



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND DISABILITY

(Reference: Annual and financial reports 2003-2004)

Members:

MS K MACDONALD (The Chair)
MS M PORTER (The Deputy Chair)
MRS J BURKE

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

WEDNESDAY, 20 APRIL 2005

This is a **PROOF TRANSCRIPT** that is subject to suggested corrections by members and witnesses. The **FINAL TRANSCRIPT** will replace this transcript within 20 working days from the hearing date, subject to the receipt of corrections from members and witnesses.

Secretary to the committee:
Ms T Carling (Ph: 6205 0129)

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

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

The committee met at 9.30 am.

Appearances:

Mr John Hargreaves, Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, Minister for Urban Services and Minister for Police and Emergency Services

Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services—

Ms Sandra Lambert, Chief Executive

Dr Colin Adrian, Deputy Chief Executive

Mr Martin Hehir, Executive Director, Housing and Community Services

Ms Bronwen Overton-Clarke, Executive Director, Policy and Organisational Services

Ms Lois Ford, Executive Director, Disability ACT

Ms Rosalie Hardy, Senior Manager, Therapy ACT

Mr Adam Stankevicius, Senior Manager, Strategic Policy and Organisational Governance

Mr Ian Hubbard, Director, Finance and Budget

Ms Roslyn Hayes, Director, Disability ACT

Ms Helen Fletcher, Director, Housing ACT

Mr David Collett, Director, Strategic Asset Management, Department of Housing and Community Services.

THE CHAIR: I declare open this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Health and Disability. The committee is inquiring into 2003-04 annual reports, and I welcome you all here today. This morning we are taking evidence in relation to the annual report of the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services.

Before the committee starts taking evidence, for the benefit of those present I would like to note that this is a public hearing and a *Hansard* transcript of the proceedings is being made; there will be a short break for morning tea from 10.30 am to 10.45 am; and answers to questions taken on notice and additional information should be received by the committee no later than Thursday, 28 April 2005.

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

I would like to welcome Mr John Hargreaves, Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services. I understand that you are accompanied by Ms Sandra Lambert and Mr Colin Adrian. I see that Ms Overton-Clarke is also sitting at the table, and you have other senior executives sitting behind you. Minister—do you wish to make an opening statement?

Mr Hargreaves: Yes, I do. It gives me great pleasure to address this standing committee in relation to the 2003-04 annual report of the Department of Disability, Housing and

Community Services. I make this point before I go on: There has been a temptation in the past for people to wander off down cul-de-sacs. We will address, quite readily and quite happily, issues that have been reported in the annual report for the financial year 2003-04. You would be aware, because of the time of year, that information is being collected towards the annual report for 2004-05. If information relates to something in that, that will be the response.

I also draw to your attention that I am happy to discuss programs and issues—provided, of course, that they are either within the substance of the 2003-04 annual reports and/or are issues that have been identified within that report. Where we said we would do something, we will happily address those. Other than that, I am aware that the time we have is precious.

As one of the ACT government's youngest departments, the department of housing and community services has already delivered an enviable record of achievement. Importantly the department's record has struck an effective balance between innovative, forward-thinking policy development and the need to focus on the frontline of service delivery. The 2003-04 annual report, the second for the department, shows how they have built on these achievements.

In the development of new agencies it is interesting to reflect on the manner in which organisations establish and grow. Typically there are three phases of organisational development. These include storming, norming and performing. That sounds cute, doesn't it? I am sure that your colleague, Mrs Burke, knows all about the first one—the storming bit—but we will teach her about the norming and the performing as we go down the track!

MRS BURKE: I wait to be enlightened!

Mr Hargreaves: I know you do, and I am here to deliver just that bit of education. During its first year of operation in 2002-03, the department was in its storming phase—that process whereby services are better coordinated, common policies and procedures are established, cultures are integrated, backend functions are consolidated and staff get used to working with each other.

While this process of integration was occurring the department continued to deliver a range of services essential to the Canberra community. Briefly, for the information of members, some of the key achievements of the department in 2002-03 included:

- a coordinated response to the 2003 bushfires—that was a significant amount of work;
- extra funding for individual support packages in disability;
- the establishment of the Canberra emergency accommodation service;
- risk assessments for accommodation clients in Disability ACT;
- additional funding for community housing services;
- increased funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing;
- establishment of the disability innovation fund;
- establishment of Therapy ACT; and

- consultation on the ACT homelessness strategy and caring for carers policy, followed by additional funding in both areas.

The department was able to deliver a comprehensive set of outcomes—thanks, in no small part I think, to the leadership of its minister, my predecessor Mr Bill Wood, and its chief executive, Sandra Lambert. If 2002-03 was the period of storming for the department, then 2003-04 was the period of norming. This is the period we are discussing this morning.

In this phase the department was settling down and working to ensure constant improvements in the delivery of its frontline services, which saw it respond to a number of significant changes and challenges. The most important of these challenges is recognising and managing the high level of risk within the department.

The operations of human services agencies always engender a significant degree of risk, and the department is no different in this regard. These risks can range from catastrophic damage to our physical assets, or the death of a client, through to contracts not being delivered upon or services not being provided to a particular standard. It is a challenge to ensure that each of these types of risks is recognised, assessed and mitigated to the best extent possible.

The growing complexity of the department's client needs is one of the greatest challenges to be recognised and managed. Fortunately, the department has tackled this challenge head-on and is focusing on a higher level of service integration to respond to these needs.

Greater community services supports are being provided to public housing tenants through the community linkages program, and we are working on a better model for disability accommodation through the housing and tenancy reform working group. At this point I make the observation that the tenancy marketplace out there—the community—expects the territory to provide support to its tenants when its tenants are in trouble.

I observe, for the benefit of those members of the fourth estate who may be listening, and may in fact be looking at your good countenance, that the responsibility for looking after tenants who are a little bit at risk or troublesome is not carried by the private tenancy market. I think that is something to the eternal shame of the private rental marketplace.

The government of the territory has accepted its responsibility. Both colours of government, I might add for the record, have accepted this responsibility and I think it is to the credit and maturity of the parliament that we have done that. I put the challenge out to the private rental marketplace to accept their responsibility as well. It is a community activity when people are at risk.

In this period of norming, which is where the department was at in 2003-04, the department's strategic plan provided the framework in which it delivered its services and undertook valuable policy development work, both internally and across government. As the annual report shows, there were significant achievements under each of the department's strategic themes, which included engaging and involving our clients; improving outcomes for our clients; building better community partnerships; serving and

contributing to good governance; and performing as a best practice organisation.

It is noteworthy that this department works with its clients; it doesn't do things to its clients. Obviously the most important of these themes is the focus on improving outcomes for our clients. The focus on the frontline of service delivery is at the centre of all work undertaken by the department.

Whilst we all recognise that there will never be enough funding to meet every service need that exists in our community, the department continually strives to improve its service performance to clients within the means it has at its disposal. Some of the more significant achievements made by the department in 2003-04 include:

- the introduction of the active support model into seven Disability ACT homes;
- significantly expanding the range of services available to homeless individuals and families in the ACT, with the \$13.4 million in funding provided by the government;
- the piloting of the community linking and needs assessment service with 32 families and 26 individuals, to assist them in identifying their needs and building networks of community supports;
- increasing the funding available to people experiencing financial hardship through the increased funding for emergency relief agencies;
- consulting with disability clients and their families in relation to tenancy arrangements for people in individual support services;
- extensive consultations on a revised service delivery model for Therapy ACT, focusing on age groups;
- working with community groups to develop and implement the tenant participation program for public housing tenants;
- actively working with public housing clients to manage their debt, by intervening earlier when problems arise with client payments—something which is notably absent with private tenancy managers;
- amending the public rental housing assistance program to better support a range of clients experiencing specific problems such as attendance at detoxification programs, refugees, and domestic violence;
- replacing almost all of the public housing properties destroyed in the 2003 bushfires;
- opening Betty Searle House, which provides supportive accommodation for older women—something that I know you are particularly interested in, Madam Chair;
- expanding the supply of community housing through funding to Centacare, Billabong Aboriginal Corporation, Havelock House and the AIDS action council for innovative housing models; and most importantly, as outlined on page 54 of the annual report, the largest capital program, at \$86.5 million of annual expenditure, for public housing since self-government.

If we want to argue the toss about the provision of public housing, let us first acknowledge the extent to which it has been provided—at \$86.5 million. We can talk about that. A top-up may be needed. I have no problem about that, but let us recognise the extent of the provision in the first place.

These achievements have significantly impacted on the level of service delivery to many people in the Canberra community, in particular those in need of a roof over their heads. All of this work would not have been possible, however, without the dedication of the staff who work for the department. In the performing stage of a department's development it is the staff who are the critical success factor.

The staff of the department at all levels have been integrally involved in its development throughout the past three years. A series of consultative workshops, held in the first few months of the department's formation, led to the themes around which the department's strategic plan were developed.

Project management groups, involving all levels of staff from across the organisation, have driven an ongoing reform process in housing and community services over an 18-month period. Similarly, the reforms to the service delivery model in Therapy ACT have involved extensive consultations with staff and community groups.

With this in mind, it is particularly pleasing that the staff turnover level for the department has remained relatively low and, in fact, dropped between 2002-03 and 2003-04. The *State of the service* report, produced by the Commissioner for Public Administration, shows that employee-initiated separations from the department dropped from 90 in 2002-03 to 82 in 2003-04.

This is a very pleasing outcome for a department that deals with some of the most difficult and complex client situations across the ACT government. Information drawn for the department's separation survey and exit interview process highlights the reasons for which people are leaving the department, which include: better career opportunities; better pay and conditions; retirement; and moving interstate. It does not include low morale and it does not include people being worked to death, Madam Chair. I repeat—and this is from the separation survey and exit interview process from those very people who exited: better career opportunities; better pay and conditions; retirement; and moving interstate.

It is also very pleasing that the department's workers compensation claims are showing a downward trend. There has been a decrease in psychological injury claims, and total workers compensation claims look like being down further in 2004-05 from the 2003-04 period.

Staff achievements are also well recognised in the department, through the chief executive's staff awards, through which staff can be nominated for excellence in service delivery. The commitment to excellent service can be demonstrated by introducing innovative ideas; processes and procedures to improve service delivery; consistently displaying professionalism in service delivery; going the "extra yard" for the customer; and receiving commendations from members of the public for exceptional service.

Those awards are not possible without an ongoing dialogue between the departmental management and the people on the ground. That relationship is a very strong one within this department. The majority of staff receiving these awards have been from the department's frontline areas, including housing managers, Therapy ACT staff and disability support officers.

Since taking on the disability, housing and community services portfolio I have been impressed with the performance of the department and its clear recognition of its responsibilities. As I said earlier, they have found the right balance between focusing on the frontline of service delivery and developing innovative policies and strategies to provide the context for their work.

From the frontline service delivery staff through to senior management I have seen compassion for clients, dedication to service and a high degree of professionalism. I am proud to be the minister for an agency that works so hard to support individuals and build communities.

As an aside, I think I have presented myself to, or met, well and truly over 50 per cent of the staff within the department and I am constantly—not amazed, because I expect it—pleased, I suppose, and heartened by the staff dedication at every level: from the person who delivers the mail in the main office to the people in a disability support worker capacity. My officers and I look forward to questions from the committee on the 2003-04 annual report.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Minister, and thank you for that opening statement. I take on board the comment you made at the beginning about this being the 2003-04 annual report. I will try to make sure that I confine everyone, as much as possible, to this report. Ms Lambert, I would like to congratulate you on the way this report has been presented. I have to say, of all of the annual reports, it is probably the most readable I have seen. I am particularly impressed with volume 2 of the annual report, which has all the attachments, which are responses to different reports.

We are limited today because we need to finish at 12.30. You can never get through all the questions that you want to get through, and I am sure the committee is well aware of that. I would ask committee members, or anybody else from the Assembly who comes to asks questions, that, where possible, could you state which report and the page number you are referring to. For the most part, mine deal with volume 1 of the annual report.

