

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

(Reference: Appropriation Bill 2004-2005)

Members:

MR B STEFANIAK (The Chair)
MS K MacDONALD (The Deputy Chair)
MS R DUNDAS
MRS V DUNNE
MR J HARGREAVES

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

THURSDAY, 20 MAY 2004

Secretary to the committee:
Ms S Leyne (Ph: 6205 0490)

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 9.19 am.

Appearances

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

Disability, housing and community services portfolio

Ms Sandra Lambert, Chief Executive, Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services

Dr Colin Adrian, Executive Co-ordinator, Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services

Ms Bronwen Overton-Clarke, Director, Policy and Organisational Services, Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services

Mr Ian Hubbard, Director, Finance and budget, Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services

Ms Lois Ford, Executive Director, Disability ACT, Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services

Ms Ros Hayes, Director, Disability ACT, Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services

Mr Martin Hehir, Executive Director, Housing and Community Services, Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services

Ms Helen Fletcher, Director, Housing ACT, Housing and Community Services, Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services

Ms Bernadette Maher, Senior Manager, Tenancy Support, Housing ACT, Housing and Community Services, Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services

Ms Maureen Sheehan, Director, Community Development, Housing and Community Services, Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services

Ms Sarah King, Senior Manager, Community Services, Community Development, Housing and Community Services, Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services

Mr David Collett, Director, Asset Strategies, Housing and Community Services, Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services

Ms Pauline Brown, Senior Manager, Therapy ACT, Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services

THE CHAIR Welcome monster—I mean Minister—and public servants all.

Mr Wood: That's a fine approach!

THE CHAIR: Sorry, Willy! Ladies and gentlemen, you should understand that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Assembly, protected by parliamentary privilege. That gives you certain protections and also responsibilities. It means you're protected from certain legal action such as being sued for defamation for what you say at the public hearing, and it also means you have a responsibility to tell the committee the truth because giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter. Do you all understand that? Thank you.

Could any witness coming to the table please state your name and the capacity in which you're appearing before you start speaking. If you have to take a question on notice please clearly identify that you are taking it on notice. It is then your responsibility to check the transcript and respond to the question. Responses to questions taken on notice are required within three full working days, as I think you're all aware.

The transcript will be emailed to the minister and the departmental contact officer for distribution to witnesses as soon as it is available. If members asking questions want a question to be taken on notice, please give any page references of that. That helps the minister and the relevant departmental officials. These proceedings are broadcast to government offices—poor things, they'll be bored silly. The media also might be recording proceedings and may pop in and take some visual footage.

Mr Wood: Would you like me to make a bit of an introductory statement?

THE CHAIR: If you would like to make an introductory statement, Minister, please do.

Mr Wood: I will make a promotional introduction. This is the second budget developed by the department, which was established in July 2002. Since we created the department there's been a significant financial commitment to supporting the things it stands for—disability, therapy and community. The better integration of these services is to assist clients with multiple needs. The department's budget supports the Canberra social plan and, in particular, two of its priorities—affordable housing and the homeless. It must be viewed in the context of the previous budget and the second and third appropriation commitments.

We have in the last year, for example, released \$33.2 million from the home loans portfolio to boost public and community housing. This has been supplemented in the current budget with an additional annual capital injection of \$5 million, with \$20 million over the next four years, for affordable housing initiatives. In the last financial year the department has continued to reform the structures, systems, and procedures that underpin the delivery of human services in the ACT. I must emphasise that. That's a lot of work that you don't really see, but the impact has become pretty obvious. There has been an enormous amount of work in all that and it has brought very good results.

The disability reform process has continued at pace and the integration of community services into the housing division is delivering tangible benefits to clients. Recently I was pleased to announce that we are now working with ACT Shelter and the tenants union to develop a tenant participation program to enable tenants to have more say in the management of ACT public and community housing.

This budget further commits new moneys to disability services, reflecting some of the key priorities outlined in the Future Directions for Disability ACT draft strategy that I released last week. The 2004-05 budget reflects our strong commitment to addressing disadvantage in further ways. For example, boosting emergency accommodation for the homeless and emergency relief services will also be improved; more than 25,000 pensioners will benefit from new energy concessions; community building will be assisted through the refurbishment of older community centres, as well as the construction of a long overdue community hall at Palmerston.

I will take a few moments to reflect on some of our specific achievements during 2003-04. All tenants affected by the bushfires were rehoused within a rapid timeframe. We brought down a public housing asset management strategy—a major document, a blueprint to guide the planning and management of the territory's substantial public housing portfolio.

Importantly, and in accordance with the social plan, the strategy recognises that we must plan for the housing requirements of an ageing population. Through the department's capital program, budget moneys will be allocated for the further provision of public housing specifically tailored for older people. There are currently some 1,400 units designated for older residents, with 82 being constructed or purchased in the next 12 months.

The development and release of the carers policy was a major accomplishment. Moneys in the budget have been allocated specifically to progress its implementation. The homelessness strategy was finalised, released, and is currently being implemented.

An unprecedented \$55.8 million will be spent in the next four years in response to homelessness in the territory. We have developed a community services facilities management strategy, as well as a procurement plan for community services funding.

A single therapy service, Therapy ACT, has commenced. Overall the budget supported 10 initiatives within this portfolio, totalling \$8.46 million in the coming year and \$10.46 million by 2007-08. The department is also providing \$155,000 for bushfire recovery activities in Weston Creek, Tuggeranong and rural communities, recognising an ongoing commitment to those most affected by that tragedy.

THE CHAIR: I'll start the ball rolling with a few questions from budget paper 4 at page 245. Under "financial performance" I see that the GPO increases seven per cent to \$79.3 million. I note that in part this reflects a saving achieved by engaging a single agency to supply relief disability services staff, which you note on page 249. Are there any issues with having only a single supplier of these staff, or is the lack of competition compensated for by other efficiencies?

Mr Wood: One supplier went out of business during the period. I haven't had my attention drawn to any particular difficulties arising from that. Someone else might make further comment on it.

Ms Lambert: Sandra Lambert, Chief Executive of Disability, Housing and Community Services. As far as the clients are concerned, there have been significant advantages in having the one service provider. One of those is that we have been able to work with that provider in terms of consistency of support, and we also have a range of casual staff ourselves that we are working with. So we haven't still got just one agency in the sense that we don't have other casuals. In the way we've structured the service, our clients now have much more consistency in the people who deal with them. If you recall, that was one of the issues with Gallop—that there was a significant turnover, particularly in our own support services, of relief staff. This didn't help in respect of the structured programs our clients in group homes have.

As the minister pointed out, we did go to a national tender for this process and arrived at one outcome. To date that outcome has proved successful. It has also been successful in that we have increased our permanent staff. But, as I think we've said in previous estimates here, we will always have some need for casual staff. We're also working with the agency that provides casual staff and training. We are doing joint training with them.

THE CHAIR: I also see that capital injections increase 175 per cent to \$4.8 million. I note that in part this reflects a rollover of funds for the new Griffin Centre. Are there any outstanding issues with the location of organisations and interests in the new centre? Perhaps you could also tell us about the progress for the design and building of the new centre.

Mr Wood: Yes, there are outstanding issues. It's a big change. The old centre had some great advantages, in that every tenant had direct access. When the decision was made for a smaller footprint and several storeys, that obviously changed. It has been worked through but not without some issues. The other issue is one we accepted willingly in a motion in the Assembly that all existing tenants be relocated in the new building. There is some internal discussion within the Griffin Centre about the appropriateness of some of the tenants, but they've got to live with that. There's ongoing discussion about this. It's getting to the stage where we'd like to see it beginning to wind up and be clearly established. Over the weekend I read a report that we commissioned to look at it, but I've got officers who can go into fine detail on this issue.

MS DUNDAS: I wanted to pick up on the first question asked by the chair, in relation to the number of relief staff and how you're managing that. We have the discussion in the annual reports about the number of different contracts you had with different relief staff providers, with those contracts running into the millions of dollars. There was the comment that you were trying to bring that down by setting up other contracts with recruitment agencies to bring in staff. In looking at how the past year has gone, have you been able to keep the contract work under control?

Ms Lambert: I'm not quite sure. There is only one disability relief contract provider. We have our own casual staff. There were two at the beginning of the financial year. Then we went to a national tender process and emerged with one person. During that process one of the other firms, which was based in the ACT and had been providing us with assistance, went into bankruptcy.

MS DUNDAS: In the annual report there are five contractors listed. So you've moved away from that?

Ms Lambert: For relief? I do not think so.

MS DUNDAS: Provision of relief to disability support through Healthcare: Quest Employment was providing relief disability support officers.

Ms Lambert: Yes, there were those two.

MS DUNDAS: Shaw Tuggeranong and Leapfrog were providing other client-specific contracted support. Are those contracts still going?

Ms Lambert: I thought you were asking the question about the relief provided directly to our own support program. Our own delivery—just to clarify my answer.

Ms Hayes: Roslyn Hayes, director Disability ACT. The other contracts you mentioned are not for relief staff. Shaw Possibilities is an accommodation service provider. Several clients who were formerly in group homes have chosen to move to homes operated by Shaw Possibilities. So we are contracting them for those services. Leapfrog is an organisation that provides recreational activities, predominantly out in the bush-type activities, for people who attend our aCe program, which is our day activities program.

MS DUNDAS: Is the Tuggeranong Therapy Services contract still progressing for the client-specific physiotherapy?

Ms Hayes: Yes. That's for a specific client need.

MRS BURKE: I'd like to pick up on the disability relief. Given that the Gallop report recommendations said that casual relief was a problem—and I'm well aware of that—are we not finding now that there is indeed more, not less, stress on the system as far as outputs for delivery of services are concerned, with having just the one casual provider? Are you finding that it is working out how you planned? You say that there is still a casual work force. The talk was that there would be all but an elimination of the casual work force. I saw that at the time as nonsensical. We couldn't do that, for obvious reasons. You said there has been an increase in permanent staff. Are you finding that one agency now providing the services for relief staff is sufficient? What sort of feedback are you getting from your clients?

Ms Lambert: My advice is that it is working well. When I deal with clients informally I get good positive support and positive advice about it, especially from the parents. Ms Hayes will have more detail about that.

MRS BURKE: In terms of pressures exerted on it, with there being only one provider now, not two.

Ms Hayes: There have been several changes. One is that we have increased our own permanent staff and our own pool of relief staff.

MRS BURKE: Within Disability ACT?

Ms Hayes: Within Disability ACT. I can give you those figures if you would like them.

MRS BURKE: That would be helpful, thank you.

Ms Hayes: Whereas previously we had 189 DSO 1s—that's our direct support staff—we now have 206, so we've increased that level. We've also increased the number of DSO 2s.

MRS BURKE: You've done that in-house—you've upgraded and advertised?

Ms Hayes: Yes. We've taken those staff on; they are permanent; and they are in the same house on a daily basis.

MRS BURKE: You say you've taken them on. They are completely new staff to the department? Was there new recruitment, or was this in-house reapplying for jobs?

Ms Hayes: No. They are predominantly new recruits. Quite a number of them were people who had been working in one of the relief agencies, so they were quite familiar with the way we work. The one relief agency we have, which is Quest, has also increased the pool of staff it utilises to fill our relief requirements. Whereas previously, when there were two relief agencies, they had a pool of approximately 50, they now have a pool of about 70 to 80, depending where they are in the recruitment induction cycle.

MRS BURKE: How is the certificate 3/4 training going with Quest employees now? There was a bit of an issue there and that they needed to bring them up to a certain level. The staff of the previous providers were at that level and yet some of the Quest people weren't. I have to say for the record that Quest is an excellent training company.

Ms Hayes: We don't have a requirement of a certificate 3 or 4 for our disability support officers. Neither for our own staff nor for Quest do we have that requirement. We encourage everybody to be working towards their certificate 3. With Quest the induction program makes up two modules of a certificate 3. By the time they finish that, they have commenced their certificate 3. We then encourage people to pick up more modules and get that qualification over time.

MRS BURKE: Does that qualification allow them to, like the former service provider, dispense drugs or medications to a certain level? That was a bit of an issue at one time. Could you expand on that for me?

Ms Hayes: Yes. We have put a lot of effort into our medication procedures because that was of concern to us. We have developed a new medication process and both our own staff and the relief staff have been trained in that. They are required to undergo an assessment to ensure they understand and know how to operate that new medication procedure.

MS DUNDAS: You mentioned that there is no requirement for a level 3 or level 4 certificate for a person to be able to work in disability services. What is the requirement?

Ms Hayes: The requirement is a first aid certificate. We have requirements for some mandatory training in client safety and manual handling. People who are going to be working with clients with challenging behaviour do the part program.

MS DUNDAS: It has been mentioned that training levels were identified in the Gallop report as some of the reasons for major problems.

Ms Hayes: That's right.

MS DUNDAS: Are you, as time goes on, looking to make the 3/4 certificate mandatory?

Ms Lambert: One of the things we have just completed is a work force skills audit, not just of our own staff but also indeed of the community sector as well, as a base for moving forward with training and requirements. We're also undergoing, or are just about

to embark, on some quite significant training right now. This is training that workers themselves have identified, but not exclusively.

We're doing some significant work in driver training. As our staff drive people around quite a lot, we're doing some advanced driver training with them. We're also doing some extensive work in manual handling. There have been places offered to the community sector for part of that training. We're doing some work on shift work survival skills and upgrading our first aid certificate to the senior first aid certificate for workers. The shift work survival skills training will also be available to the community sector.

MS MacDONALD: Is there a financial incentive for somebody to achieve their certificate 3 or certificate 4? Do they get paid at a higher rate, having achieved that?

Ms Hayes: Not at this stage. That is something we will consider. In relation to certificate 4 we've just completed a request for proposal process to identify a training organisation to work with us to implement certificate 4 for our DSO 2 staff. We see that as an ongoing program. We decided to do the certificate 4 first for the DSO 2 level staff so that, when we implemented certificate 3, their immediate supervisors would already have that level of training and be able to mentor the DSO 1s through the certificate 3 course.

MS DUNDAS: You said that training is being offered to the community sector. If they are to participate in that training, do they have to fund it themselves?

Ms Hayes: No.

MS DUNDAS: No. It is free of charge?

Ms Hayes: Yes.

MR HARGREAVES: I've got just a few questions on page 249 of BP4, about the new initiatives. The first dot point on that page talks about addressing unmet needs for people with disabilities. What are the unmet needs that you've been able to figure out?

Mr Wood: They are considerable. There has been a lot more identification and assessment of just how much unmet need there is out there. Ms Lambert or someone might take that on.

Ms Lambert: If you look at the community statistics around disability, you will see that people with disabilities comprise a reasonably significant number of the community. The recent paper we've released on future directions for disability identifies some of that. There is quite a range of unmet need in a sense. I'll ask Ms Ford to explain in more detail.

Ms Ford: Lois Ford, Executive Director, Disability ACT. Unmet need for people with disability ranges from personal needs care. Is this the sort of thing you mean?

MR HARGREAVES: Is this more of the same? In other words, there are more people out there than we can deliver services to, so it's a quantum issue.

Ms Ford: It is a quantum issue.

MR HARGREAVES: I was looking at whether or not we are seeing a greater degree within certain disabilities which require a higher level of services, or whether it's just a numerical issue.

Ms Ford: No; 17 per cent of the population are identified as having a disability. Of those, 9.4 per cent will, from time to time, require some form of support. Of those, 3.4 per cent of the population will require sustained and ongoing support. The target population for disability funding is those people who have an intellectual, physical or sensory disability and who rely solely on disability-funded services.

It's not an exact science. We don't have exact numbers because we need to take into account that 13 per cent of people with a disability are cared for by their families, so they don't rely directly on funded services. We have engaged in, and will continue to do this, identifying more clearly not just the quantum of unmet need but the range of unmet needs and the areas where an intervention or funding is more likely to have a positive impact on both the family and the individual. With the right sort of support, people can maintain their natural environment and their natural supports for much longer, which will hopefully prevent them having to go into high-cost full-time care. That work is being undertaken at the moment.

In relation to unmet need in general for disability, I'm firmly of the opinion that demand will always outstrip supply. People's needs will always increase, and people will continue to need significantly more support than we are currently able to give them. We have exact numbers of people who are currently waiting for support and we continue to fund those people first. Our priority for funding are those people who have the highest and most complex of needs; and where a family situation has maybe broken down; or where, with support to the family, they can continue to live substantially in the community.

MR HARGREAVES: All right. I haven't got the sort of recall to be able to do that. I have "senior moments" from time to time. We've always addressed the fact that we can never provide services to everybody who wants them anyway.

Ms Ford: Absolutely.

MR HARGREAVES: You're quite right. You know, hell's going to freeze over before we can do that. I guess I'd be interested in your instincts or your feelings from the research you've been doing as to whether the range of disabilities is changing—whether it's getting larger, whether in fact the seriousness of those disabilities is getting worse, and whether or not we're seeing families less able to cope amongst the family unit than in the past.

Ms Ford: Definitely.

Mr Wood: There was an email on my system this morning with one of those families. By circumstance or whatever, just in the last few months we've inherited some most difficult cases. We will have to deal with those and they are going to be very costly to manage.

Ms Lambert: Part of the funding you see there is to try and do a shift in service delivery. We now want to have people in the community working with people with disabilities, enabling them to access a range of services, including mainstream services, which are there, of course, in an inclusive community to support them as well. In that particular initiative there is a shift whereby we work with the community in a different way to address unmet need as well. Ms Ford will be able to answer the other questions you put.

Ms Ford: Our longer-term planning is to address the range and the seriousness, and also the breakdown of families. We would see that, over the next 10 years, there will be a significant increase in older adults with a disability and, over the next five years, an increase in families who are getting older and are unable to cope with the ongoing care of their family member. Our funding has been targeted, in the future, towards those ages and stages where we think we will be able to make the best impact. For example, we have a mature carers program that looks at the needs of those families who are caring for young people with a disability and the long-term needs of both the person with the disability and the family.

We've increased the range of respite services we might provide through that mature carers program. We prioritise family members who have high and very complex needs, in respect of new funding that comes in—and where the family is likely to break down. As to the seriousness of people presenting to us, I think you're asking about people presenting to us in crises and our need to respond to that—whether we are noticing an increase.

MR HARGREAVES: Yes.

Ms Ford: We're not noticing an increase in that but, fairly consistently, we have approximately 10 to 13 families that present to us in extreme distress in relation to the fact that either their natural supports have broken down or the disability has advanced and the person needs far more care; or, as a result of the disability, the family unit has started to suffer. For example, where younger children have been looking after their family member and they've got older and moved on, it's now left to the parents and the parents are no longer able to cope. We are wanting to identify those families much earlier and start to work with them to put the supports in, which is what we're doing through mature carers, individual support programs, and also another program called the post school options program.

MR HARGREAVES: I have had a concern for some time and I'm not sure how the department addresses it. But I'm sure it does address it and I'm interested to know how it is done. Where mature-aged people are looking after a mature-aged person with a disability and they fall off the perch, what happens to the person with the disability after that, who quite clearly can't cope? Where do they go? How are they looked after?

Ms Ford: Through the mature carers program we're now identifying earlier those families where there's a likelihood that they will fall off the perch, or a likelihood that the natural supports will break down. We have within the government services a needs assessment and community linking service that's undertaking assessments and looking at planning and the funding needs of those individuals. We prioritise people with the highest and most complex needs for funding.

Additional to that we have three services that are currently working with what we call mature carers, which is the older adults of families—Koomarri, Centacare and Community Connections. They are also working with those families to identify both the current and likely future needs. They start working with them to put supports in place now, so that they don't get to a crisis point, and also to give them the additional support they need through respite services, where possible. It's not a perfect science.

MR HARGREAVES: That's okay up to the point where they slip off the perch, though. What happens to the poor person with the disability who can't cope after they don't have that? I guess it's a case of what's happening now, and is it in your thinking. What does happen to the person with a profound disability who is say 55-60 but so far their folks have been able to cope with supports and all that? When either one, or both, the parents dies do they go into supported accommodation? What happens to them?

Ms Ford: Yes—usually supported accommodation. We have worked with Centacare, who have developed what's called a link project. Through the supported accommodation program and housing, we are working to develop five houses within a neighbourhood that will be networked. People can live close to each other or with another person, if they so desire, and a worker who will work with them.

Along with that, Koomarri have some new CORHAP leases, and they will also be providing accommodation services. As well as that we're working with the transitional accommodation service, which is TAS housing, to better develop their accommodation model. The thing is that housing cannot be seen in isolation from support for the particular group you're talking about. They need varying levels of support. That's part of our individual support plan project as well.

Ms Lambert: What Ms Ford is talking about are ways that the agencies have worked together. We've worked with housing in respect of the community housing grants to enable some models to be trialled.

MR HARGREAVES: Now that you mentioned it, one of those houses got a tenant of the month award not long ago. Thank you very much for that. It eases my mind in case I need it.

MRS BURKE: Perhaps this is a question for Lois while we're on this tack. One of the particular supported accommodation properties that I'm very interested in, which the minister knows I'm supportive of, is the proposed Abbeyfield development at Throssell Street in Curtin. I notice that \$1.1 million funding for a 10-room dwelling is mentioned in the 2003-04 budget.

I have found that the process had been handled very clumsily. I think that, happily, we are now working through some of the issues there. The residents of Curtin were feeling that they were having that just plonked in their suburb. That's a side issue but something we may need to look at in the future—something we can handle better.

I guess it's one of the realities that community land in Canberra is going to be more and more utilised. We need to make people aware of that. I've talked to the minister about that too. Where is Abbeyfield up to? How are we going to expedite that? I understand

20 May 2004

there's to be a meeting on 28 May. I understand that, hopefully, residents will have met before that, and that I've met with residents too. Where are we up to with that now? How soon are we going to see something happening?

Mr Wood: Let me give a bit of an overall view. I've been anxious about the timeframe. I think about that and I become less anxious about that timeframe.

MRS BURKE: Why do you become less anxious?

Mr Wood: We're still keen to keep it moving; let me not give a wrong impression here. This is a group of parents who have a long-term plan to see that their children are looked after—in respect of the earlier response to a question of Mr Hargreaves. They're moving on. I've spoken to them and they're anxious to keep moving. Time is still available to work this through. These things take forever, it seems.

MRS BURKE: Are you happy with how it was handled from the beginning?

Mr Wood: I think, from the discussion we had with you, we should go back to those days when the NCDC had signs all over the place saying, from their own experiences, "This is reserved for community purposes."

MS MacDONALD: The signs are still up.

MRS BURKE: Yes, they're still there. I'm just talking about this particular issue and how we could have better managed it so it didn't cause the impasse that it caused at a public meeting I was at. That has taken time, I believe.

Mr Wood: It has taken time, but I have the understanding that the parents themselves knocked on doors in the neighbourhood very early on.

MRS BURKE: I think they've patched it up. What sort of timeframe are we looking at now?

Mr Wood: I don't know that they patched it up. I thought they were out there first being proactive about it. They went out there and said, "We just want to let you know what's going to happen here". It's moving. I don't want to give the impression here that I don't care if it takes forever, because we do need to get it moving and keep it moving. We allocated funds quite a long time ago.

MRS BURKE: That's what I'm getting to. Will we see that happen before the election?

Mr Wood: We need to see that the funds are expended. Maureen can give you the updates on all that.

Ms Sheehan: Maureen Sheehan, Director of Community Development. Part of my responsibilities involves the funding of community housing projects. In 2002-2003 a grouping of Community Housing Canberra and Abbeyfield Disability were successful in gaining \$1.1 million of funding in order to build accommodation for up to 10 young people—the model for providing the housing. And their future support needs were funded under the mature carers project, which Ms Ford was just talking about.

20 May 2004

So having got the funding to construct the premises, you need to consult with the community first about the use of community land. The need to consult is obvious. That is going ahead. You need to consult with the community about the design and how it impacts on the amenity of the area. Certainly the parents involved in the project have no problem whatsoever consulting with the community about those things.

MRS BURKE: No, I do not think that has ever been the case. I think that there was a void between the parents and then going along with the program with all the authorities that they needed to and the residents. I know that is a discussion for another day. I just want to know whether we will see anything before the election.

Ms Sheehan: I would like to emphasise that there is no delay in the legislated timeframe for consultation, first for the direct purchase of community land by a community organisation for a community purpose. There are requirements for consultation that are being met.

I think it would be fair to say that some of the views expressed about people with a disability were offensive to you, as you have just mentioned, and were very difficult for those parents to hear in a community forum. That level of stress is hard for the parents but it does not mean that the timeframes are being dragged out. In fact, the timeframes have not been dragged out.

MRS BURKE: No. I have since talked to that group of people where those comments came from. It was because of how it was handled in the beginning—again a discussion for another day. I want to know whether we will see anything happening before the election. The money has been committed.

Mr Wood: We thank you for your support and the support of other members.

MRS BURKE: Thank you, Minister. Can you answer my original question: will we see bricks and mortar?

Ms Sheehan: Yes.

Mr Adrian: Colin Adrian, Executive Coordinator, Department of Disability, Health and Community Services. You have mentioned the meeting on the 28th. We are hopeful that that meeting is more successful than the previous meeting and that the parents are feeling quite positive about how that meeting will be conducted and how it will go. The next step—

MRS BURKE: And the community, let us not forget.

Mr Adrian: And the community. We are hopeful—assuming that process is successful—that Abbeyfield can lodge a development approval straight after that consultation process. Obviously we then have to go through the DA process. So there would be just the normal planning processes that would flow from that.

MRS DUNNE: From the 28th—what is the overall timeframe between then and pouring the slab?

Ms Sheehan: Once the development application is lodged there is then an opportunity for the community to voice support or objections to the design of the building. Once the time for comments closes, the objections—if there are any—will be assessed by ACT Planning and Land Authority. So it is the usual—

MRS DUNNE: Sorry, I know all that Ms Sheehan. When does Abbeyfield envisage lodging the DA?

Ms Sheehan: They will be lodging the development application almost immediately after the meeting on the 28th.

MRS DUNNE: Okay. When will they get a lease on the land?

Ms Sheehan: There are two processes going on concurrently.

MRS DUNNE: Yes, I understand that.

Ms Sheehan: The first one is the application for the direct grant of land, which is happening at the same time as getting ready to lodge the development application.

MRS DUNNE: When is that likely to go to cabinet, for instance?

Ms Sheehan: I cannot give you a direct time for it to go to cabinet, but we could provide that information for you outside; take it as a question on notice.

Ms Lambert: I just add to the conversation. For the parents this is not an immediate need; it has been part of a long process. Indeed, as they were building up to this process before they got their community grants, I attended some sessions where they were workshopping with their children.

MRS BURKE: Four years, I think.

Ms Lambert: Yes, that is right. They have been working on this for some time. They understood they were in for a long haul when they started. I have had many conversations with one of the parents who were leading this.

The other thing that is important is that this is regarded by many as quite innovative. Therefore you expect, when there is some innovation, that there will be some time and we will need to look at what we did and see if we could do things better. But this was something quite new and quite different and we have had to work it through a lot with communities as well—not just the immediate community, but a broader community.

MRS BURKE: Yes. Ms Lambert it was assumed knowledge that was clearly the problem at the meeting I was at, anyway: one thought the others knew exactly what he or she was on about, and of course they did not. Assumed knowledge is fairly dangerous. Abbeyfield is based on an aged care model. But that is a discussion for another day.

Ms Lambert: I certainly take your point. Whenever we do something that is quite different and we run into issues, we need to go back.

MRS BURKE: We have to bring the community with us, yes.

Ms Lambert: But I can say that we have worked very strongly to bring the community with us in many other ways.

THE CHAIR: Are there any more questions on Abbeyfield? If not, I have a few general questions. Before I pop out briefly, I ask you about the Griffin Centre. I go to page 259 of BP4 and ask why an additional \$1 million was sought and obtained through Appropriation Act (No 2) when \$1.3 million had actually been rolled over?

Mr Wood: I will find someone with that knowledge.

MRS DUNNE: There was the original building. Another \$1.6 million was allocated in about 2001 to the Griffin Centre. Is this money in addition to the \$1.6, from memory?

MS DUNDAS: The second appropriation did relate to that area, but it was for the stairwell or the lifts or something—extra space.

Mr Hubbard: Ian Hubbard, Chief Financial Officer for the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services. You will remember that, as part of the arrangement around section 84, the developer was going to provide most of the funding for the development. As the development gained greater definition through the architectural drawings, et cetera, we discovered that we needed to fund some additional space and some funding for, as you were saying, the plant work—the lifts and the air conditioning.

