



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL
TERRITORY**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND DISABILITY

(Reference: Annual and financial reports 2006-2007)

Members:

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

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

WEDNESDAY, 28 NOVEMBER, 2007

**Secretary to the committee:
Ms G Concannon (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 that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the committee office of the Legislative Assembly (Ph: 6205 0127).

APPEARANCES

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The committee met at 9.32 am.

Appearances:

Hargreaves, Mr John, Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Housing and Minister for Multicultural Affairs

Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services

Lambert, Ms Sandra, Chief Executive

Hehir, Mr Martin, Deputy Chief Executive

Sheehan, Ms Maureen, Executive Director

Collett, Mr David, Director, Strategic Asset Management

Hubbard, Mr Ian, Director, Finance and Budget

Manikis, Mr Nic, Director, Multicultural, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

THE CHAIR: Welcome, minister and officials. Is there anybody in the gallery who has not heard the privilege statement before? No. I will not read it. You all know what it is and understand what it is about. I see lots of heads nodding. That is excellent. This is the public hearing into annual reports of the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services. Minister, would you like to start by making an opening statement?

Mr Hargreaves: I thank you for the opportunity to discuss the achievements of Housing ACT across 2006-07, and I will answer questions from the committee on information contained in the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services' annual report. The year 2006-07 was a year of great challenges and great results for Housing ACT. As minister for housing, I am proud of the range of public housing reform that has been delivered and that Housing ACT continues to demonstrate exceptional service delivery, dynamic management of the public housing assets and vigorous financial controls.

Throughout 2006-07 Housing ACT achieved a savings target of \$14.5 million through implementing a range of administrative and operational efficiencies and via a loss of 40 staffing positions. While I must acknowledge the considerable impact of realising these achievements on the organisation, this innovation and willingness to adopt new ways of operating have resulted in improved services to clients and a reduction in operational costs so that they are now closer to the national benchmarks.

The year commenced with the introduction of the new public rental housing assistance program in July 2006 and associated operational reforms which commenced on 1 October 2006. These included a reduction in the qualifying income criteria, a tightening of the ACT residency requirements and major changes to the priority application system moving to a needs-based allocation system which recognises complex needs in the assessment and allocation processes.

These changes in service delivery have streamlined our approach and improved our responsiveness to the needs of our clients. They have also further integrated public housing into the wider human services system. Reforms to the public housing allocation system have resulted in significantly reduced waiting times for those most

in need. The public housing waiting list now also accurately reflects the number of people who need public housing. This work has been supported by the establishment of a multi-disciplinary panel from across ACT government and the community sector which draws together experts from across relevant portfolios to assist in determining the comparative need of applicants and making appropriate property allocation.

Applicants who are assessed as eligible for priority housing are now being housed with an average waiting time of 68 days. This is well under the 90-day target provided under the new allocation system. This is a remarkable achievement that fulfils our obligations under the commonwealth-state housing agreement to target public housing provision to those most in need. Average waiting time for priority housing under the previous system was in excess of nine months. I repeat those two numbers: now, 68 days; previously, nine months.

Housing ACT has also implemented additional measures to ensure that it remains as the post-crisis response for people who require housing assistance and that appropriate community-based support services are available to assist tenants to achieve and maintain sustainable housing outcomes. An example of this is the introduction of pre-allocation case conferencing. This process involves Housing ACT and other support agencies working with applicants to discuss their needs. It also identifies any agencies who are currently providing support. It may also assist in referring people to other agencies that may be of assistance in the future. This information and the early identification of support services assist Housing ACT to make appropriate allocations to its applicants.

Another example of service innovation implemented in 2006-07 is the commencement of outreach to individual clients and community agencies, such as homelessness services, the ACT government child and family centres and mechanisms to enhance relationships with community partners through a range of networking activities.

There has also been considerable achievement in the capital program. I will start this bit again because I think it is important and people might like to take note. There has also been considerable achievement in the capital program, managing to increase overall stock numbers, even with the decommissioning of Fraser Court, taking it to 504 units. The capital program for 2006-07 had outlays of \$26.8 million on the acquisition and/or construction of dwellings. The balance of the capital program, \$9.6 million, was expended on improvements to dwellings.

The main source of funding for the capital program was the sale of 76 properties, which yielded a net receipt of \$26.8 million. The sales included 35 properties sold at auction and 41 properties sold to tenants. The other main source was a capital injection of \$11.1 million in the 2006-07 budget and a further \$10 million internally sourced funding, comprising an operational surplus of \$4 million and savings of \$6 million.

Throughout the year, 25 properties were purchased from the operational savings achieved by Housing ACT and allocated to needy families. Because of our restructure and the fact that we are doing things better, we were able to provide 25 needy families with homes. Imagine the level of satisfaction within the department on that; you can

imagine the morale increase through the department being able to do that.

In addition to these high-level reforms, Housing ACT has continued to focus on meeting its core business targets and working to improve our day-to-day service to clients. A key achievement has been carrying out 10,424 client service visits, being approximately 99.7 per cent of the target, comprising 9,599 annual visits and 895 visits to all new Housing ACT tenants within the first 90 days of their new tenancy.