On page 20, with respect to disability services and policy, can you provide further details of the relative financial contribution of the commonwealth versus the ACT government to disability services?

Mr Hargreaves: I will get the officers to give you specific detail but, as an overview, quite frankly, my exposure to the commonwealth, when disability ministers meet, indicates that the ACT punches well above its weight in terms of financial contribution—and always has, actually. It is a bit of shame that, when it comes to such things as GST revenues, there is a hypothecation, if you like—or, attempt at hypothecation—on the part of the federal government, particularly the Treasury. There is also some power placed on the minister, Senator Patterson, to try to restrict the amount of money available to the states by refusing to acknowledge some of the things that we do. So that is it, by way of background.

To pay the point to Senator Patterson, I think she has a difficult task, dealing with a very difficult Treasurer and that she often finds herself as the meat in the sandwich. I wish to publicly acknowledge the contribution she has made, and I am looking forward to having

greater discussions with her in the future. If you have a look at the numbers on page 20, you will see for the period July 2002 to 2007—it's a five-year period—we are talking about \$39 million going into the sector. I will get the officers to give you detail but I think this government has put the accent on disability support very significantly and, if anything, we take it up to the commonwealth and to some of our state colleagues, who are not doing as well as they could do.

Ms Ford: Over the life of the agreement, which started on 1 July 2002 and continues to June 2007, the ACT government has committed to growth to \$71 million, which is approximately three per cent. Additional to that through the life of this agreement, and from 2002 to 2007, the ACT government has committed an additional \$37.5 million. Twenty six million of that is recurrent and has gone into areas such as unmet need, the taxi subsidy scheme, high and complex need, intensive treatment and support services, autism assessment services, indexation and SACS award for the non-government organisations, including some infrastructure funding for non-government organisations that is non-recurrent, along with recurrent funding for those organisations. And \$11,000 of that \$37.5 million is indexation, which this government has committed to. The Commonwealth contribution, additional to the \$39 million over the life of the contract, has been \$802,000, which is a share of respite, which this government has committed to matching over a four-year period.

MS PORTER: Minister, on page 16 of volume 1 of the annual report, there are details of the steps to reform program following the board of inquiry into disability services. How successful have these been in the implementation stage?

Mr Hargreaves: Thank you very much, Ms Porter, for the opportunity to talk about this. I will ask Ms Lambert to elaborate and then she can distribute opportunities around the officers that want to let you know how well things are going. Before we do, I can say to you that one of the big steps to reform is to strengthen the partnership between the community and its government in the provision of services to the less well off.

If there is a single achievement of these reforms, a single success of these reforms, it has to be the way in which various elements of the disability sector feel free to engage with the government. I acknowledge Mrs Burke's attendance at the client-guardian forum. I fully expected, when I went to that forum—the committee should be aware that it is my intention to further my visits to all of these places, and they have been quite extensive so far—to see the old angry mob syndrome, but I did not see that. What I saw was a bunch of concerned people saying that they want some assistance and to be able to work together with the government and its parliament. There is this three-way partnership between the parliament, the community and the government in addressing these issues. I would suggest to you that possibly as little as five or six years ago that would not have occurred. What would have occurred would have been the angry mob syndrome; it did—and I went to a couple of things in those days.

I was very heartened that we can talk around the issues and find solutions together. Quite often, these meetings are an opportunity for individual people to pore out their particular concerns and their pain, and it is equally important that we are there to hear it. I was very pleased to see that that intangible part of the process of reform is actually bearing fruit.

Ms Lambert: At the outset, I would like to formally thank the two officers who were

responsible for the annual report, Adam Stankevicius and, particularly, Ms Tracy Chester, who did a lot of work on the annual report. They will be pleased to have that recognition, particularly Tracy, given the hard work that she did.

In relation to the steps to reform, it staggers me, frankly, how far we have come. At the launch of the government's response to the Disability Reform Group and the Gallop report's comments, when I first took over this portfolio at the beginning of the agency, I can remember saying as I read it and talked to the audience how daunted I was by the tasks ahead of us. I do go back to that and I still remain somewhat daunted, because the fact of the matter is that people with disabilities continue to be people whom we need to pay attention to and, while we have made significant progress, it would be foolish of me to say that we have got everywhere. We have not and there are still some things that we need to do.

But what I am particularly proud of—I pay full tribute to Ms Ford and Ms Hayes for this as well—is the way in which we have engaged the community. The thing that struck me most when I took over this portfolio or when I began in it was the alienation that there was between, if you like, the government department or the government players and the community. The hostility in that interaction was quite extraordinary, really. My view is that now we actually have the capacity to work openly.

We have done that in a variety of ways through the disability reform working groups, which are co-chaired, which was an innovation in itself. Ms Ford in particular took that on board. It has been tough having co-chairs and it has created a number of issues for us, but we have persisted with it. When we launched the future directions strategy, we thought that we would seek to wind up those groups, but the strength of the wish for community members to continue indicated the importance of those groups to them.

The response to the steps to reform strategy is on the internet and you can see the way in which we have dealt with all the recommendations there, but we still have some in relation to systemic changes that we need to pay attention to as we move forward, areas such as legislative reform and continuing to drive person-centred approaches. It is really difficult to work from the person backwards all the time and it is a challenge for organisations to do that, but we persist with that.

We have some real issues to work on in moving forward in relation to housing and tenancy management and, because we are the department for housing as well, we have some opportunities that we need to work through. Work force and quality improvement strategies continue to be issues that challenge us, work force ones in particular. In the building a skilled work force strategy, we are doing a lot of work on that and we need to continue with that.

Those are the areas that we need to continue to work on, but an enormous amount has been achieved. I do not know whether Ms Ford or Ms Hardy wants to talk a bit more about that and some of the things we do; but, in terms of the recommendations, we have completed probably about 30 of them fully, 113 are in the process of being implemented and there are others we are still working on. That is all I would like to say. Ms Ford may like to say some more.

Ms Ford: The reforms were about an improvement in the quality of disability services.

In relation to that, I think that we have made large strides forward, particularly around increasing the quality of services and things that would not normally be seen as increasing that quality, such as the boost to the non-government organisations structure. Over 2003-04, an additional \$900,000 went into the non-government organisations in relation to increased SACS awards, indexation, quality initiatives, equipment, technology and improving the technology of those organisations. Additionally, looking at some of our smaller organisations and assisting them to reposition themselves better in relation to their contracts and assisting our larger organisations to put in place better business structures for better sustainability.

Obviously, more and better services have gone into the ACT disability sector through individual support packages: an increase of \$4 million to \$6.8 million for individual support packages between 2002 and 2004; the introduction of CLANAS, the community linking and needs assessment team; increased housing through TAS Housing; the Centacare link program and the virtual support services themselves changing the way in which they deliver their accommodation services, taking on partnership roles and shared services roles; the establishment of a single therapy service; and more support for carers.

The introduction of training for staff in the non-government organisations sector and staff with an ISS certificate IV is aiming to improve the supervision and management skills of our disability support officers. Disability support worker forums four times a year provide an opportunity for disability support workers to get together to network and learn about the sector and the more strategic factors. It has been enormously pleasing to see that group of support workers come from both non-government organisations and our own agency at the DSO or support worker I level at the last two forums, which were organised with our support.

The first one was to learn more about future directions in disability services and the second one was about learning to serve their clients better. It was a very innovative type of networking event. The feedback from that has been very positive; in particular, the feedback around there not having been that opportunity for support workers to network in that way before, to share information, and to learn and build on their skills.

There has been sponsorship of families, carers and our own workers to attend both local conferences and national conferences to improve their skills, knowledge and understanding of what is best practice in the disability sector. I want to make mention also of the improvement to the taxi subsidy scheme, which has been increased to include 16-year-olds. Those types of achievements mean that people with disabilities can take their rightful place in the community as opposed to relying solely on specialist disability services, that people with disabilities can access generic services, take their place in employment, take their place in education and take their place in social and recreational events in the ACT.

So, in terms of improvement of quality, improvement of transparency and more and better services for people from Disability ACT, I think that the recommendations of the Gallop inquiry, whilst not fully implemented—and I have to say that I would suggest that they probably never will be in terms of infrastructure, because we will continue to change and shift the way we do things to continue to get more and better services—have been a success. It has been a great driver and a terrific vehicle for improving the lives of people with disabilities in the ACT.

Mr Hargreaves: Madam Chair, I have mentioned before that the big thing that is happening these days, which Ms Lambert alluded to a minute ago, is the relationship that we have with the community and with disability advocates. That means that we go to these sorts of meetings. I alert you to the roles of things such as the Disability Advisory Council. I have met with them and I have met on a number of occasions with Mr Craig Wallace, whom I would like to pay tribute to at the moment, because it is really good to see people with significant disabilities taking the leadership. We do not always agree with Mr Wallace and I also do not disagree with him all that frequently, either, but it is really good to see those sorts of people being involved. A visit with those people will soon reveal who is driving the bus. It is not us, I will tell you that.

I alert the committee to pages 167 to 175 of the same volume of the annual report, which list the major activities of a lot of these groups. You can let your fingers do the walking through this lot, but you will notice as you wander through those pages how there are many people who are not government employees in those groups, significant numbers. For example, the other day I met with the Housing Review Committee and we talked about some challenges facing the provision of affordable housing to people. If you look at the list of names there you will see that they are all people from the community. I draw the committee's attention to that. Do not forget that this was in 2003-04, a financial year ago, and we have built on those sorts of linkages and those community things. We cannot provide effective services to people with a disability in this town without their being on the bus with us.

Ms Lambert: I wish to add to what the minister and Ms Ford have said. One of the things that I appreciate about our relationship with the community is, if you like, the robustness of it. It is quite clear that people feel that they can come to us with issues and would have seen that we were there at the meeting at ACROD the other evening as well. I will continue to meet with groups such as the Client Guardian Forum and address their matters as well. I appreciate that they will speak to us openly and honestly. That is really important for us as we work forwards, because we are not always going to agree and we need to have that robust debate. We operate within the parameters, obviously, of government policy and the directions set in the response to the Gallop inquiry and subsequent policy directions from government, but I always appreciate the way in which the community will talk to us openly and bring their issues to us. That is very important to us as we build the partnerships that we want to have.

THE CHAIR: For the information of members of the committee and everybody else in attendance, I would like, because we are speaking about Disability ACT, to stay on that track for the moment.

MS PORTER: Minister, Ms Ford mentioned employment a minute ago and I would like to know what difference the access to ACT government strategy, mentioned on page 17 of volume 1, is making in terms of employing people with disabilities in the department?

Mr Hargreaves: I will get Ms Ford to answer the detail of your question. Fifteen to 20 years ago the equal employment opportunity policy was introduced. This was before self-government—I don't know which government of the day, federally, introduced this but it was a bloody great idea. It put the focus on employers to employ more women at

the senior ranks, which I support very significantly, and also to employ people with a disability. It started the focus on disability in a workplace and what it means. Most people think it is some character in a wheelchair: it isn't. It can be deaf people, blind people, people with an acquired brain injury, people with a genetic defect—any number of things. This has put the spotlight on it. What happened some time ago was that both the government sector and the private sector dropped the ball on employing people with disabilities and providing facilities for people with disabilities. I mean, the facilities stopped at having a ramp at the front of your building. That was about it. We didn't talk about having corridors a decent width. We didn't talk about having toileting facilities made appropriate. We didn't have other sorts of facilities, neither did we have any preferential treatment for people to be given management courses and training, and actually being encouraged to work at a level beyond their normal understanding, which we do with other people in the system. I am particularly pleased to see that we are turning the spotlight on to that again—we have got a long way to go but as long as we keep the spotlight on it and work cooperatively I think we will go a long way.

