breakdown of how it occurs?

MS DUNDAS: Yes. How much of that was then expended in disability or housing policy or overview?

Mr Hubbard: I could probably do that for you now. I can give you how the \$205,000 is broken up.

MS DUNDAS: Yes, that's the question.

Mr Hubbard: Well, \$40,000 was given for the evacuation recovery centre. That was for

salaries of staff that went to the evacuation recovery centre.

MS DUNDAS: Was that across the department?

Mr Hubbard: Not including housing.

Ms Lambert: It didn't include housing. It was for Community Services.

Mr Hubbard: So, \$100,000 was provided for counselling and outreach services and that essentially went to NGOs.

Ms Lambert: Mostly to Lifeline.

Mr Hubbard: And that would have come through the Community Services output.

MS DUNDAS: Again, through output 1.3.

Mr Hubbard: Then \$65,000 was provided for a destroyed group home, one of the group homes.

Ms Lambert: So that's Disability.

Mr Hubbard: Yes, that was in Disability. That was essentially for equipment and staff costs.

MS DUNDAS: I remember that one.

Mr Hubbard: Yes. One of the houses got destroyed and then it was required to have two houses because they couldn't replace it with one house, which was five bedrooms, and therefore they required additional staff and additional equipment. That's where that \$65,000 went, and again that came out under Disability.

MS DUNDAS: Did CHADS need to expend any money in relation to the bushfires?

Mr Hubbard: I don't think so.

Ms Lambert: We didn't receive extra money.

MS DUNDAS: You use the same note under all of them, so it indicates that CHADS was utilising bushfire money when they weren't.

Mr Hubbard: Point taken.

Ms Lambert: They did some things but they did it within their own budget.

Ms Overton-Clarke: Particularly on the night of the bushfires a lot of their staff went informally to the evacuation centres and set up, particularly physios.

MS DUNDAS: That's mentioned in here, isn't it?

Mr Hubbard: Yes.

THE CHAIR: A great job they did too. Mrs Burke, you've got a question.

MRS BURKE: Page 219, volume 2, output class 1. It may be an overall question for the minister. You were measuring the performance of the department, Minister. Maybe you can explain, if it's been explained to you, why an error has been identified in reporting against a measure—community support recreation. Targets were set and there's nothing there. That looks alarming. Perhaps community support recreation can be explained. We've got people wandering around and we don't know where they are or what they're doing or what the output is. We've got some targets but we don't know what happened. What's the error, Minister, and what is that all about? Can somebody explain that?

Mr Wood: I'm sure we can.

MRS BURKE: So you wouldn't know yourself, Minister?

Mr Wood: No.

Ms Hayes: The error has to do with what was being counted. This measure had previously been occasions of service. An occasion of service is a variable measure; it could be half an hour, three hours or five hours.

MRS BURKE: Don't people clock on or off? I am sorry to interrupt. Wouldn't you know by people reporting for duty or not, and measure?

Ms Hayes: It's not just our service. This is funding that we give to non-government organisations. In the contract we ask them to report occasions of service. Then we change the measure to hours of service because it's clearly a more consistent measure that allows us to compare things. But that was not for the full year, so the measures were contaminated. They were collected partly in hours and partly in occasions and there wasn't a clear way to convert from occasions to hours. At the end it really wasn't possible to make that conversion. Some services had reported in hours, some had reported in occasions and the data simply wasn't consistent enough for us to feel as though we could convert from all the occasions to hours and give a measure on that.

MRS BURKE: I note that the footnote says that, but it says nothing other than what you've just said. I'm at a loss to know why targets were set. What did you set the targets on—occasions of service or hours of service? When did you decide to change from occasions to hours?

Ms Hayes: We decided to change when the targets were set at the start of the financial year, but that was not conveyed either well enough or clear enough to service providers for service providers to change the way in which they collected data and reported to us.

MRS BURKE: The 8,700 says occasions of service, but it was meant to be hours of service?

Ms Hayes: Hours of service; that's correct.

MRS BURKE: But measures were being taken and you'd have some reports for occasions, some reports for hours, would you?

Ms Hayes: Yes, we do.

MRS BURKE: Couldn't that have been included and explained?

Ms Hayes: Yes, it could have been but, as I say, the conversion wasn't straightforward so we didn't report against two measures.

Mr Hubbard: There was a change in the unit of measure and we did have some information where we did convert occasions of service to hours of service. But, as you'd appreciate, these papers are audited and this was a discussion we had with the Auditor-General to say that we've got them in hours of service and we've also got them in occasions of service. We took it on the chin—essentially it was our responsibility to collect it in the right way. We couldn't sufficiently convince the Auditor-General that we could put both measures there, occasions of service and hours of service, and after some negotiation we didn't get the outcome we wanted, which was to put both of those measures in.

MRS BURKE: So you've got the data?

Mr Hubbard: We've got the data.

MRS BURKE: Has it been released anywhere?

Mr Hubbard: No, it hasn't, but the Auditor-General asked us to put there "not measured" and wasn't prepared to sign off on our output statements unless it said "not measured".

Ms Lambert: We can provide you with that data, if you'd like it.

Mr Hubbard: We'll do that.

MR CORNWELL: How many people does that represent?

Ms Hayes: That's not something that we do collect data on.

MR CORNWELL: Why not?

Mr Hubbard: Because it is a different unit of measure. We're doing hours of service.

Ms Hayes: If it had been decided that the number of people who were provided a service was a better measure, we could have done that, but again that leads to inconsistencies of was a person only given half an hour of service or were they given 23 hours of service. You would have no real way of comparing. So at the end the hour of service is probably the best measure for us. It just means we have to get consistently to that.

MR CORNWELL: But we don't know whether 1,000 people in fact received the 8,700, do we?

Ms Hayes: No.

MRS BURKE: I thought you'd made it clear at the beginning when you made the comment that you have changed over from occasions to hours?