That is why we made an extra request that we needed additional funds for some extra space, due mainly to the footprint that the plant was going to take up. And to deliver on the original agreement that we had with the Griffin Centre that we would not compromise any of the tenant space, we needed to go back and get some additional funds to build that extra space to accommodate lifts and air conditioning.

MRS DUNNE: So the \$1.3 million in Appropriation Bill (No 3) is in addition to the one point something from 2001, which is in addition to whatever QIC was putting in?

Mr Hubbard: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: What does that add up to in today's dollar terms? Do we know?

Mr Hubbard: We will not do an evaluation on the building until it is built. But as you are saying, the developer has agreed to build the building. That will probably be worth between \$6 million and \$8 million in itself. We are basically covering the additional costs that we are putting on the developer subsequent to that original agreement. So it will probably end up—

Ms Lambert: We were not, of course, a party to the original agreement either.

MRS DUNNE: Yes, I understand. It has been going on for a long time. The responsibility for this has moved around quite a bit. Where is the money for the fit out? Who pays for the fit out?

Mr Hubbard: The fit out is included in those two lots of funding.

MRS DUNNE: Okay.

Mr Hubbard: Yes. This is the bill to fit out.

MS DUNDAS: The original question Mr Stefaniak asked has not been answered. Why was \$1.2 million rolled over when we were in the last financial year allocating over \$1 million?

Mr Hubbard: To get the building developed and to get our additional space in the building, we need to know that we have the funding before we can give the developer the go ahead to do some additional work.

We cannot do work without knowing that we have the resources to be able to cover that work when we ask someone to do the work. We have agreement to those funding. The funding is drawn down from Treasury as the development takes place, and of course we will pay for the development once we are happy with the final product of the development. So we will keep the funds until the building is finished and we have agreed that it is in the condition that we agreed to buy it for.

MS DUNDAS: When do you expect construction to start?

Ms Overton-Clarke: Bronwen Overton-Clarke, Director of Policy and Organisational Services. Construction is due to begin within the next month.

MRS DUNNE: There were ads in the paper on the weekend or the weekend before.

Ms Overton-Clarke: That is right. That is the construction on, if you like, the shell of the building: the outside form of the building.

Ms Lambert: Money was allocated to this project prior to this department being formed. When the department was formed, we did some further analysis of the plans and so on and we discovered that the money was not enough to cover some of the things needed. As soon as we found that out, we went back to government and asked for the dollars so that we knew, as Ian says, that we could build it as we needed to build it.

MS DUNDAS: You are getting the money, so you have this pool of money that you can hand over at the end of the development once you have seen the building as finished. But some of that money has already been spent, as page 260 indicates. So what have you been spending the Griffin Centre money on?

Mr Hubbard: Are you talking about the \$53,000 that has been expended so far?

MS DUNDAS: Yes.

Mr Hubbard: That is all that has been expended so far. When we were negotiating the extra space and how much it would cost, as part of our probity about getting agreement to the amount of money that we were going to pay the developer, we went through a

costing exercise, so we needed to get a quantity surveyor.

We needed to engage an independent quantity surveyor to check the cost per square metre being offered up by the developer. They were saying to us, "If you want this extra 600 square metres, it's going to cost you x amount per square metre." Part of my role was to check those numbers to make sure that we were not making a commitment to some space that was too expensive, so we had it checked. The cost of that consultancy was \$53,000.

MRS DUNNE: That means, Ms Dundas, that we are in the wrong business.

MS DUNDAS: This is possibly a question on notice, and I think this goes to the question that Mrs Dunne was trying to get the answer to before: since the beginning—and the original contract was signed—can we have added up how much extra funding has been appropriated for the Griffin Centre for community space or whatever? We had the answer that only \$53,000 of that extra money has been spent.

Ms Lambert: In this department.

MS DUNDAS: In this department. But over the last—

Mr Hubbard: That is all that has been spent.

MS DUNDAS: I want to know how much extra money has been appropriated for the Griffin Centre.

MR HARGREAVES: For this department or—

THE CHAIR: Overall, total.

MR HARGREAVES: I do not think this department can answer your question.

Mr Hubbard: No, we can.

MS DUNDAS: They have responsibility for the project and they took on that extra appropriation.

Mr Hubbard: We can. Yes, we can answer that question. I think the actual amount appropriated to the Griffin Centre at the moment, not including the cost the developer was going to put in himself as part of the deal, is about 2.74.

MS DUNDAS: And that is all additional to the original contract?

Mr Hubbard: That is right. That covers fit out of the property itself and the cost of building extra space; floor space.

MRS DUNNE: And we are building extra space to accommodate for plant; is that right?

Mr Hubbard: The footprint of the lifts and the air conditioning—all our plant work.

20 May 2004

MS DUNDAS: The majority that is there is the extra community space work in progress. How is that different to the money that is being rolled over as a technical adjustment? Is that 1.2 part of the 2.7?

Mr Hubbard: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: Ms Lambert, when did your department acquire responsibility for the Griffin Centre?

Ms Lambert: When we were formed; July 2002.

MRS DUNNE: So you have had it since then.

MRS BURKE: Minister, I wonder whether you could clear up the confusion that seems to be in the community in regard to community organisations for the Griffin Centre. My understanding is that they have had advice from the Chief Minister that they will be housed in the proposed new multicultural centre. And I think your office has advised them that, no, they will be remaining in the Griffin Centre. Can you please clear up that little point for me? Who is right?

Mr Wood: It is a matter for them. My view is that it is a matter for the organisations. I believe they have been offered space.

MRS BURKE: They have been offered space at the Griffin Centre. Has that been made clear to them? Because at this stage they are—

Mr Wood: Yes. To the best of my knowledge, yes.

MRS BURKE: Well, they are confused.

Ms Overton-Clarke: They are all very clear that they have been guaranteed space in the Griffin Centre—and absolutely guaranteed. All the existing tenants have been guaranteed space in the Griffin Centre. That has been said to them a number of times at a number of meetings.

MRS BURKE: I think I have recently written to you, Minister—you may or may not have seen that letter—but there is still confusion. Thank you for clarifying that Ms Overton-Clarke.

Mr Wood: I do not know why they would be confused. I know there is some debate amongst them about whether they want to go over to the north building or stay at the Griffin Centre.

MRS BURKE: No, I think it is confusion from advice given to them from two different people. You may not be aware of that, but they have been told—

Mr Wood: I do not know where that contrary advice would be coming from because it has been so clearly expressed.

MRS BURKE: The Chief Minister's office.

MR HARGREAVES: Mr Chairman, I have a point of order. Could you ask members to let the witnesses answer the question and not talk over the top of them?

THE CHAIR: I think that is reasonable; yes.

Mr Hubbard: Actually, could you repeat the question?

Mr Wood: I think we have been there. I think those bodies have been looking at what is the best deal for them.

MRS BURKE: Thank you. I just hope Mr Hargreaves listens to his own words.

THE CHAIR: Are there any more questions on the Griffin Centre?

MR HARGREAVES: I am not on the Griffin Centre. Page 249 of BP4 on the new initiatives also—for those who want to open up their books; 187 of BP3—talks about the continuation of the Canberra Emergency Accommodation Service. It is fantastic that we are chucking nearly \$400,000 into this. But can you explain to me why a continuation of a program is regarded as a new initiative? Was there any thought that it might be canned?

Ms Sheehan: The initial program was funded as a trial with a comparatively low level of funding because it was a new type of one-stop shop for homeless people where they could get short-term accommodation overnight. So in fact all that was being offered at that stage was to put people in contact, hopefully with the existing crisis accommodation, but if not that then a room in a motel or a caravan overnight.

Fortunately, throughout last year, we had some non-recurrent funds available through the general supported accommodation assistance program. That enabled us to provide some non-recurrent extra money to lease a range of motel rooms for the whole year that we could then use for accommodation. We had some support dollars. But none of that was recurrent. So it is recurrent funding of the program that would have ceased altogether had it not been funded as a new initiative in this budget?

MR HARGREAVES: So the department has had this great idea, trialled it, found it to be an even better idea, and decided to keep it going. Congratulations to you.

MS DUNDAS: Can I ask some other questions about the CEAS service?

MR HARGREAVES: Some concerns were raised initially that a number of phone calls were coming in and there was just nowhere to put the homeless people—that the CEAS was developing a backlog. Can you let us know the number of calls? Do you keep the numbers on how many calls CEAS is receiving?

Ms Sheehan: We do receive reports from the providers. We can provide you with the details that we receive in the reports.

MS DUNDAS: Do those reports tell you how many people are unable to be assisted on a particular night?

Ms Sheehan: They record the number of calls that come in and then they record whether they are able to place people.

MS DUNDAS: So are you concerned about the deficiency between—

Ms Sheehan: In general, the government is very concerned about homelessness. That is why we have been able to develop the homelessness strategy, which the minister launched in April. The government allocated \$13.4 million over four years in the 2003-04 budget specifically to address the problems to do with homelessness.

In a sense, the fact that CEAS is not able to house every single homeless person is not a surprise because we know that homelessness is an issue. It is an additional service. To that extent it is addressing homelessness and we are very pleased with that. As we roll out the six new services that will come about through the extra \$13.4 million, we will have even more services for homeless people.

In fact, in the community housing funding round, we have funded the purchase of two properties by a consortium of Anglicare, which is one of the parties that provides the CEAS service and Havelock Housing Association, which will directly provide long-term housing for people coming out of CEAS. So a lot of progress is being made in addressing homelessness and it will only improve as we implement the strategy.

MS DUNDAS: So somebody could call up CEAS and get placed in a long-term accommodation?

Ms Sheehan: That is what we hope for with every homeless person: that we find an immediately long-term solution. Sometimes that is not possible, but it would always be the main aim.

MS DUNDAS: Is everybody who calls CEAS looking for a long-term solution?

THE CHAIR: No.

Ms Sheehan: Well, it would depend on the circumstances of the individual; why it is that they are homeless on that particular occasion.

MRS BURKE: Obviously I get stats regularly and keep updating them. CEAS is an excellent service. I congratulate the government on that. My alarm is that currently there is virtually no emergency accommodation in Canberra at all. I think that is what Ms Dundas was alluding to. What are we doing? In the sector we are told that there is no emergency or crisis accommodation.

Mr Wood: I think you had better define that a bit more.

MS DUNDAS: There are no vacancies.

MRS BURKE: If somebody rings up, you cannot place the person. This is the problem that CEAS is having. Just so that you understand, the minister asked for clarification. The crisis accommodation is non-existent. There is a backlog; there is a bottleneck. That

20 May 2004

goes on to housing, which we will talk about later. But what are we doing? A lot of money is being talked about. What are we doing to put roofs over people's heads—before the election hopefully?

Mr Wood: We have not been shy in putting out all the information about it. The problem is considerable. It is all the more considerable because it was neglected for a long time until this government and this minister came into it. The government has put more new money—in fact, if we look back over the years we see that it is the only new money in considerable amounts—into this issue. It is not handling the situation in full because, like disability, there remains an unmet need.

The link with housing is very significant. We have a low exit rate from our emergency accommodation because we do not have enough government housing to put people into. That is where most of them will exit. That is the reason I stopped selling off properties. We have been maintaining a level of properties. We are working at it from a number of areas. It still remains an area of difficulty within this community.

MRS BURKE: Would the minister concede that some of this problem is probably due to the inordinate number of houses waiting to be refurbished—as in Fraser Court and Northbourne Flats? I would like your idea on the timeframe at the end of May, particular for block 17. Are you hopeful that that will be accomplished and further refurbished? This is all to do with backlog. It comes back to emergency accommodation and the bottleneck that there is in the system. How can we better free it up? Can you tell me what you will do with Northbourne Flats and Fraser Court?

MR HARGREAVES: I have a point of order before the minister answers, Mr Chairman. I do not want to have the question not answered, but is it more appropriate that this happen during a housing section?

MRS BURKE: With respect, the minister is on a flow with respect.

MR HARGREAVES: Notwithstanding that.

THE CHAIR: I was thinking that, Mr Hargreaves. I will allow it and yes, we do have a whole segment on housing. But the minister is on a flow.

MRS BURKE: Yes, I appreciate that; thank you.

MR HARGREAVES: The support officers are not necessarily here.

MRS BURKE: It overlaps.

THE CHAIR: Continue with that question, Mrs Burke, and then Ms Dundas has one.

Mr Wood: Yes, the refurbishments are underway on Northbourne Flats. They are not underway on those other flats at this stage. Contracts have been called for and the tenders are in. There are some issues around the tenders. I do not want to get into a political slanging match. It is a regular occurrence in government housing that we refurbish. And we refurbish at a fairly rapid rate, as best we can. We also watch very closely the turnover rate when properties become vacant to ensure that they are empty for as little

time as possible. I think the records there are very good.

You have made a point about the refurbishments. There are 50, 60—whatever the number—of vacant units at Fraser Court awaiting refurbishment. We could have people in them. There are particular issues around that one, but Northbourne is moving fine. I will not go into the history of the disposal of public housing, which is the biggest problem.

MRS BURKE: No, that is fine. It is a fact and I have a concern that CEAS may not have enough output lines. Hopefully your funding will address that. We get feedback to our office. You would be aware that they simply do not pick up the phone. That is an ongoing problem. Can you tell me that the money—the very welcome funding—will help resolve that problem of calls not being answered?

Mr Wood: I am not aware of the detail of that.

Ms Sheehan: The first point that I make is that it is simply not true that there is no crisis accommodation available for CEAS to put homeless people into. In fact, as I was saying before, the funding for CEAS was supplemented considerably throughout the course of the year and that supplementation included increasing the pool of funds available to spot rent overnight, both motel rooms and caravans. In addition, we are able to provide the money for annual rental of a block of onsite vans and other accommodation throughout Canberra. So there is that capacity within CEAS, which CEAS itself controls, to put people into crisis accommodation?

In addition, CEAS can provide links into other types of crisis accommodation that people would be well aware of such as the refuges inside Canberra. For example—and this would often happen—if an indigenous family from outside the ACT did not know how to access any type of accommodation including refuges, they could ring CEAS, and CEAS would first of all refer them to the existing crisis accommodation.

If that was unable to accommodate them, then CEAS would rely on its own pool of funds, either for renting properties overnight or for the long-term properties that they have. So CEAS will continue to do that very successfully. As I also mentioned, we were very pleased to fund Anglicare and Havelock Housing Association to purchase two properties for long-term permanent accommodation for people coming out of the homelessness system.

The money that has come for homelessness is welcome not only in short-term problems of homelessness but also in providing that very important long-term accommodation that people are really looking for.

MRS BURKE: Let us hope that that stops people who have rung my office and rung CEAS saying they cannot get accommodation. Hopefully I will not get any more calls saying, “CEAS just don’t have anywhere for me to go”. I am not blaming CEAS.

MS DUNDAS: What kind of support is provided to people put in a caravan or a hotel overnight? One of their benefits of refuges is that they provide ongoing support to deal with the crisis that led to homelessness.

Ms Sheehan: Yes, indeed. When CEAS started it was simply that putting someone somewhere overnight. In the one off funding throughout the year, we were able to provide what we call brokerage in the trade, but it is actually the provision of support for people to help case manage the individuals, with their consent and agreement, to look at the issues that have caused the homelessness and to assist them to move through those issues and define longer term accommodation.

If we had not received this initiative funding in the year, we would not have been able to continue with that. But now that we do have the funding, we will be providing the accommodation and also that support for people to address the issues that have made them homeless and to help them then move into longer term accommodation.

MS DUNDAS: Earlier you said there were six new services being supported through the additional homelessness initiative. Are any of them new crisis accommodation? Can you tell us what those six services are?

Ms Sheehan: The services have just gone to tender. In summary, we will be building up to supporting 30 families in permanent long-term accommodation. That will be in regions throughout the ACT. There is a specific service for up to six indigenous families throughout the ACT. There will be another grouping of services for single men exiting the criminal justice system. The service providers will develop a model for that, but obviously we will be working very closely with JACS and corrections on those issues.

There is a group of services specifically to do with outreach. The advantage of that is that it is a flexible model. People might need outreach whether we provided the accommodation or not. That enables people to stay in their homes or to return to their homes and have outreach. The final grouping is indigenous families exiting the criminal justice system, outreach services. I think there are two groupings of services for people leaving the criminal justice system.

MS DUNDAS: So it is not actually working to provide—

Ms Sheehan: Of course. Sorry, I do apologise. Specific services for families headed by single men, which was one of the needs identified in the needs analysis of homelessness.

MR HARGREAVES: Indeed it was. Great report.

MS DUNDAS: Is there any funding for more emergency accommodation spaces or working with the shelters that already exist to expand their services?

Ms Sheehan: The expansion of a crisis service is to move someone out of crisis into longer term accommodation. These packages provide the support for people to move from homelessness into permanency. They can move immediately into their longer term accommodation, and you might say that the family is in crisis at that point. But as the service provider works with that family, hopefully that family will move out of crisis. So it certainly is an augmentation of the existing crisis system.

We are moving away from the idea of saying, “Let’s put people in a refuge and let’s put a whole lot of people in crisis together and then try and work out what to do after that.” This is a really innovative idea, which says, “Let’s get people into the longer term

accommodation and work with that family or that individual so that they're not in crisis anymore." So it is addressing people in crisis, but in a much better way that enables them to really get their life together.

Ms Lambert: Homelessness is, as you understand, a very complex issue. So a lot of focus is now shifting—not just in the ACT but also in other jurisdictions—in sustaining a tenancy where people are before they move into the homelessness situation or being homeless. A lot of effort is going into not only sustaining tenancies, in the public housing arm too—there is a lot of emphasis on that— but also in enabling people to remain where they are and get the support that they need in that process.

MS DUNDAS: How is your department working with education, youth and family services to maintain support for young people experiencing homelessness? It was identified in the homelessness strategy as one of the largest problems facing anybody working with homelessness. It is easier to work with a family and maintain their tenancy than to work with a young person who no longer wishes to speak to his family in terms of maintaining that tenancy. What work are you doing specifically there?

Ms Lambert: I speak first from my own experience in working with young people. As you would know, I have had a lot of experience with that. Their needs are even more diverse in this situation. We have commissioned extra work. And that was with the agreement of the taskforce that has been working with me—that I have chaired—in homelessness. We have commissioned some extra work on that. We have had a range of suggestions as a result of that. We have a draft report, which I wish to discuss further with the sector and with young people.

We have money set aside as part of the strategy for dealing with young people's needs in this situation. At the moment we are at the point of working towards what is the best solution. I think we will need a diversity of solutions for young people. Because their homelessness ranges—as you would know from couch surfing through to chronic homelessness as a result of mental illness or drug abuse, or just simply disengagement with society. In that situation we have to work very closely with other agencies. We have to be very careful about our protocols and we have to work in a united way across agencies with young people.

It is easy to say but it is quite hard to achieve. I think we are moving. The group I have around me working on this is a cross-agency group. It intersects with some of the work we are leading on—on complex needs as well. We will map through it as we can. But we need to step it through carefully and not rush into just one solution; we will need a variety of them. I will be meeting I think early next week again with the sector around the draft report that we have received. We will be doing a bit more validation of it because that is needed at the moment.

MS DUNDAS: Is that the draft report from the expert that you brought in?

Ms Lambert: That is right, yes.

MS DUNDAS: When can we expect to see that report? You have just outlined why it is taking some time. Do you have a timeframe?

Ms Lambert: I would like to bring it to resolution within the next month if I can, provided that I can engage young people as well. It will not be just me doing it. We need also to do a bit more work with young people.

THE CHAIR: It now being nearly 10.30, we will break for morning tea and resume at quarter to 11 with Ms MacDonald asking some questions.

Meeting adjourned from 10.29 to 10.51 am.

MS MacDONALD: My question relates to carer recognition and supporting ATSI carers, an initiative on page 187 of budget paper 3 which is also referred to on page 249 of budget paper 4. It sounds like a great initiative. You say that small project grants will be made available to develop carer knowledge, skills and support networks. I am curious to know how much the project grants will be, how they will be administered and who is going to administer them. Any other information you want to toss in along the way, I would be happy to hear about.

Mr Wood: Just as an opening, I say that that's an outcome of the policy that has been established on carers. We're now starting to put that into action.

Ms Overton-Clarke: As you know, the carers policy has been launched and, as part of that, the government has made available \$200,000 this year. What we're going through now is a further consultation process to verify, if you like, the draft actions that were brought up as part of the consultations on the policy to identify what the community sees as being the priorities for the usage of that money. We haven't actually decided on the exact amounts of the grants. As it says there, there are small project moneys. It really depends on what the consultation process ends up proposing in terms of the priorities as to how it will be split up. We haven't really made any definitive decisions at this stage. It's likely that the grants will be administered by the department, but they will be grants for community organisations.

MRS DUNNE: I had a bit of a chat with officials at morning tea and they know that this question is coming, so it's not a trick question. I notice that there has been in the past year about \$850,000 extra for SAAP. Something that I've been conscious of for quite some time is that the ACT hasn't in the past performed very well in relation to SAAP in comparison with other jurisdictions. Can someone give me an exposition on how we're going? Are we improving our performance? What are the things that are helping us to do so or are inhibiting us from doing so?

Mr Wood: Do you mean specifically in terms of getting people through SAAP?

MRS DUNNE: Yes. One of the things is that you've got to have somewhere for them to go at the other end.

Mr Wood: Yes.

Ms Lambert: One of the things that, if you like, skews our figures quite significantly is Ainslie Village, because it's counted as part of our numbers and it has become more of a long-term form of accommodation, even though we've put in some short-term accommodation; but that is still the issue for us. Ms Sheehan can give you more detail.

20 May 2004

We are enmeshed in a quite appropriate and thorough consultation process, but my judgment—I'm sure Ms Sheehan will correct me if I'm wrong—is that, until we determine the best way forward with that, that will continue to have quite a significant impact on our figures in terms of exit points.

MRS DUNNE: Ainslie Village, you're saying, is a skewing point. Why in particular?

Ms Lambert: Because people stay there. It's regarded as a SAAP service.

Mr Wood: It's counted as SAAP.

MRS DUNNE: Some of it is temporary and some of it is long term.

THE CHAIR: What is the average length of a stay?

Ms Sheehan: There are people that have been there for as long as 15 years. For that reason, when the whole site was reviewed in 2001, there was a series of recommendations which included that, given that there are so many people that stay for a long time, then there should be forms of housing on the site that recognise that it's a long-term home.

We are working with the residents on site, the main service provider on site, which is Centacare, and other service providers as well, including mental health, to try to establish some permanent forms of housing on a community housing model which recognises that people would be community housing tenants, that they would participate in the governance of their own housing, and that they would have tenancy rights. Then some other parts of the village which are really crisis in nature would be the SAAP-type services, because SAAP is supposed to be for crisis accommodation.

So, while you're spending \$1 million a year on crisis accommodation for 200 people, some of whom have been there for 15 years, you're not actually funding a crisis service there. We're trying to give people certainty and involvement in their housing, so that they can think of it as their home, at the same time as then having parts of the site that do properly provide crisis accommodation with the appropriate supports.

MRS DUNNE: That's very useful. I'm glad that that sort of work is happening. But the second state of the territory report highlighted for me quite some time ago, 2001, that this was a problem and that we weren't achieving there. Have we been achieving better since the last figures that I saw, the 2000 or 2001 figures? Have we improved? I seem to recall the minister mentioning in passing that we still weren't really achieving there.

Ms Sheehan: Every year, the Australian report on government services, which looks at all of the services that are provided in all the states and territories and by the Commonwealth, describes what we do in the ACT and what happens nationally with SAAP services. Looking at the cost per bed is one thing that's important and we've described how our costs are skewed just because of Ainslie Village.

MRS DUNNE: No, I wasn't really talking in terms of costs per bed, but actually getting through the system and out the other end.

Ms Sheehan: In terms of outcomes, there are a number of indicators where we do the best in Australia, that is, the number of people that go out of SAAP accommodation and back into housing in the community with appropriate supports and the satisfaction of people who have been in our SAAP services with the way that they were supported and their eventual outcomes. We can certainly provide you with the relevant parts of that report which show you how we compare with the rest of Australia. But it's very important that people do get those supports inside the SAAP system if they are to move on to get their lives in order and into permanent accommodation. We perform extremely well on that factor.

MRS DUNNE: Apart from Ainslie Village, is there other supported accommodation, SAAP-funded accommodation, across the territory, and how is that performing?

Ms Sheehan: All of the refuges and crisis services in the ACT are SAAP accommodation. Ainslie Village is just one part of it.

Mr Wood: How many beds is that? There is a very large number of beds.

Ms Sheehan: There are about 200 beds in refuges across the ACT. In addition, we have over 200 beds at Ainslie Village. There are about 20 mental health beds there as well as the beds that we fund.

Ms Lambert: But my judgment would be that we're still not performing as well as we should on that and that the numbers are skewed to a certain extent because of Ainslie Village and we need to work on that. But my judgment is that, with the interventions we're making with the homelessness strategy, we will start to make much more of an impact on that result.

MRS DUNNE: There was an extra \$800,000 last year for SAAP. It's hard to find. Is there more SAAP money this year, or is that just continuing at basically the same level?

Mr Hubbard: Sorry, I didn't hear that question.

MRS DUNNE: On page 250 of BP4, under grants and purchased services, there is a reference in the dot points to an extra \$853,000 for SAAP. Down the bottom it's called a one-off expenditure. What is that?

Mr Hubbard: That expenditure is basically SAAP accommodation money that was rolled over from the previous year. When we formed the department—we came from education, health, and chief minister's, et cetera—we had to finalise the accounts and \$600,000 of that \$800,000 was actually in education's accounts and we rolled it over out of education's accounts and into ours, which gave us \$800,000 in additional resources we could spend on SAAP in that year.

MRS DUNNE: So what you're saying is that before you came together there was SAAP money sprinkled—

Ms Lambert: No, there was SAAP money in the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services and it was moved to our department. At the time, we did the best possible divvying up of dollars that we could, but we've since spent some time trawling

20 May 2004

back through things and we have discovered that there was indeed an amount of some \$600,000 which had not come across and we have negotiated for it to come onto our books over this last financial year.

MRS DUNNE: That really confirms my suspicions about all those hollow logs in education and family services.

Ms Lambert: It confirms that we were assiduous in tracking dollars that we needed.

MRS DUNNE: I dips my lid to you, Ms Lambert, for finding that money in education and family services. I'm impressed.

MR CORNWELL: I have a couple of questions in general. In budget paper 3 at page 188 some money is being given in terms of gas and electricity concession card holders, which, I presume, does not relate to low-income, self-funded retirees.

Mr Wood: That's right.

MR CORNWELL: Thank you for that acknowledgment. What's the rationale behind the decision to increase the maximum concession to \$189 per year for gas and electricity costs from the \$165 previously provided? Was there any particular rationale for this or was it just a figure that seemed reasonable?

Ms Sheehan: There was an extremely specific rationale. That was that previously ActewAGL provided a small gas concession of slightly over \$30 for pensioners essentially, if I may use that word—

MR CORNWELL: You have to, because the self-funded retirees don't come into it.

Ms Sheehan: Whereas the ACT government provided a concession specifically for electricity. The government was concerned that energy costs could be gas costs and electricity costs and it was more appropriate for the government to provide the concession across both electricity and gas. So the government decided to increase the concession to meet the amount that ActewAGL was previously paying for gas so that then the government could have a broad energy concession and then people could be covered for either electricity or gas and it wouldn't be specified as \$130 for electricity and \$30 for gas. It could be that you can have that amount across all of your energy costs.

MR CORNWELL: Now that you have put it up to \$189, that means it's across all energy, gas or electricity.

Ms Sheehan: That's right.

MR CORNWELL: Fine. How does that interact with the increased funding of \$1.3 million over four years for concessions for electricity, water and sewerage on page 189 of budget paper 3?

Ms Sheehan: In general, the Essential Services Consumer Council can agree to increases in costs for essential services. If those costs increase and the government is paying a

concession to individuals, then it's necessary to fund an increase in concessions to meet the increase in energy costs. That is an estimate of how costs will increase over time.

MR CORNWELL: An estimate over four years.

Ms Sheehan: Yes. If, for example, costs increased to a greater extent, our department would go back to government, inform government of the actual increase, and then put a proposal that the amount for concessions be increased as well. But it's prudent to make an estimate into the forward estimates.