Ms Ford: I think it is significant that of the nine people with a disability who have been employed across the ACT public service during the three-month period, January to April, four of them have been employed within the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services. I think it is also fair to say that, once you put the spotlight on disability—in this instance disability and employment within the public service—it does raise the consciousness of everybody within the service. Whilst there are some tangible benefits in terms of people getting employment in the public sector, there are also the intangibles. That includes raising awareness amongst staff—their ability to interact much better with people with disabilities and their understanding of what some of the difficulties are. And, for people with disability in the workplace, they are not necessarily large difficulties. It does not necessarily mean a complete redrafting of the workplace or special technology or whatever. Sometimes it is just about the way in which they might relate to people, their communication or their physical attributes and the way in which they need to work.

Apart from employing people with a disability, the department has also developed Internet tools for managers on line. In terms of recruitment, planning and training, we have a dedicated officer to support managers and individuals with disability who are employed and that officer also interfaces with Disability Works Australia. We have a protocol with Disability Works Australia for the recruitment of people with a disability, which gives them some priority in relation to the length time that they have for making applications and also looking at positions. Also, right across government, the public service management standard has now been completed and is up on the web site. There is an MOU with Disability Works Australia, where they have done quite a lot of work within the department around briefing sessions, recruitment protocols being agreed and visiting other agencies looking at how we would recruit better into the workplace. The tangibles are that more people have been employed and of course the intangibles are the impacts that that has had on the department as a whole.

MRS BURKE: I have a question on page 18, volume 1, in relation to the applied behavioural analysis program pilot. I was pleased to see that there and that that has been happening. I heard Ms Ford mention the funding, among the many other things you have been funding, for autism. How successful was the pilot and are plans under way after the review to continue to utilise applied behavioural analysis as a tool in assisting children

with autism to gain further independence? You may not be able to answer this, given the outcome of the review that was to happen in 2004-05, and I am not sure whether that has happened, but will you continue to support the four children at Woden School?

Mr Hargreaves: I can answer part of that question. I think it is more appropriate that we await the result of that because that will be in the 2004-05 report. We need to understand that once something is evaluated we then have to decide what we are going to do about it. Those decisions are ongoing and are part of the living, if you like, and evolving decision making process which is a bit unique to Disability Act and to Sandra's department. I will get Ms Ford to talk about the four kids. One of the big challenges in recent times has been the emergence of autism as a community problem, and a grossly misunderstood one at that. This government acknowledges it significantly. It is acknowledged significantly around the states. It is very difficult when you get issues like autism, where some facets of it are well understood and some are not.

MRS BURKE: I think that is where Asperger syndrome comes into it because people lump everything together, and there are some very different aspects to it.

Mr Hargreaves: And that's exactly the issue—you are absolutely right, Mrs Burke. The problem for us is providing appropriate supports for the effect autism has on families. Whether it is on the person with autism, on the family, on the school environment, on the friends or otherwise, trying to find a holistic approach is one of the biggest challenges that we have. I want the community to understand that we do accept that as a challenge. In the meantime, we try to provide as much support for people along the way who have individual needs, and I will get Ms Ford to address that.

Ms Lambert: Before Ms Ford speaks, the other area of the department that focuses on this is Therapy ACT, and you may wish to ask in more detail about autism and Asperger syndrome when Ms Hardy is here for Therapy ACT.

MRS BURKE: Sure. Thank you.

Ms Ford: The program is being evaluated at this time and the report is due at the end of May. It is also important to note that this program is in partnership with education. As to how it is going, it has had its up and downs. It is a rather unique program for this age group, sitting in a special education school. That within itself creates some quite some considerable complexities. However, in relation to the four children, one of those young boys has gone into another class now because the program was too intense for him, and the other three are continuing with the program. We have committed to those families that we will continue the support, based on the evaluation, and that, obviously, we will continue our support to them, whatever the outcome of the evaluation, in relation to their needs.

MRS BURKE: What did you mean by 'too intense'?

Ms Ford: It is a very intense course and for one of the young men, it was too full on, basically. It is a very intense, very structured behaviourally. Does that explain?

MRS BURKE: I was just wondering why four were chosen and one has to go. I would have thought that they would have been assessed as appropriate for the type of course.

Ms Ford: It was set up before my time so I can't fully answer the question as to why those four, but I do understand that, in relation to the proposal going forward, they were the four most keen to try this and other families weren't. In terms of the intensity of the program, there were no guarantees that this would suit all four.

MRS BURKE: I understand, thank you.

Mr Hargreaves: Just one other thing, Mrs Burke, it is a pilot. It would be quite inappropriate for us to pick people to be involved in the pilot that we know are going to be successful. What we need to do is take people who, we hope, are representative. In that way, when you do the pilot, you can see the strengths and the weaknesses of the proposal. That is where the value of a pilot comes up. It is really easy to pick people we can run through a program, find it successful, and then run it up the flagpole. That is not the responsible way to go about it. The way to go about it is to find the weaknesses in the pilot and then have a crack at it. I have to say if we find that an issue is too full on for an individual, then in a funny kind of perverse way that is the success of the pilot. We have to know that we have to tailor things for people like that. If they don't emerge in these sorts of things, then you have to question the worth of the pilot, don't you?

MRS BURKE: I would like to have a discussion around individual support packages as per page 25 of volume 1. It is obviously a problem we are still grappling with. Are you able at this time, given that the evaluation and the use of ISPs was done in 2003, to give me now a bit of an update on where things are at and how effective you were in 2003-04? It is very difficult doing this annual report hearing so late, given that we are backing up to another one.

Mr Hargreaves: With respect, I really don't think we are going to achieve much going back to 2003-04 because, as you quite rightly say, we are almost on top of the 2004-05, and I would beg your indulgence to talk about it in the context of the estimates committee. I don't want to duck your question; it is just that if we talk about it in terms of 2002-03 that is well over a year ago. I think, generally speaking, that the ISP philosophy is a good one. The difficulty, of course, faced by every government ever to come is that whenever you do something that actually works the word gets out there and you get exposed to levels of unmet need that you did not know existed, because people were not coming out and telling you. We are now seeing that. We then have an issue about the extent of unmet need, the type of unmet need, the amount of resources we can apply to it and all those sorts of issues. I think it will be a more fruitful exercise if we talk about it in the context of the 2004-05 annual report and in all the estimates, really.

MRS BURKE: I am happy to leave it there.

DR FOSKEY: My first question follows on from Mrs Burke's question.

Mr Hargreaves: What page are you talking about?

DR FOSKEY: I am still on page 25. Both my questions are on page 25 of volume 1. Given that we know that, beyond this annual report, a further \$1.25 million was allocated in last year's budget, or the budget for this year, can you please comment on how unmet need is being measured and monitored so that the budget process this year can take that

into account?

Mr Hargreaves: Thank you for the question. I congratulate you on the fishing trip to find out what was going to be in the budget for this year.

DR FOSKEY: No, it wasn't.

Mr Hargreaves: I am sorry; I am not going to play that one. It was very good.

DR FOSKEY: Really, it's the monitoring and measuring that I want to know about.

Mr Hargreaves: I thought that was one of those very sneaky ways of going about it. That was very good. I will get the officers to walk you through the process. As I have mentioned to Mrs Burke, one of the big challenges for us—and I know you are only too well aware of it—is identifying the extent of unmet need out there and then working out where it sits in the spectrum of need.

For example, we put out the concept of ISPs, and heaps of people applied. Some people need money; some people need accommodation, money and services; and some people just need accommodation and services. Working all that out is a particularly difficult exercise.

I just put in a word of caution out there. I am not interested in talking about waiting lists for people on ISPs as a measure of an unmet need, because it doesn't tell us about the nature of their need. We need to be talking about the nature of unmet need, not necessarily the numbers. I will get Ms Lambert or Ms Ford to walk you through that.

Ms Lambert: The issue of unmet need is an interesting one. When I took over, or when this department was created, there really hadn't been any planning done. There is the capacity to do that planning because, of course, when you work with the school system, which is where I came from, you know about students who are progressing through the system, and of course you know from the child health and development service. So we have much more opportunity as the department we are, and we work closely with education to do planning.

There are always tensions around whether you focus on unmet need as applied to individual support packages or whether you think about the need that is being met through other services such as the community linking services—CLANAS—that we've started just recently in the department; the way in which people access—as Ms Ford said earlier—mainstream services as well and how you factor those into the equation. So it is quite a complex issue in terms of planning and then meeting. I will hand over to Ms Hayes to talk about the detail of what we are doing.

Ms Hayes: There is a range of different ways in which we are trying to approach the problem of unmet need. It is not a straightforward issue because there isn't an easy tag that says, "These are the people who require supports and services."

THE CHAIR: You are saying that they don't have a big light over their heads.

Ms Hayes: No. You can start with some population demographics of what is produced

by the ABS and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare studies that give you a broad population demographic. Of that very large group of people—approximately 10,500 people in the ACT fall into that category—only a small proportion will ever request or need supports and services.

How you determine which of that larger group that is, is more complicated. So, as well as looking at it from the larger demographic view, we also need to look at it from the individual view—that is the people who come forward and request services, either directly requesting services or putting in applications for things like individual support funding.

We are attempting to build a model around those things, which we are calling the funding plan, but it is really a planning model that looks at, over the next 10 years, what the expected demand for services and resources in relation to specialist disability support will be.

Part of the complexity about that is that our aim is to have as many people with a disability as possible receiving all of their services through generic supports and services, as every other citizen does, and for specialist disability schools to only be the small amount on top of that required specifically, because generic services can't meet their needs. So in one sense the more successful we are with the rest of our reforms the less of that demand for specialist services there will be.

Just to give you a little more detail about some of the things we take into account in that planning model, we look at the numbers of children who are in special education classes and receiving assistance. The assessment tool now being used by the department of education is very helpful in terms of letting us know the numbers coming through the education system.

We collect actuarial data on the number of people we can expect to acquire injuries through road accidents; workers' injuries and other catastrophes; medical and diseases such as strokes; development of MS and so on in later life. We collect all that information and, as I say, we are in the process of building a model that will give us some indicators of what that will be in the future. It will never be accurate because, as I say, you can't tag which of that very large group are the ones who are going to need supports and services.

DR FOSKEY: I have one more question, also from page 25, related to the taxi subsidy scheme. The 2003-04 budget had an initiative to introduce a lift fee for wheelchair accessible taxis. If you want the reference I can give it to you.

Mr Hargreaves: I think we know about that one, thank you.

DR FOSKEY: There doesn't appear to be a report against this initiative, certainly on page 25 of volume 1. It may be elsewhere, in which case please advise. If not, could you please provide me with an update regarding the initiative and any review of whether or not it has been effective.

Mr Hargreaves: Firstly, we put in the annual report that there is \$160,000 for fare subsidies, to meet the increased demand of the cost of the scheme. As to the point you

make about the \$7.50 lift fee, I believe that was a bona fide attempt on the part of the government to provide an incentive for people who are operating wheelchair accessible taxis to provide the service to people with disabilities. I have to suggest that it assisted in some small way but, quite crystal clearly, not enough.

As to the subsidy scheme itself, we have to understand that there are two parts to this. One is that these people have significant costs that the rest of us don't bear. This is an attempt on the part of the government to alleviate part of that. There is a responsibility, however, on the part of providers of services to either provide that service or get out of the game. I confess to you that I believe the only reason I am answering this question at the moment is because I think it flows from a constant concern about wheelchair accessible taxis for people with disabilities.

For the record, and for any members of the media who are listening in, I am sick to death of excuses from the industry—blaming one another for an incredible lack of service. I would ask each one of the people involved in the provision of this service to walk one mile in the shoes of a person with a disability and see how it feels. Walk around for a week with sunglasses on so you can't see; strap your legs together and see how you get on. You won't be able to do it.

What is happening, Madam Chair, as you will no doubt have read in the media, is that the attempts to solve this issue have been feeble; the taxi cooperative has tried, with a spectacular lack of success. I don't wish to denigrate the attempts they have undertaken because they have tried hard.