Ms Lambert: Yes, but Mr Cornwell's question was in relation to the number of people. When we established the department we inherited a range of performance indicators and I made the point at the very first estimates I attended, which was soon after this department was formed, that I expected that we would have to work on the performance indicators, and we continue to do that, but it is an iterative process. We are also undergoing significant reform in the disability area. As that reform progresses we will want to be changing the way we measure things because we are making significant changes on the ground. So it is important to put that in context and I frankly am much happier with "not measured" than something which is inconsistent. We can certainly give you the data that we have collected in relation to this measure.

MR CORNWELL: The reason I'm interested in the number of people is that, if you're not counting the amount of time spent on individuals, perhaps you are not recognising alternative procedures that may be necessary with some individuals; that you'd be spending a considerable number of hours with one or two people who might better be looked after by some other method.

Ms Hayes: We're working towards some better measurement of that through the implementation of the national minimum data set, so from this year onwards we will have accurate information about the number of people who are being provided with each of the service types and the hours of support that they get. Future reports, which will come through the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Studies, will be able to give us those kinds of breakdowns of the number of people by type of service and by hours of service. We will then be able to do the sort of analysis that you're talking about.

MR CORNWELL: Would some of that information be available in subsequent reports, annual reports?

Ms Hayes: I'm not sure. It certainly would be available through the reports that are done by the AIHW.

Ms Lambert: The AIHW reports will be public reports, so that information will be there. The data is there to inform policy development and program performance.

MS DUNDAS: Page 221, which is the output class for housing policy and planning, indicates that there was an underspend in other housing assistance because about \$3 million wasn't spent on community housing initiatives. I was looking for an explanation of why it wasn't spent on community housing initiatives, or why it was rolled over.

Dr Adrian: The reason that wasn't spent, we went through a process, when the government announced that initiative of an additional \$3 million for community housing, of calling for expressions of interest from the community housing sector to put forward projects to access that money. Those projects were assessed by me, the head of

ACTCOSS and the head of the National Office of Community Housing Organisations. We agreed on a number of proposals. They're still in the process of coming to fruition, so there have been some delays in getting those projects on the ground. So the \$3 million is still there. It's been allocated to the organisations that won out of that process but we've yet to see those community houses emerge on the ground.

MS DUNDAS: There were two initiatives for community housing, weren't there, two lots of money over the past two budgets?

Dr Adrian: Yes.

MS DUNDAS: I know we're looking at the financial statements for 2002-03, but how is the second project going? Will we see it progress in a more timely fashion?

Mr Wood: We learnt the lesson, but there are processes there that take some time.

Dr Adrian: With regard to the second \$3 million, we've actually gone back out to the sector and sought proposals. They'll be in by the end of this month, early next month. We've indicated this time round based on, as the minister says, the experiences from the previous financial year that we're looking for projects where they can get them up and running before the end of this financial year. So we'd anticipate that a number of the proposals that come forward, and we've had briefing sessions of the sector, will actually involve properties that already exist or where they can purchase properties, rather than in some cases complicated issues where the process is going to take much longer.

MS DUNDAS: The other note under that payment was that the money was underspent due to additional payments to ACT Housing. I want to know what happened there.

Ms Sheehan: In the previous arrangements, where there was a purchaser/provider model for the purchasing of housing services and then the provision of housing services, the housing policy and planning unit was responsible for funding innovative housing models such as the boarding house models. Therefore, because there had been a delay in the establishment of the Gungahlin boarding house because of appeals against the development application and also some delays in establishment of the older women's boarding house, those moneys went with housing policy as part of the old housing, which was part of the previous department. So, those initiatives become community housing initiatives in the new department but previously were a carryover from housing.

Mr Hubbard: The actual projects are noted in the footnote before that. So the carryover projects are boarding houses, transitional accommodation service, and also the development of the Ainslie Village complex including the night shelter. It's those ones.

THE CHAIR: I draw your attention to page 225, risk management. It notes that the outsourcing of the management and the maintenance of public housing portfolio represents a contract risk. What is that contract risk?

Ms Lambert: Do you mean in numbers?

THE CHAIR: No, where's the risk?

Mr Hubbard: The risk is about contract delivery. Whenever you outsource a contract or get someone else to do something for you there is a risk of non-delivery. So that's part of the risk there, that there'll be underdelivery. So to manage that risk we make sure that we manage the contract closely to ensure that all the deliverables within the contract are met in a timely way, et cetera. As part of this section of the report, we just identify what risks there are and also indicate that we've got some control mechanisms in place.

THE CHAIR: The first paragraph on page 226, under financial risk, says that the property numbers are not to reduce and additional funding may be provided. Is that right?

MS DUNDAS: Yes. So that paragraph runs on from the other page?

THE CHAIR: Can you give us a little bit more information on that?

Mr Hehir: Particularly when you're looking at your asset management strategy and dealing with large multiunit properties, where those properties are aged or in very poor condition, you need to make a decision about whether you're going to refurbish them or not. In the event the decision is made not to refurbish, basically you've made a decision that the asset is in such a state of disrepair it most likely needs to come down. The sale of land around that process will not provide anywhere near sufficient funds to replace the number of units that you will have lost, so clearly at that point you need to look at what sort of capital injection or strategies you need to address the loss of such a number of units.

MR CORNWELL: I refer back to a comment I think Ms Sheehan made about part of the money being delayed for an older women's boarding house. Why have we a delay on this?

Ms Sheehan: There was a delay in completion of the refurbishment of the building. It was previously known as Mapleston House, which was a purpose-built hostel for young people with an intellectual disability.

MR CORNWELL: Somewhere in Weston Creek.

Ms Sheehan: In Chapman. When further houses were built for those young people, the property became vacant. It had been vandalised and so on, so it was actually a bigger job than had been anticipated. We're very pleased to say now that the building works are complete, that the successful provider of the service will be a combination of Havelock Housing Association and Toora Women's, which is a very exciting partnership of service providers, and that there will be women in the service by the end of January.

MR CORNWELL: How many?

Ms Sheehan: A maximum of eight.

Sitting suspended from 3.45 to 4.01 pm.

MS DUNDAS: My question relates to the bushfire response. How did supported accommodation and community services respond to that? What were the committees in

the Woden community service contracted to do and what was the extra funding for?