MR CORNWELL: Yes, I understand. You've made a decision, so it's not going to be too extreme if you don't make the estimate. Mr Chair, if I could just ask one other question in relation to concessions. I'm talking about the rates concessions now and the increase from \$250 to \$305 per annum. Again, how was this determined? Was it another estimate?

Ms Sheehan: Again, it relates to an estimate of the increase in rates, given increases in land values and government decisions about the percentage by which rates will increase over time.

MR CORNWELL: What will happen if what I am reading in the newspapers does occur and housing costs go down and unimproved land values also fall? Would the concession fall?

Mr Wood: I don't know that the rate revenue will fall.

MR CORNWELL: That's what I'm worried about, Minister.

Mr Wood: The rate revenue will remain constant. In fact, I think it's the case that every year the percentage of the land value you pay in rates varies just to make you pay approximately the same.

MR CORNWELL: Approximately the same. Is there any percentage on that variation?

Ms Lambert: We wouldn't have that. Treasury would have that.

MR CORNWELL: I will take it up with treasury, then.

MS MacDONALD: My memory from being on the public accounts committee is that there is a fairly complicated formula for determining the rates and that it is done over the entire territory and then divided up. It is something you'd need to ask of treasury.

MR CORNWELL: I appreciate Ms MacDonald's comment that it's complicated. I will take it up with treasury.

MS DUNDAS: There has been a lot of concern in relation to pay levels within the community sector and how it is meeting increases in the SACS award and increases in the minimum wage while still trying to deliver services. How is the department that monitors the majority of these contracts with the community sector coping with those demands?

Ms Lambert: That work is actually led by chief minister's and we contribute to that work. Ms Sheehan can answer in more detail.

Ms Sheehan: We do include in our contracts for services an amount for CPI increases.

MS DUNDAS: What's the CPI for the 2004-05 financial year?

Ms Lambert: It is 2 per cent.

Ms Sheehan: Yes. It's usually somewhere between 2 and 3 per cent. But treasury do an exact calculation and advise us and then, because we pay quarterly in advance for services, we adjust payments.

MS DUNDAS: Will every community organisation funded by the department get a 2 per cent CPI increase?

Ms Sheehan: They will get the amount determined by treasury, yes.

MS DUNDAS: Have you been able to work through the problems you had when the department was formed?

Ms Lambert: Yes, and we paid those dollars. Not this financial year, obviously, but the first financial year we were formed. Yes, we did.

Ms Sheehan: The community organisations in the past have suffered from the fact that the SACS award was not varied for national wage adjustments. Because that hadn't happened for such a long time, there was direct funding of those increases. But we're now at the point where that award is up to speed on national wage increases. On that basis, when we provide CPI increases for our services, they would be able to meet national wage increases out of those increases to the services that we fund.

MS DUNDAS: Just having CPI doesn't actually support workers progressing up the pay scales in regard to terms of service and the levels that they are actually working at and increases in the SACS award and the minimum award wage do go above and beyond a general CPI increase every year. It is a major concern of the community sector that they're not being able to retain staff because they're just not being able to offer wage parity with other public servants.

Ms Lambert: As I said, we're not the lead agency in this, but we do contribute. One of the things we have done since we've been formed is actually made sure that one of the regional community service organisations is represented on the community/government reference group which operates in chief minister's and so on as well. So the community sector has that voice as well a bit differently, but this is an area where we need to provide information, and we do, to the Chief Minister's Department and they work with treasury on it. It's generally that agency that deals with it.

MS MacDONALD: ACTCOSS did raise this issue with us the other day and I did ask them at that point what enterprise agreements were being done in those community organisations, because anybody who has worked in industrial relations would know that

the award these days is just a minimum and most places don't operate on awards any more; they actually operate on enterprise agreements which give their staff a much higher level of payment, which therefore means that they can be more flexible. The answer that I was given was that they weren't aware of any community organisations which actually had enterprise agreements. Are you aware of any community organisations that have done any enterprise bargaining?

Ms Sheehan: I'm not personally aware of enterprise bargaining agreements, but in the community sector enterprise bargaining agreements are far less common. In fact, in the past, historically, people weren't even paid under the SACS award. One of the conditions that we put in all of our contracts for service provision is that people must abide by legislative requirements and that includes a requirement to pay the correct wage under the award. We do take that very seriously. We have a commitment to the staff that provide the services that we fund and we show that commitment by including in the contracts that they are paid the correct legal wage.

MRS DUNNE: There are requirements put on people to pay these awards, which is very good and important, but there isn't always the commensurate funding to allow people to receive increments. You are saying, Ms Sheehan, that we don't have EBAs in the community sector. That's mainly because they don't have any money to negotiate them.

Ms Lambert: That was that we weren't aware of them.

MRS DUNNE: We heard from ACTCOSS this year and we hear it fairly constantly that, as a result of this, people in the community sector are earning up to 50 per cent less than people in the government sector and probably doing harder and more important work, but they're not going to stay because they can't raise their families on it. They're going to go somewhere where they're going to be paid more probably for doing less.

Mr Wood: In general, the government has been very supportive. I recall that one of the very first things we did when we came to government was to provide funding for that purpose that had not been occurring before we came to government. In general, we acknowledge absolutely that award increases have to be paid and that, if it's under contract from us, we have a responsibility. I think there has been a deal of work going on for a little while, yes, to see what best process can be put in place. Among other things, when three-year contracts are worked through they should always build in, as far as you can estimate, what the impact of any award increases would be.

Ms Lambert: I've just been informed that there are some EBAs in the community sector. I was not personally aware of them. Apparently, Centacare, YMCA and possibly three other organisations do have EBAs, I've been told. That's the advice I've just received.

MS MacDONALD: Very interesting. They have proved that it is possible to do it, so maybe there's an option. I'm sorry if I'm providing discourse rather than a question, but—

MRS DUNNE: No-one else has been constrained.

MS MacDONALD: Yes. My question, I suppose, would be: if those community sectors

negotiated enterprise agreements, surely the government would be obliged to provide funding to cover the enterprise bargaining agreement increases.

Ms Lambert: We operate on a contractual basis with them and it's about working with the agencies to see the dollars that they need. I think we've tried very hard to work with them. I know that, particularly in the disability area, we've worked very closely with organisations to enable their financial sustainability. So we try to know about our organisations as much as we can, I guess.

THE CHAIR: I have a few questions concerning BP4, page 245, and the operating result. The outcome improves from a deficit of \$2.8 million to a deficit of \$1.6 million, yet this change is described as an increase of 44 per cent. Shouldn't this outcome be represented as a decrease, that is, a smaller deficit? Why isn't it?

Mr Hubbard: There is a change in the numbers there and it's actually a 44 per cent improvement on the negative \$2.8 million. To go from \$2.8 million to \$1.5 million is actually an increase of 44 per cent, because you're getting less of a negative, if that helps.

MS DUNDAS: On the same page, Mr Chair, I wish to ask a follow-up question. Further down the page, there is reference to a loss in net assets due to the admin restructure. Can you explain what you lost or ceased to need?

Mr Hubbard: I've just been advised that that's part of the SAAP \$600,000 that came in.

Ms Lambert: That's the \$545,000.

Mr Hubbard: That's the \$545,000. Is that the one?

MS DUNDAS: Yes, that's what I was asking about. It's just your way of accounting for what has been going on with those transfers.

Mr Hubbard: Yes, you just bring in revenue.

MS DUNDAS: Why are you not expecting any capital injections into the future? Is that because you will no longer need that support from treasury?

Mr Hubbard: With capital, you probably know that that's a discussion we have each year in the budget process. Capital funds are provided and you've got to bid for those every year. So in the outyears you don't know what capital funding you'll get.

THE CHAIR: On page 251, under the financial position, the current liabilities increased substantially in 2003-04 because, inter alia, of an increase in the provision for creditors to reflect a realistic level of creditors that was not known when the original budget was developed. This error doesn't appear to have been repeated for 2004-05. My question is: why did it occur in 2003-04? What systems and processes have been put in place to ensure that it will not be repeated?

Mr Hubbard: Thanks for that question. What's happening there is that, as the department was formed, we were doing our balance sheet and our profit and loss and we

had, in a sense, to predict the volume of creditors that we'd have at the end of the year. Now that we're coming up for our second anniversary, we've got a lot better idea of what that level of creditors will be in each year, so that's the answer to that. We've actually got some history about what level of creditors we do need to have in our accounts.

THE CHAIR: I have a question concerning page 254. I must say that the numbers in this report look a little bit suspicious. Why are they all the same for the outyears? Are events so predictable that nothing will change? Surely that's unlikely.

Mr Hubbard: Why it looks like that—and quite often we get accounts that look like that—is basically because the funds that we get on behalf of the territory are things like concession funds and we're expected to have expended those every year. This is basically an accounting format. I agree with you, Mr Stefaniak; it does look pretty repetitive and it doesn't give you a lot of information, but what it's basically saying is that that 1.1 is coming in and going out in the same year.

MRS BURKE: The operating result of a deficit of \$1.589 million intrigues me. Does the 44 per cent improvement to the deficit of \$2.832 million mean that you still have a 56 per cent decrease in managing expenditure levels within government funding?

MS DUNDAS: Mrs Burke, which page are you on?

MRS BURKE: Page 245 of BP4.

Mr Hubbard: Can you ask that question again?

MRS BURKE: It intrigued me. Your answer was amazing. The operating result on page 245 was a \$1.589 million deficit. My question was: does the 44 per cent improvement to the deficit of \$2.832 million mean that you still have a 56 per cent decrease in managing expenditure levels within government funding? The measure focuses on the financial performance of the department and will measure the department's success in managing expenditure levels. So, in response to your answer, I am asking whether you are still 56 per cent short of reaching a zero deficit or going into the black.

Ms Lambert: None of us operate in the black, as you will have seen, in government. We all operate with an operating deficit.

MRS BURKE: I just thought it was funny to say that, picking up on Mr Stefaniak's point.

Mr Hubbard: What it actually does represent is unfunded.

Mr Lambert: It represents things such as unfunded employee liabilities, depreciation and all of those sorts of things.

MRS BURKE: I have another question. I refer to organisational support services to Housing ACT, BP4, pages 249 and 250. We see increases or provisions amounting to some \$7.107 million. When you read through and look at the figures, there are increases in terms of user charges, costs associated, full-year impacts and supplies and services.

Can you tell me what we have bought or what we have done with all this money? What has it bought us? What are organisational support services? I realise that some of that is in terms of the department changing and moving.

Ms Lambert: I am quite happy to start the answer on this. This refers to output 1.4. I mentioned before that we, in establishing the agency, needed to do a lot of building and so on. I have said in this forum before that one of our charges was to dismantle the purchaser/provider relationship. So this represents, if you like, the last stage in that dismantling, and it is actually about transparency in the way we do our business.

In forming the agency, we formed core services. We got rid of duplication which had occurred as part of the purchaser/provider relationship. We now have a set of organisational services, and those dollars are about the services which support me as commissioner, and which support the public trading enterprise. A good example of one of those would be a vastly enhanced audit function, which we have only just really finished creating, because we really do need to have a very good audit function in this department, particular with the public trading enterprise and the risks associated with that. So that is one example of what we do.

We also provide a much more comprehensive data service, because in my view, if you don't have good data, you don't have good policy, et cetera, et cetera. It is also important that the public trading enterprise has very good data processes and procedures.

So this is about saying: we now have a united organisation, as much as possible an integrated organisation, and this is how we are doing it, and we are actually being quite transparent about the funds which go to support the large body of people who work in what is the public trading enterprise, which we call now Housing ACT. Ms Overton-Clarke, who heads that area, can tell you more about the detail of it.

Ms Overton-Clarke: Would you like to know some more specifics about what it comprises?

MRS BURKE: Yes. And I just wonder if it has peaked, are we going to see a levelling out of that, or is there going to be an increase in funding?

Ms Lambert: We will constantly benchmark our organisational services. We do that regularly anyway. We established the department with a 6 per cent, I think, which is the usual government benchmark. Not all agencies have that, but we will constantly be benchmarking this. We will also be constantly evaluating it in terms of the service that it provides.

Ms Overton-Clarke: It is a range. It includes things as basic or as sort of process-like as the cost for payroll, which actually is funded through the department of health. We had, as you can imagine coming from a number of departments, a number of payroll providers, and we went through a tender process within government to get the most efficient payroll provider.

It includes all the personnel advice that we give throughout the department, the industrial relations advice. As Ms Lambert has said, occupational health and safety is something that we place a lot of importance on. It includes all the policy advice that we do as a sort

20 May 2004

of centralised function and we work very closely with the policy in disability and housing. It also includes a small media communications unit, a website area and also—I can carry on, if you like—the government support.

MRS BURKE: If you want to provide that later you can take it on notice and give more detail later.

Ms Lambert: That pretty much covers it. In the past, quite often this would have been done with—and many of you would be very familiar with this—service level agreements. So this is about actually being up-front and transparent about services to the commissioner for housing and housing staff across the organisation in that regard.

Ms Overton-Clarke: I am sorry but the two I did miss was the finance and budget area and also what we call the organisational governance area, which is the support to the minister and the Assembly.

MRS BURKE: Thank you for that.

MS DUNDAS: In the response that you provided to the implementation of justice options you mentioned working to make the lives of ACT women safe. The policy framework, which is mentioned in your annual report, talked about how the department was developing a whole-of-department approach to mandatory reporting of child abuse over 03-04. Can you provide us with an update on that particular issue?

Ms Overton-Clarke: We met with department of health yesterday to work out how we will roll out the child protection training to officers in the department. It has been relatively spasmodic to date and we are seeking to implement that in a far more thorough fashion. So as part of that we will actually be identifying the mandated officers.

MS DUNDAS: So is that spasmodic across your department or spasmodic across the ACT government?

Ms Overton-Clarke: Well, it has been provided through the department of education but it has been done in—I suppose “spasmodic” is probably not quite the right word—an ad hoc way through the different areas within the department. What we are doing now is taking a much more cross-department approach to make sure that there are no areas that miss out. So we will be rolling it out in a much more systematic way, I guess.

MS DUNDAS: The training will be rolled out?

Ms Overton-Clarke: The training, that’s right.

MS DUNDAS: And you have identified all the officers who have to comply?

Ms Overton-Clarke: As part of that—that’s exactly right, yes.

MS DUNDAS: So you have identified all those officers?

Ms Overton-Clarke: We are going through the process at the moment of identifying exactly who the mandated officers are.

MS DUNDAS: Okay. That completes that question. I have other questions.

THE CHAIR: Are there any further questions generally before we go to the output classes?

MS DUNDAS: Yes.

THE CHAIR: All right.

MS DUNDAS: The department has managed to reach general savings that in the out years end up totalling \$700,000, and I assume that's part of the expenditure review committee process. How will your department specifically be finding those savings?

Mr Hubbard: As you say, in the out years it does actually grow to 700. In the initial year I think it is 346. As you highlighted, that was done through an ERC process where, in a sense, we were asked to make some savings. Each year we go through quite an extensive process of looking at the programs we actually have, which programs are still meeting the needs of government 100 per cent and whether we can make any changes.

When you look at 346 compared with \$100 million of cash that actually flows through the organisation, the way I have done it is to apportion it across the output areas equally and during the year as savings present themselves we will actually take that out of the 346. In the following year, when you look at the out years I think the next year goes to 500. You have already made the savings of 346 and in the following year I have got to find another \$200,000 saving. So it is a gap between the year before and that year.

MS DUNDAS: Okay. Sure. Jumping topics again to try and move this forward, where is the review of statutory oversight bodies that we have been waiting so patiently for?

Ms Lambert: We had to wait for and I still have not seen the full report from the Commissioner for Public Administration, Ms Vardon, on child protection. So we need to wait to see how that intersects with the work that we have done. We are poised ready now to conclude that and for the government to respond but we need to wait to see the intersection of that report with the work that we have done.

MS DUNDAS: Is the review of statutory oversight bodies going to have anything to do with the establishment of the commissioner for small business, which we were told earlier this week will be a statutory oversight body?

Ms Lambert: We have not included the commissioner for small business at this point but we need to obviously have a rationale around that as part of our going to government. So we need to still go through government process with what we have determined across agencies and with the steering committee as a result of the work on the review of statutory oversight.

MS DUNDAS: Sorry?

Ms Lambert: We have yet to go to government so I am pre-empting what government decisions might be in relation to it.

MS DUNDAS: The government's decision has already been made that there will be a statutory body that is a small business commissioner. That decision appears to have a complete relationship to this review of statutory oversight bodies that has been going on for quite a while and has looked at every other statutory oversight body in the ACT. We have been told repeatedly that we cannot even talk about having a commissioner for children and young people until that review has been finished. So I am interested to know how Treasury got one outside of that process?

Ms Lambert: The process that has been gone through across agencies in terms of the review of statutory oversight has been really about the rights and complaints focus and so we have focused then, if you like, on those human service issues, and that has been our primary focus. We have yet to go to government in terms of determining where everybody sits and how everything is positioned but we certainly have worked to be as comprehensive as we can in our response to government. That is about all I can say before I take it to government, or before the group takes it to government.

Mr Wood: And I think Mr Quinlan would have quite specific ideas about the small business commissioner as a—

MRS DUNNE: We thought that too, but he didn't.

Mr Wood: supportive role for small business. I am not sure if it sort of fits into—

MS DUNDAS: Well, he didn't talk about it being a statutory body independent of government able to take complaints through on behalf of small business.

Ms Lambert: But our focus has been primarily, as you understand, human services, and it is different from human services. We are looking at groups—health complaints, disability complaints, all of that. So it is a different focus. It is probably more aligned with issues around fair trading and so on than it is with the work that we have done in statutory oversight.

MS DUNDAS: But we can expect a couple of weeks delay between the government release of Vardon and the government's response to Vardon before we actually see the outcome of the statutory oversight?

Ms Lambert: Yes. As I said, we are poised to conclude but we need to see the intersection.

MS DUNDAS: Sure. Thank you.

MRS BURKE: I have a general question. The devil may be in the detail and I could well have missed it, but I am curious about a couple of initiatives. Is there any measure or output or funding allocation to cover these two things: a budget recommendation by the ACT Disability Advisory Council to establish a small equipment grant for people with disabilities; and also is there anything that would cover an ACT companion card, which relates to the current range of businesses and community providers to offer discounted or free goods?

Ms Lambert: There are not specific outputs related to that, no. But in terms of the Disability Advisory Council, as part of our own work going forward we will be looking and we have indeed made commitments to deliver aspects of their budget. Ms Ford can talk about it in more detail but I have certainly just recently signed off some work to do with the companion card as part of our own procedures. We have recently gone out to the sector with some work on grants for individuals as well. Lois, I don't know if you wish to add anything to that?

Ms Ford: The small grants scheme: what we are looking at for next year, which will incorporate some of the ideas that came from the Disability Advisory Council, is to allocate \$100,000 to individuals on a non-recurrent basis for small amounts of equipment that are not covered by any other scheme. Bear in mind that there are a number of other schemes that are funded to provide equipment for people with disability. But also to provide maybe some small amount of funding for bridging or an initiative for a person with a disability that would make a significant difference in their life. We would see using the Disability Advisory Council's idea of a small community grants body to administer that fund.

MRS BURKE: So it's not true that they have been sidelined or forgotten in any way? That is what I am trying to establish.

Ms Lambert: No. Indeed, one of the main initiatives, the \$1.25 million for unmet need, is entirely consistent with the work that they put up.

Ms Ford: They also put up proposals for workforce development and audit of the workforce, which we have undertaken. We don't have the results of that as yet but we have undertaken that audit. Also they have put forward a proposal for some infrastructure funding for non-government organisations, particularly around human resource management and quality initiatives. This year we have recurrently funded non-government organisations for their organisational infrastructure up to, I think, in the range of about \$900,000; a one-off non-recurrent grant for all organisations to support them to renew equipment, workforce initiatives, quality initiatives; and also small grants for individuals and consumers in their service who may require some additional support outside of that which can be funded by that organisation.

Ms Lambert: They are an advisory body. They are an advisory council to the minister, but they are a body which I attend and Ms Ford attends as well, and we work hard to make sure our business is aligned with their advice.

MRS BURKE: When do we hope to see the workforce development audit? When is that going to be made available?

Ms Ford: That should be—can I just check?—in another couple of weeks. Yes, in another couple of weeks. They are just collating the data and analysing the data. So it should be available in another couple of weeks.

THE CHAIR: If there are no further questions, we will move to the output classes. Are there any questions in relation to output class 1.1 at page 261?

MR HARGREAVES: I have got one on 1.3. I thought that all of those generals would

have picked up those. I will wait to 1.3.

THE CHAIR: Ms Dundas, you had your hand up.

MS DUNDAS: I did. There was an evaluation of individualised funding. Does that come under specific disability services?

Ms Lambert: Are you referring to individual support packages?

MS DUNDAS: Well, there was an evaluation with individualised funding done and you were going to act upon that review over the 03-04 financial year. What activities have been taken?

Ms Ford: We have developed a draft discussion document that addresses all of the recommendations in that—I think there were 21 recommendations—evaluation. It was to look at the funding mechanism and the way in which individual support packages are developed in the future. That is due for consultation over the next month.

The plan is to put together a reference group from both community and department to look at that and then to go back and consult with the stakeholders of that, which are the individuals who receive funding packages as well as the organisations that auspice those funding packages.

MS DUNDAS: So we won't see any changes until next financial year?

Ms Ford: Very likely not.

Ms Lambert: We have, though, conducted sessions with the people, too, who receive packages and we have stepped outside those sessions and let them talk about it. So that has been invaluable in terms of guiding the way forward as well. So they are very engaged in this process, too.

Ms Ford: We have, in terms of that as well, undertaken several very small projects with individuals with the packages to look at how they may manage them better, or differently, or self-manage them. So there is a range of activities that are underpinning that work.

MS DUNDAS: I refer the entry “Respite—In own home (number of hours)” on page 261 of Budget Paper No 4. Looking back over previous years, it does seem to have dropped. There is now the target of 23,000 hours, when I believe that in 02-03 over 24,000 hours were delivered. Why has that figure dropped?

Ms Hayes: The increase in those hours was done over and above what was contracted for by non-government organisations. Their capacity to sustain those additional hours above what they were contracted for cannot be relied on and so they are not included in the targets or estimated outcomes.

MS DUNDAS: Obviously, if the service was being accessed over and above contracted hours, there is demand over and beyond contracted hours. Respite care is something that is of great import to the community. Is there any scope to actually expand the delivery of

respite hours?

Ms Hayes: Yes, there is, but some of that capacity is actually for individuals with individual funding packages. So they are actually purchasing in-home respite hours which are not part of the contract we have with the non-government organisations. So those additional hours are not included in that particular output.

MS DUNDAS: Do you have any idea of what those additional hours are?

Ms Hayes: No, because it would vary. An individual may choose to purchase respite in this quarter, they might purchase in-home support in the next quarter or they might purchase something else. So it is not something that we predict. It is part of individuals actually choosing what services they need at that time.

MS DUNDAS: So in terms of own-home respite care, we do not have an accurate picture of how much is being used across all the people accessing disability services?

Ms Hayes: We can have an accurate picture of that from the national minimum dataset information that we get about what actual services are delivered. So that would then pick up the different kinds of services that people are actually receiving from funded services.

MS DUNDAS: Could we get that figure then for 03-04?

Ms Hayes: The national minimum dataset information—yes.

MS DUNDAS: On 03-04. “The latest figures that are available” might be a better way to put it.

Ms Hayes: Yes, it certainly won’t be available yet because they are a quarter behind. So it would be some time before we will have the full year national minimum dataset information.

Ms Lambert: But there is a tension here which is being explained, I think, that as we move more and more to individualised service and person-centred service it will be harder for us to include some of that in our output statements as well. Because it is about individuals selecting what they want rather than us saying, “This is what we are offering and this is what you have to have.”

MS DUNDAS: I do recognise that these quantitative measurements have changed since last year and I think that has improved drastically the amount of information we are getting, as we have had with other departments. It is an ongoing process.

Ms Hayes: If I could just add that there was an additional injection of \$1 million for respite. Those funds went initially to ACT Health but have purchased respite services for people with disabilities as well as aged people and people with mental health issues and so on. Two new programs that have come out of that have been around family support, which provides a lot of that flexible in-home respite-type function.

MS MacDONALD: On the same output class, I draw your attention to the number of service visits conducted by contract managers. I note that in the footnote you say that the

number is so high as opposed to what was estimated because of trying to strengthen the NGO capacity. You have estimated the targets for 04-05 as being 60 visits in the year, which is only five more than was estimated for the current financial year, but it has increased so much because of what you are trying to do. Do you think that that will be sufficient; that you have completed your task and strengthened the NGOs sufficiently and they won't need to—

Ms Hayes: No, we certainly don't think that. The visits that are actually here as the target are those that we formally agree to do in relation to the contract. So we have a standard that we have set, that for our large organisations we will visit them on that formal basis to discuss their contract twice a year, and for the small agencies once a year.

Outside of that there is very frequent contact between the contract manager and the service, and that can be almost daily by phone or quite frequent contact with the organisations. But that is informal and supportive and we don't actually put that in the target figure. The additional 40 in this year, or 45, is because we did do an additional formal round of visits to all agencies in order to conduct a contract audit with them.

MS MacDONALD: All right, thank you.

Ms Lambert: That was part of the process I was referring to before of actually working very closely with our agencies to see what the pressures were on them; particularly the smaller agencies—where their pressures were in relation to viability and so on.

MRS BURKE: Just as a little bit of a sub to that: you obviously have achieved what you wanted to with that and you feel that the decrease is warranted now—back to a more sustainable level?

Ms Lambert: I will have to take advice from my experts here.

Ms Ford: I think it is important to note that these are formal contract visits. The work with the non-government organisation sector will be ongoing. You will see from our futures direction that part of our strategy four is to continue to strengthen both the NGO sector and the government sector and the way in which they do their business.

There is also not only just the informal contact that we have with our NGOs, but there is also their annual general meetings that we all attend. We host formal workshops for non-government organisations as well as other workshops and seminars that we fund and sponsor our providers and also people with a disability to go to. So there is a range of ways in which we will make both formal and informal contact outside of those counted specifically to deal with contractual issues.

Ms Lambert: And people who are in the office, as I understand it, Lois, are actually spending a week out in organisations as well. So people who work in Disability ACT—that is, within the “central”, if I can use that word, and we don't use it very often, office environment—are spending time in the community organisations, too.

MRS BURKE: Okay. And just talking about contracts, I note that under the heading “Timeliness: Contract payments disbursed within contracted timeframe”, you were hoping for 100 per cent, and we are still 95 per cent. What are the problems? Have you

identified why that is? Is it to do with procurement tendering processes, whatever, whatever? Can you explain?

Ms Hayes: If I can just respond to that: this estimated outcome is based on the first six months of payments and it represents one payment that wasn't made on time. And so we have estimated that over the full year that may be two—if we doubled that in the second six months. So we hope it will actually be 97.5 and there will only have been one payment in the year that was not made on time.

THE CHAIR: Are there any more questions on 1.1? If not we will go to 1.2. Ms MacDonald, do you have any questions on community development services and policy?

MS MacDONALD: No, not at the moment.

THE CHAIR: Ms Dundas?

MS DUNDAS: In terms of the number of community facilities managed, I am interested to see that it is still at 39. I could be completely wrong but didn't you acquire a new community facility through the year?

Ms Lambert: Acquire a new community facility? We are going to build one next year.

MS DUNDAS: Which will replace one you are going to knock down.

Dr Adrian: Colin Adrian, Executive Coordinator. That's right. It just represents the community facilities that this department is responsible for.

MS DUNDAS: Sure, okay. Maybe it is another department that has found that building and it's not you. Sorry.

MRS BURKE: I am looking at quantity under output class 1 at page 262 of BP4. I refer to the number of service visits conducted by contract managers. I know it is a small drop—110 and 110 in the out years. It was 118 in 2003-04; estimated at 110 in 2003-04; and in the out years, 110. Can you give a bit of brief explanation on that one please?

Ms Sheehan: It was a very small drop. The drop in this year related to a staffing shortfall temporarily, but it is estimated that this is an adequate number for the number of contracts that we have. We do visit every service twice a year. And even if the same organisation provides a number of services, we don't just visit the organisation twice, we visit every service twice. So it is adequate for the number of services that we fund.