Some of the operators of the vehicles out there are the most blessed of people; they are superb people; and there are some people out there who ought to hang their heads in shame because they would rather go out, sit at the airport and pick up a fare to Civic than pick up a disabled person, who is living in Curtin, and take them to the Woden shopping centre, because it doesn't pay. It doesn't pay—why? Who cares, quite frankly? We are paying a \$7.50 lift fee to help with the time of waiting and these people are not accepting their responsibilities.

One thing that occurred to me was that, in the public discussions about this service—and it has been publicly discussed to death—it has never been from the perspective of the persons who use the service. To that end, you will have noticed, I have asked the CEO of this department, Sandra Lambert and the CEO of urban services, Mike Zissler—because he has responsibility for taxi matters—to join with Craig Wallace, the chair of the disability advisory council, to form a steering committee. We will progress the provision of a solution to this. They, of course, have other officers and other interested people to assist them.

I am particularly interested in their views on the nature of the vehicle. At the moment we have a requirement that they have two wheelchairs in a vehicle. It strikes me that that was a well-intentioned mistake. I am interested in their view on that. If it is their recommendation that we go to single wheelchair vehicles, then fine.

I am also interested in their view on the notion of having the total fleet being wheelchair friendly over a specified amount of time. That is not unheard of around the world and, as a layperson, I don't see why we can't progress that. But we need to have that

conversation with the industry and with the people who are receiving a less than satisfactory service. I have to confess also to a fair degree of impatience about this.

MRS BURKE: I can tell!

Mr Hargreaves: Yes. If they are members of the fourth estate who doubt the passion I have about that, I invite them to have a chat with me privately. I have asked the steering committee to do things with some speed. If it requires legislation—and I have no anticipation that it will—I would like to foreshadow with members of the committee that that will be forthcoming. If it requires a greater emphasis on competition policy, then so be it—we will go down that track.

This is not a case of people getting a cheap service or a cheaper service; it is not about having competitive advantage to the benefit of the consumer. What we are talking about is a significant part of this community who are being messed around because people just don't have the will to help them. If they won't find the will, then this government will provide the will. We can go carrot and stick. Let the industry be absolutely aware: I have both, and I will use both.

MS PORTER: You mentioned Therapy ACT in your introductory remarks. What progress has been made in establishing a single therapy service in the ACT?

THE CHAIR: Perhaps we could continue with disability for the time being.

MS PORTER: Okay.

THE CHAIR: I have a question concerning the disability access audits referred to on page 17 of volume 1. Can you tell us what the response has been of government agencies to the requirement to conduct these audits? What were the challenges during the transition? Did the audit and information kit 2003 aid in this transition?

Mr Hargreaves: I think that it is important that people understand that we will have these sorts of audits along the way, that we will have the checks and evaluations along the way, but I will ask Ms Lambert to address your question exactly.

Ms Lambert: The process is for all government agencies to conduct a preliminary access audit of their services, processes and facilities and develop action plans, and then each year we will have a role as lead agency in evaluating those action plans. At the moment, the progress across the whole of government is that our agencies, CMD, treasury, CIT, ACTPLA and health have all completed their initial actions plans and the others are in their final approval stages. DUS also has an existing action plan which covers the period and it will be updated. That is the stage we are at at the moment. The action plans are there and then we report on those as part of our reporting processes.

THE CHAIR: Obviously, you are dealing with government departments, but do the access reports extend to places such as the courts? I have a reason for asking that.

Ms Lambert: Yes, they would. They would be under the JACS action plan and they are still working on theirs.

THE CHAIR: I will just make the point that people from Better Hearing attended the Assembly recently, as the minister would be aware and I am sure you would be aware, Ms Lambert.

Mr Hargreaves: I did not tell them, Madam Chair; we just did it. You, Ms Porter, Mr Gentleman and I addressed these people and I did not tell them.

THE CHAIR: But somebody from the department was there and I know that Mrs Burke spoke to them earlier in the day and, indeed, organised the visit by Better Hearing and the Deafness Resources Centre. The comment was made during morning tea that there is an issue with the hearing aid loop within the court system. I know that there is an issue with the committee rooms of the Assembly and the Assembly itself. There is a hearing aid loop in the gallery and a person with a hearing aid who is sitting in the gallery can use a T-switch and hear quite well, but if such a person comes to the front of the committee room or is elected to the Assembly they should not expect to be able to hear by using a T-switch; they have to use a mobile one that they would hang around their neck.

Mr Hargreaves: Not altogether a bad thing sometimes, Madam Chair!

THE CHAIR: Indeed, minister. That was just an issue that was raised with me and the comment was made that Better Hearing had gone along to court to assist a person with a hearing difficulty and had not heard anything for three days and that the magistrate was speaking so softly that they could not be heard. I just wanted to mention that as an area that JACS probably should be looking at. I know that it is not your area in terms of fixing it up, but I would encourage you to encompass that in your response.

Ms Lambert: As I said, we do have a leading role in this. It is, of course, up to agencies to do the work on their own, but Ms Overton-Clarke, who leads this area of the department, certainly can take that on board and talk to our officer who is responsible for working directly to her on these matters.

MRS BURKE: I am glad I raised it as an issue.

Mr Hargreaves: Can I just indicate to you, Mrs Burke, that, whilst we have had a conversation in the media regarding community support workers for people with a hearing impairment, I did sign off a letter to you this morning, which will find its way to you through the normal rounds.

MRS BURKE: Is it good news, minister?

Mr Hargreaves: I think the record should show that every time a letter from me to Mrs Burke arrives it lightens up her office. Madam Chair, I also need to say, for the benefit of Mrs Burke, that I have a meeting scheduled with those people and we will have the discussion around what supports they need and what resources, if any, are available to meet those demands.

MRS BURKE: Thank you, minister.

THE CHAIR: We will move on to a question from Mrs Burke about disability and

break for morning tea after that.

MRS BURKE: It may be that it will need to be answered after morning tea. I am sorry to do so, but I jump back to page 16. We were just talking about the audits mentioned on page 22 and I did notice there that the findings of the second audit had not been concluded by 30 June 2004. That was an audit of the implementation of the recommendations, et cetera, on page 22. Firstly, I was wondering why that was so. Is the inference there that it should have been concluded by 30 June 2004 and you are owning up to the fact that it was not? I can see you shaking your head to indicate no. The second question I have—it may be a broader one and need to be taken on notice—is about page 16 and the 50 recommendations of the Gallop report. Is the government or the department able to inform the committee of the total expenditure during 2003-04 on recommendations of the Gallop report, moneys spent or funding put into the system directly correlated to the recommendations of the Gallop report?

Mr Hargreaves: We will take that question on notice.

MRS BURKE: I am happy with that.

Mr Hargreaves: However, I do wonder, given that it is an historical thing, whether you would prefer to ask us that question in the context of the estimates committee. It is a financial question and we could probably give you more up-to-date information.

MRS BURKE: I am interested in getting a bit of an idea now. It may be difficult to extrapolate the figures, but I would hope that you would know at each recommendation you have hit and addressed the expenditure against that. I would just like to know whether I could get a current snapshot of that.

Ms Lambert: That will be an interesting task because, of course, the response to Gallop has driven all our business—indeed, the creation of Ms Ford's and Ms Hayes's positions, for instance. So it is actually a holistic document for us in that it positioned the department, in the context of the government's response, to the way in which we would do business. In effect, it is almost all our budget, I would think. Ms Ford has been directed to implement the Gallop reforms, or the government's response.

Mr Hargreaves: In that sense, you could go to the budget papers for 2004-05, look up the achievements of 2003-04, take out the totality of the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services and extract the Housing ACT component, and there you would have it, remembering, of course, that we cannot extrapolate that inwards because we have had additions to the department in that time.

MRS BURKE: Ms Lambert is indicating that it may be possible, minister. If it is at all possible—

Mr Hargreaves: I understand the imperative to answer questions on notice by the time The Chair has indicated—next Thursday, I think. I have asked all of my departments to respond to questions on notice within three days, where possible, and not the normal five. The caveat I have put on that at other annual report hearings is that, if the extraction of the information would be particularly difficult because of the intricacies of the issue, any delay would not be because of a lack of will to do so; it would be because of

systemic issues. We will advise the committee secretary of those difficulties if we cannot meet the three-day mark. We will try to extract that information for you, but, if it is difficult, we will advise you accordingly.

MRS BURKE: One would hope that you would know what you were spending on the recommendations. I am sure that you have an excellent department and people who would have that at their fingertips, minister.

Mr Hargreaves: I do not know about having it at their fingertips, Mrs Burke, because their fingertips are too busy with trying to deliver services to the people for whom you advocate. Also, I have to sign off on it.

THE CHAIR: We appreciate your efforts.

Ms Lambert: The issue for us will be confining it, because it might be about a proportion of my salary and things like that. In response to that question, we might set a parameter around it and provide some links to it.

MRS BURKE: That is fine. I am just interested in ascertaining what we have done financially in response to the recommendations of the Gallop report.

Mr Hargreaves: You should expect an answer of millions of dollars.

Meeting adjourned from 10.49 to 11.08 am.

THE CHAIR: Welcome back. We will move now to Therapy ACT.

MS PORTER: Minister, you mentioned Therapy ACT in your introductory remarks. I would like to know what progress has been made in establishing a single therapy service in the ACT.

Mr Hargreaves: I will ask Ms Hardy to give you some details on this but I predicate it by saying that it is a movement toward a single therapy service in the ACT: it is a journey and it has yet to see its completion. We are going to give you a progress report as at the end of the 2002-03 financial year. If you want to find out what has happened during 2004-05, we will see you again at annual reports hearings.

Dr Adrian: I have been asked to make some opening comments because therapy, within the departmental structure, reports directly to me. I am certainly not a professional in the field but since the decision was made by the government in July 2003 to merge multidisciplinary teams from disability services, at the time, and the old child health and development service—CHADS, as it was known, and it has certainly been a pleasure working with the staff involved—the service they provide now to all ages in the ACT is well-recognised in the community and would have to rate as one of the best in the country. It might be best to ask Ms Hardy, who is acting in the position as the senior manager as Therapy ACT, to map out the steps that have been taken since the government decision, as the minister has indicated, to progressively form the new service.

Ms Hardy: In July 2003, the multidisciplinary teams from disability services and the old

child health and development service merged. We had different cultures, different backgrounds and different eligibility criteria. We spent 2003 merging the two systems together. A lot of time was spent planning, developing policies, protocols and eligibility criteria. At the end of 2003, we had a consultancy from Westwoodspice to look at what the best structure would be. The report was tabled at the beginning of 2004. They made a number of recommendations, which went out to consultation, for public consultation and for stakeholders.

After that, there was a decision that we would look at a two-hub system, one on the north and one on the south. Each hub would have a full service component—services from zero to 65—and we would also look at having various outreaches, depending on the geographic and demographic needs of the area. These outreaches may change, may come and go depending on what we are planning at the time. There was funding allocated. In the 2003-04, \$460,000 was allocated. We spent about \$325,000 of that on staffing. The staffing was to expand behaviour management services to adolescents and adults, to improve the services for adolescents with disabilities, because there had been a major gap in that service—CHAD services stopped at the end of primary school and disability services took people who had an intellectual disability but not those who had a physical disability. We have expanded our service to encompass that. There was some funding to look at safe transport options for children.

The funding was also used to create six new positions. We did have some recruitment issues and over that period our recruitment vacancies fluctuated from 20 to 30 per cent. Since then, we have done quite a lot of planning and we have been able to implement a lot of things in the 2004-05 budget period.

MRS BURKE: I guess you have identified some of the gaps in service delivery in 2003-04 and it probably would not be pertinent to pre-empt anything for 2004-05 but I will hopefully be looking at some identification of the gaps that you talked about.