Ms Sheehan: Because we needed broader involvement than just government support we decided that it would be appropriate to fund regional community services that already received core funding from our department for community development activities so that they were able to post people at the recovery centre. Funding did not include a range of outputs; it enabled the provision of a community development worker for both of those regional community services.

MS DUNDAS: So funding was provided to employ two people at the recovery centre.

Ms Sheehan: That is right, yes.

MR CORNWELL: I refer to page 39 of volume 1, headed "Full retail contestability in the electricity market", which states:

Additional funding of \$245,000 was allocated in the 2003-04 Budget to increase current electricity rebates to offset cost increases directly attributable to the introduction of Full Retail Contestability.

The only problem is that we do not have contestability. We have nothing other than ActewAGL.

Mr Wood: Let me refer to what Ted Quinlan had to say about this.

MR CORNWELL: I would not do that because what he had to say was not terribly good. I know that we have to allow for contestability, but that has not eventuated.

Mr Wood: It has not eventuated, but cost increases were expected. I do not know whether those cost increases have flowed through. I do not know the circumstances.

Ms Sheehan: The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services administers the concession payment system. Let me refer to the way in which concessions are paid. We receive a list or an account from electricity providers. We anticipated that we would receive an increase in costs in the accounts provided by electricity providers. That is why we thought it was necessary to allocate an initial amount.

MR CORNWELL: But that has not happened, has it? There has not been an increase.

Ms King: No additional providers are in contract. We have in place mechanisms to contract with new providers if they become available and if they are able to support customers on a pension. At this stage there are no additional providers other than ActewAGL.

MR CORNWELL: In the event that there will be no additional providers this financial year, what will happen to that amount of \$245,000?

Ms King: There has been an increase in concession and electricity costs. There has been an increased cost even though there are not, as yet, any additional providers.

MR CORNWELL: So there was an increase in electricity costs.

Ms King: The ICRC recommended a 9 per cent increase.

MR CORNWELL: That amount was provided in order to compensate for full retail contestability, which has not eventuated.

Ms King: I think that allocation related to an expected increase in full retail contestability. The ICRC approved a 9 per cent increase in electricity costs, which impacted on electricity concessions.

THE CHAIR: We are referring to issues in the 2003-04 financial year. Annual reports refer to what occurred in 2002-03. I understand that Mr Cornwell is referring to an allocation in the financial statements. However, I suggest that he pursue that issue during the estimates committee hearings.

MR CORNWELL: I am happy to pursue the matter elsewhere.

THE CHAIR: I invite Mr Cornwell to place that question on notice. I refer to page 178 of the report, which deals with the community linkages program. There is a grant of \$3,700 to the YWCA. The document refers to financial counselling services to public housing tenants at the BAC flat complex. What counselling services would you get for \$3,700? What additional services would that organisation provide compared with the services provided by other financial counselling services that are also funded by the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services? The department places a great deal of emphasis on counselling people before they find themselves in difficulties.

Ms Sheehan: Funding was allocated to the community linkages program in the first year and in subsequent years. Proposals were received from tenants and from community organisations already working with tenants in public housing about the way in which they would like to see that funding allocated. In this instance the YWCA had a specific project in mind. It had specifically determined how much it would need to provide that type of support. So we funded the amount that it asked for. We also provided ongoing funding for a community development worker. In that instance it is easy for a community provider to piggyback an additional amount of funding from services that are funded on an ongoing basis.

THE CHAIR: Did the government not allocate funding in the housing budget to provide for counselling skills or services, or did the YWCA just state, "We have a great idea and we want you to pay for it", and that funding was provided?

Ms Sheehan: That is right. However, we also provide ongoing funding for CARE for credit and debt counselling right across the community. So there is an existing service. As I said earlier, the YWCA thought that it could provide some extra value at BAC with that additional money.

THE CHAIR: And you agreed with it.

Ms Sheehan: We did. A panel assessed all the applications and it won on its merits.

MS DUNDAS: I refer to page 39 of the report, which deals with three-year funding agreements. Funding is being provided for new human services purchasing agreements. Without taking up too much time, could you explain to me how these new three-year funding agreements will work? Have any been offered since July 2003?

Ms Sheehan: The department is extremely proud of the fact that about half its services are funded under community services. A combination of services for homeless people and general community services are now on three-year funding agreements—something that was strongly advocated by the community sector and by peer groups such as the ACT Council of Social Service. It is hard to deliver quality services over a long period of time if your funding is allocated on an annual basis. For example, how do you recruit skilled, trained and experienced staff if you cannot give them a guarantee of employment for more than one year? We saw it as a move to sustain the sector—a move that was greeted positively by the sector.

MS DUNDAS: So most of the core agencies that you fund are now on three-year agreements.

Ms Lambert: That is in the community services area. I meet quarterly with the heads of regional organisations. One of the first things that they talked to me about was the need for more certainty in their funding so that they could deliver sustained outcomes for the community. We worked pretty hard to get those in place. However, we could not do it for everyone because we had some accountability issues with some of the organisations. We will work towards putting that in place as comprehensively as we can.

THE CHAIR: No doubt that initiative would have been welcomed by ACTCOSS. It has been screaming for it for a number of years.

Ms Lambert: In the human services area people can take up a lot of time putting in lots of applications rather than in delivering services. If we enable as many people as possible to get onto three-year funding that will be a good outcome for the delivery of services and for clients.

MS DUNDAS: Are SAAP organisations and 50 per cent of other community service organisations still on rolling one-year contracts?

Ms Sheehan: No. Almost all SAAP services are now on three-year contracts. We can provide you with a list of our three-year and one-year contracts.

MRS BURKE: An amount of \$100,000 has been spent on various programs under the heading “Community Linkages” on pages 176 to 177 of the report under the prevention eviction program. I notice that the contract began on 30 August but that program has obviously now finished. Most of these programs have a one-year contract. What successes did you achieve? What were the reporting requirements and so forth? How did you determine whether that program was successfully run?