MRS BURKE: Okay. Perhaps you can answer this one on quality and effectiveness. Satisfaction is 80 per cent, and that is a good figure. But I guess we can always look for continual improvement. In what areas are you hoping to be able to lift that figure? Or, more to the point, I suppose, why are you saying it is going to static at 80 per cent?

Ms Sheehan: We do always strive to improve the service that we deliver. We do survey organisations every year across all of the services that we fund to find their level of satisfaction. We try to drill down on that. So, are they satisfied with the number of times we visit them; are they satisfied with the information that we give them; are they

satisfied with the level of consultation we have; are they satisfied with the way in which we incorporate their views into the policies that we formulate? And so, as we get more information about the levels of satisfaction, we will try to improve our performance so that we do things that will make those organisations more satisfied.

MRS BURKE: But wouldn't you want to be looking at a bit of a higher figure for next year? If you are on a continuous improvement and you have already identified there may be things that you can improve—

Mr Hehir: Martin Hehir, Executive Director, Housing and Community Services. I might answer that in part. Part of the reason we have a flat estimate there is we have not yet undertaken the survey this year. It is done in the fourth quarter. It is very difficult to try and predict a higher result when you have not actually done the surveys.

MRS BURKE: Had I have known that in the beginning I would have understood. So that is good. Thank you for clearing that up.

THE CHAIR: I there anything further on 1.2?

MS DUNDAS: Yes. Still on the community facilities: does every community facility have the *Building our city, building our community* logo on it now?

Ms Overton-Clarke: These are all owned by the ACT government but they are managed by community organisations, so they generally have their own logos. So the Northside Community Service has its own logo; Belconnen Community Service. The facilities that are in here are not the government owned and run and operated facilities.

MS DUNDAS: Okay. So who do I ask about that?

Ms Overton-Clarke: Which facility are you particularly—

MS DUNDAS: The ones that are government owned and government run.

Ms Overton-Clarke: We only have one of those and that is the therapy centre at Holder.

Ms Lambert: This department, you mean?

MS DUNDAS: This department. So the other ones are managed by education?

Mr Wood: Ask me tomorrow.

Ms Overton-Clarke: Well, a variety.

Mr Wood: DUS manages surplus property. That is mostly rented out.

Ms Overton-Clarke: Health has its facilities, so it really does depend on which one you are looking at.

MS DUNDAS: I think it might be an education one when it all boils down. So the facilities that you are managing have not been branded as such?

Ms Overton-Clarke: Only the therapy site in Holder.

MS DUNDAS: Okay.

Ms Lambert: Only with our logo, I think.

MS DUNDAS: Not with the BOCBOC logo?

Ms Overton-Clarke: No.

MS DUNDAS: Okay.

Ms Lambert: With our logo.

Mr Hubbard: With the departmental logo.

Ms Overton-Clarke: Yes, that's right.

MS DUNDAS: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Okay. If there is nothing more on 1.2, we will consider 1.3: therapy services. Mr Hargreaves has been waiting patiently for this.

MR HARGREAVES: Thank you very much, Mr Chairman. Incidentally, I have not looked up the statement of intent, the performance agreements or any of the other ancillary paperwork that goes with these rather complicated budget documents. I thought it would be easier to ask you guys. All of the officers will know that I have a bit of an interest in this area. It has not been easy to get professional staff over the last few years and I am aware that this is one of the issues across all service delivery areas within the community. In fact, the ability to satisfy need is tied up in terms of resources, but also very, very heavily in terms of whether you can get the resources at all.

I am aware that in the past, physiotherapists were very difficult to get. Speech pathologists were as rare as rocking horse teeth. Can I ask: what is the situation now with therapy services? Are you still experiencing those difficulties with the professional services? Where do you stand at the minute?

Ms Brown: Pauline Brown, senior manager, Therapy ACT. At the moment, I think I'm about 6 per cent down on our total funded positions.

MR HARGREAVES: What were you last year?

Ms Brown: About 34 to 35 per cent down by the end of the calendar year and in the last four months, with some of the recruitment drives that we've had going over the last nine months, we've gotten staff up to where I'm only 6 per cent down on funded positions.

MR HARGREAVES: In the very big reduction from 34 per cent to 6 per cent, what were the main professions in which you had success in recruiting and in which ones are you still having trouble? Was it across-the-board?

Ms Brown: We're fully staffed in social work at the moment, in occupational therapy, one position down in speech pathology, one position down in psychology and 50 per cent down in physiotherapy.

MR HARGREAVES: I'm hoping for a really good answer here. What sort of effect has it had on the throughput in terms of waiting lists and that sort of stuff? If that sort of growth has been on, you would be going gangbusters about now, wouldn't you?

Ms Brown: We are working very, very hard on the waiting lists. Yes, they did increase quite substantially while we had very low numbers of staff. There are particular strategies in place in a number of those professions right now to address the high waiting lists. It's been something that I've worked out with the senior staff and they have put in place some very significant strategies to address those waiting lists. We're doing the best we can under the circumstances.

MR HARGREAVES: One of the worries that I have with attacking a backlog is that there is an area of unmet need and you've now got the resources to tackle the unmet need, so if you go back and tackle the backlog you have an ever-perpetuating exercise. What sorts of strategies do you have to meet as much of the unmet need as you can and clear the backlog at the same time?

Ms Brown: This year, because I've been significantly understaffed, the areas where we have been able to get additional staff I've allowed to staff up beyond their funded levels for the rest of this financial year, specifically for the purpose of addressing the backlog and the waiting lists, while the rest of the staff deal with the ongoing throughput. So, in those areas where we are fully staffed and we have been able to get additional staff in place on a temporary basis, I have done that. In some areas, I've created some temporary positions for therapy assistants, which would normally be professional positions, and we have put specific training behind those people to assist us to deal with current throughput in a way that allows professional staff then to concentrate a little bit more in those areas on the waiting lists. So we've been doing a number of things to address those issues.

Ms Lambert: New South Wales as well.

Ms Brown: Yes, next week the New South Wales Autism Association will be sending a team of people down to help us with the autism assessments. They'll do a block of assessments for us next week.

MR HARGREAVES: So you have very successfully poached people from New South Wales.

Ms Brown: Yes, at a price.

MS DUNDAS: How many people will be coming down and what are they?

Ms Brown: There will be three people coming down and they're all trained psychologists.

MS DUNDAS: And what's the total cost for the extra three?

Ms Brown: I believe it's going to be to the tune of about \$10,000 for a week.

MR HARGREAVES: I wish to follow up questions in the last estimates committee, Mr Chair. Teacher satisfaction is at 85 per cent. You explained to us last time that part of it was to do with the reluctance of the teachers to engage in the survey process and you had some coercive strategies in mind, if I remember correctly, to bring them kicking and screaming to the altar of compliance. Were you successful in doing that? Are they now willingly involved in the survey or are they still scared to reveal the truth?

Ms Brown: I think we talked about this in committee meetings in January-February.

MS DUNDAS: About the annual reports.

Ms Brown: It's still addressing the current survey for this financial year and the result, so nothing has changed because the next survey won't be done until November. Yes, we will run that survey earlier this year so it's not so close to the end of the school year. Yes, we will be sending it out to more people and I will be talking to principals and different people about how to get more people engaged in this survey. At the moment, I've had quite a number of conversations with various principal groups and various individual principals. I believe that this coming year we should get a better response to that.

MR HARGREAVES: So the reaction you're getting from them is that the changes that you're introducing in terms of bringing the thing forward will ameliorate some of that opposition.

Ms Brown: I think it will.

MR HARGREAVES: I wish you well and I wish them a successful entree to the world of surveys.

MS DUNDAS: You said that current staff levels are 6 per cent below target. The budget papers still have them at 30 per cent below target. At what point in time were you 6 per cent below target?

Ms Brown: As of the end of last month.

MS DUNDAS: The end of April, and the budget papers were done at the beginning of April.

Ms Lambert: They were done during April.

MS DUNDAS: So there was pretty intensive recruitment over April.

Ms Brown: No, it was the final outcome of a number of recruitment processes that actually eventuated through the month of April so that I had several new staff come on in April, particularly in psychology.

MS DUNDAS: In terms of the work being done in schools and that survey, do Therapy ACT staff have any involvement in the development of the individual learning plans in

schools?

Ms Brown: Not formally, no, but our input is taken into consideration by the teachers when they're developing those with the families. Some schools actually do put in the therapy goals in those plans. It's not consistent across the education department, but they do consider our issues when the teachers and the parents are working up those plans.

MS DUNDAS: And Therapy ACT staff work with the teachers in terms of their input, not with the parents.

Ms Brown: Both.

MS DUNDAS: In terms of the non-consistency across-the-board in relation to therapy being part of the individual learning programs, are you working with the department of education to have that as standard through the ILP process?

Ms Brown: It's a conversation we're having and I believe that the staff in the special needs area in education are very aware that we would like to see more of that happen. We are discussing it at the moment. It's much more common in special schools for the therapist to sit in on the individual learning plan development, to have conversations with the parents and to have our issues incorporated into those plans because of the complex nature of the children in those schools and how everything has to work together. In the mainstream schools, it's not as common that that happens, but it does happen.

MS DUNDAS: There is a mandatory requirement for an individual learning program, but there have been lots of cases where individual learning programs haven't been progressed because of disputes between parents and teachers about the learning outcomes that are meant to be achieved and there have been concerns that the therapy side hasn't actually been reflected enough, that there hasn't been enough focus on therapy in terms of helping the young people to come forward. Has that impacted on the work that Therapy ACT is trying to do in that there is ongoing a different approach to a young person's goals and achievements from parents versus teachers?

Ms Brown: I'm not sure that I can respond to that. Sandra, do you have any thoughts on that?

Ms Lambert: I am not aware of that tension. It hasn't been brought to my attention as the chief executive of this department and the person responsible for therapy, but I would say that the primary agency for individual development plans is education.

MS DUNDAS: I know.

Ms Lambert: No, I'm not being defensive; I am just saying that it is their issue and, if there is an issue with that, I would certainly seek to address that issue at executive director level or whatever.

MS DUNDAS: But those problems aren't impacting on the work that Therapy ACT is doing; they're still able to go in and work with the young people and with the teachers, irrespective of the other issues that are happening.

20 May 2004

Ms Lambert: Yes. I can assure you that if Pauline and her staff weren't able to do that, she would be at my door in about five seconds. Basically, if there is an issue with that, then I would be very happy to take it up with the education department. An IDP is primarily a learning tool.

MS DUNDAS: Yes, I understand. As to the work that Therapy ACT is doing in schools, do you feel welcome in all of the classroom settings and able to achieve your goals in the classroom settings?

Ms Brown: Yes. I haven't had any conversations with staff that say they're not welcome. In fact, I think it would be far the reverse, that they'd like to see more of us in the classrooms, yes.

MS DUNDAS: Absolutely. There is more funding for autism support and assessment in the budget. Have you figured out how it's going to be delivered? Is it going to be in school support or out of school support?

Ms Brown: It could be a little bit of both. The autism assessment function happens outside of the school and it is a diagnostic process, so we would have trained psychologists in that area doing that. The funding here will allow me to increase from one to two the staff to do that assessment as a senior psychologist and the additional funding for the additional staff will be to put particularly social work and psychology support in place for parents while they're going through the assessment process and immediately afterwards so that we can make sure that they're supported through their reactions to finding out their child may have autism and in getting them linked with the appropriate services and the appropriate educational programs and support. So it will be a very key role in terms of dealing with some of the grief and loss issues that parents experience when they find out.

MS DUNDAS: So it is just an assessment and referral service that we're getting with the new money.

Ms Brown: It's a support service, not a referral service.

MS DUNDAS: But it's a short-term support service.

Ms Brown: Yes, but we already are providing considerable support through psych, social work and other things with the children.

MS DUNDAS: The new initiative is just for assessment and short-term support.

Ms Brown: Yes, additional support in those very early phases immediately post-diagnosis.

MRS BURKE: I am looking at the average cost per hour of therapy services. The targets for hours provided were going to be 53,500 at \$127 an hour. We see instead that we have 38,744—you've explained the reason for that—at an increased cost of \$178.38 an hour. Isn't this a case, Minister, of paying more and getting less?

Mr Wood: No. You can read a lot into figures if you want to.

MRS DUNNE: We are paying more. We are paying \$178, which is \$51 more.

Ms Brown: Which one are you looking at?

MRS BURKE: Page 263 of BP4.

THE CHAIR: The average cost per hour of therapy services.

MRS DUNNE: It is \$51.38 more than budgeted. Why is that?

Dr Adrian: The reason for that in large part is the way the calculations are done. Because the hours are down and you have a lot of built in overheads, then your average cost is actually going to be higher. It reflects really the abnormality this year of having lower staff numbers and hence your average costs per unit of the population you're serving are going to be higher. The 2004-05 target better reflects what would be the sort of average figure that we would expect.

MRS DUNNE: So what you're saying is that your fixed costs are driving up the average cost because you're actually providing fewer services.

Dr Adrian: That's right.

MRS DUNNE: I'll look at the *Hansard* as to why we're down so far. I missed that bit. With regard to the delivery of the autism services, do you have the staff to deliver the services yet?

Ms Brown: With the new initiative funding, not yet, no. We'll be recruiting to those positions in the near future.

MRS DUNNE: Are they going to be full-time ongoing staff or is it just going to be to address the backlog?

Ms Brown: No, it will be full-time ongoing.

Dr Adrian: That money goes into the base of Therapy ACT, so it's ongoing money, which means that when Pauline recruits the additional psychologist to that position that will be a permanent appointment.

MRS DUNNE: Did you say additional "psychologist"?

Dr Adrian: For the specific purposes of more tests.

MRS DUNNE: Is it one or more?

Ms Brown: There will be one senior psychologist employed to assist with the diagnosis and that requires a special skill level and training.

MRS DUNNE: Yes, I understand that.

20 May 2004

Ms Brown: In that position this time I am seeking to recruit a neuropsychologist, because that is a significant gap in the ACT. There is no neuropsychologist in government services dealing with children. As neuropsychologists are specifically trained for autism diagnosis above and beyond, I thought that would be an appropriate thing to do. And then we will have another psychologist and social worker and there is some more funding there for additional staff. I'm not sure what we're going to put there.

MRS DUNNE: Effectively, you will be having only one extra person for diagnosis.

Ms Brown: Yes. That will then give me two people who are doing the diagnosis.

MRS DUNNE: Is that all the diagnosis that happens in the ACT? Is there any scope for outsourcing to private practitioners?

Ms Brown: At the moment, there are only a couple of private practitioners who are doing this service and they are fully occupied with that. One of them has been giving us some assistance over the past 12 months. I think he's done about five or six assessments for us to help out on a fee-for-service basis. But there isn't a great deal of capacity in the private sector to do this, because they're all fully occupied at the moment.

Ms Lambert: I think while you were out of the room we talked about the fact that we've engaged the New South Wales Autism Association and they will arrive soon, so we are exploring as many avenues as we can to get that.

MRS DUNNE: Is it the case, Ms Brown, that there aren't many people in private practice, clinical psychologists and neuropsychologists, who are actually trained in that.

Ms Brown: That's my understanding.

MRS DUNNE: That's what I've been told.

MS DUNDAS: In the 2003-04 budget—this is a general therapy question—there were a few new measures implemented in relation to the number of service hours contributed which was a continuation of the number of hours of service provided annually, but the new measure of therapy services contracted to hours is not repeated in this year's budget. Have we just decided that that information is not worth giving?

Ms Brown: No, that really was an incorrect measure to put under my area. It was not contracted services. Where has Mr Hubbard gone? There were some issues around that output belonging to the disability program and it wasn't about contracted therapy service hours; it was about contracted services for another function that used to be under the disability program's budget and was put across to ours incorrectly. It's not about contracted therapy hours.

MS DUNDAS: Okay, I'll take that as an answer. We have focused on young people, but therapy services have a Therapy ACT consultative committee that operates as well.

Ms Brown: Yes, we do.

MS DUNDAS: I understand it was the intention to have two young people on that

consultative committee.

Ms Brown: Yes, and we've asked for that and gone through the school system as well to ask people to put themselves forward for nomination on that and we've not had any success, so we're following up on that again.

MS DUNDAS: So the committee is up and running, but it doesn't have any young people representatives on it at this time. The idea of therapy services is to provide support for people from birth to age 65, basically. We've focused quite specifically on what has been happening in the schools. I understand that one of the reasons for bringing in therapy services was to work with that transition when young people were leaving school and then having to move. How are you picking up those young people as they are exiting school and continuing with therapy?

Ms Brown: By referral when they require services. We're putting our service together now and we're going through a major project at the moment in terms of defining our services, where we're located and how we're structured and it has taken us a long time to get the staffing up to not only the previous levels but also under the new funding that we had for last year. That new funding was to address a lot of that in terms of transitioning, particularly picking up those children from the end of primary school to the end of school and then transitioning into adulthood, because there was a huge gap in that area.

Now that we have the staff in place, we're looking at how to do that and we're getting a large number of referrals right now for people of high school age and for young people post-high school. Those referrals are starting to come through now that people know that we actually have staff there to deal with that. So we're picking up on that. In the future, we'll be working very closely with education and with the disability service area in terms of how, as an interagencies approach, we deal with young people transitioning from the school environment to the post-school environment.

MS DUNDAS: What were the OH&S problems at the Holder building?

Ms Brown: The roof has leaked incredibly for the last 15 years that I can speak of and certainly the last eight years that I've been there. We've had a huge number of problems with a leaky roof. It's a very old building. The heating system was almost decrepit. There were huge rusted pipes and rusted heating systems and such like that. We had an area of the building which you couldn't access with wheelchairs, prams or anything like that, which is pretty unacceptable when you're a disability-type service. We now have a temporary ramp in place, we have a new roof half-completed and we have the heating system finally up and running, having been repaired. This week it should turn on.

MS DUNDAS: Will the capital works funding in the 2004-05 budget complete that work?

Ms Brown: Yes.

MS MacDONALD: Pauline, you have a flat roof at the moment on your Holder premises. Is it a flat roof that has been leaking?

Ms Brown: No, it's arched, but there are flat areas in between parts because of the way

the building was constructing initially.

MS MacDONALD: Somebody I know said that it will never be fixed because it's a flat roof.

Ms Brown: It's not a flat roof.

MS DUNDAS: I'm going to ask this question of health, but there's money going through to the University of Canberra to do some work, \$10 million to expand their program for allied health professionals. Is that something that therapy services in the department of disability are going to access?

Mr Wood: We're very pleased about it, yes. It's very important. There's a range of factors behind it, but certainly one of them is to provide people that we find so difficult to get.

MS DUNDAS: Will you be working up memorandums of understanding with the university to take people on for work experience and then possibly recruit them?

Ms Brown: Yes. That's already in place. We do that currently with the Australian Catholic University for social work students and we provide staff to lecture out there as well. I've had conversations with the new dean of the physio school going out at the University of Canberra and that will be live and in action as of July this year. It is really pleasing for me to see a physio program that will be putting out new graduates in this town. I believe they're discussing now OTN and speech pathology, but I'm not sure what the outcomes of those will be.

Ms Lambert: I can assure you that Pauline is assiduous in recruiting staff. We had a temporary personal assistant who was training in something and Pauline had her signed up before she left to go back to university, so we are quite assiduous in our pursuit of people to work with us. On a very serious note, Pauline has worked very hard until now with universities outside Canberra as well to get placements of students here and so on. It interests me a lot when I go there to see the range of young people that we have engaged in our service there.

THE CHAIR: There being no further questions on 1.3, we will go to 1.4.

MS DUNDAS: One of the quantity measures is the provision of key reports and publications. Does that include the newsletter? Does it count as a key publication?

Ms Overton-Clarke: Yes.

MS DUNDAS: Eighteen is your target for 2004-05. What is the breakdown of those publications?

Ms Overton-Clarke: Three for next year. Are you talking about 2004-05 or 2003-04?

MS DUNDAS: I was actually talking about what you're aiming to do, the target of 18.

Ms Overton-Clarke: Okay. Three Housing ACT newsletters. The strategic plan

implementation report. The fraud control plan. The risk management plan. Coordination of the annual audit plan and its implementation; they're two separate reports. The human resources strategic plan. Three OH&S employee assistance program and absenteeism reports. We combine profiles of the work force indicators and provide them to the executive director in housing, three of those for next year and only two for this year. The coordination of input to the budget papers, including the ownership agreement. Four budget output quarterly statements, performance reports and the coordination of the annual report.

Ms Lambert: I think, Ms Dundas, you've got the whole-of-department newsletter; is that right?

MS DUNDAS: The community partners newsletter.

Ms Lambert: That's the whole-of-department one. There is a specific newsletter for Housing ACT which is a part of this. That one is not a part of this.

MS DUNDAS: So the community partners newsletter isn't a part of—

Ms Lambert: It's a whole-of-department one.

Ms Overton-Clarke: Community partners is just the branding thing we have. That's the whole-of-department newsletter. This is an output for Housing ACT as the PTE, so included in the measures are the newsletters for housing and their tenants.

MS DUNDAS: There are, basically, three reports that will go to tenants and, more probably, to the community and the other 15 are internal reports.

Ms Overton-Clarke: That's so.

Ms Lambert: And we are refining this, too. It may well be that we determine, and I as commissioner determine with the executive director, that there is some other information that we need as well.

Ms Brown: The budget papers and the annual reports are, of course, external, not internal.

Ms Overton-Clarke: One thing I would add is that those auditable numbers represent a cross-section across the discussion we were having earlier about the range of advice. It's a good cross-section, but it's obviously not the full complement of what we provide.

MS DUNDAS: Does the debt review team come under Housing ACT, not under this output?

Ms Overton-Clarke: That's right.

THE CHAIR: There being no further questions, I thank everyone from the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services. We will resume at 2.00 pm with housing and those officials who do not need to come back are excused.

Meeting adjourned from 12.22 to 2.01 pm.

MS MacDONALD: Welcome back. Are there any departmental officials who weren't here this morning?

MRS DUNNE: They've all had their "Miranda" rights read to them!

MS MacDONALD: As I said to you before, Mrs Dunne, "Miranda" is only applicable in the United States of America!

MRS DUNNE: Yes, I know. It's just a generic term for reading the riot act to people.

Ms Lambert: I need to table the last two newsletters in community services and housing. These were provided in the break by one of my officials. We referred to them when talking about the organisational services output as an example.

MS MacDONALD: We're moving onto the area of ACT Housing.

MS DUNDAS: How are we going with the implementation of the multiunit property plan?

Mr Hehir: The multiunit property plan is a couple of years old. We are moving forward with it. As Mrs Burke identified earlier, there are some projects which are running slightly behind time on where we'd want to be. The multiunit property plan itself was quite a broad directional document, rather than specific. It identified a number of properties that it believed Housing ACT shouldn't keep in the long term, and we've moved on many of those.

It also identified other properties that it believed Housing ACT should look at keeping in the longer term and probably should keep subject, of course, to the more detailed financial analysis. We are moving forward with that. You'll be aware that we're moving forward on the Northbourne Flats project, and we currently have a tender in process for the Fraser Court flats.

MS DUNDAS: Which are the ones that you are behind schedule on?

Mr Hehir: The Northbourne Flats.

MRS DUNNE: And Fraser Court?

Mr Hehir: With Fraser Court I'd say we're behind schedule, but the tender is in the process of being looked at. We have gone out to tender and we have received tenders. There probably are some issues with those tenders.

MS DUNDAS: The multiunit property plan made it quite clear that there were serious problems that needed to be rectified at Currong. There was a process by which Currong was being decommissioned, but there are still people living there. What's happening in that sense?

Mr Hehir: I don't think it said that the problems should be rectified; in fact it implied, or

said, that we really shouldn't stay there in the long-term, the problems were that severe. That's why it is being decommissioned. That's still underway. Decommissioning a property of 212 units is quite a lengthy process. We are trying to work with the clients as best we can and make sure that clients are placed in appropriate circumstances. I don't have the up-to-the-minute figures, but we have moved a fair percentage of the people into other accommodation. We also have other accommodation being built right now which will take up the remaining people.

MS DUNDAS: Can you give us on notice some of the figures of people who are moving out of Currong who are still waiting to be housed, and also the number of students currently living in Currong?

Mr Hehir: The number of students is approximately 22 at the moment. There are another three or four that we're looking at. That will be the last group we take in. I will check those figures, but that is my recollection of them.

MS DUNDAS: Sure. Their tenancy is only until the end of term 4?

Mr Hehir: That's right.

MRS DUNNE: On the question of Currong, the students' tenancy is until the end of the academic year. Presumably by then it will be fully decommissioned—by the time they move out.

Mr Hehir: I'd expect it to be fully decommissioned around about December, yes.

MS DUNDAS: Has a decision been made about whether or not the property will be sold?

Mr Hehir: No. We're looking at the options with that. It is most likely is that the property will come down either after a sale or before a sale. We're looking at options about how we'd do that at the moment.

MS DUNDAS: So it's not the government's intention to maintain ownership of the land and rebuild?

Mr Hehir: They're options we're considering.

Mr Wood: We are still considering just how to work through that.

Mr Hehir: To rebuild something of that scale would be a very expensive exercise.

MRS DUNNE: Mr Hehir, just on the subject of decommissioning Currong as an example, you said that there's accommodation currently being completed that will take up the slack of the tenants.

Mr Hehir: The remainder, yes.

Mr Wood: Some of that slack, yes.

MRS DUNNE: When Currong is decommissioned—and given the stuff that’s already been decommissioned like Burnie Court, where the land is lying idle—where will we be in relation to housing stock? Where were you—and this is really something to take on notice—at, say, the beginning of 2001 and where are you now? Where do you anticipate being at the end of—

Mr Wood: As you’d expect, it’s a figure I watch very carefully. I think 11,454 was the sort of number when I came into office. It’s around about the same now.

MS DUNDAS: The budget papers indicate that for the end of 2003-04 you expect to have 11,125 properties.

Mr Hehir: No, that wouldn’t be right.

MS DUNDAS: Sorry, 11,521.

Mr Hehir: That’s right.

MS DUNDAS: I was reading the tenancies, not the properties.

MS MacDONALD: What page are we on, Ms Dundas?

MS DUNDAS: Page 278. That number of 11,521 is accurate?

Mr Wood: It has to be if it’s in the report.

MS DUNDAS: I’ve already found some other typos, Minister.

Mr Wood: They fluctuate from day to day as properties are bought and sold.

MRS DUNNE: That figure of 11,560 was the target but you’re down on the target, and your target for next year is up a bit. That figure of 11,500 properties is roughly what we’ve had over the past three or four years?

Mr Wood: Two or three years, I’d say.

Mr Hehir: That’s right. Since the decommissioning of Burnie Court the figure was 11,454. The capital program is an extensive program for Housing ACT. This year we will expend \$96 million in capital on purchases and construction. It is a very large program. You’ll understand that figures can move a little bit each way. At the moment our estimated outcome is 11,528, I think.

MS DUNDAS: The budgets say 30.

Mr Hehir: Yes. The latest figure I had was provided last week, so there may have been a slight move in that, but it is in that region. Next week it may well be above that. We do have an ongoing program of purchases and construction and we are still—even at this point—looking to acquire properties.

Mr Wood: It’s a pretty substantial capital program.

MS DUNDAS: \$96 million is a significant capital program—I won't deny that at all. It just seems that a net outcome increase over the year is, on latest figures, seven or eight new properties.

Mr Hehir: No—sorry.

MS DUNDAS: If you're looking at an outcome of 11,521 for the 2003-04 year and you're looking to increase that to 11,530 in 2004-05, that is nine extra properties.

MRS DUNNE: In fairness, what is a property? Is it a house? Is it a multiunit development? How is it counted?

Mr Hehir: Can I clarify the question? If you're talking about the 2004-05 year, the expected increase is nine for that year. For 2003-04, which is the year I'm talking about, we have a \$96 million program. The actual increase for that year is 136 dwellings.

MRS DUNNE: That figure of 11,500-odd: they're dwelling units?

Mr Hehir: That's right.

MRS DUNNE: That is irrespective of whether they're in multiunit developments or not?

MS DUNDAS: Over the financial year that is about to end, you're expecting to have 136 new units or properties come online?

Mr Hehir: That's right.

MS DUNDAS: Then, over the next financial year, we're only going to get nine more. Why is the program slowing so significantly? Nine new properties isn't a lot. I know you're shifting things around.