Mr Hargreaves: Let me elaborate on that. I can assure you that where we identify any gaps in services, the 2004-05 report will address what we have done. It will not be a litany of the gaps in those services that people really need to have to gain to media oxygen.

MRS BURKE: Sorry?

Mr Hargreaves: The point is that we are not going to list in the 2004-05 annual report a whole heap of gaps in services. Where we have identified gaps in services, they have been plugged.

MRS BURKE: I think Ms Hardy answered my question. I don't know what the minister is talking about.

Mr Hargreaves: Mrs Burke, on a question of protocol and process, the minister appears before the committee and the officers support the minister. I shall decide that.

MRS BURKE: Ms Hardy brought something up and I was just asking—

Mr Hargreaves: Notwithstanding that, I will decide that.

MRS BURKE: Fine, I understand. What are the recruitment issues you talked about? What were they and were you able to overcome them?

Ms Hardy: At that period of time, the salaries were not equal to NSW and we were losing staff to the NSW area. We find that some of the disciplines do not do training. It is not mandatory for them to do paediatrics or a disability unit within their training so we were not attracting staff. During that 2003-04 period, the ACT health unions, and other areas that had allied health professionals looked at a reclassification structure. That was implemented the next year and it has made a difference to our recruitment.

THE CHAIR: You referred earlier to the issue of services for children with autism. On page 38 of volume 1, there is a reference to enhancing existing early intervention services for children with autism. Could you explain the details of these enhancements?

Mr Hargreaves: As we discussed earlier this morning, the whole issue about young people with autism and their families, their carers, their associates and their schooling requires innovative thinking on how we are going to deal with it. We can provide services for some of it, and some of it is emerging issues and of course we need to respond as quickly as we can to that. You will find reference to our services for people with autism in the 2004-05 annual report. I will ask Ms Hardy to give you some details of the service delivery enhancements that we have done so that you can get a flavour. I just advise the committee that this is a flavour of what we are doing, an idea of how seriously we are taking the issue, and some of the challenges that we face.

Ms Lambert: I might start, if that is all right, because I worked with Pauline Brown, who was the person in Ms Hardy's position previously, on some of the work that we did on this in the UK last year. One of the most exciting things we did there was visit a man at Guy's hospital called Professor Hilton Davis. He is a professor of child psychology there and has developed a model called the parent adviser, which in Australia has been called the family partnerships model. The training that he offers is one of the things that we will now start offering in the ACT. Hilton Davis was here last year, when we had him run a one-day workshop, and many jurisdictions are now using him.

What he does is, if you like, work on a strengths-based approach with families, which enables family capacity to build more in terms of children with autism. That is one of the very direct things we are doing as a whole of department to enhance those services. That model is also very relevant to our housing managers and other front-line staff, because it is about how you work with people when they are in extreme circumstances or when they are in crisis. It is based a lot on mutual respect. Some of it seems quite commonsense but it is a real reminder to us of the way in which we must respect those that we work with and the way in which we can engage in a productive and successful way.

We also learned from a visit to the University of Bristol how important it was to engage in the first three years of life, and Ms Hardy can talk a bit more about that because that is the sort of focus we are having including engaging, we think, more productively with our constituency—that is, our parents of children who have autism.

Ms Hardy: During the period 2003-04, we had one psychologist doing autism

assessments. We of course had long waiting lists and as a result of our research and feedback from the UK study—and we were lucky also to get a budget initiative to expand our autism service—we looked at family support as being a very important element in the assessment. This year we have been able to launch an increased autism assessment program. We have another psychologist who is able to do that, plus a multidisciplinary team which will look at providing family support and training to families, at providing informal networking for families and also contributing to the assessment process for these families. We see that as a very big step for us. I know waiting lists have been a topic but we certainly hope to be able address that issue. As for the under-threes being a major focus for early intervention, we work very strongly with the early education system. The specific playgroups for children who are potentially identified with autism are held at our Holder site and we work closely with them.

MRS BURKE: It is good to hear about some of the good things that came out of the tour and the trip to the UK. On page 38, volume 1, you state:

Therapy ACT will continue to review and revise intervention models in line with evidence-based best practice ... working parties are gathering evidence on intervention models for early intervention.

Can you elaborate on how successful that was during the year, obviously not forward looking but it will be ongoing.

Ms Hardy: It is one of the projects that we have done this year. Staff have done a lot of research and intervention. We have prepared our draft models. They have been presented to the Therapy ACT consultative committee and they are now in the process of going out to government NGOs and stakeholders for consultation and going up on our web site.

MRS BURKE: So they are not public at this stage?

Ms Hardy: They are nearly there. We have got the list and we are in the process of preparing the mail-out and we expect them to be there by the end of April.

DR FOSKEY: This is possibly just teasing out what we have already been talking about, which is waiting lists. I think we have answers to some of my questions through your responses to other people's questions. Just nod or say yes—we don't have to go right into it. Will we see a real reduction in waiting times this year?

Mr Hargreaves: You will have to wait and see the 2004-05 annual report.

DR FOSKEY: I thought there would be a shortcut here—just a yes or no.

Mr Hargreaves: Maybe that would have been so—but bad luck.

DR FOSKEY: I think you have indicated what you are doing to address staffing shortfalls and maintain maximum capacity.

Mr Hargreaves: Yes.

DR FOSKEY: I am interested in what you mean by “timely response to referrals”. What

would you consider to be, in days, weeks or months, a timely response to referrals?

Ms Hardy: When a referral comes in, it comes to an intake officer, an allied health professional, who talks to the parent or referee—asking what the issues are. The referral is taken and is then sent to the teams. If there is a complex need, or more than one need, the team leaders then contact the parents. They may contact schools, pre-schools or whatever and look at what the needs are. We have a prioritisation system that we're working on at the moment. If we feel it is very high priority, if it is life-threatening or if there is concern of danger to carers or to the client, there is immediate action.

If there are immediate feeding issues or any behavioural issues, we look at a time period for those. So if the need is high, hopefully we can address it very soon. I am reluctant to put days on it because something may happen—staff may be sick or something—but if it is a high priority it is addressed.

DR FOSKEY: Are you talking days, though, rather than weeks?

Ms Hardy: If it's a high priority, yes.

THE CHAIR: On page 37 there's discussion about Therapy ACT's involvement with the children's plan. Can you elaborate on that?

Mr Hargreaves: I might ask Ms Lambert to give the committee a bit of an overview and we will then flick to the Therapy ACT component.

Ms Lambert: We have had close involvement with the children's plan in relation to our constituency. Indeed, now that the department has expanded to include the Office for Children, Youth, and Family Support, we have an even more active role, obviously, in this plan. In the initial phases, Therapy ACT really was one of the leaders in our involvement with it because of their very important role with children, and particularly young children. I will ask Rosalie to talk a little bit more about that.

Ms Hardy: We were actively involved in the steering committee for the children's plan. We have a number of key areas that we need to address, one being the speech pathology drop-in clinic—to go into the child and family centres at Gungahlin. This commenced in the 2004-05 year and we have been running them from there very successfully.

The other one was the extension of the autism assessment, and development of the family support program, which is up and running. We have had a lot of collaboration with areas such as schools as communities. We are working very closely with Narrabundah and the Kootara Well program there, providing consultation, school assessments and input into curriculum. We have also been involved in the development of some of the early intervention programs with health and education.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much, Ms Hardy, for your participation. We might move on community and supported housing. It is scattered throughout, but it is output class 1.2 on page 27. Is everybody okay with that?

Mr Hargreaves: Absolutely. I'm looking forward to discussing housing issues. I have been preparing all the week to do people an absolute damage—for misinformation out

there in the media. So let us proceed at your leisure, Madam Chair.

MRS BURKE: Don't go glass jaw on me now, Minister.

Mr Hargreaves: Glass jaw my foot! Bring it on!

THE CHAIR: We will move onto community development services. Referring to community and supported housing, on page 61 there is reference to the steps the government is taking to further develop the community housing sector. Can you provide us with an update on the progress of this, please?

Mr Hargreaves: I will get the details to you from Mr Hehir, but I would like to address the committee in the context of community housing and public housing, generally speaking. You can have a bit of a read through this document. I know members anxiously await the 2004-05 annual report and look mightily towards the 2005-06 budget process, when they will see the history laid out as to who has actually been in partnership with the community and who hasn't over the last 10 years.

I need to advise the committee that, in respect of community housing particularly, there is a partnership, as you would know, between the territory government and non-government organisations. A few of them are listed there for you—Centacare, Billabong Aboriginal Corporation, Havelock Housing Association and also the association in partnership with Anglicare. These partnerships have delivered in getting housing for people who are in strife. These programs have been particularly successful in allowing people to transition from crisis accommodation into their own individual permanent arrangements with their esteem rebuilt.

At this point I have to give some credit to two people in the department who have been instrumental in bringing forward options to address people's difficulties: Martin Hehir, the executor director, who you will hear from a little later on, and David Collett. These two gentlemen have brought a level of professionalism to this organisation so that, instead of being a fire-sale department, this is a department that is investing in its stock, investing in its community and investing in its clients. I have to express, for the public record, my gratitude to both of those officers for being able to be responsive out there.

You will hear, from time to time, people wailing in the wind about vacant properties in multi-unit developments saying, "Oh deary me; there are people lying rough who should be going into these things." Indeed, as part of the government's commitment to the homelessness strategy, those are the very places where we seek to provide these people with succour. At the forefront of Mr Hehir's and Mr Collett's mind is how we can address those issues.

We would all know that, if Raine & Horne real estate were to put out a property for rent which was substandard, they would be before the Residential Tenancies Tribunal before their feet hit the ground. It would be grossly improper of this government to put out substandard tenancies to people who are homeless and say to them, "Well, you're homeless; you're in the ditch in terms of your esteem. What we're going to do is maintain the lowness of your esteem. We're going to encourage you to feel hopeless by giving you a substandard dogbox to live in." Well, I'm not going there, Madam Chair; I won't go there at all.

We have a strategic approach to homelessness; we have a strategic approach to community housing and we have a strategic approach to emergency accommodation assistance. The casual observer will have seen in that illustrious journal, the *Canberra Times*, and that illustrious media outlet, WIN television, how emergency housing opportunities have, in fact, only recently been extended in partnership with the YWCA.

We have regular discussions with such places as Community Housing Canberra and of course with Havelock housing. Those people provide an absolutely brilliant service and they do so in partnership with Martin Hehir and David Collett. They have, as I say, brought a level of financial acumen to the whole process, which has been sadly lacking in all of the other regimes in the past.

I have to say that Sandra Lambert, Dr Colin Adrian and Minister Bill Wood were very wise people indeed when they appointed both of those people. It is a sad indictment on the pathetic failure of the previous regime to address these issues. I might ask Mr Hehir to give you specific detail on what we have been doing. I am happy to add a little colour from time to time, if I may.

MRS BURKE: You seem to be a bit touchy this morning, minister.

Mr Hargreaves: I am not touchy, Mrs Burke; I am angry. I am angry because you, Mrs Burke, misrepresent the situation to the destitute in this town and give them hope. You give them hope and you should be ashamed of yourself.

MRS BURKE: That is not true and you know it.

THE CHAIR: Order! Minister and committee members, I call you to order.

Mr Hargreaves: We will see you in the media, Mrs Burke.

THE CHAIR: Order! Everybody, settle down.

Mr Hargreaves: We will show your glass jaw.

THE CHAIR: Let's settle down. The minister will not antagonise Mrs Burke and Mrs Burke will not respond, please. I call Mr Hehir.

Mr Hehir: Capital funding for community housing has been quite extensive over a few years. There is certainly identification in the annual report of the \$3 million that was provided in 2003-04. The previous year, \$3 million also had been provided. Indeed, out of the third appropriation, a further \$3 million for capital funding was provided for community housing purposes, with another \$7 million of that \$33 million being allocated for CORHAP, which is our program by which we provide houses through community organisations. So, within quite a short period, about \$16 million has been dedicated to providing assets and leases to community housing organisations. So it is actually seeing quite a growth in the area in a short time frame.