Ms Sheehan: Although the program was funded initially for only one year, we saw the benefits of that program before the end of the first year. In the second year of funding the committee linkages program we decided that, rather than make all regional committee

services reapply for funding, we should simply extend the program for another year. So the program has been extended for a second year. Initial reports that we have received indicate that the program, in particular in the Belconnen area, has had a substantial impact on people going before the Residential Tenancies Tribunal, which is what we expected. We are keen to evaluate the program. It is important to demonstrate clearly that these programs are successful. We are planning in the next two months to go to tender and to evaluate the whole program. Next financial year we will have some clear evidence of the success of the program.

MRS BURKE: What are the key performance indicators for each program? What criteria are involved? Do you set clear goals and targets?

Ms Sheehan: We do not have KPIs. Initially, the community linkages program was not run by way of a contract; it was run by way of a grant.

MRS BURKE: That is right.

Ms Sheehan: So the proposal was that regional community services would employ a community development worker to assist tenants who were facing eviction. This time we have encouraged them to focus more on early intervention rather than waiting until a tenant is already facing a problem. They must get in early when they see the first signs.

MR CORNWELL: I refer to page 78 of the report. Under the heading “Older People”, the report states:

Towards a Society for all Ages: Forward Plan for Older People in the ACT.

That seems to me to be a community service issue. That plan, which is still in existence on the internet, was last updated on 14 March 2000. I do not know whether the plan, which was initiated by the former Liberal government, has been officially adopted or updated by this government. We have found no information to that effect. Will the minister enlighten me?

Mr Wood: I will check with my colleague the Chief Minister, who has responsibility for that area.

MR CORNWELL: I would appreciate it if the minister took that question on notice.

Mr Wood: I will take that question on notice.

THE CHAIR: I refer to page 185 of the report, which deals with the Migrant Resource Centre. The centre received a non-recurrent grant of \$3,500 for English language classes, volunteer home tutoring and settlement information, and community education. What is happening now? Did it receive another grant?

Ms King: That organisation, which is funded recurrently, received a one-off recurrent grant. From time to time we are able, through the community service program, to provide organisations with an opportunity to submit proposals similar to the one about which Ms Sheehan was talking earlier. We say to organisations, “What do you need? We have available a small amount of non-recurrent funding to provide some capacity

enhancement to the program.” So smaller allocations of \$3,500 or so would be grants of that nature. That organisation receives recurrent funding to provide English classes and community development for people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

MRS BURKE: I refer to page 38 of the report and to the heading, “Raising the Standard.” I would like some feedback from you about raising the standard of practice and raising standards generally for community service organisations. How do you assess whether they are better engaged or better equipped to self-assess against generic standards? Do you have some feedback on how that is helping and assisting?

Ms King: The implementation of the raising of standards tool is still in its early stages. However, all our funded organisations use the standards tool. We provide regular training in the implementation of the standards tool in human services across the ACT government. Organisations are contractually required to let us know how they are using the tool. We do not assess or report on where they are in relation to different benchmarks. However, they are required to let us know how they are using the tool and how they are progressing.

MRS BURKE: Is that formal or informal?

Ms King: It is formal. It is a contractual requirement. Referring to the success of the tool, recently we were advised that the New South Wales government is interested in using the same tool in the provision of its human services. Over time we will be better able to measure its impact on service provision. The important thing at this stage is to ensure that we have a partnership with providers and that we evaluate how different elements of the service delivery are progressing. That is a good thing.

MRS BURKE: Did you say that the tool had not been formalised as such?

Ms King: It is in its early days. Last year a small number of services were piloting it. This year more services are actively engaged in using it. It will take a while before we are confident that all services are implementing the tool fully.

MR CORNWELL: On pages 39 and 40—ACT government concession programs—you have listed a whole range of programs that Community Services have provided. Is there any means of identifying from the figures listed here individually how much funding may have been provided to self-funded retirees who might qualify for health or other concession cards under the scheme?

Ms King: All of the concessions are provided to people who meet the eligibility requirements. For example, for energy you need to be in receipt of a Centrelink pensioner concession card or a health care card. If the self-funded retiree were eligible to receive a health care card or concession card, they would be able to receive the concession. I would assume that they would generally be means tested out of the concession eligibility.

THE CHAIR: Otherwise you would not know what determines eligibility.

Ms King: That is correct.

THE CHAIR: There is a bit of self-interest here. I do not have a seniors card, by the way. The seniors spectacle scheme interests me because I used to be involved in the free spectacle scheme years ago. Is possession of a seniors card the only criterion for people? If you have a seniors card, you are over 60, not working more than 20 hours a week and you live here, what is the benefit? Do you get a part payment or free spectacles?

Ms King: The concession holder will pay \$20; the rest is covered by the scheme. There are some limitations, such as the type of frame that would be covered. The cardholder pays the first \$20 and that is it.

THE CHAIR: A retired diplomat aged 60, living in Red Hill and working for less than 20 hours a week could rock up, pay \$20 and get a set of spectacles.

Ms King: Once every two years if you are eligible to receive the spectacles.

THE CHAIR: Yes. Free spectacles with a \$20 surcharge on top. I am glad to see it. Thanks for that. We will move to housing. Thank you to those who have given us their time. Page 50 refers to housing allocations. In 2002-03, 25 priority applicants waited for one to two years for affordable housing. What has happened to those applicants? Have they been accommodated? Has there been an improvement?

Mr Hehir: The overall trend for housing allocations is generally taking longer. Compared to three years ago, we are definitely taking longer on average to place people. The amendment that was undertaken in 2002-03 gave the commissioner the ability to look at criteria outside the time of the allocation being made. Cases that are considered to be more important are generally dealt with as a priority rather than just on the individual criteria and then the time of the application being received. There will be many cases where applications are received and dealt with within quite short timeframes, particularly where it has been identified that they should be dealt with as quickly as possible. As an overall statement, it is taking longer and that is because fewer people are moving out of public housing.

MS DUNDAS: The chart on page 49 shows the priority applicants versus standard wait list allocations. Obviously people who are asking for priority housing are getting it, which is what the chart shows. We have standard applicants on waiting lists for one to two years. At what point do they say, "I have been on the list for two years. Does that not make me a priority now?" How are you progressing the standard wait list as well as trying to move the priority wait list?