Mr Hehir: The government commitment was that they maintain a level of housing stock. The base figure was 11,454, from memory. There has been a significant injection this year. You'll be aware of the \$33 million that has been identified. There has also been quite a commitment to bring on stock, without that, this financial year to replace the accommodation at Currong. There is a very concerted effort this year. In the out years it will be a case of having a look at the circumstances. In general, we would expect to maintain the level of housing from then on, based on the current figures, with slight increases.

MS DUNDAS: Considering the conversation we were having this morning in relation to the bottlenecks in emergency accommodation, do you think those levels are adequate?

Mr Hehir: As a percentage of the overall housing stock, we are certainly in decline. I understand the commitment was to maintain the total number of stock, not a percentage. It is a difficult area when we're looking at the amount of funds that need to be injected and the fact that predominantly the funding we receive from the government is through the CSHA funds. I think that is the only Commonwealth-state agreement which still has two-to-one matching. The Commonwealth puts in \$2 for every \$1 that we put in. Having

a look at how we operate and at our operations as a public trading enterprise, we are basically on a break-even position.

Ms Lambert: With regard to the exit points from SAAP, as Ms Sheehan could tell you in more detail, we're looking at a range of other options as well. One of them is around private rental leasing, a scheme we're calling the "social landlord scheme". So we are investigating other ways. Public housing is not the only exit point for people from SAAP; community housing is another exit point. We're endeavouring to grow that sector at the same time. You heard about a couple of other examples this morning.

Again, it's complexity and diversity. Sometimes, given the nature of some of the people who are most at risk in our system, it is the community service organisations that can in fact effect the best result for some of those families. Public housing is one of the issues but we are working hard, as I said earlier this morning, on sustaining tenancies in public housing rather than ourselves contributing to homelessness, as well as looking at the ways in which we can build the community sector for responses. They're very keen to do that. We've had a couple of good pilot programs, one of them with Inanna, and so on. We're working with those organisations as well.

MS DUNDAS: There is a diversity of options coming online in relation to people leaving emergency accommodation.

Ms Lambert: That is right.

MS DUNDAS: Is that because the public housing numbers just aren't adequate?

Ms Lambert: No, it's not predominantly because of that. It's because we need a range of options for people. People have different needs. The indigenous community, for instance, cautioned us very strongly to work from their reality in the way that we were dealing with their homelessness. So we're endeavouring to find solutions that suit their community. You'd be aware of a girls boarding house that we've established. So it is also about finding the options that reach the people who are at risk.

As I said earlier, sometimes those community organisations can provide different levels and expertise of support from what we can. One of the reasons we meshed the community services side of the organisation with the public housing arm was to try and get that diversity working more—so that the people who work on the community services side of the organisation work more closely with the housing managers to talk about the range of options for people when they front for support and assistance—both our own clients, the ones we already have in our system, and also those fronting with complex needs.

MS MacDONALD: Minister, at the ACTCOSS briefing you talked about the difficulties in gaining capital for ACT Housing but you didn't elaborate on what those difficulties were. Can you talk a bit about that issue?

Mr Wood: Yes. I'm sure others here—such as one of the former ministers—know that issue. Housing is a public trading enterprise. Any funds coming from the government go on the precious bottom line where you don't run into deficits and you keep a balance. Therefore, to gain significant amounts of money out of the recurrent budget is not easy;

the accounting standards won't allow that. That's the issue. Mr Hehir might have more technical details of that.

Mr Hehir: The issue is probably best explained by example. When the Department of Urban Services gets a capital injection of, say, \$100 million to build a major road, that is an expense for the territory's operating statement. That's treated as a movement from cash to physical asset on the balance sheet of the territory. So it doesn't go through what they call the bottom line of the budget.

When Housing ACT is given \$33 million to buy houses to house people in, that is treated as an expense, so it comes off the territory's bottom line. We're defined as a public trading enterprise under, I think the phrase is, the government finance statistics—a national group which sets the standards. I understand that other jurisdictions are looking at this issue. Tasmania, for example, has approached I think the Bureau of Statistics, which deals with this issue, about changing the definition away from a PTE to include it in the general government sector. It seems ridiculous that an important social service is having a physical asset that will remain in the control of the territory expensed.

Mr Wood: My only understanding is capital. The same applies to Action because it's another PTE. Seemingly the obvious capital expenses aren't treated as such on that bottom line.

MS MacDONALD: How long have they had it defined as such?

Mr Wood: It's being going on—it's historic.

Mr Hehir: Certainly since 1995-96, to my knowledge. That is when we introduced accrual basis budgeting. It would have been at that point that we would have noticed it most significantly.

MS MacDONALD: You're presumably watching with great interest what happens with Tasmania approaching the ABS. Are you making any approaches yourselves?

Mr Wood: Yes. We are talking internally about it as well.

Mr Hehir: Yes.

MS MacDONALD: You did say it was a common problem across the states.

Mr Hehir: All the state housing arms are public trading enterprises. Therefore, they're all treated in the same way. When people are so focused on keeping the bottom line in surplus, it certainly makes it difficult to get quite substantial sums through.

Mr Wood: The capital program we were talking about a moment ago—the \$90 million plus—comes from asset sales and from internally generated revenue, not from the funding we've been talking about.

MRS DUNNE: I want to go back to the \$98 million of capital works. I suppose, Mr Hehir, you're the person to answer this question. What do you envisage doing with \$98 million next financial year?

Mr Hehir: The \$96 million was this financial year.

MRS DUNNE: I am sorry—\$96 million. How much is next?

Mr Hehir: I think the program is approximately \$78 million. I'll just confirm that.

MRS DUNNE: What has happened with the \$96 million—I stand corrected—this year? Has it all been expended, or will it all be expended by the end of the financial year?

Mr Hehir: The \$96 million is our expected expenditure this year. The original program was \$78 million. That is where I got \$78 million from. Next year's program is \$73 million. There is a significant amount of work which we have carried over as work in progress, but there are also two key items that reflect money yet to be expended. That's part of the \$33 million from the third appropriation. We identified that \$7 million would be used by Housing ACT to purchase housing, but for those properties to be head leased to community housing providers.

We're still working with the community housing sector to identify what their parameters are for suitable accommodation. That money is unlikely to be spent this financial year. We also had \$6.2 million set aside for grants which we have identified as most likely to be paid in 2004-05, \$3 million of which is for a capital injection for the community housing sector, similar to the last two years, and \$3.2 or \$3.4 million to be used for some of the ATSIC initiatives under the homelessness strategy.

If you don't mind me digressing for a minute, that's a really nice example of the efficiencies of community services and Housing ACT, and where they are able to work well together to fund that quite important initiative which was identified by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group to the homelessness advisory council.

MRS DUNNE: With the capital works program, how much are you going to roll over into next year as works in progress?

Mr Hehir: There is one other amount which will come up of approximately \$6 million for the fire safety upgrades. In respect of the total rollover for next year—

MRS DUNNE: Gee, I wish you hadn't mentioned that. I was wondering whether we could get through it without mentioning it. You mentioned it once and you didn't get away with it!

Mr Hehir: Let me put it this way: it wasn't unexpected. I thought we could get it out on the table right now!

MRS DUNNE: It's confession time!

MS DUNDAS: What was the total then, Mr Hehir?

Mr Hehir: I'm just working through that figure—it's either \$47 or \$57 million.

20 May 2004

MRS DUNNE: How much was for fire safety—\$6.6 million, did you say?

Mr Hehir: About \$6 million.

MRS DUNNE: How much are you rolling over?

Mr Hehir: The works in progress are about \$56 million. In terms of the funds rolling over, it's nowhere near that amount.

MRS DUNNE: There will be some of that that will not be completed by June, that you will be carrying?

Mr Hehir: The fire safety money? The \$6 million is what we're rolling over there out of the \$10 million.

MS DUNDAS: To follow up on that, could we possibly take on notice the amount of money that is being rolled over out of the capital budget and the \$33 million that was in the third appropriation bill? You've given us some but if we could have a written list, that might assist us.

Mr Hehir: We can certainly give you a written list of the works in progress, which is the \$56 million. That includes the \$6 million for the fire safety upgrades, the \$7 million for the community housing assets to be owned by Housing ACT and the works in progress on things like Hartigan Gardens, accessible units in Turner and Braddon, the Gungahlin boarding house and other such projects. Yes, we can give you the list.

MS DUNDAS: Is that \$25 million that's being rolled over?

Mr Hehir: In terms of the cash position at the end of the year, our budget identifies it as about \$22 million. We'll find out closer to the end of the year exactly what that figure is. So there is \$22 million worth of cash that we rolled over but there are works in progress of about \$56 million.

MRS DUNNE: On the subject of the capital works program, you said before that some of that is for new works and some of it is for purchasing existing properties. What are the criteria you use to decide whether you'll build or buy?

Mr Hehir: It generally comes down to a value-for-money exercise. Basically, if we can build cheaper than we can buy, we build; and if we can buy cheaper than we can build, we buy.

MRS DUNNE: A couple of years ago it was said to me that ACT Housing wouldn't buy anything that was less than a three-star energy rating, et cetera. Have you had a look at your criteria for the sorts of things you should have in respect of energy efficiency, water efficiency et cetera—the usual things that I talk about on days like this—to assess, in addition to whether it's better value for money now, whether it's better value for money over the life of the property, not just for ACT Housing but for the tenants? Do you do those sorts of sums?

Mr Hehir: We do still have the same criteria in that it has to be a minimum of a three-

star rating. If it's less than three stars we work with the people who are selling it to move it up to three stars. We won't purchase until it has reached that standard. We did have a program of going in and making sure there were water saving devices, such as dual flush systems, shower heads and other such things—and also making sure that there weren't any leaks and so on before the property goes in. At the moment we have recently outsourced that function, but we'll continue to work with an outsource provider to make sure they maintain the same level of standards.

MRS DUNNE: Is that before—when you purchase them—or is that an ongoing maintenance program?

Mr Hehir: That's before we purchase them—those specific requirements. We're also working with Environment ACT on the initiatives that they recently announced for trying to save water to see what access we can get to those schemes. When we refurbish properties and/or do major work on them as they become vacant, we also look at the water saving options then.

MRS DUNNE: When you're doing Northbourne Flats, for instance, does that include ripping out the loos and putting in better loos, fixing up the showers and those sorts of things?

Mr Hehir: I believe it does, but I will need to take that on notice to confirm that.

MS DUNDAS: There's a new affordable housing initiative with a capital injection of \$5 million. What's that \$5 million going to get us?

Mr Hehir: The \$5 million is intended to make sure that we can at least maintain, if not grow, the level of housing stock we currently have.

MS DUNDAS: So it's maintenance money?

Mr Hehir: No—maintain. It's making sure that we can purchase properties. We have a regular program of sale and purchase. We sell to tenants and we also sell stock that's very old and tired and would cost us a lot of money to bring up. As you'd be aware, when larger groups of properties are sold we also need to bring replacement properties online. That is intended to at least maintain, if not grow, the overall level of housing stock.

MS DUNDAS: The minister said earlier that they've actively taken the position of trying not to sell off housing stock but to upgrade it so we don't lose properties in the numbers sense. What state of disrepair does a property have to be in before you decide it's easier to sell it?

Mr Wood: In particular, I was referring to holding the multiunit properties. Obviously there's a continuing turnover of that older stock.

Mr Hehir: We look at a number of things including ongoing maintenance costs of the properties. We have the oldest average age of housing stock of public housing providers in Australia.

MRS DUNNE: That is why I wonder why we keep buying.

Mr Hehir: It isn't necessarily cheap maintenance for that. So we do have a look at the longer-term issues when we buy or choose to sell; it is part of the process. We can often make a little bit of money on a sale compared to a new purchase, if the property is in a good area. We also sell a significant number of properties to tenants.

MRS DUNNE: I still don't have a very clear idea what the \$5 million for affordability is—that's the thing. Do you have a clear idea?

THE CHAIR: Why don't you ask?

MS DUNDAS: It's to maintain the levels of housing stock!

Dr Adrian: To keep up the numbers.

MS DUNDAS: This is the way I understand it: if you're selling properties to tenants, you're not getting the same return as you would if you were selling them on the market. So you need money to be able to buy other market properties, and that \$5 million helps you maintain the level.

Mr Hehir: Let me put it this way: that's quite a tricky issue. The sale of housing to tenants is an ongoing program. We do that through a valuation exercise. In a period of a rising market, it is likely that we will not achieve the same value as if we went to auction. That's a standard thing that you would expect in a period of a rising market. In a period of a falling market it's quite likely that we would at least achieve what we would achieve if we went to auction—although we don't sell the low valuations—so therefore we would achieve that value. The importance of the program in selling to tenants is that tenants move out of the public housing system and have the chance to build equity in the house themselves. I think that was the original basis for the program, which has been around for a number of years. It's quite a long-term program.

MS DUNDAS: Part of the \$5 million is being used to offset that gap, in a sense.

Mr Hehir: Offset it?

MS DUNDAS: Yes. You are getting your valuation price, but to go and buy a new property would cost more in terms of the market.

Mr Hehir: Similar levels or more, yes.

MS DUNDAS: What is the rest of the \$5 million going towards?

Mr Hehir: To maintain the level of housing stock, as I said before, but I'll give a broader explanation for that. I don't know whether you have had the opportunity to read the latest AHURI report on the issue by Jon Hall, but public housing stock across Australia—

MRS DUNNE: Guess what? I haven't.

Mr Hehir: It's a very interesting read, let me assure you. It has identified that all public housing authorities across Australia are facing a significant issue as we have a high percentage of our tenants receiving rebated rents. Therefore, the greatest increase in our revenues is marginal, at best, because it's only a quarter of the indexation of their pensions, but our costs are going up at CPI or higher. Our wages costs can often be higher than CPI. So we have, if you like, a divergence between our income and our expenditure which is growing. For example, this financial year we would be \$2 million or \$3 million down on our operating result, when you take out the effect of the \$6.2 million we've talked about previously. The choice that public housing authorities around Australia have is to sell down stock to finance that gap or to receive capital injections. The intent of that injection is that in part it will cover that, in part it will hopefully grow the stock, and we will work to get our costs as close to our revenues as we can as part of that process as well.

MRS DUNNE: Selling down stock to cover your running costs is, essentially, selling the silver to buy the groceries, isn't it?

Mr Hehir: Absolutely, yes, and that's a situation for all housing authorities.

MRS DUNNE: It's not sustainable in the long term.

Mr Hehir: No, that's right, which is why the amount of \$5 million is in there. It will ensure that we maintain the level of public housing stock and, hopefully, it will also allow us to grow it.

Dr Adrian: Perhaps I could add some comments there. What Mr Hehir is raising is a fundamental issue, as he indicated, with public housing authorities across Australia. They're totally dependent on Commonwealth-State housing agreement moneys, which over the years has been declining.

The other major component they have in income is their rental return, with a greater proportion of your tenants on rental rebates. That number has gradually been getting higher and it's predicted to continue to get higher; it's about 85, 86 or 87 per cent. Your rental income is also proportionally going down and the only other sources of money are through a sales program, which you don't want to engage in on a large-scale basis if you want to maintain your numbers. So it really forces you down a path for all governments that the only other source of money is through capital injections.

If you look at the bottom line of housing, it has been and is dependent on the recent injections, including the \$33.2 million, and then those \$5 million injections over time, otherwise it simply would not be possible to maintain the stock numbers even at the current levels. If those trends continue and we want to increase the stock, for example, the only process at the moment would be to go back to government and seek further capital injections.

Mr Wood: And that's the importance of that earlier question that you asked about access to capital.

MRS DUNNE: I'm sorry, I am probably labouring this a bit, but surely there are other means from time to time; for instance, ACT Housing owns a vast amount of land down

20 May 2004

Northbourne Avenue, which is a designated public transport corridor. Surely over time the value of that land will be increasing, so that there would be an incentive to redevelop that land either singularly or in partnership with other people. You have already done that with some of the area diagonally opposite the Rex Hotel.

Dr Adrian: If I might make one comment: that's certainly true and there might be some cases where you could look at taking a site that's got a certain number of public housing units—it might be a multiunit property, for example—and having some sort of arrangement where you might be better off in a net sense. If you look at the AHURI report, though, and all the analysis that we've done, in general it is extremely hard to generate sufficient returns from any such venture to replace the existing number of public housing stock. It is almost impossible. So, whilst joint ventures sound very attractive and there certainly would be specific cases where we should pursue those, in most cases they won't generate a net increase in your public housing numbers, either through building replacement public housing on that site or generating capital that you buy or invest somewhere else.

Mr Hehir: That's certainly the experience that most people find when you go and look at your redevelopment figures. It is very difficult, particularly for our large multiunit properties, to replace anywhere near the level on them for the value you would get for the land. So it's a large loss when you move in those exercises. However, having said that, we are looking at joint ventures and actually trying to gain more return, that is, more dwellings, from the land that we do own where we have already made decisions or where we cannot sustain the multiunit property that's there because of the expense of maintaining it or the cost of keeping it liveable.

For example, we're in discussions at the moment in regard to the remainder of the land at Lyons where the previous Burnie Court was on how we can actually maximise our return from that by undertaking either a joint venture or part of the development profit ourselves and seeking to get a reasonable level of social housing within the actual development area as well. We are actively pursuing those options and we're working very hard to make sure that, where we do actually have vacant land or valuable land, we do utilise it to best effect. We're aware of that as an option. In the long term it will not generate significant returns compared with the losses when you have major blocks coming down. I agree with you about the Northbourne Avenue corridor. We're certainly very interested in that. You'll also be aware there's an interim heritage order on many of those assets.

Mr Wood: Who is the minister for heritage!

MRS DUNNE: I think the minister for heritage and the shadow minister for heritage should get together and fix that.

MS DUNDAS: We've had a number of things in budgets tagged affordable housing and affordable housing initiatives. This \$5 million which you've just explained at great length what it is for has almost the same heading in the budget papers as the \$33 million that was put forward in the third appropriation bill, which from the list that you gave us is actually doing quite different things from what the \$5 million is doing.

Mr Hehir: I think that's a matter of how it has been spread out. If we had got a lump

sum of \$20 million, it would have been another injection up front like the \$33 million and we would have grown the stock numbers at that point, but we would have faced inevitably the situation that we face now, which is that in the outyears we would see a slow decline in the overall level of stock. I suppose you can say it's different, but in my mind I don't think it is. It's a slightly different timing, but it's exactly the same principle.

Dr Adrian: The only other difference is that the four lots of \$5 million are explicitly for public housing, be it either constructing new properties or buying properties. Of the \$33.2 million, as was indicated, a proportion of that, roughly \$20 million, is for injection into public housing. The other two components of the money are a component for community housing and some money set aside for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sector which will work in concert with the homelessness strategy.

MS DUNDAS: Budget paper No 3 says at page 189 that the affordable housing initiative will, among other things, respond to two issues of housing and rental affordability in the community as highlighted in the affordable housing task force report. Which recommendations are being responded to and what is actually coming from the report out of this \$5 million initiative?

Mr Hehir: The substance of this recommendation responds to the finding of the report that public housing is most suitable for the lowest two income quintiles.

Ms Lambert: As affordable housing.

Mr Hehir: As affordable housing. It's one of the best ways of delivering affordable housing for the people on those wages or levels of income. So, quite frankly, maintaining the level of public housing stock is of key importance for that grouping.

MS DUNDAS: It is only money for public housing, the \$5 million.

Mr Hehir: That's right.

MS DUNDAS: Budget paper No 3 talks about social housing, which, as we've discussed before, is the broad term for public and community.

Mr Hehir: That's right.

MS DUNDAS: There was a bit of confusion about what this \$5 million would do, but it is all public housing.

Mr Hehir: It is all public housing.

Ms Lambert: One of the findings, as Martin said, of the affordable housing task force report that the government endorsed was that the most affordable housing for the bottom two income quintiles is public housing, and public housing bodies are, indeed, affordable housing providers as well.

MRS BURKE: I would like to ask about community housing. My understanding was that there was an allocation in the 2001-02 budget of \$3 million a year to community housing.

Ms Lambert: Yes.

MRS BURKE: My understanding is that the tender process fell down. I understand that there were some complications in the tendering process in 2001-02 or 2002-03. Given that up to \$9 million supposedly would have gone into that portfolio area, can you tell me what has been expended and what is the current balance of affairs?

Dr Adrian: I might start answering it and Ms Sheehan can answer it. There were two lots. There was the \$3 million that was in the 2002-03 financial year, which was funded from within Housing ACT moneys, and then in last year's budget there was a further \$3 million identified—that is, in 2003-04—for community housing. There is also money, as I indicated before, in the \$33.2 million which we will be looking to spend this coming year.

MRS BURKE: That's out of the home loan portfolio area.

Dr Adrian: That's right.

MRS BURKE: How much of that is community housing money? Is it a lot of money?

Mr Hehir: \$3 million of that is specifically for the community housing sector.

MRS BURKE: Another \$3 million.

Mr Hehir: Yes. There's also \$3.2 million or \$3.4 million for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing which may also be seen as part of the community housing sector. In addition to that, there's the \$7 million for the properties that we'll purchase for head lease out to the community sector.

Dr Adrian: In relation to the earlier lots of \$3 million, we entered into a process that involved the department, community housing, the community housing peak body and ACTCOSS, and did an assessment of a number of project bids that came in from the community housing sector. That money has been allocated to those organisations, and I can run through who they were. A number of those projects have run into a number of issues in terms of sorting out some of the final details about them proceeding. Again, Maureen could go through that in some detail.

We did learn a lot from that process, and that was discussed with the sector in looking at the \$3 million this year. We entertained a different process this time where we insisted that organisations be in a position to spend the money this financial year. That is, in fact, the situation with about three or four projects where the money will go out the door this financial year.

MRS BURKE: So the money that was rolled over, am I correct in saying, was at least \$6 million, if not \$9 million?

Dr Adrian: No.

MRS BURKE: Has it been expended? Are you telling me it's been expended?

Dr Adrian: The \$3 million this financial year will be expended and there will still be an outstanding amount from the moneys from the 2002-03 budget.

MRS BURKE: Is it \$3 million or \$6 million?

Dr Adrian: It won't be quite the \$3 million, but it will be close to it.

Mr Hehir: In terms of the budget papers, we've estimated about \$2 million will roll over.

Ms Lambert: I might just add that that first process that Dr Adrian referred to was one that was generated initially by community forums and so on, which is why the process involved continued to involve organisations such as ACTCOSS. What was the other one?

Dr Adrian: CHOACT, the national body. Just as one other comment, one of the projects which we did discuss this morning that is in the first lot of \$3 million is the Abbeyfield project, \$1.1 million. Maureen might explain where we're at with the projects out of this year's money.

Ms Sheehan: The projects that were funded this year, as Dr Adrian said, because we required organisations to commit to completion by the end of this year, the organisations essentially put up proposals to buy existing properties. Therefore, that can be done in a timely manner. The sorts of projects that were successful were projects where community housing organisations had actually partnered with other community service organisations and support organisations. Partnerships are good because they make sure that tenancies are sustainable because the tenancy is sustainable with the supports as well as the housing that you provide.

We mentioned earlier that we had funded the Havelock Housing Association in partnership with Anglicare to purchase two properties which would provide exit points for homeless people coming out of CEAS. That was a very worthwhile partnership.

MRS BURKE: Sorry to interrupt you, Ms Sheehan, but would those be the two properties accessible in north Canberra, Vagabond Street?

Ms Sheehan: No, they're not. The funding is for Havelock and Anglicare and they are identifying the properties at the moment. Havelock Housing Association also partnered with an AIDS organisation to provide supportive accommodation for families where a member has AIDS, again a very worthwhile partnership that we're very pleased to support. Earlier today Ms Ford described a project called the link project, which is where we provide funding for five properties to Centacare, where Centacare purchases the properties to form a network of 10 properties for people with a disability.

The exciting part of that partnership is that we will actually bring an additional five properties from public housing stock into that mix. So that's an example where we partner with the community organisations to provide that sort of network and provide accommodation for people with a disability. We also provided funding for Billabong Aboriginal Housing Corporation to purchase an additional property and to provide some

extra funds to complete purchases of two properties from the first funding round, again providing appropriate properties for people who don't have otherwise access to property. So it's a very worthwhile program which provides sustainable tenancies in a supportive environment.

MR HARGREAVES: I want to go back to something that Mrs Dunne started. It has to do with stock that was being purchased. Mr Hehir, you were saying that if the places are not at EER3 and you work with the people to bring them up, you also make sure that they've got water saving devices, dual flushes and those sort of things, in them when you work with the people. I understood the answer. My question, though, is: are we doing any work to retrofit the existing stock to bring it up to that rating?

Mr Hehir: Perhaps I should clarify my first answer. Yes, with existing stock, as they become vacant, we go in and have a look and see what they need to be brought up to standard. At that time, we do look at whether it's appropriate to change over the cisterns, the showerheads and other such devices. The other issue, I suppose, is that in major upgrades they certainly get done, and we are working with Environment ACT on their recently announced water saving initiatives to see what access we can get to those programs so that we can participate more fully.

We've also been working with the WES project, which is looking at water and energy savings and trying to teach people how their behaviours can change things and also what changes need to happen within the housing structure, the fittings of the house, to make savings there. I won't say we have a rolling program at this point to completely retrofit every Housing ACT property. We'd like to get there at some point, but there are significant cost issues associated with that, which is why we're looking at working with Environment ACT and the government-announced initiatives in that area.

MR HARGREAVES: I would like to pursue that for a little while, Mr Chair. Looking at budget paper 3, page 189, we're making concession payments for electricity, water and sewerage charges. You got that money in the third appropriation, \$326,000 in the first year and then it rolls on. These are payments presumably to public housing tenants, amongst others. It's a significant amount of money.

MS DUNDAS: For *Hansard*, Mr Hehir was nodding.

MR HARGREAVES: Thank you very much, Ms Dundas. Where there are concession payments for these people or rebates applicable to these people, public housing tenants, for a long time, because you just said that you would only look at them when they become vacant and upgrade the toilet flush system and so on, would it not be a decent idea to say, "These folk are receiving a rebate in regard to their power or water supplies. If we could introduce something which is cheaper than that as an ongoing exercise it would be a better idea to do that?"

Mr Hehir: I understand where you're coming from, I think, but that rebate is payable from the start of an energy bill, I understand, so even if we were to make the house more energy efficient or more water efficient it would not necessarily reduce that concession. That's not a reason for not doing it, but I'm just trying to clarify that response.

MR HARGREAVES: I understand what you're saying. You can drop it down a lot, but

20 May 2004

they would still get the rebate. But if the actual energy usage were to drop the cost would drop, so presumably the differential that these people are paying now would also drop.

Mr Hehir: Certainly the principle of trying to save people who are on pensions money is appropriate. As I said before, we are looking at the environmental initiatives that the government has announced to see how we can access those funds and/or those programs to expand our program within the public housing sector.

MR HARGREAVES: If somebody came to you with a really good idea for saving a lot of money on electricity charges, for example, greenhouse gases and all that sort of stuff, you might entertain the thought of exploring it with other agencies of the government or even looking internally in your own budget for it.

Mr Hehir: We always look at proposals of that sort.

MR HARGREAVES: Very good. I shall pass on that information.

MS TUCKER: To follow up on that, the fact is that at this point you don't appear to have an output for retrofitting and improving the energy efficiency.

Mr Hehir: No, we don't.

MS TUCKER: Why not? You said that you don't have a rolling program, so maybe that's your answer. It might be a recommendation of this committee that there should be an output in the next budget so that the estimates committee can keep track of how you are retrofitting houses for energy efficiency and that, in fact, you do have a rolling program, because I assume that that would be something that the committee would want to see.

Mr Wood: I don't have difficulty with that. It also points to the fact that to do that we would be looking for more capital at the same time, because then you're taking money from new properties, maintaining the level of stock, and you've got this balance to work out. If we could work through some of these issues of capital it would be very useful.

Ms Lambert: Are you looking for a specific measure under the public housing outputs?

MS TUCKER: I think there should be a measure. You said that you're interested in doing it, so it's a matter of us being able to keep track of how you're doing it, basically.

Ms Lambert: We're comfortable with that.

MS TUCKER: It's an important measure.

Mr Hehir: We will take that on board.

MS TUCKER: I thought I saw somewhere that you were actually putting curtains in the Currong Flats. Can anyone find reference to that? I can't find it.

Ms Sheehan: The commitment that we've made to tenants from Currong is that, when they're relocated to new properties, if the property that they're relocated to doesn't

already have window treatments we will provide window treatments, and we're doing that.

MRS DUNNE: Gee, that sounds like a good idea.