The organisations are very broad. They include organisations such as TAS Housing, which does an excellent job in providing housing for people with disabilities, and

Havelock Housing, which is probably the largest organisation, with, at the moment, nearly 400 tenancies within its control, and much smaller organisations, such as Centacare for its link project, which is an excellent initiative based on the caring project in the UK, and Billabong, which is an Aboriginal housing corporation. It covers a very wide range of services.

We also provide housing to SAAP service providers under the CORHAP leases. We have had a more innovative example of that recently. We provide a house to the SAAP service provider initially under the CORHAP rental program but, as the tenancy becomes more sustainable, rather than transferring the tenant out, we have some options whereby the tenant will be able to take up that lease. I am pleased to say that we had the first success with that program recently, when a single man transferred from crisis accommodation within the same flat that he had occupied within the SAAP service to holding that tenancy, which I think was an outstanding result.

THE CHAIR: For the record, SAAP is an acronym for supported accommodation assistance program. People should keep in mind that it is not always clear what they are saying when they use acronyms.

Mr Hehir: CORHAP, another acronym I used, stands for community organisations rental housing assistance program.

MS PORTER: Minister, could you elaborate on the initiatives taken at Ainslie Village, as referred to on page 60 of volume 1 of the report?

Mr Hargreaves: This is another exercise where we have had a service sit there in the shrubbery for quite a number of years, left to wallow and be subject to intense neglect over an enormous amount of time. What has actually happened is that a partnership arrangement has been developed under the guidance of Martin Hehir, Maureen Sheehan and other excellent officers that we have. I will ask Mr Hehir to give you some details about what we are actually doing and what successes we are actually achieving.

I went there and had a look and I have to say that what I saw there was very encouraging. The people who are living there are amongst our most vulnerable. One of the things about people who are vulnerable is that their esteem takes a nosedive, and that is generally because they feel totally and completely disempowered, for a range of reasons. The changes at Ainslie Village are providing a certain degree of community control and that sort of stuff, but it is about building esteem and it is about re-empowering people. The significant change has been one of philosophy as well as being a tangible product. I will get Mr Hehir to go down that track with you.

Mr Hehir: Ainslie Village, as the minister said, has quite a number of long-term residents. It is currently funded as a supported accommodation assistance program facility, which is generally intended for shorter time frame residents. As to the work that we are doing at Ainslie Village, quite a number of physical works have been undertaken at the site in terms of improvements to the building and improvements to the surrounds to improve the overall appearance of the site and also to deal with some fire safety issues associated with the location of the site; but, more importantly, we are trying to develop a changing culture there in terms of how we and the residents see the facility itself.

With so many long-term residents, we do not really believe that the majority of the site should be identified as a SAAP service. We believe that it is more appropriate that it be seen as what it is—as a long-term residential option for many people—and that those people should have a say in how that residence is managed. So we have been working very closely with the current service provider on the site, community organisations, Community Housing ACT, Centacare and the residents themselves, of course, on the sorts of models we could put in place to move to a more realistic view of what the site actually is.

We do have a number of people in crisis living at the site and we have services operating from the site for that. We do not envisage that changing. We would like it to become a community housing site where the residents themselves have a large say in how the site is managed and what happens within their arrangements. Certainly, the fundamental philosophy for the site has changed and I think that the participation of the residents in that process has been an excellent result. I cannot claim the credit for a lot of it as it was initiated before my time, but it is an excellent program and it is certainly well managed by Ms Sheehan.

MRS BURKE: I have a question regarding page 57 as it relates to the women's housing policy. The page refers to the development and implementation of a women's housing policy for public housing in conjunction with the community sector and other government agencies. My understanding is that Beryl Women's Refuge is awaiting three properties and that it was made clear at a public meeting the other day that it does not appear to have those properties. Should they have been provided in 2003-04? Will funding be made available for that organisation then to run those three properties?

Mr Hargreaves: In the context of the annual report for 2003-04, those properties did not come on line.

MRS BURKE: My understanding is that they had been waiting for these properties for some time and they were allocated in 2003-04. That is why I am bringing it up today. It was brought up with me by a stakeholder at a public meeting, so I think it only fair and reasonable. If it was something that should have been addressed in 2003-04 and was not, I wish to know why.

Mr Hargreaves: I will ask Mr Hehir to give you details as to why. We just need to understand that this is in the context of that annual report and not the 2004-05 one.

Mr Hehir: The advice that I have just received is that they are actually waiting for replacement properties, not new additional properties. They currently have a residence from which they are operating and they are waiting for two replacement residences, if you like. They are looking to move location.

MRS BURKE: I think that they are under a misunderstanding, then, because, when I questioned them further on that and asked them whether they have the funding, they said, "No. We will have to do it on our current budget."

THE CHAIR: Mrs Burke, I call you to order. This is not a place for debate. You asked a question and Mr Hehir has given an answer to it. You cannot go on and have a debate about it. If you have another question to follow up on that, fine, but ask the question; do

not debate the issue.

MRS BURKE: Fair comment. Has the department had discussions recently with Beryl Women's Refuge regarding three properties that it believes are extra to the properties it currently runs?

Mr Hehir: I will have to take that detail on notice.

MRS BURKE: That's fine. Thank you.

DR FOSKEY: I seek clarification. Are we going to do Housing ACT separately?

THE CHAIR: Yes. It was a Freudian slip on my part to bring Mr Hehir to the table. I got confused with the order of my questions. Clearly, we have moved into housing.

Ms Lambert: Mr Hehir is responsible for community services as well; so he does have a broad responsibility.

Mr Hargreaves: You could do the lot, given that you have only 45 minutes left, Madam Chair.

DR FOSKEY: Okay. I will start off with community housing.

Mr Hargreaves: Could you give us a reference, please, Dr Foskey?

DR FOSKEY: Page 61. Apparently, there has been a review of the private rental/leasing program. I am just wondering, first of all, whether there is a report available about that.

Mr Hehir: The review was concluded in 2004-05 and we do have a report available, yes.

Mr Hargreaves: Is it publicly available?

Mr Hehir: At the moment, we have not developed our response to that report. Once we have, it could be made public.

Mr Hargreaves: I will consider whether to make it public when we see the results of the report and our conclusions on it. Dr Foskey, let me assure you that we are not being secretive about this sort of thing; it is just the process. Ministers actually give permission before they go out.

DR FOSKEY: That is good. Certainly, we will be looking for it and perhaps inquiring with your office, Mr Hargreaves, about the availability of the review and the response.

Mr Hargreaves: I expect a question in question time.

DR FOSKEY: In relation to affordable housing—

Mr Hargreaves: Is it on the same page, Dr Foskey?

DR FOSKEY: No, I am moving to page 135 of volume 2, concerning the government

response to and departmental progress on the report of the affordable housing task force. I am focusing specifically on recommendation 33. There is a lot of interest to us in the response. First of all, we are wondering about what measures are being taken concerning the City West development, because there is a provision in the master plan referred to here that the ACT government will ensure that a minimum of five per cent of residential accommodation established through the master plan will be offered for low and medium income earners. I want to know whether there is a huge discrepancy between low and medium income earners. We would be hoping that the emphasis there would be on low income earners. Where possible, it is to be managed by affordable housing providers. I am interested, first of all, in finding out how we will ensure that that occurs.

Mr Hargreaves: City West, as you understand, Dr Foskey, is part of a planning initiative of my colleague Mr Corbell. I can assure you that there is dialogue with Housing ACT, through Dr Adrian and Mr Hehir, in terms of how our provision for low and medium income earners will actually manifest itself, but these are issues that you need to take up with that minister as I am not the Minister for Planning. Let me assure you that the accent as far as we are concerned starts at low and works its way up to medium, not the other way round.

DR FOSKEY: There is a commitment here by the government to examine recommendation 33 that there be a hand back option in new multiunit development sites. I am wondering how that examination is proceeding.

Mr Hargreaves: I will get Dr Adrian to give you some details on that.

Dr Adrian: The arrangements are partially within our portfolio but, as the minister has indicated, a key player in the negotiations or discussion around this topic, obviously, is ACTPLA. It partially relates to the City West site, which we have already discussed. We are looking at various options with the planners regarding how that five per cent minimum residential accommodation for low to medium income earners can be met within City West and also the possibility of that on other sites. For example, there has been discussion, and the government has made its intentions clear, in relation to the Burnie Court development to include a certain proportion of housing either for a public housing provider or for some of the housing on the redevelopment of that site to be for community housing organisations. There is an ongoing process in relation to individual sites and there are negotiations that we are handling with ACTPLA. I guess the government will be making announcements about that in relation to City West and other sites when it sees fit.

Mr Hargreaves: Which isn't just yet.

DR FOSKEY: I have a supplementary question on that. You have just mentioned that a proportion of the rebuilding of Burnie Court will include public housing. Could you put a figure on that proportion?

Mr Hargreaves: I think that we are venturing into the realm of the responsibilities of Mr Corbell, and I would not want to do that. He might get angry with me.

THE CHAIR: Yes, I do not think that it would be a good idea for you to make a guesstimate of that. I have a question in relation to this area as well. On page 60 of

volume 1 there is a reference to the boarding house program and the boarding house approved for Gungahlin. How is the construction of the boarding house going? Is it on track?

Mr Hargreaves: Again, this is where people like David Collett, Martin Hehir, Maureen Sheehan and Dr Adrian have come up with some innovative solutions to solve the issues of particular people, focusing on them, in partnership with the territory, getting on with rebuilding their lives. We have to have many solutions to the many problems that cause people not to have a roof over their head. This is one of those fantastic programs, I have to say—Betty Searle House, which is dealing with older women.

You might recall—in fact, Mrs Burke may even recall—that one of the things that emerged out of the elder abuse inquiry was that some of the domestic violence was actually happening with older couples and, of course, that had its consequences. We were thinking that domestic violence was limited to young and middle-age people. I have got news for everybody out there! We were not responding particularly well in those days because we missed it; all of us missed it. We are now talking about alternative options that will rescue people from that environment. The achievement in opening Betty Searle House is listed here and you know all about that.

For your information, Madam Chair, the contract for the construction of the Gungahlin boarding house was let on 31 August last year to Integrated Construction Management Services Pty Ltd and the completion date for the construction project is the end of June this year. The tender for the service provider for that boarding house was advertised on 2 April. The closing date for the service provider tender is 5 May this year. We are hoping to evaluate it in time so that she opens up and the service provider goes back. Let us hope that this boarding house will come on line really quickly, but a deluge of rain over winter might hold it up a bit.

THE CHAIR: It will be good news and bad news if there is a deluge of rain, minister.

MRS BURKE: Much mention is made of Havelock Housing throughout the 2003-04 report and I know that they do an inordinate amount of good work.

Mr Hargreaves: They save lives as well, actually.

MRS BURKE: I commend them for the work that they do. I am just wondering if the minister could say whether he was pleased with the outputs in 2003-04—I will certainly be asking about the outputs in 2004-05—in terms of the standards, the delivery and so on.

Mr Hargreaves: With an organisation like this one that is dealing with an enormous number of difficult circumstances for people, satisfaction in every single case is definitely not guaranteed. I can say, however, that I am quite pleased about the outcome of our relationships with Havelock Housing as reflected in the 2003-04 annual report. However, I would like to read this question on notice to you, Madam Chair:

What will the Minister do to ensure that Havelock Housing tenants meet their obligations under the Tenancy Act in relation to ensuring that other tenants are not adversely affected and are allowed to enjoy the peace and quiet of their own homes,

following ongoing complaints over many months from residents and other Housing ACT tenants from across Canberra regarding difficult and disruptive Havelock Housing tenants.

That was placed on the notice paper on 7 December. I do not propose to answer it yet because I have not signed off on the answer.