Mr Wood: The detail of that is the key question. How we reach a balance is something that focuses our attention quite a deal.

Mr Hehir: People from the standard allocation lists are still allocated housing, as you can see from the chart. Under the Commonwealth-state Housing Agreement it is a requirement that we do focus our attention on those in greatest need; therefore, as the charts show, we clearly assign people in the emergency allocation criteria before we assign people in the standard allocation criteria.

As to your question about whether people can put their hand up and request to move to a different allocation category, people can resubmit information and supporting

documentation at any time to support their claim for a change in their allocation status. So people can come in and say, “We believe that we are no longer a SAAP allocation. Our circumstances have changed sufficiently for us to be identified as an early allocation criterion.”

There are criteria identified which people are assessed against. While I cannot say that those criteria are absolute, there is some flexibility within them in terms of people being allocated from one category to another. It becomes a question of whether or not they meet the criteria, but that is an assessment officer’s call. There are appeal processes which people do avail themselves of.

MS DUNDAS: Does the chart on page 49 indicate that we have had an increase in the number of people who are identifying themselves as priority applicants? Tell me what this graph shows when we look at it over three years. Are there more priority applicants?

Mr Hehir: The chart will not show whether or not we have more priority applicants. All it shows is the number of applicants that we house as a percentage from those early allocation criteria.

MS DUNDAS: The number has increased over the last three years. Is that because we are allocating more houses to the same number of people who are putting their hands up as being a priority, that we are going through the priority waiting list faster or that there are more people in need of priority housing?

Mr Hehir: The overall waiting list does not seem to have grown significantly over the last three years. There has been some movement in between the categories, but again that does not seem to be very significant in terms of end of year assessment against the numbers. It is important to have a look at the flows between the categories in and out. For example, the chart shows roughly that we have over 90 per cent allocated to the emergency allocation clients. Approximately 1,140 people were placed into housing and approximately 900 were within the EACs’ category. That category does not seem to be dropping dramatically as a result of that. So we have people presenting for the first time as emergency allocation clients. I do not know whether that helps you. I suppose one point to make is that they do not really say what they are; there is an assessment process.

MS DUNDAS: I am just trying to understand the trend in the graph. If you extrapolated out 2003-04—this is not based on any figures that have come through yet—on previous trends it looks like priority housing allocations will be 95 per cent of the allocations made over the year and only five per cent will be for the standard waiting list. It seems like a good trend to follow if the number of people asking for priority applications has increased and standard applications have dropped off. If that has not happened, the graph on page 50 will start to increase again and those listed as standard allocations will just wait longer and longer for housing. As the minister has said, it is a hard balance. I am trying to understand whether or not my analysis of that graph is correct.

Dr Adrian: What you say is true. The number of priority applications has increased, as has the overall allocation. When you look at the graph, that tends to mean that fewer standard allocations are occurring. Another thing that would potentially affect that, though, is that it depends a lot on the nature of the application and how restrictive people are in what they are seeking.

MS DUNDAS: Such as the region they want to live in—those sorts of things.

Dr Adrian: Some people can stay on the list for a longer period of time if they are very specific about both the location and the style of accommodation that they are looking for. In addition to questions on number of dependants, income levels and their circumstances, their actual requests do have an impact on how long they stay on the list as well.

MRS BURKE: I have two questions; one will be on notice. On page 103, expenditure for contractors is \$58,463,861. This is a summary. Could I have a breakdown of expenditure. If you can only do one area, that is fine. In housing, for example, was it for gardening, plumbing, maintenance or cleaning?

THE CHAIR: Have a look at page 106.

Mr Hehir: If you look at page 106 through to—

MRS BURKE: Sorry, on page 52 it says 93, 95 and 103.

Ms Lambert: You are quite right, the maintenance contracts form a significant component of that.

MRS BURKE: That is fine. On page 53, volume 1, is the output performance summary. Under “Quality/effectiveness measures” it states that, for the percentage of properties inspected during the year, your targets were 97 per cent but that we reached only 58 per cent. What happened there?

Ms Lambert: There were a couple of reasons for that. As we mentioned earlier, one of them was the impact of the bushfires. When the bushfires hit, we had to devote a lot of energy to the people whose houses were affected—and I am not just talking about the people whose houses were destroyed. Some 140 houses also had damage and we needed to focus very strongly on those people. Some of that relates to the fact that there were probably multiple visits to the one property rather than the more comprehensive coverage that we might usually have. That is certainly part of the reason for that.

MRS BURKE: Would it be fair to say that we are not really maintaining that inspection process to the level that we would like—probably every six months?

Ms Lambert: No, I do not think so.

MRS BURKE: Do you think we are inspecting every property every six months?

Ms Lambert: From my experience and from talking to Housing, I think we need to look at the way we measure this. I mentioned the group I was working with before. The number of inspections we do is quite significant. Perhaps the way in which we are measuring is not as appropriate as it should be, but there is no doubt in my mind that the bushfires had an impact on this as well in that we had to focus resources on a group of people.

MRS BURKE: That is a six-month impact.

Ms Lambert: Yes, that is six months. There was a flow-on effect into this financial year as well. We have done an enormous amount of work not just with public housing tenants, as the minister said at the beginning, but with a range of people who needed accommodation as a result of the bushfires.

MRS BURKE: Notwithstanding that, are you telling me then that you still think that we are on target and that we inspect our properties enough? The minister talks about being in line with the private rental market, for example. Do you think we are?

Mr Hehir: I understand that the private rental market is able to inspect twice a year. Our measure is inspecting at least once a year. The purpose of the client service visit is more than just a physical inspection of the property. It is slightly more complicated in that the private sector certainly are not going to undertake the same sort of customer service visit that our officers undertake. It is certainly our target to visit people at least once a year, and we identified that in the 2003-04 program. How we achieve that and where we focus our attention is something that we will continue to look at and continue to improve.

Ms Lambert: As I said, within that number some properties receive more than two visits, which is what the private sector is able to do.