MS TUCKER: Is that for energy efficiency purposes in particular, privacy purposes or both?

Ms Sheehan: It's for all of those purposes, because it is what our tenants would want, and we're trying to respond to their needs and their circumstances.

MS TUCKER: When you supply curtains you supply them not just for privacy; you actually look at the quality of the curtains, floor to ceiling, et cetera, because of the energy efficiency that comes from that.

Ms Sheehan: What we did in the case of Currong, and Currong is quite a specific instance, we actually have a group that meets fortnightly of all service providers on the Currong site and we are funding the YWCA and Northside Community Services to provide ongoing support to residents. We provided three costings of different types of window treatments and the consensus of the committee was on a particular type of window treatment, which is pelmets and vertical blinds.

MRS DUNNE: I was hoping you wouldn't say vertical blinds.

MS TUCKER: Has there been any discussion—it sounds as if there hasn't—between this objective to make the public housing energy efficiency and the provision of these curtains? Vertical blinds aren't renowned for their energy efficiency.

Ms Sheehan: No, but pelmets are and it's a question of, I guess, the available dollars and a combination of what the tenants actually want. There has been consultation with the tenants and with the community organisations that are acting on behalf of tenants and working with tenants through the relocation. We're wanting to provide what it is that our tenants are looking for, which is, of course, energy efficiency to reduce their energy costs, but also they're looking for privacy and they're looking for amenity. We want to respond to all of those things that they're looking for.

MS TUCKER: How do you explain that you've dealt with the energy efficiency? Where was the input in this conversation? Was Environment ACT invited? Was the Office of Sustainability offered an opportunity? It doesn't sound like a good result for energy efficiency to have vertical blinds.

Ms Sheehan: With pelmets. Pelmets are identified as the most energy efficient thing that you can do to stop heat loss from windows.

MS TUCKER: Let's not get into an argument. I am interested in the process here. What was the advice given? Was advice sought when you had this committee discussion about what should be recommended in terms of energy efficiency; if so, what was that advice?

Ms Sheehan: The business management group, which is part of the department, is involved in any of the retrofitting that does go on and seeks the advice of external

consultants on energy efficiency matters. That group put together a proposal with three different window treatments, with three different costings. The proposal was presented to the community groups that formed the group that meets fortnightly specifically to deal with issues from Currong and that group made the decision about window treatment.

MS TUCKER: Were energy ratings for the three proposals given as well as the costs?

Ms Sheehan: There was energy discussion. I would have to refresh my memory about whether there was a numerical value given, but I'm certainly very happy to provide you with the information that was provided to the committee.

MS TUCKER: Thank you. It would be interesting to know whether the energy ratings were supplied with the three options. Can I ask another question going back to the affordable housing?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

MS TUCKER: I don't know if this is the appropriate place, but it may be generally. I noticed in the Civic West master plan that was just launched that there were incentives for affordable housing. One was presented as removing the requirement for stamp duty for properties under, I think, \$250,000.

Mr Wood: Something of that order.

MS TUCKER: I'm interested in understanding why you think that is a guarantee of ongoing affordability?

Mr Wood: I would see it as one avenue to pursue. It wouldn't be the only one to take up.

MS TUCKER: Sorry, I might need to go a bit more into detail. It's a bit like the first home buyer grant. That benefit goes to the first person who purchases it, but then they can sell it at whatever price without any guarantee or support for the people who can't afford the very expensive costs at the moment of housing. I'm interested to know why you didn't look at something that would ensure ongoing affordability. For example, perhaps you will offer ongoing concessions to landlords in the form of no land tax if they provide rental accommodation under whatever—\$100 or something—as ongoing support for affordable housing.

Mr Wood: That is something that I'm not sure was taken into account with Civic West; I wasn't intimately involved in it. That sounds reasonable. We've explored, over the period, any option we can find, not specifically in respect of Civic West, but in terms of redevelopments of either our properties or private properties to see what mechanism might best be put in place for affordability. We've examined that. We've had various proposals for the Burnie Court redevelopment. It's an area that has to be explored. We've looked at what local councils are doing around the place. I'm interested in any avenue available.

MS TUCKER: Do you agree that this is going to offer the opportunity for a windfall gain later for the people who purchase these?

Mr Wood: I don't know.

MS TUCKER: It isn't ongoing support.

Mr Wood: It may do. It may offer a windfall gain to the developer if it's not carefully watched. You would agree that you've got to watch these mechanisms. We are building in other mechanisms in our affordability program and we've got to be careful that there isn't that avenue for gain down the track. It's not an easy thing to be able to do, but we work to do it. You know about the land development stuff.

Mr Hehir: There has been ongoing discussion in a number of areas about where affordable housing should be allocated and how we do that. I think in the land release program this year we identified that they would release 100 blocks per year through a ballot system at the affordable end of the range and that, further to that, an additional, I think, 50 or 60 blocks per year would be made available for social housing providers, which does include public housing, to undertake that proposal. So that ensures that those properties stay in the affordable housing sector. We'll continue to have discussions across government about expanding those schemes into all places in the city, not just in Gungahlin.

MS TUCKER: Can I ask a question just on Civic West, which is related. The accommodation for students, as I understand it, was going to be through, maybe, more avenues than this. Tasman House was one of the examples given.

Mr Wood: One of the sites.

MRS DUNNE: I gather it's not finished.

MS TUCKER: Yes, but that's not my question. I'm interested in the model. Tasman House was one of the ways that you would be providing student accommodation. My question again—

Mr Wood: We'll, we're not providing it.

MS TUCKER: No, I understand that.

Mr Wood: It is being provided.

MS TUCKER: But it's being provided and you're seeing it as a way of accommodating students. So my question to you is: you are saying that is a way guaranteeing accommodation for students. I don't understand how that is so when each unit is unit titled and we have no idea what will happen to it. The fact is that it's small and pokey and not particularly designed for students in that there's no community room in the building or facilities to acknowledge that it's a particular space for a demographic which is students. But if each unit is unit titled, what guarantee is there that that's going to be there for student accommodation? It can be sold to anyone who wants a cheap bed-sit.

Mr Wood: Well, I wouldn't think there's any guarantee. I don't think I or our department's been much part of that at all. That's the matter that the university and developers are talking about and ACTPLA is approving. If there are deficiencies there,

well, maybe that lesson should be learnt.

MS TUCKER: Well, why I raise it is that I thought it was part of the government's explanation of the social equability of Civic West.

Mr Wood: Yes.

MS TUCKER: I'm sorry, you seem to be claiming credit for it in some way in that it's there to provide accommodation for students, even though now you're saying it's not your project. But I'm concerned that it isn't going to guarantee anything and I'm raising that with you.

Mr Wood: Yes, fair enough.

MRS DUNNE: I just want to go back to the energy efficiency and ask—and this is definitely a question on notice—whether you can provide an analysis of the energy efficiency rating of properties that you currently have.

Mr Wood: There are a lot of properties.

MRS DUNNE: I understand that. I really meant it in very broad terms. It is 11,000 properties.

Mr Wood: A bit of an assessment?

MRS DUNNE: Yes.

Mr Wood: Broad assessment?

MRS DUNNE: Yes.

Mr Wood: Okay.

Mr Hehir: We'll be able to do that to a certain extent. The condition assessment of our stock isn't yet complete, so I might not have very good data on that. We'll certainly be able to advise you where we have committed substantial funds, i.e., through upgrades and so on over the last year, which have included those features. Would that be sufficient?

MRS DUNNE: Yes. Actually, what you're telling me is that you don't really know yet, yourselves?

Mr Hehir: To a certain extent, that's right.

MRS DUNNE: And that's a useful piece of information to know as well.

MRS BURKE: I'm interested in the bilateral agreement under the CSHA. I'm noticing that you're implementing strategies of that agreement. In connection with the 5 per cent penalty for not engaging the private sector, how is that working through? What inroads have you made into that?

Mr Wood: Well, it's a big focus. We might take that on.

Mr Hehir: Certainly in looking at options around development, that's one of the ways we're hoping to engage the private sector. So we certainly hope to do that. The community housing sector is also a sector that we're engaging in that the social landlord scheme will also be classed as engaging the private sector; so we actually have quite a number of projects under way where we believe we probably already meet the requirements.

MRS BURKE: Is Burnie Court the one you mentioned earlier? Is it one of them that you're trying to do something with?

Mr Hehir: Yes. We have a meeting with a number of private sector organisations, including the MBA and the HIA and other developers around town, where we talk about options, about how we can participate in terms of expanding the public housing stock and how they can assist us with that. As discussed previously, we have the social landlord program which directly engages with the private sector. I've forgotten—

Ms Lambert: There was our accessible adaptable house too that the MBA built, which is in Dunlop and which has attracted, we're told, significant community interest; and that's certainly part of this program as well.

MRS BURKE: I've been there twice.

MS TUCKER: I've just got a quick one. I note in budget paper 4, page 271, that you're talking about an increase in the budget due to, in particular—one point you make—higher general operating costs largely as a result of high legal fees and the reclassification of contract payments to ACT Shelter, Council on the Ageing, et cetera. Does that mean extra money is going to Shelter?

Mr Hehir: No.

MRS DUNNE: In words of one syllable.

Dr Adrian: They asked us exactly the same question when they saw it.

MRS DUNNE: Why not?

Mr Hehir: It's the technical accounting issue. We had a look at the substance of the transaction rather than the form, which is what you're actually meant to do. In the end we actually decided that we were receiving services from those payments that should be more correctly identified as an expense rather than a grant. So it's a movement from the grants to the expenses.

MS TUCKER: So you think that they're not entitled to more funding, that their work doesn't require—

Ms Lambert: I don't think that was said.

Mr Hehir: We worked with them on projects as identified. If we believe that they've identified projects that are worth while supporting or indeed they win a tender for a project, then they get additional funds through those mechanisms.

Dr Adrian: An example of that would be the program we've entered into with them this year with the Tenants Union and Shelter on the tenant participation project where the total funding for that, I think, is in the order more of \$80,000.

MS TUCKER: Just in general outputs—and maybe this is in the Chief Minister's section; I'm not sure, but it would be quite useful to see it here—I know that you have an initiative to provide more housing for indigenous peoples. But I don't see that as an output. I would be interested to know if you think that would be a reasonable thing to do as it's a particular policy objective or objective of the government.

Mr Hehir: I think it's certainly possible. We do have problems in terms of self-identification, so we won't necessarily get great figures but we could certainly have a measure where appropriate.

MS TUCKER: I wasn't thinking particularly about which indigenous families have access to public houses. I thought you were building special houses—crisis accommodation, et cetera. That was what I thought we did a while ago. And we had six houses.

Ms Lambert: In Monash.

Mr Hehir: Yes. In general that's done through the community leasing program. They're done under Corhap leases.

MS TUCKER: That's right, yes.

Mr Hehir: But, yes, we can certainly put a measure in to that effect.

Ms Lambert: We'd need to be aware that the measure would have to be able to have a multiplicity, if you like, of definitions of accommodation options. We can certainly have a good look at it. It is an area where we're investing considerable energy, so it would be useful to work out a measure that we could use for it.

MS TUCKER: That's a thought anyway. Just one other one on what your measures are. Why don't we have a measure of waiting lists of people waiting to access public housing? I thought you'd take a deep breath, but it's a kind of basic question.

Mr Hehir: To tell the truth, when we were reviewing them, it wasn't one of the ones that we decided to put on. The measure is how many people can we move through the system to actually come in which is, I suppose, a de facto list. You then have to look at which segment of the list you're looking at.

MS TUCKER: Yes, you would; that's right. But that doesn't mean you can't do it. I guess why I'm interested is: you can have unmet need for priority housing and for what isn't considered priority housing. Just in terms of giving information to members of the Assembly and the community, that's obviously one that's of interest to people, and

20 May 2004

I don't know why we couldn't have some indication of it.

MRS BURKE: I think it's in the news fairly much, though, isn't it? You're right.

Ms Lambert: It's also part of the annual Productivity Commission Report on government services. That information is usually part of that report as well and there are—

MRS DUNNE: The big fat one like this?

Ms Lambert: That large document, yes.

Mr Hehir: Yes, we could certainly have a look.

MS DUNDAS: One of the department-funded initiatives is some bushfire recovery activities with the rural communities. When the Chief Minister was here he announced—he didn't announce, he indicated that the master plans for the settlements will be announced in a couple of weeks. Have you worked with people who are former tenants of those settlements to ensure that their views are heard in the development of those master plans? I don't know if master plans is the right phrase, but I'm going to stick with it for a while.

Dr Adrian: The answer is yes. I guess there are two components. The money that we've identified, the \$155,000, is ongoing money for next year to provide ongoing support to both those that were affected in the urban areas and also \$80,000 for those affected in the rural areas. So we're in regular contact with those tenants. They're in different circumstances. Most of them have been re-housed on a temporary basis within the existing urban area, and we have ongoing consultations and discussions with them and certainly—

MS DUNDAS: As Housing ACT?

Dr Adrian: Housing ACT does, yes, with those that have been our former tenants, just with that group. For example, when the bushfire recovery centre closed recently, we wrote to all those tenants outlining the support services that we would continue for them and, if they had any issues with their tenancies or other issues, they could get in contact with us. Most of the discussion around the options for the possible re-establishment of the rural villages has been conducted out of the Chief Minister's Department, but we have been involved in those discussions and we ensured that all of our tenants had the opportunity to participate in the forums that they ran.

MS DUNDAS: Especially those tenants who are still living in the settlements.

Dr Adrian: Well, there are those that are still living in the settlements, as well as those who have been re-housed in the existing urban area and some others that, on a temporary basis, have chosen to move interstate. There are not a large number of those but there are certainly some of those. And we've also been involved, as a department, in making sure that we have input into those decisions about the possible replacement as well.

MS DUNDAS: Can I just clarify something you just said. Housing ACT has had

20 May 2004

ongoing contact with all of the former tenants of the rural villages, the forestry settlements?

Dr Adrian: All of those that were our tenants in those situations, yes.

MRS DUNNE: So there's obviously a distinction there, Dr Adrian. Some of them might be forestry tenants.

MS DUNDAS: No, they are all Housing ACT tenants.

Dr Adrian: Sorry, just to clarify there, so that what I've said is not—

MS DUNDAS: Yes, because I have a different story to that, so I'll give you the opportunity.

Dr Adrian: Well, all of those whom we have re-housed, in some shape or form, we've been in contact with.

MS DUNDAS: Which is different to all the people who were Housing ACT tenants the day the fire struck.

Dr Adrian: That's right. There are some, for example, who have moved interstate whom we are not necessarily in regular contact with.

MS DUNDAS: Or have been able to find their own means and are no longer tenants of Housing ACT.

Dr Adrian: Yes, sorry, that would be true as well. Yes.

MS DUNDAS: So I'll rephrase my question. Has work been done through Housing ACT to ensure that those people who are no longer your tenants, but were your tenants, are still able to contribute to the ongoing discussions?

Ms Fletcher: Helen Fletcher, Director, Housing ACT. We've been working very closely with the staff that used to work in the recovery centre and who now work in the Chief Minister's team to make sure that, where we have existing addresses for those former tenants, we are putting correspondence to them through that project team. So as long as one of the two organisations or, indeed, Communities at Work or the community service have forwarding addresses, then we're continuing to send that information to the last known address.

MS DUNDAS: So that work is stepped up. I remember, as part of the annual reports process, there was very much a focus on talking to the tenants who needed you and not necessarily talking to the tenants who didn't need you and there was that self-referral process. If you asked, if you didn't hear back, you let them go.

Ms Fletcher: To an extent. It's stepping up the process to an extent in recognition of the closure of the recovery centre and ensuring that there was that continuity of support to clients. So we're meeting regularly with the two community organisations that have been funded to continue to provide that support. We're meeting with them approximately

20 May 2004

every month. Certainly after the correspondence went out there was a program with the housing managers also making phone contact about a week after that letter went out just so people had time to think about whether they had concerns, but also for us to contact them to go through any of those issues that may have arisen.

MS DUNDAS: And that was both current and non-current ACT Housing tenants.

Ms Fletcher: Where we had current phone addresses, yes.

MRS BURKE: Along the same lines: I have been very vocal about my concerns. It's possibly for the same reasons that Ms Dundas has, although we've never talked about this until now. It was interesting hearing her comments. I think there are people still falling through the gap, and I think there are people that aren't coming forward necessarily. That may be something that we need to look into further.

I'm just wondering whether the recovery activities for Weston and for the rural people was something that went out to tender—yes? That was something that was put out—is that right?—or is it done in-house?

Ms Sheehan: No, it didn't go to tender. Community services provides core funding for community development activities for all of the regional community services. That includes communities at work, which covers Tuggeranong and Weston Creek and Woden community services. So those services were engaged immediately after the bushfire to provide that ongoing support. And the continuation of funding to those organisations follows on from the community development work that they have been doing and that we provide core funding for them to do already.

MRS BURKE: So you've just boosted their level of funding to carry out these services?

Ms Sheehan: Yes.

MRS BURKE: Thank you.

MRS DUNNE: Tanjil Loop has been an issue of some controversy on and off. Where are we with Tanjil Loop?

Mr Hehir: We recently went out to tender. The price that came back was not acceptable. We're looking at how we re-tender it.

MRS DUNNE: So, you went out to tender when?

Mr Hehir: I don't have the exact—

MRS DUNNE: April, something like that, March.

Mr Hehir: Around that time.

MRS DUNNE: It was a long time after it was called in.

Mr Hehir: It went out to tender in March.

MRS DUNNE: Yes, and it was called in in October last year, something like that.

Mr Hehir: That's right.

MRS DUNNE: And what did you go out to tender on, the whole box and dice, the whole package?

Mr Hehir: The whole package of works, yes.

MRS DUNNE: And when you say the tender didn't come in—what were the words you used?

Mr Hehir: The price was not acceptable.

MRS DUNNE: So did you underestimate what it was going to cost or what?

Mr Hehir: We used external consultants to provide the estimated price. It came in significantly above that price.

MRS DUNNE: So external from Housing ACT.

Mr Hehir: That's right, quantity surveyors.

MRS DUNNE: So markedly over price?

Mr Hehir: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: I don't want to actually go into the figures because that tells a whole lot of things that we shouldn't know, and I'm not going to do that. So did you get your original figures wrong or what?

Mr Hehir: I thought that the price the quantity surveyor put on it was very generous. To come in above that, and come in significantly above that, was not acceptable to Housing ACT.

MRS DUNNE: And so what are you going to do now?

Mr Hehir: We're having a look at how we tender it and our options under that.

MRS DUNNE: So are you looking at cutting it up into bits and pieces or—

Mr Hehir: That's right. We'll look at whether we take it out as two parcels or more.

MRS BURKE: I just have an area of concern that seems to be emerging here in regard to property procurement and tendering as a whole. But my understanding is, too, that the tender for Fraser Court has gone pear-shaped, without going into details there as well.

MRS DUNNE: Is that a technical term, Mrs Burke?

MRS BURKE: I don't know. It's collapsed, fallen through, whatever you want to call it. We talk a lot about value for money. Cheapest isn't best. It seems we've got, in two different areas, people have tendered for something. What was the external consultation or advice that you were given? Was it external people within Canberra or external to Canberra giving you that advice?

Mr Hehir: They were local.

MRS BURKE: And why are you determining that something is expensive when you get professionals tendering for works? Aren't the professionals telling you how it should be, not the other way around?

Mr Hehir: When I have professional advice telling me what I believe is a very generous figure and a quote comes in significantly above that, I believe I have to question that and seek to achieve value for money.

MRS BURKE: Is that for more than one tender that you received that? Were they all above? You'd have got a certain amount of people—

Mr Hehir: I don't really want to go into the details of the tender.

MRS BURKE: No, I didn't want you to go into the details. I'm talking about the number of people that tendered for it. So if there were six, were they all too expensive; or if there were three, were they all too expensive?

Mr Hehir: I wouldn't talk about the highest price as being unacceptable. I'm talking about the best price quoted was unacceptable.

MRS BURKE: And you can't give us what grounds. I just have a hard job because—

Ms Lambert: We have to be very careful because it's tender processes. And the other rider that we have of course is that we are dealing with public money and we must seek to get value for money. That doesn't mean the cheapest, but we must seek to get value. You would know that Martin has a significant background in land development and so his judgments in these instances are very important in terms of value for money.

MRS BURKE: But how does this leave the industry, Ms Lambert, when you've got people who are experts tendering for work who are good at what they do and yet they're being told they're too expensive? And this is in two or three projects now that we're hearing it.

Mr Hehir: I made a judgment on that based on my experience and based on advice on what reasonable prices are, which has been made public in a number of forums. The MBA have consistently advised how much they believe housing can be constructed for. It was well in excess of those figures. So I did actually look at what the industry says as a whole rather than what the tender price came in as well when I made my judgment.

There are issues in terms of the construction industry in the territory at the moment. There have been significant rises in the costs. Notwithstanding that, for this style of accommodation, based on the professional advice of both the quantity surveyor and my

own knowledge of what the industry and the industry representative bodies are saying about what is a reasonable price, I made the decision that we would not proceed with that tender.

Mr Wood: And Tanjil Loop is not the only project to cease because the tenders were too high—not in Housing ACT, out in the private sector.

MRS DUNNE: Sorry, can I just go back. With Tanjil Loop, as an example, you weren't proposing anything so flashy that it would be at the upper end of construction costs or anything like that?

Mr Hehir: In Tanjil Loop there was some significant consultation with the Office of Sustainability, so there were some measures there but nothing that would drive the prices that we received.

THE CHAIR: Are you still doing inspections, minister?

Mr Wood: Well, certain people are; not me personally. Although I have to say that I regularly visit.

THE CHAIR: You've probably been in a few public houses, but I don't expect you to do it personally.

Mr Wood: Yesterday I visited a number of our properties, but not as an inspection.

Ms Fletcher: Yes, we are continuing to undertake client service visits.

THE CHAIR: How often do you do inspections of public housing?

Ms Fletcher: We're aiming for a target of an annual visit and recognising that our facilities and amenities are currently undertaking a condition audit which will basically consume the other allowed visit under the Residential Tenancies Act.

THE CHAIR: What's the tenant debt at present?

Mr Hehir: The tenant debt at the moment is approximately \$840,000, the current debt.

THE CHAIR: And I've noticed, probably in the last 18 months, a considerable number of my constituents complaining about probably only a small number of very difficult public housing tenants. I note in some instances some tenants have been moved, because they've caused problems, to other residential areas where you're just effectively moving the problem. Have you got any strategies in terms of dealing with those very, very difficult tenants?

Ms Fletcher: Absolutely. I think this is one of the tangible benefits we're expected to get out of the integration of housing and community services. It will allow us to far better combine the services of the provision of housing in the tenancy management and the support services those clients need. And so, while Housing ACT is now trying to intervene in a more early intervention with clients who are experiencing difficulties, we're also coming to a situation where the situation has got to a state where the tenancy

and the tenant community have functionally broken down. We, on occasions, will undertake moving that household to a new location, with the support of a community service organisation that we negotiate through the community services area, so that the client and the neighbourhood can have a new start. Certainly, with the number of helpers and households who've done that, it's been quite successful.

Mr Hehir: You could build on that answer a little bit. We certainly don't try to move the problem to another area. We do, as part of the process—

THE CHAIR: I appreciate that, but it has happened.

Ms Fletcher: Absolutely.

MRS DUNNE: I'm sure there are residents who want to know why.

Mr Hehir: One of the things that we require is that clients engage with us. At times they don't necessarily want to engage with Housing ACT, in which case we give them options in terms of engaging with community services organisations. We have a number of programs including the preventing eviction program and also some special services which we try to link the tenants up with in order to enable them to sustain their tenancy. So part of the process is: the first thing we do is require an engagement of some sort with themselves or someone who is appropriate for us. If that community has broken down irreparably, we will then move that client, with support services in place, to try to enable them to start afresh.

THE CHAIR: What if that doesn't work? I can think of a couple of examples, but, touch wood, it has been quiet for about four weeks. One is in Florey, and one is in Dunlop. (*By resolution of the committee, two addresses were here expunged from the record*). Touch wood, I haven't heard anything for about four weeks, but I think in both instances those difficult tenants were moved from other places and then continued to cause difficulties in the neighbourhood. What do you do when whatever systems you have in place simply don't work?

Mr Hehir: Options that we have used in the past include to actually move the tenancy to a community-based tenancy. That has proved effective in a number of circumstances; so that, where it may be more appropriate to have a community-based organisation look after the tenant, is one of the options we explore and that certainly has been successful in a number of high-profile cases. Again, it's the partnership between Housing ACT and community services delivering that.

Mr Wood: And police have a role. Sometimes these aren't so much tenancy issues as police issues, and so that has to be worked through. And of course there's very intense management where it can be agreed between our housing managers and tenants.

Ms Lambert: And sometimes there are issues for other departments—and we work with them—such as the Mental Health Crisis Team and people like that as well. There are a range of ways that we need to work across government in dealing with this and out into the community sector as well.

Meeting adjourned from 3.32 to 3.47 pm.

THE CHAIR: I have got just one more question. How many properties are there now in community housing?

Dr Adrian: Under head lease arrangements, certainly in excess of 230.

Mr Hehir: The total number in the sector is roughly around 500.

THE CHAIR: That includes Havelock House, doesn't it, which has about 90 rooms.

Mr Hehir: That's right.

THE CHAIR: Are you still aiming to get to 1,000, or has that sort of gone out the window?

Mr Wood: No, that's history.

THE CHAIR: Sorry?

Mr Wood: Oh yes, maybe over time. But there is no passing over of houses.

THE CHAIR: So how do you do it now? Do you sort of acquire property?

Mr Wood: Bits and pieces of money, that sort of thing. CORHAP leases.

THE CHAIR: All right. Does anyone else wish to ask questions?

MRS BURKE: Yes. This is still niggling away at me and I am going to revisit it anyway—the number of units that are lying vacant at the moment waiting to be refurbished. I am a little concerned about the process in terms of the request for tender and so forth, that it took so long. That is having a really adverse impact now upon residents, tenants, who have been moved out to other housing properties, which is obviously having a squeeze on the sector in terms of available properties. Those people are coming to me from around Canberra. They have been adequately housed again, which was fine, but they are now saying, “Well we are taking up two units.” And they are.

There are other issues there that I need to take up with the minister, too, in terms of costs associated with services when they were at, say, Northbourne flats to wherever they might be now, and there has been no decrease in rent. So I think there are still some cases that need to be looked at there, Minister, in terms of that. But it still is a problem.

In terms of timelines, there are dozens of empty units, aren't there, between Fraser and Northbourne? How many are we talking about, what is the program of works and schedule of works for completion? Can you put a bit more light on it? It all seems very unclear.

Mr Hehir: I might answer generally to start with. This will be an ongoing issue whenever we have major repairs or major upgrades to properties. It is not possible to leave tenants in those properties, and I think you recognise that. But it will be an ongoing

20 May 2004

issue wherever we have that circumstance arising.

Clearly, we need to work to minimise the timeframes where there is a vacant tenancy, and that is one of the things that we do look at quite closely. In relation to the Northbourne flats issue, there were a number of things that overtook that process, including the fire safety works and the additional consultation around that. I think it was last week or the week before that the minister opened up the display unit in Northbourne flats.

MRS BURKE: Yes, I have been along to that.

Mr Hehir: So we are expecting those works to get under way quite quickly and we will move through those flats. Ms Sheehan might be able to give you the details.

MRS BURKE: Is block 17 going to be completed by the end of May? That was the minister's statement. Is that now on track or not?

Ms Sheehan: I will have to double check that.

Mr Wood: Have to have a look and see. By 18 May, yesterday?

MRS BURKE: End of May.

Mr Wood: End of May. I will have a look at that.

MRS BURKE: And the remainder—the other units that are lying empty there. The tragedy is it is having a really adverse impact on the people that are still there, and I know you know that. But can't we somehow expedite what is going on? These people have waited months and months, they were consulted so long ago, the tender took so long to get up and happening—

Mr Hehir: We do intend to move that forward as quickly as we possibly can.

MRS BURKE: And you would acknowledge that this is having a really big impact upon the vacant properties available to house people.

Ms Sheehan: Quite a number of the Northbourne tenants are being re-housed at Currong. So, in fact, they are not having any impact at all since those properties have been vacated at Currong and would remain empty because of the decommissioning of Currong.

MRS BURKE: So we are asking those people to move twice, Ms Sheehan, are we?