MRS BURKE: On 7 December?

Mr Hargreaves: That is my understanding; question No 8 of December 2004. You have to remember that I had been a minister for about three weeks at that stage and things require time. I will take advice on this. Have I signed it off? I am advised, Madam Chair, that I have signed off on it and it has gone back to Mrs Burke. I said in there:

As a responsible and experienced property manager Havelock Housing Association is aware of its obligations and responsibilities as a landlord when any of its tenants exhibit disruptive behaviour.

We are talking about a whole range of things in there. The short answer to your question as to whether I am happy with the way Havelock Housing Association performed in 2003-04 is yes. Do I think that they discharged their responsibilities to their tenants? Yes. Do I think that everybody else should take a lead from them? Yes. Should Raine and Horne and all the other private rental or real estate agents out there take a lesson from Havelock Housing Association? Yes. Did we allow them to get on and do the things they did before the Stanhope government came to power? No. So I am very pleased with the relationship that exists between Housing ACT and Havelock Housing to provide that particular and peculiar style of community support.

THE CHAIR: Mr Burke, I am aware that you want to ask a supplementary question. I am also aware that Dr Foskey wants to ask some questions. Dr Foskey, are your questions on community and supported housing or general housing?

DR FOSKEY: I have one more on this topic.

MRS BURKE: Madam Chair, I wish to follow up on Havelock.

THE CHAIR: Yes, Mrs Burke, if you will allow me to get some order going in relation to what we are doing with the rest of the time, given that it is now two minutes to 12. I will allow Mrs Burke to ask a supplementary question and then we will go to Dr Foskey on community and supported housing before we go to public housing services and policy, output class 1.1.

MRS BURKE: I have a very quick question. I want the minister to clarify his authority in regard to Havelock Housing and his role and responsibility. You have told me, or I have had it through your office, that you are not directly responsible for Havelock. Could you just clear that up for the public record?

Mr Hargreaves: Havelock Housing Association have a contract, an arrangement, with us to provide the services that they do. Essentially, we have in that arrangement a set of expectations. When we talk about direct responsibility, I do not have, I understand—I was advised some time ago—for example, the power of hire and fire. I do not have that.

I do not want that. I want the community to come up with community-based solutions, so that the arrangement that we have in place with Havelock Housing Association is just that.

MRS BURKE: Ultimately, you are the minister responsible, it would be fair to say.

Mr Hargreaves: Mrs Burke, I am absolutely the minister responsible for providing public housing, community housing and emergency housing on behalf of the territory and everybody in it, including your good self.

DR FOSKEY: I am still on page 61 of the first volume. There is a report that 23 units at Currong apartments in Braddon will be decommissioned by December 2004. I am just wondering whether any other multiunit sites were decommissioned during the 2003-04 reporting period.

Mr Hehir: Not that I am aware of.

DR FOSKEY: In that case, would you mind taking the question on notice?

Mr Hargreaves: The answer is no. That is my answer to you.

THE CHAIR: There is no need to take it on notice because the answer is no. We will move on to output 1.1, public housing services and policy. Minister, I refer to page 47 of volume 1.

Mr Hargreaves: I hate graphs.

THE CHAIR: It is an easy question. I am not asking you to interpret the graph; I will do that. It show that the waiting lists for public housing are growing. Would you mind commenting on this trend?

Mr Hargreaves: I will get Martin Hehir to respond to you on that because it is something that has occupied his mind quite a bit lately. I need to put the caveat on it that the people who wish to consider this issue need to consider the criteria for the application list categories. That is a significant thing, remembering that there was an article in the media only recently saying that we had written to everybody asking about their circumstances. The paranoid in our community and the hysterical in our community will say that we are trying to get them off the list. Let the record show that nothing could be further from the truth.

From time to time, we need to look at the lists to see whether people have got themselves accommodation and moved on in their lives and therefore do not need it, whether they have moved on and have not told us, and whether they satisfied the eligibility criteria for, say, EAC 2 and their circumstances have changed and they have not, for one reason or another, told us that we need to whack them up or down into another allocation, depending on that relationship. So we are taking the opportunity, in the context of this exercise, to more accurately reflect for our purposes of allocation exactly what the situation is and the picture is for the people out there. The best way of doing it, rather than making sweeping assumptions, is by asking the people themselves. This is another way in which Housing ACT engages the community. Over to you, Mr Hehir.

Mr Hehir: Certainly, there has been a rise in the waiting lists, as demonstrated by the charts that you see. That, of itself, would not worry me if it were not for the increase in the waiting lists for early allocation category 1 and early allocation category 2. Early allocation category 1 is the group of people that we are most concerned about. A simple explanation of that category is: functionally homeless. It is a little more complex than that, but that is probably the best way of thinking about it. The fact that that waiting list is growing is of great concern to us.

It should be recognised that that waiting list is actually growing in a period when public housing stock has grown. That, I think, reflects on the overall property market in Canberra. We have the highest median rental in Australia for a three-bedroom home. In the private sector it is \$300, compared with \$280 in Sydney, which is the next highest. We have the second highest rental in Australia for two-bedroom units. Only Sydney exceeds us for the median rental there.

We are seeing very slow levels of turnover from within public housing. Two or three years ago, we would have expected 1,100 to 1,300 people to move through our flats and houses. Last year we got about 860. This year we are currently on target for just under 600. This is in a context in which the private rental market has over 1,000 properties vacant. They have a five per cent vacancy rate at the moment, but we still have the highest rentals in Australia. Certainly, it is a major issue for us. The increase in the waiting lists reflects the fact that we have fewer people moving through and, therefore, it is taking us longer to house people. That is just a reflection of the market in Canberra.

Mr Hargreaves: I would like to pose a rhetorical question that I think that the committee has to consider, Madam Chair. One of the reasons that there is so much demand on public housing is that private rental market rents are so high. I pose this question: whose job is it to bring them down so that people can afford them? Is it the job of the government of the day to intervene? Is it, in fact, for the people who own a significant number of private rental stock to consider the greed factor and perhaps think that there is not a necessity just because the ability to pay is there?

Are we seeing any response to this community need from the Real Estate Institute of Australia? Not much. Are we seeing anything from the collection of people who are building for investment around town, the private developers, in terms of domestic dwellings? Not much. We are seeing in the media that it is the rotten government's fault that we cannot have people renting in the private market because the rents are too high. I have to say in the context of this committee and perhaps the estimates committee as well that maybe the gauntlet needs to be thrown down for people to have a community response and the acceptance of a level of responsibility out there.

It is not sufficient, in my view, to say that some people can get quite well off, thank you very much, by investing in a property 15 years ago when the price of the property was quite low. Interest rates are low and now rents are high. Rhetorically, I ask, Madam Chair: who is the beneficiary of this? It is the owner of that property. They have been getting a far greater capital return over that period than the community would like to see. They, indeed, have got the windfall. What we are seeing, in fact, is more people being condemned to the public housing waiting list because they cannot afford to pay \$320 a week for a three-bedroom home.

Perhaps those owners of private stock out there would like to consider some sort of community service obligation and join with the government in trying to bring the stock down. I note Dr Foskey's cynical smile and I join her on this. I think that we will have to wait until hell freezes over before it happens, but I chuck the challenge out there anyway.

Mr Hehir: To expand on that answer a little, it is worth noting that the ACT has one of the best records in terms of responding to those in need. I will ask Ms Fletcher to give you a little more detail on that.

Ms Fletcher: Certainly there have been studies undertaken as part of the government service provision report, which is undertaken by the commonwealth part of the assessment process. That is undertaken for the capacity of individual housing authorities in responding to people most in need. Over the past couple of years Housing ACT has come up as best targeting the provision of housing assistance to people entering the system, with a success rate of housing people most in need of 94 per cent, compared to around the 80s for most of the other jurisdictions.

It is probably also worth reflecting that one of the benefits that has accrued to Housing ACT in becoming part of the human services department, as opposed to some of the other arrangements it's been under, is a more sophisticated understanding of priority need. So, to an extent, the increase through the earlier allocation categories has outstripped those in the other portions of the applicant list as a whole.

That has been a result of Housing ACT stepping back from being a gatekeeper managing the number of people on various portions of the list and instead looking at it as a reflection of what is going on in the community. So, to an extent, while there are some very deep concerns about the number of people appearing in the early allocation category, I think it is partly due to a more sophisticated assessment process being undertaken by the organisation.

Mr Hargreaves: I think we need to underscore a little bit there that we have the biggest number of public housing stock in the country per capita, and we have the best response rate in the country as well. We have people in our departments working in partnership with the community developing all manner of options, which doesn't happen as well in the other jurisdictions.

Certainly every single one of us would love to be able to give somebody else a roof. I have to say that we need, in our examination of whether the ACT is doing enough, to put that into the context of saying we are doing a hell of a lot better than anybody else in this country. We certainly can do more; we will be endeavouring to do more; but we need to understand that there is daylight between this jurisdiction and other people's activities.

THE CHAIR: With that, you have said that we have the greatest proportion of public housing stock. That impacts, then, on the mix of public versus private housing stock. Because we have such a large amount of public housing stock per capita, does that mean that we have a lower rate of private housing stock in comparison to other jurisdictions?

Mr Hargreaves: The short answer is yes. One of the sad indictments on us as a society

is the inability of some of our tenants to buy the places they live in, because of their income levels. As Mr Hehir will tell you, the rate of people who pay market rent is very low.

Any suggestion, for example, that we should be booting people out of their homes because they are paying market rent is numerically not of much import. It is also significant that we now have a lot more people who are receiving rental rebates on our books than ever before. That shows that the gap between the haves and the have-nots widens. We accept our community responsibilities.

One of the reasons why the gap widens is because of the greed of people out there renting their houses at \$320 a week when they don't have to. If they were renting them out at \$220 a week, people would be in private and public housing and they would have the choice. At the moment they don't have that choice. We are seeing our waiting lists increase. Interestingly, I see a reasonable correlation between the increase in the waiting lists and an increase in the greed factor.

MS PORTER: Going to the asset management strategy at page 54 of volume 1, I read this section with interest. I wondered where Fraser Court fitted into this strategy.

Mr Hargreaves: One issue that is often trotted out is that we have assets with empty premises. People ask, "Why don't you make them available?" The reason we have done it is because we have a strategic approach to the stock we have because of the ageing infrastructure.

We are fortunate to have David Collett looking at the whole of our stock, as to whether we refurbish it; knock it down and build another one; sell it; rebuild it; or sell it and buy more stock. So we have this strategic approach under David Collett's guidance. I will get him to address the issues specifically for Fraser Court.

Mr Collett: Fraser Court presents some unique challenges for us. Not only does it have some of the social problems that are part of our large aggregation of public housing tenants in multi-unit properties but there is also a series of technical problems with the building itself.

It was a piece of English new town architecture which was constructed by the NCDC soon after they brought architects out from Great Britain. The architects involved had been directly involved with the new town processes and the architecture reflected some of the styles and techniques of those.

Part of that is that the roofs are flat to allow gardens; they drain to the inside of the building and then make their way down through the building before going out. As a result of that, it is possible that an interruption to that flow of water will flood any of the apartments in the building from the top down.

We were keen, because of the relative youth of the buildings, to find a technical solution to those problems. In fact, through our total facilities managers, we went out to tender on work to correct those problems. The cost of doing so, though, because of the age of the buildings, was going to be in excess of \$110,000 per one or two-bedroom unit. For that money we would not have been able to address any of the internal problems and issues

the tenants have identified; we would simply have been able to fix the roof and water problems.

In discussions with the tenants it was agreed that that was not a good outcome for them and that it was not a good outcome for the public housing portfolio. As a result of that, we have included Fraser Court as one of the three properties that we are currently seeking joint venture partners for. The response to that joint venture proposal has been very encouraging.