MRS BURKE: And some a lot less. Of concern to me are those that say they have not had an inspection for a long time.

Ms Lambert: What are they talking about in terms of an inspection?

MRS BURKE: You have just alluded to things such as contact and a great change of area managers. There would be a lot of complications and I understand that you are trying to address that. Some people say that they have never seen people inspecting their properties for years. I have told them to ring again. It is nice to know that people want inspectors to come into their home to inspect and make sure that they are doing the right thing. Often it is a case of their being asked for maintenance, which also involves customer service inspection. The bushfires are now over and we can get back on track.

Ms Lambert: As we said before, with the community linkages program we have other agencies performing some of this work as well. Quite often our housing managers are not equipped to deal with the complexity of issues that some of our tenants have. That is one of the reasons that we use organisations like the YWCA. They have access to services and are inspecting properties, talking with people and working with them. It is quite a complex measure.

MRS BURKE: I note with processing applications that your targets were 100 per cent but that we reached only 60 per cent again. Could you explain that, please?

Mr Hehir: As identified earlier, the issue with processing applications is that many of our cases are increasingly complex. The client may not provide sufficient information for us to undertake a complete assessment of them. They are able to take up to 28 days to provide further information to us and many of them are taking that period of time. An allocation starts when the application is first submitted not when it is complete. Technically we are not able to meet this measure, primarily because of the time being

taken by our clients to provide additional information to support their case. We may need doctors' referral letters or evidence of homelessness—any number of things—to assist us in making the allocation. They have 28 days to provide that and many of them are taking that time. In many cases they have to get a whole lot of information together. You can see that it is almost impossible in those circumstances for us to meet our timeframe.

MRS BURKE: The disappointment for me there is that people moving from a priority to wherever are often asked to give the same information again on an upgrade. I can see the wisdom in that, but it is very frustrating. We are exerting pressure on a group of people that can least manage a lot of these emotional stresses and strains. Is that taken into consideration? Why do we keep asking people for the same information over and over?

Ms Maher: It is to keep the information current.

MRS BURKE: I understand that.

Ms Maher: The recruitment of our housing manager specialists has provided some opportunity for staff to provide that level of support and assistance.

MRS BURKE: That is alleviating some of the pressure.

Ms Maher: Advising people on how to document their housing situation takes some time.

Ms Lambert: There is always a tension between consistency in practice and process in dealing with the individual. We have to ask people to make judgments about that. On the broader point that you are making, the executive of that area of the department, the executive coordinator and I are working very hard on streamlining processes in relation to client practice. We have begun that process. As you will see, one of our priorities is to have a business framework which minimises duplication, particularly for the clients who front to us—and that is not just for the housing side of the equation. That is why we have community services and supported accommodation now with that part of the department. It was not there when we formed it, but that is the structural change we made to enable that to happen more easily.

MRS BURKE: As part of your strategic plan.

Ms Lambert: That is right.

MR CORNWELL: I refer to page 35, the output performance summary. On the public and community housing properties there is a difference of 81 between the targets and result. Is that because of the bushfire?

Mr Wood: We did lose 81 houses. I do not know whether it is exactly that, but it would be of that order.

MR CORNWELL: I wondered whether that was it. The target for the number of applicants housed was 1,500 but the result was 1,174. A figure of 326 less than the target is fairly important.

Ms Lambert: Ms Sheehan will have the detail on this.

Mr Wood: They are not leaving; they are staying in their houses.

Ms Sheehan: I will refer, firstly, to the issue of properties and dwellings. The properties lost in the bushfire account for the lesser target for public housing. With respect to community housing, a number of projects were delayed in completion. Earlier we spoke about the older women's boarding house and about the Gungahlin boarding house. The older women's boarding house will house eight people and the Gungahlin boarding house will have 20 units. In addition to that, with the allocation of \$3 million for community housing capital funding, which we ran through earlier, we are anticipating a number of properties there for older person's units—for example, for the Tamil senior citizens, 10 person units for Abbeyfield, two houses for Billabong and so on. I can provide you with a complete list of the houses that we are expecting to be built with that funding.

Ms Lambert: It was about 50 tenancies, wasn't it?

Ms Sheehan: Yes. We will provide you with that list. That more than accounts for the shortfall in the properties. With respect to applicants housed, as Mr Hehir has explained, applicants are housed off the waiting lists including the priority waiting lists. As we lost properties in the bushfire and as the private market became tighter there were fewer people moving out of public housing, which then reduces the number of additional applicants that you can house over the period. That is what you see in the figures.

MR CORNWELL: Why is there a discrepancy at page 35 and page 53 as to the number of applicants housed? The target on page 53 is 1,450 and on page 35 it is 1,500, a difference of 50.

Mr Hehir: There is a difference in the measure. The table on page 35 relates to both community and public housing. The table on page 53 that you're referring to refers only to public housing.

Ms Lambert: That's the difference.

THE CHAIR: I have a question for you about page 142 and it refers to the Housing Review Committee. It relates to the number of appeals that have been upheld in the various categories. Would you find the same figures in the same categories for the previous financial year and get back to us on that?

Ms Lambert: A comparison?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Lambert: Yes, a comparative chart for the HRC?

THE CHAIR: Yes please. Then, when we come back to do the annual report again next year, we'll have a three-year comparison. If that is possible, I would appreciate it. The percentages are rather high at an average of 33 per cent. That means that one in every three is upheld. What sort of review process do you have to incorporate the reasons for

this success? What are we doing about having someone appeal against the decision and having it upheld in 30 per cent of the cases?

Ms Lambert: I will talk generally first. One of the things I do is visit with the committee once a year. They talk to me about their problems and the trends that they see emerging. I then instruct people to have a look at those. One recent matter was the threshold income which we need to have a look at given the nature of people's living circumstances now. This concerns affordability and so on. That is a mechanism that we use with the Housing Review Committee in the broad sense. I meet with them as the chief executive and we talk about the broad trends, not about individual cases. Ms Maher can talk a little bit more about how that translates into practice operationally.