Ms Sheehan: No.

MRS BURKE: From Currong. Because you are decommissioning Currong, they are going to have to move out of there—

Ms Sheehan: No. I am sorry if I wasn't very clear. People from Northbourne are temporarily at Currong waiting for the refurbishment of their property at Northbourne.

20 May 2004

So we are not asking them to move twice. But because they are relocated at Currong they are not having an impact on accessibility to housing because Currong is being decommissioned.

And the other thing, it is very important for us to be able to provide temporary accommodation very close to where people are. For example, children have to be able to have access to schools, their friends. So we do need to take all of that into account, and we do try to really minimise disruption to our tenants.

MRS BURKE: I don't dispute that. I think the major concern is the amount of time it is taking to get these properties back into our system. I just don't think it is acceptable.

Mr Hehir: As I said before, we will move as quickly as we possibly can to get those units completed.

MRS BURKE: Have you got any timeframes? Can you be more specific than that?

Mr Hehir: The latest advice I have, which was last week, was that they were still on track for the end of May.

MRS BURKE: Block 17 or the whole—

Mr Hehir: Block 17.

MRS BURKE: And then the remainder of Northbourne flats? Have you got any idea?

Mr Hehir: I don't—

MRS BURKE: I am happy to take that on notice.

Ms Sheehan: It will be refurbished block by block.

MRS BURKE: If you could give me some timeframes, because I have to give people answers.

Mr Wood: Okay.

Mr Hehir: That's all right.

MRS BURKE: I think if we are to work together on this you need to be very clear and straight with me so that I can give proper advice to people who are coming to me totally beside themselves and extremely anxious.

Mr Wood: We will come back with confirmation or otherwise of the block 17 time. And I think it should be possible, would it, to come back with each other block—

Ms Sheehan: Yes.

Mr Wood: with the likely start and finish dates for each of the other blocks there.

MRS BURKE: I would appreciate that. Many promises have been made. These are faxes and emails that have been sent to me. Many promises have been made to many people. It is severe enough for them to be moved anyway. They are very appreciative that their homes are going to be upgraded—and I agree, Minister, they are terrific improvements—but I put it on notice that I think the process has been appalling; I think it has been a real pressure on the system. We have got people who are not in homes, who are in limbo, who should have been having access to the homes that the other people have been moved out of and in, et cetera. The bottleneck is in the system and that is a grave matter of concern.

Mr Wood: That is noted.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: Mrs Burke, the minister has said he will take that on notice.

MRS BURKE: Yes, thank you Ms MacDonald.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any questions?

MS DUNDAS: Output class 1.1?

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: Yes, why not.

MS DUNDAS: I have one non-output question left floating around. I want to return to the conversation we were having about the number of public housing properties managed. The 03-04 target is 11,560—and I am not going to say this is a bad thing, because it is actually up. But in the 03-04 budget the target for 03-04 was actually listed as 11,479, and there isn't a little footnote to tell me why you changed that.

Mr Hehir: I understand your confusion. The 2003-04 targets are the targets as amended after the third appropriation.

MS DUNDAS: The 03-04 target?

Mr Hehir: Yes. You will notice that the normal budget part of the financial statements have got 03-04 budget, estimated outcome and then the current budget. The format for the output classes is slightly different. The targets are there as targets after the third appropriation, so they include first, second and third appropriation measures. So, for example, there the number of public housing properties managed is 11,560. That included the full expenditure of the \$33.2 million, or nearly full expenditure of \$33.2 million.

MS DUNDAS: Which we are not going to achieve this year?

Mr Hehir: We will get most of it out but we won't necessarily get all of it out.

MS DUNDAS: We'll be about 40 short, looking at these figures.

Mr Hehir: Yes.

MS DUNDAS: So when are we actually going to achieve the target of 11,560?

20 May 2004

Mr Hehir: I expect that to occur by mid next year.

MS DUNDAS: Then why is the 04-05 target only 11,530?

Mr Hehir: That's a good question. The decommissioning of Currong is probably going to impact on that.

MS DUNDAS: So we are not actually going to achieve the target of 11,560 until 05-06?

Mr Hehir: We may not at that point. It depends on how we actually go with our sales programs in terms of how much profit we make or how much over and above the cost of replacing stock we make on our sales program and how much of the \$5 million goes towards increasing stock. There are a series of timelines when you work through and you have got stock decommissioning. That would impact on what we are actually doing.

MS DUNDAS: Okay. So that based on where the third appropriation was going and what was in the 03-04 budget, the aim was to have 11,560 properties?

Mr Hehir: Yes.

MS DUNDAS: And the decommissioning of Currong was part of the 03-04 budget?

Mr Hehir: No. It is estimated to occur next financial year.

MS DUNDAS: 04-05?

Mr Hehir: Yes, that's right. There will be people in it until November/December.

MS DUNDAS: So this is kind of part of the conversation we were having before. We are putting in extra resources, we are trying to maintain stock, and all those other issues. 11,530, even with the decommissioning of Currong, seems to be quite a small target to aim for in terms of the number of properties, when this time last year the target was 11,560.

Mr Hehir: This time last year the target wasn't 11,560.

MS DUNDAS: Sorry, not this time last year. This time last year the target was 11,479 but what I am saying is that with all the extra resources going in it does seem to be such a small target that we are aiming for in the next financial year.

Mr Hehir: The decommissioning of Currong is 212 dwellings. That is a significant reduction overall and to actually get back up to the point where we still intend to be in advance of the 11,454 is actually quite an effort and it does require a great deal of resources to achieve that. In terms of the replacement of stock, we don't have any revenue from the sale, including 04-05, of Currong because we have not yet determined what that form would be or if, indeed, it will be.

So that is the public sector. We are not even getting the revenue from that plan to help us increase stock. All it is is that we have got 212 properties coming off. If you think about

20 May 2004

it, if an average property costs us in the order of \$333,000—that is three properties per million—to replace 200 properties is a lot of money.

Mr Wood: It is a major effort. I think it has been extremely well managed to keep that constancy of properties. Given the difficulties in resourcing, the difficulty of replacing stock, I think it is remarkable that officers have been able to maintain those figures. And the aim was to maintain the figures.

Mr Hehir: If you think about it, to replace 212 properties on the figures I have quoted would cost us \$70 million.

MS DUNDAS: Can I then make a comparison with the quantity of the number of new public housing applicants housed. The footnote refers to additional properties included in the 04-05 target that are meant to increase the number of new public housing tenants target by 50. Am I reading this right?

Mr Hehir: In reality, the most significant part of the number of new public housing applicants housed is churn—sorry to use such a harsh word when we are talking about people. It is about people being moved out of the public housing system into the private housing system or home ownership or whatever.

MS DUNDAS: And then coming back?

Mr Hehir: No. And then we are able to place new people into the system.

MS DUNDAS: Okay.

Mr Hehir: So that first measure isn't about an increase of stock, it's about how many people we expect to be able to house from our waiting list, primarily because other people have decided that they no longer need to stay in public housing. That is the major factor within that measure. There is also a component of that measure where we moved from 900 to 960 to reflect what we would expect to be able to purchase from the \$33.2 million.

MS DUNDAS: That was my question.

Mr Hehir: There is a factor in that related to the issues that Mrs Burke had been talking about.

MS DUNDAS: So you do expect to do better as a target for the 04-05 financial year than you achieve, partly because you have additional properties coming on line?

Mr Hehir: That's right.

MS DUNDAS: And they are the additional properties that you spent some of the \$33 million on?

Mr Hehir: That's right.

Ms Fletcher: Most of the \$33 million.

MS DUNDAS: And the reason why the outcome is 110 lower than the target is because of lack of churn?

Mr Hehir: It is the fact that we won't have purchased all those properties or they won't all be in service at the time at the end of the financial year. But also there is some reduction in churn and also there will be some higher levels of vacancy than we necessarily want with the—

Ms Fletcher: It is also important to notice that this figure excludes transfers within the system. While, at the end of the day, the property that the person is transferring over to a new one becomes available for another allocation, there are timing issues that also impact on that. Traditionally, in respect of the number of people that get allocated within Housing ACT each year, between a third and a quarter of our allocations relate to people moving within the public housing system.

MS DUNDAS: Ms Tucker raised some questions earlier about the numbers on the waiting list. Do you break the waiting list numbers down between people who are currently in ACT Housing at the moment?

Ms Fletcher: Yes.

MS DUNDAS: Did we ask for those figures on notice or do you have them?

MRS DUNNE: I don't think we asked for them on notice.

Mr Hehir: Yes, we do.

Ms Lambert: Just while people are looking for those numbers, as I think I said earlier today, one of the reasons is that we are working for less churn, to use that term. We are working really hard to sustain tenancies as well. And that is really important in terms of, as I said before, impacting on homelessness and so on as well. We have noticed over the last year that that churn has slowed and that is, in many respects, a good outcome.

MS DUNDAS: I do agree with that. I think that is footnote No 10.

Mr Hehir: Did you want the waiting list figures?

MS DUNDAS: Yes please.

Mr Hehir: In all categories, new applicants, we have approximately 2,483.

Ms Fletcher: That is in all categories.

MS DUNDAS: That is just new applicants. And how many internal or re-applicants?

Mr Hehir: 1,156 for transfers. Re-applicants can include people that have left housing and come back in. They would be on the new applicants list.

MS DUNDAS: Okay, so the transfer is 1,456.

Mr Hehir: 1,156. It is worthwhile noting that that list has not been checked for some period of time—where we have actually gone out and recontacted people to find out whether they are still interested or still wanting it. Many of those people, particularly those who do have existing homes, may well actually be perfectly comfortable where they are if they have a job or if their job has improved or some such thing. So it has not been cleared up for, I think, a number of years.

Ms Fletcher: There has been some ad hoc review of the applicant list but, in a process sense, that has been held in abeyance while other work has been done.

MRS DUNNE: Just to follow up on Ms Dundas's question: ministers for health always like to say that it's not the length of the list but the waiting time. What are waiting times like?

Mr Hehir: Waiting times are good, from my perspective. I will break this down by category, which I think is the only sensible way of doing it. Early allocation category 1, it is approximately 180 days, just under that figure; early allocation category 2, it is 543 days; standard allocation category 3, it is 812 days; and standard allocation category 4, it is 814 days.

Ms Lambert: And while those figures are sobering and we work really hard on them, I would just like to point out that in terms of our comparative performance across jurisdictions we have one of the highest proportions of new allocations to those most in need and we have a higher rate of getting those people into property compared with other jurisdictions as well. So while our numbers are sobering, and ones that we pay great attention to and work on and are constantly looking for ways to deal with, we actually do compare well with other jurisdictions in this regard. So that is important. We have been working quite assiduously on this, particularly with the high-need applicants.

MR HARGREAVES: Madam Deputy Chair, just a comment: I just want to put this in context. Let the record show that in fact the waiting list in 1972 for standard allocations was three years. So I think we need to make sure that we keep this in a bit of perspective. It is not something new.

MS DUNDAS: Wasn't 1972 when they actually brought in a means testing to address that problem?

MR HARGREAVES: In 1972, I got a government house and I waited three years for it. Yes, and I got it because I was super poor, not because I could afford anything else.

Mr Hehir: Certainly that was roughly the period where they did introduce means testing for public housing. But the issue that Ms Lambert was referring to is that as part of the CHA we are required to target our housing assistance to those most in need, and we certainly do that.

That is an average waiting time. There are certainly people who we house faster. So we are responsive to the level of need. We do look at out-of-turn allocation and other issues there, and we do work to make sure that we do get people into accommodation as soon as we possibly can.

So the figures are indeed sobering but we do work within the system to make sure that we identify those in highest priority and get them into accommodation as quickly as we possibly can. We have a very high level, particularly when compared to other states, of allocation to people in the highest need category.

MS DUNDAS: In terms of particularly category 1 and category 2, besides the CEAS service, are you stepping up support that you provide to people while they are waiting to get a house? We are talking about half a year. People are saying, “I’m in an emergency, I need a house.” These are often people who end up ringing the Assembly and saying, “I’m in an emergency and Housing won’t give me a house.” What supports besides CEAS—we have just spent all afternoon talking about CEAS—are you able to offer in the interim?

Ms Lambert: I might just start by saying that what Mr Hehir provided were average waiting times. It is important in this context to note that when someone is extremely in need, we move as quickly as we can. I, as commissioner, have built in more discretions to enable us to be able to move in a way which, when people display a genuine and high need, we can work to house them, whether it be in community housing or whatever, as quickly as we can. Ms Sheehan and Ms Fletcher will have the details.

MS DUNDAS: But, of course, everybody who has put forward an application to be category 1 would classify themselves as being in high need.

Ms Lambert: We need to get in under that. It is about the immediacy of the need as well.

Ms Sheehan: For example, anyone who is in a SAAP service is classified as homeless. So any person there could be and should be on the early application 1 list. So, of course, they need to be housed. However, they do have food and shelter and support while they are in a SAAP service. So, for example, we have not fully met those needs but we are starting to meet the needs of those people.

I mentioned earlier that we are going out to tender for \$13.4 million worth of SAAP services, and that would be services for homeless families, homeless children, homeless indigenous families, men coming out of the criminal justice system, and so on. I also mention that there will be outreach services, and outreach services can actually support people in the accommodation that they find themselves in. It might be that with outreach that becomes stable; it might be that with outreach they are then able to move onto something more stable. So I am putting out to tender \$13.4 million worth of services for homeless people, including people who could be and should be on our early allocation 1 list.

MRS BURKE: Look, I guess this is a bit of an overall question in terms of outputs but can you explain the entry “Operating Result (\$19.392m loss)”?

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: Sorry, what page are you on, Mrs Burke?

Mr Hehir: It’s back with financial statements.

20 May 2004

MRS BURKE: I am sorry. I am referring to pages 266 and 267 of BP4. I am just trying to equate that activity with what is happening here. We read that “this target focuses on the financial performance for the year and measures the performance of resource utilisation, and in particular the success in managing revenues for User Charges” et cetera, blah blah. It is a whacking increase so perhaps you might like to explain that.

Mr Hehir: A significant portion of that increase is the \$6.2 million which was allocated from the \$33.2 million. That is because it comes in as a capital injection in 03-04. The capital injection doesn't appear in the general revenue part of the operating statement, there is no offset there, but those grants will be expensed through there, so the actual operating loss is more in the region of \$13 million.

MRS BURKE: It is still nearly double from your outcomes.

Mr Hehir: There are a number of increases there that are discussed in detail in the financial statements. I am happy to go through them more broadly. But it is important when you are looking at these things to recognise that there are non-cash items in there. The depreciation and amortisation line is \$14.4 million. So in terms of the overall cash position, it is not too bad for that financial year.

Once you look at the \$6.2 million, in terms of repairs and maintenance, that is actually done under the line “supplies and services” and you will see that there is a significant increase in there—

MRS BURKE: I will be getting onto that later.

Mr Hehir: some of which includes a reclassification of items that used to be capitalised into items that are now expense. That is in the repairs and maintenance line. So they are the key measures. We have already discussed grants and purchased services and there is also the ongoing issue of the flat revenue.

MRS BURKE: Okay. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: We are going to stick to the output classes, aren't we?

MS DUNDAS: The number of public housing properties which are adaptable and accessible is a quantity measure that for some reasons disappears?

Mr Hehir: Yes.

MS DUNDAS: Why?

Mr Hehir: The measure reflects a bit of a change of attitude in terms of why it's come out. In terms of Housing ACT and Community Services, our interaction is moving more towards human services rather than concentrating on the bricks and mortar, which has been how many of these previous measures were developed. We provide a range of services which we believe integrate and should be delivered in a person-centred way. Concentrating on a portion of the stock—90 properties out of 11,000 is—

MS DUNDAS: Actually 35.

Mr Hehir: Well, if you look at the target, 90—whichever figure. It also doesn't give the real picture of our ability to house the aged, which is part of what that measure is meant to represent. In actual fact, we have over 1,400 properties which are able to house the aged and people with mobility problems. So we didn't actually think that was an accurate measure or gave a very good picture of what it was about.

In the national housing survey there are measures which actually look at how the asset fits the needs of the tenant. We think that is a far better measure of how we are performing in those areas than having a stock number or a very small segment of our stock identified by a particular number.

That is why we have changed it. The national housing survey is actually picked up as a whole, as part of the performance measures under the tenants' satisfaction line, and the tenants' satisfaction with the house and the suitability of the house forms a significant component of that overall satisfaction.

So that is why we actually felt the measure was better placed. As I said before, I don't think that the 90 demonstrates what people may have intended it to demonstrate, which is how accessible our properties are to people with mobility problems, including the aged.

Ms Fletcher: When we talk about "adaptable" and "accessible", that's basically enshrined in the building code. So it needs to meet a quite specific standard about the generality of accessibility and adaptability. Our experience with clients is that we often end up with a situation where we are adjusting the built form to meet that person's particular needs and it doesn't comply with the standards set down in the building code.

MS DUNDAS: Tell me you're not telling me that you're fixing up houses in a way that means they don't comply with the building code!

Mr Hehir: No.

Ms Fletcher: All I'm saying is that they meet the building code but they don't meet the standard for accessible adaptable housing. As an example, where people are moving into older persons accommodation, quite often they need the handrails and the ramp but they don't want to be in a situation where they lose their cupboards under the sink because they quite like having those and don't need to have them removed. In that sense it doesn't qualify as, capital A, "Accessible" but is appropriate for that particular household's requirements.

Mr Hehir: We have a significant program of disability modifications each year, well and truly in excess of \$1 million, which we undertake on an as-needs basis. That is something we take quite seriously. Again the focus is on dealing with individual tenants and their requirements, which is appropriate under a person-centred approach.

It's also worthwhile talking about moves more broadly. I understand one of the issues under consideration by the working group of the Building Code of Australia is whether they mandate adaptable and accessible construction in the future. They may pull elements of the "adaptable and accessible requirements" or identification at the moment and make those requirements in the future. In that case, that will perhaps become even

less meaningful over time.

We are working with the MBA through the adaptable and accessible display home to try and encourage the private sector to build it. The other issue we're trying to address through looking at it on a site-specific basis is the principle of allowing people to age in place. Generally if we have to undertake new construction, which is really the only efficient way to make it adaptable and accessible, then it's likely that we'll have to move people from their current locations. I don't think that really satisfies the test of allowing people to age in place.

MS DUNDAS: I think you've put forward a very good argument for having a different output measure. But I must say that simply having a tenant satisfaction level of greater than 60 per cent doesn't provide us with all the information that you have just provided. If the survey is specifically asking whether or not tenants find their housing suitable for their needs, then maybe you should consider pulling out that measure and putting in the output classes.

Mr Hehir: Yes.

MR HARGREAVES: I have a couple of matters. One is a follow up from Ms Dundas's question and Mr Hehir's point about the satisfaction survey. I wonder if you can give us a bit of an idea of the sorts of things, other than those you have just mentioned, which would make people dissatisfied—and what you're doing about it.

Mr Hehir: I can. I may go back and give you a little bit of background, if you don't mind. The national housing survey is undertaken every two years. We haven't performed particularly highly in it. In order to address that, the department has initiated its own biennial survey, which we'll take on the alternate years to the national housing survey. In addition to that survey we have recently undertaken some qualitative work with our clients to see what they like and don't like about the process, to allow us to work better towards meeting the needs of our clients.

Many of us had the opportunity to attend the seminars behind one of those funny mirror things, which was a really interesting process. I found the results very interesting. Our tenants are very satisfied with the locations of their properties. They're very grateful that they have the opportunity to live in public housing—that it's available for them. They also generally think that the accommodation is suitable. There are other performance measures where we don't do very well.

MR HARGREAVES: Like?

MRS DUNNE: Yes. Thank you, Mr Hargreaves.

MRS BURKE: Come on, own up!

Mr Hehir: Probably the most significant one is maintenance. We're working with our total facility management contractors to improve their level of response to the maintenance issues. The other one which is of particular importance to us as service providers is stigmatisation, which our clients feel greatly. We need to be very conscious of that when we're dealing with them and working with them. We have been at pains to

talk to our staff about the need to respect people. I think it's important to recognise—and I think the chair previously recognised this—that very few of our clients are difficult. We have many wonderful clients. The story in the paper today about one of our clients was fascinating, and we see them every day.

Mr Wood: He needs a bigger apartment, I can tell you.

Mr Hehir: I don't know whether he has asked for one. We're certainly very conscious of those issues and the need to work with our clients. That is where the tenant participation project will hopefully bear a great deal of fruit.

MR HARGREAVES: You talk about one of the major ones being maintenance. I think my colleagues will agree that half of the complaints we get in our offices would have to be about housing—as you would know, because we refer them to you. When I look down at the cost of tenancy management and property management, I see you have gone up essentially \$4 million on that. Presumably that's linked to an increased number of properties to start with. Does that signal an increase in funding for repairs and maintenance?

Mr Hehir: There are a number of factors in that performance measure, including repairs and maintenance, water rates and water consumption. I might digress here to give another piece of praise for our tenants. Over the nine months to March they achieved a reduction of 21 per cent in their water consumption. That was an excellent effort and shows just how civically minded they are. More importantly, over the summer months they achieved a 36 per cent reduction against what they've previously done. That was certainly interesting for us, and it also saved us a bit of money. There are general rates, the private leasing costs, depreciation, amortisation, land tax, body corporate fees, insurance, employee costs, interest and overheads.

MR HARGREAVES: It would be very helpful if you could give us a copy of that. You seem to be reading from a schedule.

Mr Hehir: I can do that.

MR HARGREAVES: One of the comments I get, not infrequently, from tenants about repair and maintenance is that the department seems to run out of money fairly quickly. That's presumably because there is a fair backlog of things to be done. I wouldn't have a quarrel with that. It seems to be a common comment year after year. I just wondered: is it a piece of fairy tale? Is the program of major repairs and minor repairs nicely spanned over the year, or do you respond very quickly and then run out of dough halfway through the year?

Mr Hehir: I will start with the answer but I might get Ms Lambert to talk about some more general things. One of the things I failed to mention is that the clients were very happy with our response to emergency repairs. Apparently we're very good in being responsive to emergency repairs. We pay attention to that and our TFMs respond very well. There is about \$27 million allocated to repairs and maintenance. There have been any number of figures quoted around the place about what the backlog of maintenance was at the time of handover from the federal government to the ACT government. I think Treasury like to use a figure of approximately \$100 million for backlog of maintenance

at that point in time.

Mr Wood: We got very run down stock!

Mr Hehir: There is no doubt that that's an issue. The truth of the matter we won't know for another few months, where the condition assessments or condition audits—depending on what phrase you prefer—of the properties is underway. That is the piece of information that will tell us just what the state of the stock is overall. That's key information for us for planning our maintenance and getting more value for our money, to ensure that we can satisfy more people. Quite frankly, it's very difficult to plan unless you have a good knowledge of the asset—a point Mrs Dunne was referring to earlier.

MR HARGREAVES: I might have a few complaints go through my office, but I like to consider them in the context of how many thousands of tenants we have. We're talking about a number less than 20. I just wanted to let you know that context as well.

Mr Hehir: I appreciate that point.

Ms Lambert: I was going to mention the fact that we are applying a lot of scrutiny to the performance of our total facilities managers at the moment and working, as much as we can, to make sure that they are very clear about our expectations in relation to tenants' needs. We are working very closely with them. Martin meets with them regularly and we will, of course, be going through the process next year of testing the market again.

MS DUNDAS: Mr Hargreaves talked about the cost of property management and how that increased, and Mr Hehir was going to provide us with a list. The cost of tenancy management has increased and both these figures have gone up by a significant amount. If you look down the 2003-04 targets list, you will see that we thought we were going to get 11,560 properties with the third appropriation bill and that it was still only going to cost us \$78 million to manage those properties.

Now that we think we're going to have less properties, the cost of management has gone up. We're housing less new tenants than we originally thought, and yet the cost of tenancy management has also increased significantly. You've answered the part about property management to a certain degree, but why is tenancy management costing more when we've got less tenants than we would have expected to have?

Mr Hehir: This goes to some of my earlier conversations about the areas of growth, particularly in our expenditure, and why it becomes a problem when we've got a fairly flat growth in our revenues. Employee costs are growing—there is certainly an increase there. It is not an insignificant increase when you combine employee and superannuation expenses—that is nearly a million dollars. Administrative expenses have increased dramatically. There is a list of those on page 271 which identifies what those increases are about.

There are increased costs arising from the value of the stock. Even though depreciation is not a cash cost, it does impact on our bottom line and is taken into account. So there is an increase of \$800,000, or nearly a million dollars, against that line item as well. There are a number of things that, as we work through, will add up. There is also the grants program. They're all factors that add to our total cost.

MS DUNDAS: So to a certain extent the cost of tenancy management isn't dependent upon the number of tenants you have?

Mr Hehir: No; it's a total figure. It's not divided. It's not per tenant; it's the cost of tenancy management.

Dr Adrian: It shows one of the issues of the change in the nature of the tenants over time as well. As there is an increased number of tenants on rental rebates, we've had discussions earlier about the nature of some of the tenant support functions that are increasingly required. This is one of the downsides of that in the sense that, on a per unit basis, it is costing you more to provide those sorts of support services—as good and desirable as they are—at the same time as your revenues aren't increasing.

MS DUNDAS: In respect of tenancy management, properties are being kept with the contractors for repairs and maintenance work for longer periods than expected for routine maintenance, as is noted in the budget papers. Why is that? Is that because the contractors are having problems finding staff to do the work, or is routine maintenance now more significant than it used to be?

Mr Hehir: I might hand over to Ms Sheehan and see if she can answer this one.

Ms Sheehan: Could I clarify that?

MS DUNDAS: I'm quoting from footnote 11 on page 279 which says that the property management measure "is below target as a result of properties being with the contractors for repairs and maintenance work for longer periods than expected for routine maintenance work". The simple question is: why? Is it because what we consider routine maintenance has increased?

Mr Hehir: I might answer the second part of that question, or answer that question in part, by referring to what the second part of that explanation is. There are a number of properties we hold which people just aren't very attracted to. They sit vacant for quite a substantial period of time and are very difficult to let.

MS DUNDAS: I understand that part of the question. That part of the footnote is quite easy to understand—that there are properties that people don't want—but I don't understand why contractors are taking longer. There may be a simpler way of putting that question.

Ms Sheehan: I think the simplest way of answering your question is to say that the budgets we allocate to our total facilities managers consist of responsive repairs and maintenance, planned repairs and maintenance and capital upgrades. What's happened in the last year is that a lot of the work has been done under the budget category of repairs and maintenance, rather than under the planned upgrade category.

When it comes to looking at the time taken in the category, although it's work that absolutely needs to be done, it's in a different category. Perhaps I could compare it to something we were speaking about before. Some of the payments we make to community organisations have been taken out of the grants and put into expenses

because, in this instance, it's a better way of characterising it.

MS DUNDAS: So there is more responsive work being done than planned work?

Ms Sheehan: It's being done under that category of the budget, yes. As Mr Hehir was saying before, over time we are hoping to move to the situation where, as we get the baseline information about the state of all of our properties, instead of expending more and more money in responsive repairs—we know the state of the properties—we have a planned maintenance and upgrade program. That's the sort of thing we will definitely address over time.

Mr Hehir: We are having discussions on that with our TFM's right now.

MRS BURKE: Mr Hehir, I would just like to follow on in this whole vein. I'm very pleased to see that you are monitoring the RFT's performance. We talked about value for money earlier. I have concerns that we're getting value for money—I'll just put that on the record. I won't ask you to divulge any of the things you're doing at the moment. We've seen some increase in costs and you've explained those to me, but wasn't this outsourcing measure aimed at saving money? That was my understanding. Do you believe there are considerable savings that can be made? Are you looking at other ways of being able to provide maintenance?

Mr Hehir: It wasn't intended to save money as such. We weren't looking at reducing our budget for this area. What it was intended to do was deliver a higher number of services. There is some evidence to suggest that we are getting a higher number of properties repaired with the money we're getting. We're the first jurisdiction to move to this total facility management style of maintenance management and I think we have learned some things from that. I believe that the importance of having a condition audit assessment in place at the start of the process was not recognised. We clearly recognise that now, which is why we're driving so hard to have the condition assessments completed.

It is not possible to plan. You make real savings when you plan maintenance and get good batches of work done together. That's how you manage to get more value for your money. To be blunt, I think that in our inexperience in going to this style of contract, we didn't realise just how significant an issue that was. We do realise it now.