In the meantime we have been working closely with the tenants in order to ensure that issues such as security, overall amenity and the needs of the residents as a community are addressed. Both the director of Housing ACT and I meet on a regular basis with the tenants to make sure that any issues arising are addressed.

Mr Hargreaves: Earlier I said something about the numbers of housing stock, and I referred to all the stock we have relative to other states. It is important for the committee to be aware that we also have the oldest stock. Of course, with ageing stock comes expense, so we need to be making decisions about whether to refurbish or replace, against the background of having the oldest stock in the country.

MRS BURKE: I refer to page 54 again—asset management. I take on board the minister's comments and note all of those things. I don't have any problem at all with properties being taken off line to be developed and refurbished, but I have a problem with the excess time it has taken. I add that to the public record. I am disappointed about that, as indeed I think the former minister was.

I draw your attention to point 2 of the public housing asset management statement with regard to the August 2003 management strategy that was tabled. Does the minister believe that point 2 is being fully achieved—ergo, to protect the territory's investment in its public housing assets, including management of the preventative and regular maintenance and upgrade programs? I would add to that the whole management of the portfolio stock. Are we doing the best we can do?

Mr Hargreaves: Prior to the Stanhope government's taking office and Bill Wood becoming the minister, we saw a fire sale of stock being run down to the nth degree. We would have ended up having next to no community or public housing stock at all if we had kept going at the same pace. Thank the lord that the 2001 election result was the way it was.

I will give my response to Mrs Burke's question, which was: are we doing as much as we can; are we being effective in protecting the territory's investment in public housing assets including the management of the preventative and regular maintenance and upgrade programs. My response is that, within the context of the resources available, we are doing a hell of a lot better than any regime ever before us.

DR FOSKEY: Can you tell me how many individuals or households were evicted from public housing during 2003 and 2004, and how this compares to other years?

Mr Hargreaves: This is contained in the report at page 161. Everyone is turning to the hymn sheet at page 161, *Nearer my God to Thee*.

DR FOSKEY: Thanks for that. You don't need to put that on record. I am keen to get my questions out. On page 50 of volume 1, the results of a survey of public housing tenants identifies that one area of dissatisfaction was the inability for them to buy their dwellings. I believe this was also raised in consultations on the homelessness needs analysis in 2002.

I also know that there has, in the past, been a program by which tenants could take loans and repay them. I am aware that they are now entering a market and, whilst there are some little assistances, most tenants—as Mr Hargreaves pointed out—will be unable to buy their homes. Are there any plans to explore possible programs to make it easier for public housing tenants to buy homes?

Mr Hargreaves: In the context of the 2003-04 annual report, these people in fact did, as you quite rightly pointed out, express the irritants that they couldn't buy their dwellings. The reason they could not buy them is that they didn't earn enough money to buy the things. Remember that these are not five-bedroom homes in O'Malley, they are actually homes at the very significant lower end of the market.

There is, of course, a program to enable people to buy their own government houses—the ones in which they are dwelling. That is clearly not multi-unit development but they may be in a three-bedroom government house. I did it myself. I would urge all renters of government dwellings, if they happen to be on incomes able to support it, to consider purchasing the home in which they sit and then launch into the private market as and when the real estate market allows.

We don't go out and twist people's arms about it but we do make it obvious to them that, if they wish to go down that path, assistance is available. I won't go into anything further, other than to say that we regularly explore a number of options to see whether they have financial validity, probity and all that sort of stuff, before we launch into any other scheme. It is something that we consider on a regular basis and it is something right at the front of our minds.

MS PORTER: Dr Foskey mentioned a while ago the Currong apartments. Where are things at as far as redevelopment is concerned? How many students have moved into that area?

Mr Hargreaves: I will get the numbers from Mr Collett in a second. We are right on track with that; it is the best thing we ever did, because those things were in a dreadful state. As you would be aware, we have refurbished some of them to take the heat off the ANU, the CIT and the University of Canberra through the student organisation that looks after renting—I have forgotten its name.

We have given breathing space to the ANU and those other organisations to talk about providing their own. They needed that 12 months, and we have given them that 12 months. I am particularly pleased with the way this process is going and the way in which it is being progressed with probity. I will ask Mr Collett to give us some detail on the numbers.

Mr Collett: The program to make it relevant for students has been successful, as the

minister said. We have 122 students in the apartments at the moment. Most of the apartments that are suitable for accommodation have been used in that way. The students are managed by Havelock Housing Association and the Australian Post-secondary Students Association, both of whom have experience in managing student accommodation with us in the ACT.

As I reported for Fraser Court, Currong is part of the three sites. The former Burnie Court site in Lyons and Fraser and Currong are the three sites we have taken out of the market for joint ventures. We have had a very good response to the expression of interest stage and have sent out requests for tenders for a short list, some of whom have identified Currong particularly as being the area they are interested in.

MRS BURKE: I refer to page 49 of volume 1, which talks about debt. I note, at this point, the good work of the housing debt review committee. I applaud the work they are doing—it is brilliant. There is one question I have always struggled with. Why are tenants able to fall into levels of debt that are perhaps unsustainable in terms of long-term repayment—we see that happening and hopefully less so—when Housing ACT has an identifier mechanism that alerts a housing manager that a tenant is in arrears beyond \$20? I see occasions where this is breaking down. How is that going to be fixed?

Mr Hargreaves: One of the issues about household debt, and particularly rental debt, is that it goes with social dysfunction, as you well know. It is people with social dysfunction who end up all too often, unfortunately, trying to find accommodation within the public domain.

This is another of the areas where we struggle with the notion of whether we assist people to work their way through a rental debt issue, because they are going to have accompanying issues.

Some people have gambling issues, some people have income issues because they are not receiving a decent wage from their rotten employer; and some people just don't know how to manage their money. We have our housing specialists trying to work out ways that suit them. The alternative is to cancel the debt and kick them out. There is no way in the wide world that we are going down that track.

MRS BURKE: Why aren't we identifying them early enough, when there is a mechanism there? We see that the debt spirals out of control and we then put these people in the untenable position of not being able to repay the debt. Isn't there some intervention? The mechanism is there. Why is it breaking down?

Mr Hargreaves: I don't think it has broken down. I will get Mr Hehir to indicate to you the processes we are undergoing—and it is a challenge we accept.

Mr Hehir: It is certainly true that we have a process in place where, if they are \$20 behind, the system notifies it. That is normally the trigger for the housing manager to respond and contact the tenant. A letter is produced automatically and sent to the tenant. There are occasions when the housing manager looks at it and says, "No. It's not worth while to send the letter. We'll give them a call and talk to them about it, or contact them by dropping off a note."

The issue tends to be around the complexity of the clients and their incomes more than anything else. While we have a program where we try to get people onto direct debit, just to make sure they don't get into the trap of spending the money that's in their hand, which includes their rent, we can't force people onto that program. Really that is the major issue we have with the majority of our clients.

In fact, less than one per cent of our tenants would be in the high debt range. They are a particular group with highly complex needs and issues. There will be drug and alcohol abuse for some of them; there will be gambling for others; there will just be lack of social and living skills for others, without the recognition.

We spend a lot of time working with that one per cent, trying very hard to get them into a process to repay that debt. In fact, we are also using the debt review committee to have a look at the debt of some of those clients to see whether we can bring about—or find a mechanism to do it—a reduction, so that it is able to be paid off within the foreseeable future, which is an important aspect of debt repayment for clients.

For the vast majority of our clients who have debt, it is quite manageable. We have agreements in place with the majority of those for it as well. It is my understanding that the housing managers are aware of the issue; they are aware of the need to get out there and manage it; and they seem to be doing a good job.

Predominantly the response of the client is the major issue we have. Often they say, "Yes, I will enter into a repayment agreement; I am happy to do that; I am happy to have you take the money out of my Centrelink payment." Four weeks later the Centrelink direct deduction is cancelled.

Our process to respond to that, at the moment, for those clients who are doing that sort of response routinely, is to take them to the rental tenancy tribunal. We don't seek an eviction to start with; we seek a conditional order. Sometimes that's just what the client needs—a formal recognition that the tribunal has said, "You must follow this process or you can be evicted." That's really what we are seeking, the majority of times. In the worst cases, where people refuse to engage, we do seek eviction—but they are really the worst cases.

MRS BURKE: I am not after eviction—that's obvious. I don't want people on the streets.

Mr Hargreaves: Eviction is twofold. One of the problems is that it doesn't solve the problem. Secondly, they go out of one part of public housing into another.

MRS BURKE: That's exactly right.

Mr Hargreaves: They go into emergency accommodation and come out of it; so we don't achieve anything.

MRS BURKE: I guess that's what I'm saying. Are there better mechanisms? Is there something better we can do to stop it in the first place?

Mr Hargreaves: If anybody can think of a better thing than working with them, I'm

happy to hear it.

Mr Hehir: The other thing I didn't mention is that the use of the housing manager specialist as part of the review mechanisms when people's debt starts to escalate is a process that we have put in place. It is fair to say that some of the clients do not want to engage with Housing ACT officers when they're in debt. It's very hard for them to see that we're trying to help because, as far as they're concerned, all we're trying to do is get the money out of them, and that's very difficult for them.

The housing manager specialists are well trained; they are aware of the community-based organisations that can provide assistance to these people. We try and find an appropriate organisation to work with them. For example, we often refer them to CARE financial counselling, which is an excellent service, or we try and get one of the community service organisations to work with them to bring them along. So they've got, if you like, an advocate assisting them in dealing with Housing ACT, but everyone working towards reducing debt.

Ms Fletcher: I think it's probably also worth pointing out, particularly for the people who are in the higher end of debt, that quite often our experience from an operational perspective is that cessation of payment of rent is an indicator or symptom of something else going on in their lives.

Quite often we find that part of the disengagement with Housing ACT is that their applications for rent rebates come in and so the paper debt balloons. While the debt is carried on the books, the reality is that, as Housing ACT, with the other support agencies, work through the issues, we then need to go back and look at backdating rebates, which often brings the debt down and makes it a lot more manageable. So identifying people at the high end of debt and what debt is likely to be payable by them, or indeed dealt with through the debt review committee, needs to be thought through quite carefully with the support agencies and the clients.

THE CHAIR: I would like to apologise to community development services and policy and organisational services that we are not going to get to them. I am sure they are all very upset about that. I understand that Dr Foskey has a couple more questions on housing. She will also be sending, through the committee, three questions on notice to community development services and policy. We will try and get them through to you electronically—in order to facilitate that.

Mr Hargreaves: The earlier the better. We will get them back to you as quickly as we can.

DR FOSKEY: On page 54 of volume 1 there is a reference to pursuing opportunities for better leverage of the asset base through private sector partnerships. Were there any new public-private development projects undertaken, or under negotiation, during the reporting period in 2003-04?

Mr Hargreaves: No.

DR FOSKEY: None?

Mr Hargreaves: That's not to indicate that we don't explore those sorts of things continually; indeed we are doing so but it will have to be a case of "watch this space", I'm afraid.

DR FOSKEY: I refer to page 56 of volume 1. I note that, under the bond loan program, all loans were fully repaid. This suggests that this is almost a full cost recovery program, except for admin, providing an important alternative to public housing. Can you provide a summary of the key target groups that were assisted by the program and indicate whether it is likely to be retained or expanded in the future?

Mr Hargreaves: Not at the moment. We will have to consider whether or not the information we collect could answer your question. We will take that on notice and then, if we can provide you with the information, we will definitely do so—or if we can't, we will tell you why.

THE CHAIR: Minister and officials, I would like to thank you very much for your attendance here today. I know that sitting in this room for three hours is always a great joy to you—and of course you have no better ways to spend your time! I appreciate your attendance today.

Mr Hargreaves: I would like to express my personal appreciation to Adam and Tracy for what I consider to be the premier annual report. I think that, if other departments want to avail themselves of their services, we would be happy to charge for the process and have them project for them!

The committee adjourned at 12.35 pm.