Ms Maher: Generally, when a decision is made on an allocation or a rebate—any housing assistance—if clients disagree with that decision they have the option of taking that to the HRC. What happens is that they put in an application for a review. The files and decisions are reviewed by a senior officer within Housing ACT. Generally, if additional information is provided at that time, it may well result in the appeal not proceeding to the HRC. If it does proceed to the HRC, the committee is made up of community representatives from a broad range of backgrounds. The applicants have the opportunity to state their case directly to the Housing Review Committee. At that point, it's also often the case that the committee gets additional information as a result of which it would make a recommendation to the commissioner that the decision be changed.

THE CHAIR: Yes, that just about covers it, thank you.

MS DUNDAS: I have a question relating to page 51 but it's a financial question. Page 51 refers to the expenditure of funds for the multiunit property plan for fire safety and I was just wondering what has happened to the rest of the \$10 million that came out of the Treasurer's Advance in the 2001-02 financial year. From memory, there's also money allocated in the 2002-03 budget for the fire safety plan that totals a lot more than \$2 million, so what's happening with the progression?

Mr Wood: We are working on it. There's been a significant delay. Mrs Burke has just left. I'm sure she would have been very interested in it. A good deal of it is to do with the screen doors. If you want to comment on modern society and the precautionary principle, think about screen doors—and I know there are disputes about the rightness or wrongness of the \$10 million. It began when there was concern that we needed urgently to show that we were prepared to do something about fire safety. This was because a concern had been expressed that, even though these were pre-modern fire safety standards, there was a likelihood or possibility that we could be held accountable. That got us the upgrade which has taken the screen doors out.

MS DUNDAS: I think you've shown a commitment but have you actually followed through on that commitment?

Mr Wood: Then the trouble that arose was keeping the screen doors. You had to knock the screen doors off because, if the fire door was open and the screen door was shut, the fire might come out and spread. If the screen door was open and you were dashing out of the place, that would impede other traffic getting out—ingress and egress, including that of fire people—so we set out to try to keep the screen doors. Then we got another report

that said there's a big safety issue: if the screen doors go, people might be less safe. The answer to your question is that screen doors have caused a significant delay for quite a number of months and there's a good answer to that which I'll—

THE CHAIR: Sounds like a revolving screen door to me.

Mr Wood: I wanted to tell that story because it really is a story of the modern age.

Ms Lambert: But we can give you the number and I'll pass the question to Mr Hehir for that.

MS DUNDAS: Yes, because I doubt very much that you're going to spend \$8 million just on removing screen doors. The money wasn't allocated just for that.

Mr Hehir: No. Indeed, the money wasn't allocated for that. However, it has significantly delayed progress on the actual implementation of the fire safety program. We're unlikely to spend the remaining \$8 million this year.

MS DUNDAS: In the 2003-04 financial year?

Mr Hehir: That's right. We are moving as quickly as we can, but the consultative process that arose in relation to the screen doors has delayed a resolution for many, many months. The fire safety works are being programmed in a way that minimises disturbance to our clients. Where we are undertaking other upgrades, as part of those upgrades we'll do the fire safety upgrade. For example, we're looking at trying to upgrade Northbourne Apartments. We've only just recently undertaken the full assessment of that property to see whether we can retain screen doors in all places and also fit the fire safety works. In short, we are also facing up to an additional \$3 million to put in place security screen doors where they can be put in place. It won't be possible in all circumstances.

MS DUNDAS: But will those security doors come out of the fire safety money?

Mr Hehir: No, that'll be additional money.

MS DUNDAS: Okay. Just to clarify, the next step you wanted to take with the fire safety program was in relation to the screen doors and, once you sort out the screen doors, you can do the rest of the program?

Mr Hehir: No.

Ms Lambert: At the beginning of this financial year, my advice was that we would expend the \$10 million, counting the two that we had already expended at the end of the financial year which is covered by this report. However, my advice now is that we will probably expend in the vicinity of \$8 million and the reason for the delay is that we have had to stop—particularly in relation to screen doors—do a lot of consultation with tenants and do quite a lot more work with the structural engineers on the screen doors.

MS DUNDAS: Okay.

Ms Lambert: That's the answer in terms of the dollars at the moment.

Mr Hehir: The screen doors will be fitted as part of the fire safety work. So that is one component of the fire safety program.

MS DUNDAS: Okay, thank you.

THE CHAIR: Ms Lambert gave us a very good expose of where we're at and the revolving screen doors reign supreme. Can I take you to volume 2 now and page 221? There's also a reference on page 274. In the quality/effectiveness measures, you have customer satisfaction at less than—or greater than, I can never work out those things—60 per cent.

Mr Wood: Greater than.

THE CHAIR: All right, thank you, Minister. I should listen to you because you were a teacher. Another one says greater than 77 per cent. What do you consider is a good target that happens to be greater than 77 per cent or greater than 60 per cent? Are we talking about 78 or are we talking about 98? Why haven't we got a real number?

Mr Hehir: There's a difference between the two measures you're looking at. That measure is, in part, a historical measure of the level of satisfaction with public housing, both in the ACT and nationally. The measures do not reflect very high levels of satisfaction with public housing across Australia, so that's why the target is set at 60 per cent.

THE CHAIR: I congratulate on you on the variation, because you got nil. Why, in the result, didn't you put in 61 per cent for customer satisfaction and 78 per cent for the other customer satisfaction? Those would be greater than the targets. We can't have measures with these figures, as they just say, "Yes, you did it." Good on you, but how far?

Ms Lambert: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Can I ask that, in future, we do something like that, please?

Ms Lambert: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. On to page 274 now: I have a gripe and I foreshadow a mention in the report about this. Exactly what it's going to say, I don't know. In the notes on page 275, notes (e), (f) and (g) say that a high staff turnover and increased efficiencies have resulted in reduced costs. Is there a relationship between the demands being made on staff to achieve the efficiencies and the staff turnover? Do you want to go away and think about it?

Mr Hehir: During my very brief period in the position and from wandering around the organisation to talk to people, I have found that we deal with some very difficult circumstances and some very difficult clients. I think people find out fairly quickly whether that is a job which they're suited to and which they enjoy. There is a high turnover arising from that, to a certain extent. There seem to be a number of very

experienced people within the organisation so I don't think that the efficiency is necessarily driving the turnover. I think it's more a question of whether people find themselves suited to and enjoying the work.