MRS BURKE: Do you think you're too far removed from the coalface now? That is the feeling I have. Your client satisfaction surveys are clearly telling you that there are some issues. Do you think now that Housing ACT is too far back from that particular function?

Mr Hehir: No, I don't think so. I'm still happy with the concept of a TFM. We certainly need to work on communication and management and have our TFMs perform properly.

MRS BURKE: Isn't it adding another layer of financial output in some way though—surely?

Mr Hehir: No. The theory is that it won't. It's meant to take resources that you would have had in place and allow professional people, who do this sort of business across other states and in other areas, to apply their expertise—expertise that's very hard for a

small jurisdiction to get in place—to the planned maintenance works. Having a look at that, we'd go there. In respect of the value for money comments, all I can say is that my understanding is that there was a tender process undertaken and that they believed the outcome of that tender process would deliver value for money.

MRS BURKE: How did you know it was value for money comparing that tender—

Ms Lambert: Can I just say—

MRS BURKE: Sorry. Can I just finish this train of thought? How did you know that that was value for money compared to the RFT, say for the other works that we've discussed earlier today? Who gave you the advice to say that that was so?

Mr Hehir: The contract predates me quite a bit.

Ms Lambert: And me.

MRS BURKE: I realise it was done under a former government but I am standing here questioning: can we get better value for money now? You've had three years to do that—not you necessarily.

Mr Wood: We want to get better value for money—I think we have to. That's part of the work between officers and the TFMs at the moment—to ensure that we get better value for money. I don't know how it was when Totalcare was doing it. It was still, I would have thought, a separation from housing in a direct way. They were the former maintenance people.

MRS BURKE: It just seems we have another layer of people to be paying out for administrative overhead costs that we could perhaps not have. I don't know. We are learning from what we've got now and from what we used to have. I am sorry, Ms Lambert. You were going to say something.

Ms Lambert: I was just going to say—and I say this with all due respect—that this is not something we set in train. Since this organisation has been formed we have gone through a series of processes, including a significant external audit, to determine where our focus needs to be. As I said earlier, I think in responding to Mr Hargreaves, we will be testing whether this is the best value for money. We need to make sure, in the meantime, that our tenants have someone who is servicing them in respect of repairs and maintenance.

MRS BURKE: Absolutely. You made the statement that I wanted to hear—thank you.

MS DUNDAS: We're also seeing—and I couched this one knowing that you are doing a lot of good work in this area, but—

MR HARGREAVES: Here comes a backhander!

MRS DUNNE: This is an estimates committee and there is always a 'but'!

MS DUNDAS: No. I don't want the answer to be about all the good work you're doing

because you've already told us of all the good work you're doing. And I believe that you're doing a lot of good work in this area.

THE CHAIR: It is the 'but'!

MS DUNDAS: But why is the output measure of the percentage of clients more than eight weeks in rent arrears disappearing? Or why are you reframing it to be a more realistic measure of possibly 12 weeks, considering the work you're doing?

Mr Hehir: That measure was removed quite deliberately. It's not about the overall level of performance and worrying about the comparison. The reason it was removed was because it was counterintuitive to what we are doing. Where you have a measure that requires you to keep the overall level of debt as low as possible below eight weeks, that means that you won't take the time to work with clients who are in serious trouble; it means that you won't take the time to try and sustain their tenancies. What you will do is boot them out as quickly as possible.

As soon as they hit eight weeks you take them into the rental tenancies tribunal. You move them around the circle; they come in at the other end and start on the waiting list again. That's counterintuitive to what we're trying to do. It was a very conscious decision to remove that because that did drive a management philosophy which is different from the one that we are trying to put. I know you don't want us to talk about all the good things we do!

MS DUNDAS: No, I'm not saying don't talk about it. I just didn't want the answer to be, "Well, it's because we're doing all this good work."

Mr Hehir: It was a really conscious measure. It takes people eight weeks to get into a more than eight-week level of debt, obviously. But, when it comes to how long you can take to engage with some clients, that's not a very long time. If a client has substance abuse, domestic violence or mental health issues, it can take much longer than that to engage with them properly and get supports in place.

Having that measure there was really driving a philosophy of sending one letter—bang; then a second letter; notice to vacate; bang—you're into the tribunal! It really was a very process-driven approach. That's not what we're about. We are building on our understanding developed with the homelessness strategy, where a large percentage of clients within refuges come from housing. They were slightly in and out of housing. That's not about providing any high level of stability for their lives. It's creating more stability. It's making them less likely to be able to sustain a tenancy. It was a very conscious decision that we didn't want to send that message.

MS DUNDAS: I think that's a very good answer and a very good policy to be taking on. Bearing in mind the way estimates committees work and having an overview of how that's progressing, has there been any thought of possibly developing a new measure that talks about a satisfactory outcome of helping tenants with complex needs? I know that's a bit hard to judge but the idea is to work people through their debt period so that they're sustaining their tenancy at the other end without that extra support. Is there a way of measuring that? We can then see if the complexity of issues you're dealing with is rising, and whether you need more support.

Mr Hehir: We did have a look at those issues and the measures are really quite complex. I might talk about debt for a brief period. At the moment, as discussed earlier, it's about \$840,000. That's up from December 2003, when it was about \$660,000 or \$650,000, but it's down from June 2001, when it was \$1.1 million. Debt fluctuates for a number of reasons. It's not that we don't want to manage debt; we want to manage debt very effectively because for our clients it is an enormous stress to have to pay an extra five per cent, which is the only bit that we need to do. It is the only amount we will charge for our rebated tenants. We will only charge another five per cent to get them to start repaying the debt.

We work very quickly to engage but it's not always possible. That's a focus Ms Fletcher has been working on—to make sure that they're very responsive and that they get in there very quickly and start measures to engage as quickly as possible. With all that work, we horrified the minister by showing just how many steps there are in the processes we take. And it wasn't just the minister who was horrified. As far as trying to contact and work with the client to get them into a repayment schedule is concerned, it's too complex and there are too many variables to measure simply. We put our minds to it. I must admit that—maybe I've failed in my job—I didn't really come up with a great measure that I felt was simple.

MS DUNDAS: I understand it would be difficult but, if we can see that the level of work being done by Housing ACT is increasing in complexity because we're having more people with more issues front to public housing, then that gives us another tool to go to the Treasurer to say that maybe housing needs more resources.

Ms Fletcher: Certainly for internal management. We took some pleasure in mapping out the entirety of our debt management process. I work with my housing managers and regional managers about managing debt. When we're working with those figures we constantly keep an eye on the debt figure and the number of tenancies that are in arrears at any given point. One of the things is that we immediately look at the current rental account. If the debt is reducing, then those are put to one side because they're people who are making payments on their arrears who are in an agreement or dealing with a consent order through the tribunal. Whilst we continue to support those clients, we don't continue to harass them because they're working on those issues.

The focus in the work within Housing ACT, in respect of addressing debt issues, is where the housing managers are up to; how they are contingent; to engage the client; how they are engaging with community services, the community organisations and other government support agencies; and what other avenues we can follow to engage with our tenants who are getting themselves into those circumstances. As you can imagine when someone stops, for whatever reason, making rent payments or is falling into arrears, quite often Housing ACT are the people they'd rather not talk to while they're trying to work those issues out, so it becomes harder and harder.

Certainly working with the preventing eviction program with community services; working with a housing manager specialist, working with a range of community organisations, and indeed on occasions working with government agencies and the community advocate's office to go through those issues is where we're focusing: can we engage; have we tried these other mechanisms of engagement; is there some form of

legislative responsibility if we have concerns that non-payment of rent is merely a symptom? We're working through those processes. It is extremely difficult to measure but, as we continue to work through the processes, we can continue to look at how we might be able to capture the flavour of what's going on within it.

Ms Lambert: The annual report might help in this regard as well. We might see what we can do in that context where we've perhaps got more opportunity to make qualitative rather than quantitative comment. The issue with this one of course is how we do accounting in the audit sense.

THE CHAIR: Could you provide the committee with information as to how many tenants are currently in arrears and repaying the debt and how many were in a similar situation as at, say, 30 June or 1 July last year—whichever is the most convenient date?

Mr Hehir: I can give you answers about some level of that up front. About 486 tenants have debt in excess of \$500. Five hundred dollars is one of our measuring points, which we think is a relevant one. Of those, 70 per cent are in repayment agreements right now and we're working with the others.

THE CHAIR: That's through direct debit, I take it.

Mr Hehir: That's generally the requirement. If they go to the tribunal they do that. That's not necessarily a requirement if we enter into an agreement without going to the tribunal. We certainly monitor to make sure that they continue to pay.

MRS BURKE: Looking at the debt, what percentage of the debt is doubtful—perhaps you can give me that in a dollar or monetary figure—and what percentage is bad debt written off? Are you able to provide those sorts of figures?

Mr Hehir: Bad debt written off wouldn't be in our current debt.

MRS BURKE: No bad debts written off were in the current debt of \$1.21 million?

Mr Hehir: I'd need to check.

MRS BURKE: I'm happy to take that on notice if you want to join it in with that. Can you confirm or otherwise 84 evictions last year and I think three this year? Is that correct?

Mr Hehir: There have been 35 so far this year.

MRS BURKE: So there were 84 last year and 35 this year?

Ms Fletcher: There were 89 last year.

MRS BURKE: Thank you for your correction. Is this true or not? Have there been incentives given to tenants who would sign on a Monday or a Friday? I just need to clear that up. Does anybody know anything about that at all?

Ms Fletcher: Perhaps what your information is referring to is the fact that there has been

a change to the program. One of the issues we came across, particularly when we engaged with community services and community organisations, was the barriers to entering public housing with the requirement to come up with two weeks rent in advance, plus the rental period.

MRS BURKE: That's community?

Ms Fletcher: No, this is in public housing.

MRS BURKE: Thank you.

Ms Fletcher: The department made a change to the public housing rental assistance program to give what has been referred to as a rent holiday for that first payment requirement on starting a new tenancy with public housing. It means that they'll get a minimum of two weeks but, depending on whereabouts in the week they sign up, the dollar figure varies because our rent period runs from a Sunday to the Sunday. We didn't want to start mucking around with part-weeks.

MRS BURKE: What is the expense to the government of waiving that cost in a financial year?

Ms Fletcher: My recollection is that it made a cash impact of about \$35,000 a year.

Mr Hehir: No, it was a bit more than that. Apparently, it was about a quarter of a million dollars.

Mr Wood: But it had a major impact on people's accessibility. It was a very important measure.

Mr Hehir: Looking at who our clients were, the people who were coming into the system, they were least likely to have two weeks rent set aside. They were people in serious crisis. So it was a major barrier for those people most in need to come into the system.

MRS BURKE: Is that mentioned anywhere at all? Where does that fall within the budget?

Ms Lambert: Again, we would comment on those things in the annual report. They're not necessarily things that we have here. But we were very public about these changes; I think it was at the end of last year. That, again, came about as a result of two things: one was the sector talking to us quite extensively about barriers to public housing and, secondly, homeless people themselves as part of the consultation we went through in talking about the things that prevented them getting into the public housing system. That was one of them that we sought to address. The minister gave quite an extensive media release at the time, I think, about that.

MS DUNDAS: Is the debt review team up and running yet?

Ms Fletcher: The debt review committee has had one meeting. Yesterday, the members of the committee wanted to get together and have a planning session to work through

experiences they'd had with that first meeting. It's quite an interesting cultural experience for the members of it, because we've got representatives from the housing review committee, the essential services committee, and treasury, who've generously given of their time to attend.

MR HARGREAVES: They're sweethearts, aren't they!

Ms Fletcher: In this case, they are being extremely helpful both to us and to the representatives on the committee. Housing ACT arranged for a facilitator so that the committee members could meet to work through issues in terms of the need to meet face-to-face with the clients or not, whether they thought that was valuable, because there were some differences between how the housing review committee and the essential services consumer council had operated in that regard.

There were issues about whether the information that was being provided during the pilot period of the two committee organisations was sufficient or whether there was additional information they were requiring from housing. Also, just some issues about clarifying their thinking about issues such as gender balance and representation of sectors of the community when particular people's cases were to appear before the committee. So, as I understand it, there are three agreed issues that they wish to be taken back to the debt working group, and I'm hoping to convene a meeting of that group next week to go through those recommendations so that it can be wound into the process.

MS DUNDAS: Has the debt review committee actually discussed any debt review cases?

Ms Fletcher: Yes, they had their first meeting towards the end of March, as I recall, and cases appeared.

MS DUNDAS: Were those cases dealt with or were they paused while they tried to work out these other issues?

Ms Fletcher: They've been paused at this point because the decision making at the end of the day in terms of any recommendation to waive debt actually has to be made in treasury and is not an issue for this department. They needed to be quite clear in their own thinking so they weren't disadvantaging either the delegate under the Financial Management Act or, indeed, the client and the advocacy agency that was working on the client's behalf by not having considered all the issues. Because they were done as a paper-based exercise in that sense, the committee wanted to spend the planning days first so that they could revisit those cases and send them on their way.

MS DUNDAS: Don't expect any cases to be fully dealt with until some time next month.

THE CHAIR: Turning to output class 1.2 on pages 280 and 281 of BP4, I have a question to start with. I note under quantity concerning the community housing occupancy rate you have 97 per cent, 97 per cent, and then the percentage vanishes. Footnote 6 says that the measure for the community housing occupancy rate has been transferred to be a quality measure in 2004-05. Could you tell us why?

Ms Sheehan: If you look down the output measures to quality and effectiveness, it does

appear there again. So the figure will be stated so that it's available to the Assembly. But in terms of what that tells us about community housing, we see that as an issue about the quality of the service that is being provided rather than the quantity of the service. So it's simply a classification issue. The information will be provided, but merely under a different heading.

MRS DUNNE: The number of community housing tenancies is down and the footnote says that the measure for 2004 for the number of community housing tenancies is below target due to delays in the delivery of a number of projects, mainly as a result of planning approval delays. Come on, give me some ammunition! I'm going to see the minister.

Ms Sheehan: The major project which is being delayed is the Gungahlin boarding house. That will provide 20 tenancies.

MRS DUNNE: That went into the AAT.

Ms Sheehan: That was in the AAT, yes.

MRS DUNNE: So it wasn't ACTPLA's fault at all.

THE CHAIR: That's a change.

Ms Sheehan: The other projects that have been delayed were discussed or raised briefly earlier today, but I can quickly outline those. Those are projects that were funded under the first round of the community housing capital funding where the projects are under way but the transfer of land or the direct grant or the direct sale of land is proceeding but hasn't occurred yet and, because that hasn't occurred, we haven't established the tenancies.

MRS DUNNE: So you're doing the DAs and the establishment of the leases at the same time.

Ms Sheehan: That all has to happen and then the building has to occur.

MRS DUNNE: Like the Abbeyfield one, for instance.

Ms Sheehan: That's right. This won't appear in either the property numbers or the tenancy numbers until those projects are complete. Because we were hopeful and optimistic, as we like to be, about the delivery of services, we did put them into our targets, but unfortunately they weren't delivered.

MRS DUNNE: And, like all other proponents and developers, you know that it's foolish to be optimistic when you're going to deal with the planners.

Ms Sheehan: I think it's good to be optimistic.

MRS DUNNE: Mr Hehir will be able to turn that round with his inside knowledge.

Mr Hehir: I have never worked for the planning authority.

20 May 2004

MRS DUNNE: At least the leases will be done properly and the land allocation done quickly.

MRS BURKE: I'm just wondering whether the minister might have been slightly frustrated in his plans to move certain projects forward. You can answer if you want.

Mr Wood: I'll say I remain optimistic.

MS DUNDAS: In terms of the output measure of quality effectiveness, you're moving away from the customer satisfaction survey to a funded organisation satisfaction survey. Who was the customer in that initial survey? Was it actual tenants of community housing or was it community housing administrators?

Ms Sheehan: It was tenants. The problem with the measure was the collection of the measure initially. As Mr Hehir said earlier, every two years there was a national tenants satisfaction survey for public housing and every other year there was a national one for community housing, but the decision has been made to survey during the same year. This was the year that the community housing survey was to have happened but, because of the decision to roll it in with public housing, it has been delayed for a year. It turned out to be not a measure that we could access as readily as we would like to. Every second year was not as immediate as we would like, so we've moved to a measure that we will conduct ourselves and we'll do annually.

MS DUNDAS: Which hasn't been reported in this output as yet.

Ms Sheehan: We are just about to begin the survey.

MS DUNDAS: So we will actually get a tenant satisfaction survey as well as the organisation survey.

Ms Sheehan: We will, yes. In future we will, but what we will report on next time is the providers of community housing, who will be surveyed very shortly.

MS DUNDAS: So there will be a delay of a year before we again see what the tenants are doing or how the tenants are feeling.

Ms Sheehan: Before it's reported nationally, but it will be reported nationally in the way that the public housing tenant satisfaction survey is reported nationally.

MRS BURKE: I have a question about timeliness and the reference to contract payments disbursed within contracted timeframes. Can you explain the figures there for the estimated outcome and targets for 2004-05?

Ms Sheehan: There was a glitch, if I can use that word, in the payment of contracts in one quarter. The reason for that was that as the department was forming and organising itself there was simply a processing issue of invoices having to be transferred from Belconnen to Civic and then out again.

MRS BURKE: How many contractors did that affect?

20 May 2004

Ms Sheehan: It affected most of the payments to the community housing contracts. As you see, about seven or eight. It was simply a matter of days. The payments were between two and three days late. It has been addressed now and, as you will see in the quarterly output reports which were tabled in the Assembly for the most recent quarter, that has been removed and payments are on schedule.

Ms Lambert: I'm advised that the delay was minimal; in fact, two days is what I've been told.

MRS BURKE: Thank you. I have taken note about the report, too.

MS DUNDAS: The number of housing program service contracts administered has dropped. As to the actual number of community housing properties, is that only the number of properties in relation to those service contracts that are administered by the department?

Ms Sheehan: Will you say the question again or will I say back to you what I think you're asking me? Maybe it would be better if you asked me the question again.

MS DUNDAS: Is the number for community housing properties for all community housing properties in the ACT?

Ms Sheehan: Yes, it is.

MS DUNDAS: So you do count all of the community housing properties, not just the ones that the government has a role in service contract administration.

Ms Sheehan: We have contracts with all of the community housing providers and they're required to report to us, because of the contractual arrangements, on the number of properties they have and they do report to us. That's how we get the figures here to report on.

MS DUNDAS: Okay. I will focus, then, on the quantity in relation to the number of community housing program service contracts administered, which dropped because of the resignation of a government representative director from the board of the community housing provider. No, maybe this is a better way of asking the question—

Ms Sheehan: I can very simply tell you what that was, which was a contract to arrange for that payment. That payment doesn't have to be made and therefore that contract doesn't—

MS DUNDAS: Does the contract still exist? You say you have a contract with all the community housing service providers in the ACT.

Ms Sheehan: Yes.

MS DUNDAS: How many contracts do you have?

Ms Sheehan: We have seven. I can provide you with a list.

MS DUNDAS: Did somebody cease to be a community service provider during the year?

Ms Sheehan: It's about a number of contracts rather than about service provision itself and we'll provide for you a list of the contracts that we have and a list of community housing services that we have.

MS DUNDAS: Okay. That might clarify it. I'm just getting confused about how a government representative director resigning changes the make-up of community housing in the ACT.

Mr Hehir: I think it just goes to what the definition of what a housing program service contract was. It was obviously broad enough to include that.

Ms Sheehan: A contract for the payment for that director, which no longer has to occur.

MS DUNDAS: Okay, that makes more sense. It was a contract for an actual body as opposed to a contract for the delivery of a house.

Ms Sheehan: Yes.

MRS BURKE: I have a question in relation to the higher turnover of tenants, particularly at Havelock House. It seems to contradict what you were saying earlier, but is this just pertaining to the community-supported housing sector as opposed to the way you say it in ACT Housing, the main sector, if you can put it that way, that keeping their tenancies is fairly static, so there's not a lot of movement? Does this also include Ainslie Village? You're saying Havelock House and you've often linked those, yet you're saying that a lot of the people at Ainslie have lived there for 15 years. Can you just explain that for me, the number of community housing applicants housed?

Ms Sheehan: At the moment, the residents of Ainslie Village are not tenants under the community housing program. They have, essentially, a licence agreement with Centacare, who provide accommodation for them; so their tenancies don't appear in these figures, no. The tenancies that occur here are tenancies however defined and managed by community housing providers and then they report to us on tenancies. Of course, tenancies can be a different number from housing because, as mentioned there, Havelock House is one property but has nearly 100 tenancies. Some group houses would be one property but would have multiple tenancies.

MRS BURKE: You said that there is a high turnover. Where are the people going? What are you doing? I think somebody alluded to that earlier. Where do they go?

Ms Sheehan: For example, Havelock House is the one where there was a higher than expected turnover. Havelock House has quite a number of young people and quite a number of young people who are students. Havelock House may suit their needs for a certain period of time and then it doesn't suit their needs after that. So it's not a question of not sustaining a tenancy so much as people having a choice about where they would like to live and then exercising that choice, which is something that we would certainly support and we want to see Havelock continue to support people to make those choices.

MRS BURKE: Do they go out into other tenancy agreements under ACT Housing, for instance?

Ms Sheehan: They may. They are certainly eligible for public housing. Also, Havelock Housing Association has properties offsite as well and all tenants, because of the model of housing provision, which is that tenants are involved in the management of the housing, become a member of the association and they can move on to tenancies elsewhere in the Havelock housing group.

MRS BURKE: I want to talk to you about community housing in the broader community—the salt and pepper approach, I think you call it. Do you feel that that is working satisfactorily and do you think that you've got your supported networks for those people up to speed? I am still getting complaints in my office that we try to sort out, but it's a bit like putting out fires. We can always refine a system, but I'm concerned that we have some community housing properties in the midst of private complexes and that's causing still some problems. What are you going to do? What are your plans to keep enhancing the system so that they get the support they need?

Mr Wood: That's the issue we were discussing earlier.

Ms Sheehan: Yes, it is. With community housing providers, in the arrangements that we enter into with them, we provide funding for them to do tenancy management and to do support for tenants and they also sometimes have partnering arrangements with other support agencies. For example, Havelock Housing Association has a very successful partnering arrangement with the Richmond Fellowship and they support quite a number of group houses for people with mental health issues. We fund Havelock for a support worker for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants and so on.

We fund tenancy management, but we also provide funding where appropriate for a greater level of tenancy support and that assists people in community housing to sustain their tenancies and to have the same quality of life, standard of life and connectedness into the community that all of us would hope to have. It is really important in these situations to realise that people will require some support at different times of their lives. Support may stabilise a person's tenancy and they're going really well, then something might happen and that requires another period of support.

The way that it may come to the community housing provider's attention is that maybe there are rowdy parties or someone's behaviour deteriorates. That's a sign that support and assistance are needed and we do provide funding to give that support and assistance. We shouldn't expect that with one intervention someone is going to be right for the rest of their life. It can require interventions at different times of someone's life. But it is important to fund that and we do fund that.

MRS BURKE: I wouldn't disagree. I'm not sure if I heard the minister say at some stage that ACT Housing isn't in the business of case managing people—

Mr Wood: Sorry?

MRS BURKE: Have you not said, Minister, that ACT Housing isn't in the business of case managing its tenants?

Mr Wood: I don't know. It's obviously the case that we do.

MRS BURKE: But we need to; that's right. I was rather alarmed to hear you say that.

MRS DUNNE: I think you might have had a change of heart in the past few years, Minister.

Mr Wood: I don't know. I'd go back and see the record of what I said.

MRS BURKE: Some of the properties are within private complexes with a body corporate. Is community housing involved with the body corporate of such complexes? It was my understanding that maybe not all of them are. Is that something you're looking at?

Ms Sheehan: Community housing providers do have some properties in complexes where there is a body corporate. The most notable and successful example, I think, would be City Edge. Community Housing Canberra actually was the lead in that development and they do retain some properties at City Edge, as indeed we do for public housing. Yes, there is some involvement and again that's part of, as you were describing it, the salt and peppering of social housing tenancies throughout the community.

MRS BURKE: But I have had cases where people from these complexes have said that there seems to be no compliance with body corporate rules within some of the complexes and I've tried to bring those through to the minister's office. Maybe you could look at that where you've got these properties. Can you please make sure that there is some involvement?

Ms Sheehan: We do work with community housing providers. As I was describing before, sometimes that type of non-compliant behaviour probably is a sign that there's some sort of support needed and we do encourage and work with the community housing providers to offer that support to tenants. You can provide the support and the problem may be fixed, but then something else might happen down the track and again support would need to be provided. But that's part of life's rich tapestry, really, that need to provide support when it's required.

MRS BURKE: Tell that to the people who've paid hundreds of thousands for their houses. With every respect, these people need help and support. It just seems like we're putting out fires when the need comes. I'm alerting you or the minister and the fire is put out and then we go on. Isn't there a better way of managing this?

Mr Wood: I've also made the point—perhaps this is what you have picked up—that it's not just ACT Housing alone that deals with it. Primarily, we're not a social welfare agency, but increasingly, of course, we get drawn into those sorts of functions.

MRS BURKE: He has had a change of heart.

Mr Wood: So it's an all of government responsibility and there are occasions when circumstances arise when we enlist the assistance of all sorts of other agencies.

MRS BURKE: I've no problem with that. There just seems to be a lack of continuity of care perhaps for these particular people that we know may be problematic and we're putting them into a community with other people who are feeling torn, because they want to get along with these people and help them. Anyway, I don't want to belabour the point.

Ms Sheehan: It's not only public housing tenants that might have issues that mean that sometimes their neighbours aren't very happy with them. So it's a question about a level of support and tolerance from ourselves as community members to the people that live by us.

MRS BURKE: I am just hoping that the people that need the support are getting it and they don't just cut them loose.

Ms Lambert: I think it's always important to let us know about those instances, because we do have quite structured agreements. Ms Sheehan mentioned one before, the Richmond Fellowship partnership with Havelock House. That's a very important partnership for people with mental health issues. At the same time, in applying the national standards for mental health there are issues about people's rights. The person with a mental illness also has rights. Sometimes it's about actually knowing when to make the intersection and to make that information known.

MRS DUNNE: I want to go back to something that Mr Hehir raised before. On page 3 of the newsletter, which is very informative, there is reference to water efficiency. It's 22 per cent down and 36 per cent down on what?

Mr Hehir: The 22 per cent, I understand, was down on the nine months to March for the financial year and the 36 per cent was specifically over the summer period.

MRS DUNNE: This is very good, but the water restrictions required us to be down 40 per cent over the summer period. Was that not the case?

Mr Hehir: I must admit I don't know what the final outcomes were.

MRS DUNNE: I thought the stage 3 water restrictions were supposed to bring us down to 40 per cent of our base use—not 40 per cent from stage 2; 40 per cent from before stage 1.

Mr Hehir: If you have a look at the overall make-up of our properties—

MRS DUNNE: It's very hard to treat because you've got lots of flats and things.

Mr Hehir: Flats and multiunits, where most of your savings in water are actually in your external water use. So, with a large portion of our properties in the flat, multiunit complex and small townhouse style, I think that achievement was really quite significant.

MRS DUNNE: I just wanted to check on how it compared. Fantastic.

MR HARGREAVES: I would just like the *Hansard* to note that this is the last time Mr Wood will be appearing before any estimates committee as Minister for Disability,

20 May 2004

Housing and Community Services. He will be coming back to visit us tomorrow with his DUS hat on. I think that it is important to note that we've had a shift to having greater priority for people with a disability and that he has lifted the priority of housing and community services to such a degree that we're here talking about those issues today and they are not buried inside some other portfolio, which has happened in the past. I would just like to thank him for the successful transition and let the *Hansard* note that.

Mr Wood: Thank you, Mr Hargreaves. I sat here before and worked out that this was the eighth budget for which I have sat in this seat. In reflecting on all those years, I've never seen such an expansive discussion of housing. That's very good. Thank you. Long may it continue. I must thank the officers; they're brilliant.

THE CHAIR: All the housing and disability officers are excused and we will have the Department of Urban Services before us tomorrow on probably the minister's last day.

Ms Lambert: May I just say for the record, Mr Stefaniak, that the department also would like to place on record our great appreciation of the minister's leadership and support. We couldn't have done the things that we've been able to do without our minister's leadership and guidance and we're very pleased with that. We will miss it greatly.

The committee adjourned at 5.17 pm.