THE CHAIR: Is this one of those jobs where the burnout rate is high because of the nature of the beast?

Ms Lambert: Certainly, the housing managers have significant demands on them. We've been doing some work recently as part of the training which was mentioned before by Mrs Burke and so on. I've attended all of the induction programs since I've been in charge of the organisation, and we have people of significant talent coming into the organisation as well. Some of those delays in recruitment are in areas where it is hard to recruit into the public sector, such as the finance area. That is certainly an area in which we've had problems.

The second thing I would say is that we are looking now at career structures, the opportunities that we provide to people for time out from the face-to-face, frontline work and the ways in which we can explore lateral movement in the organisation, so that we skill people more broadly. In frontline areas you will always have a reasonable turnover of staff—indeed, it is like teaching—and you have to work within your staff development and staff management structures to make changes that give people other opportunities, and to look at your structures as well.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that. Can I refer you now to an issue which has threaded right through this report. I have to say for the record that this is not unique to this department, and I strongly suspect that this department is a slave to the Chief Minister's Treasury officers and their insistence that departments put incorrect information in their annual reports.

Mr Wood: Hey, explain!

THE CHAIR: I shall give you an example and ask you to comment on it. In some cases, the situation is portrayed to the department's credit and some times it works to the department's detriment. There have been occasions when I've seen that, in fact, the department has done better than this particular process would allow. This committee has been afforded the opportunity to make mention of it and I'd be interested in comments.

The repair and maintenance figure on page 274, just by way of an example, says that your target was 3.5 per cent as a proportion of the average building value. Then you get the result of 2.7 per cent and the variation is 0.8 per cent. I would think that that particular 0.8 per cent would offend the sensibilities of any mathematics teacher. It is actually wrong. It should be 22.85714 per cent.

Ms Lambert: Yes.

Mr Wood: It's also misleading in another sense, I might say.

THE CHAIR: That's the point I make. Can you explain the reduction of that 22.85714 per cent and would you like to comment on what on earth can be done to make sure that some person can give the departments the green light to put accurate

information, and not misleading information, in these documents?

Mr Hehir: In relation to the first question, I believe this measure isn't repeated in this year's performance measures. Where you have an asset that's appreciating at a great rate, you don't necessarily need to spend more on repairs and maintenance. So where we had, in this year's figures, a \$500 million increase in our asset value, I'm not quite sure why we would be wanting to proportionately increase our spending on repairs.

Mr Wood: Yes. The cash figure remains the same.

THE CHAIR: Okay.

Mr Wood: It's the cash figure that's constant.

Mr Hehir: Yes. What we're being measured against—the asset value—is rising. We're expending our money on repairs and maintenance.

THE CHAIR: Sure, okay. Before you answer the second part, I refer you to an even better example and an easier one to work out: the percentage of timeliness, the percentage of tenants who are over eight weeks in arrears. While your target was 3 per cent you actually achieved 2 per cent. You actually achieved 50 per cent—or is it 30 per cent, something of that size—not minus 1 per cent. You haven't blown your trumpet loudly enough. The department has done considerably better, in fact, than this report allows. Do you want to comment on what we can do?

Ms Lambert: The first thing I would say is that these figures are audited by the Auditor-General.

THE CHAIR: Yes, very good. Thank you very much for that, Ms Lambert. The Auditor-General will be hearing from us. I think that is a nice succinct answer.

Ms Lambert: We've been asked to table a summary version of the annual report for you. We've done this because of our particular clientele and so on. It will be, as I understand it, Ms Overton-Clarke, used for other language versions and so on.

Ms Overton-Clarke: Yes.

Ms Lambert: We said that we would do this in our annual report, so the minister will table that now.

Mr Wood: Thank you. There it is.

MS DUNDAS: Before you all leave, I have a quick question on housing for Bernadette. What processes did you undertake as a result of the bushfires to maintain contact with public housing clients who lost their houses or people who came into public housing because they lost their houses?

Mr Wood: I'm going to intrude there and say that, among other things, I think Bernadette spent the next 100 hours practically full time on it. I want to commend Bernadette and her people for the extraordinary effort they put into it. They came in on

the day and never stopped.

MS DUNDAS: I appreciate the effort that was made initially to deal with all the immediate points, but I'm thinking more about the long term.

Ms Maher: Obviously, we kept a record of people who contacted us directly through the recovery centre or through our shopfronts. I can't remember the exact number of people but they were not only housing tenants, they were members of the general public, people who were underinsured or private renters who lost dwellings. The contact with those people in the initial three months after the fire was intensive, to make sure that their immediate accommodation needs were met. In the longer term, we have closely liaised with the recovery centre people and dealt with particularly housing tenants on almost a daily basis.

MS DUNDAS: Say the scenario was that people were in public housing, lost the public housing house and managed to support themselves, with the help of their friends or by being lucky enough to find an affordable private rental property within the next two months, and so didn't necessarily contact the recovery centre about housing within those first three months. Was there then follow-up, say, six or 12 months later, to say, "It's been a year. Was that accommodation that you found stable and ongoing?"

Ms Maher: Obviously, we had a record of the properties that were substantially damaged or destroyed. Immediately following the fires, a number of people took private options. We are still in contact with some of those who moved interstate and we have made the offer that, if they return, they can contact our staff who have been dealing with the relocation of fire victims. That contact has been ongoing and we do have details of people's current locations.

MS DUNDAS: Okay, thank you.

THE CHAIR: In closing, can I also comment that the speed with which the public housing tenants in the Kambah region were fixed up and rehoused was very, very high. People there were thrilled and they expressed their appreciation to me so that I could pass it on to you and to the department. I thought this hearing was a good vehicle to do just that.

Mr Wood: Thank you, Chair.

THE CHAIR: On that pleasant note, I thank you, Minister, and your officials for attending us today, and this public part of the inquiry is now concluded.

The committee adjourned at 5.07 pm.