A further focus on debt management has worked to ensure that we continue to engage with clients and their support services to sustain tenancies. While contact with tenants occurs when a rental account falls into debt, an additional output measure introduced in 2006-07 was the requirement that 90 per cent of tenants whose debt exceeds \$500 enter into a repayment agreement.

Improvements in efficiencies have also been achieved in the management of the total facilities management contract. In 2006-07, Spotless delivered \$25 million in repairs, maintenance and improvement works. Some 60,000 works orders were raised during the year, with the call centre receiving close to 65,000 calls from tenants. We are starting now to get a bit of an idea of the scale of things.

A \$15 million planned maintenance program was delivered, with works being undertaken on 756 properties. This work consisted of 10 major upgrades, 37 wet area upgrades, 28 kitchen and wet area upgrades, 73 kitchen upgrades; 271 properties received internal painting; 69 properties received external painting; and 268 properties had new floor coverings fitted. Spotless also completed over \$430,000 worth of insurance works to 350 properties.

Work on multi-unit properties is continuing, with a \$1.4 million external painting contract recently approved for 16 of our complexes. The focus of this package will be on our larger, older multi-unit properties. This is strong evidence of Housing ACT's commitment to managing its ageing housing stock so that we will continue to be responsive to the changing needs of the community.

Throughout 2006-2007 efforts were taken by the government to reduce duplication in the provision of housing advisory and peak body services. As a result, ACT Shelter has been positioned to provide the government with these services into the future. The job of reforming the public housing system and ensuring that it continues to provide the most effective services to those most in need in the community is an ongoing one.

The government announced a range of further reforms in April this year which will continue to hone services to those most in need. As part of the assistance, the government sale to tenant program has been expanded. A shared equity scheme announced as part of the government's affordable housing action plan will also allow tenants who cannot borrow the full value of their home to buy a share in the home in partnership with the government.

In conclusion, I acknowledge the work of the staff of Housing ACT for an outstanding year and commend them on their excellent results. This has been for the last three years a journey of reform, targeted quite specifically at making sure that we provide

for the most needy and that we are not just regarded as a collector of real estate in this town.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister. Before we go to questions, I remind members that we are looking at annual reports. I know that the minister is appearing before the public accounts committee tomorrow to talk about the second appropriation, so I will not take questions on that because that is the purview of the public accounts committee. Also, I remind people that we are looking at Housing ACT. Questions which relate to SAAP should be directed this afternoon to Minister Gallagher because that is in her area.

I refer to page 53 of report 1, the Complaints Management Unit. Minister and officials, while I think it is a good idea to have a complaints management unit because, if you are just looking at housing in a simplistic way, you would say that all housing needs to do is provide houses and how hard could that be. As we all know, we do not operate in a vacuum and there are all the pressures of society that operate and that come with tenants coming and going.

I am curious to know ways in which the CMU would actually deal with different complaints that come in. I have a specific instance which I have had raised with me where a Housing ACT tenant is at their wit's end and is looking to be transferred. Without revealing the details of the person which I can certainly speak about at a later time in private, I suppose the issue has been that they live next to a reserve and they have had a number of youths coming and partying outside their place on a regular basis. I would be curious to know how the CMU could actually assist such tenants and also ways in which the CMU deals with different complaint processes.

Mr Hargreaves: Thank you very much for that. I will give you a very quick perspective from where I am sitting and then ask the officers to give you some specific detail on the complaints and the processes that we can go through with respect to that type of example you just gave. Firstly, I would point out to you on page 53 it says that the CMU handles approximately 1,680 complaints. That will be taken by the hysterical to say, "We have got 1,680 disruptive tenants out there." Let me say that that is not so. These complaints can vary from things like long grass next door to nature-strip trees, to a broken light bulb; it can be a tap dripping. So we have got to be a bit careful in looking at those in terms of the seriousness of the complaints.

We do have quite a number of people who complain about tenants whose activities are a little bit disruptive; sometimes they are pretty disruptive. In perspective, remember that we have, in the public housing sector, 11,500 properties. That is 11,500 tenancies. That 11,500—remember that is in the public community sector—means we have got 9 per cent of all real estate in the ACT. Right? Just under 10 per cent of every house and multi-unit property in the ACT is a public housing tenant.

Of those, we would have about 100 who have challenging behaviour. So we need to make sure that we keep this in perspective. We have got 11,400 tenants who go about their daily lives, rebuilding their lives in some cases, having a good time. It is wrong to run about the town saying that public housing tenants are disruptive. I ask Mr Hehir to give you some detail about it and possibly that issue that you raised.

Mr Hehir: Thank you, minister. As you will see from that section, the Complaints Management Unit is a relatively recent innovation. We were quite concerned about how we actually track and manage the complaints so we instituted the formal complaints management process. All correspondence comes into that area. It is all checked. There is a phone line, which is dedicated, which they answer so we actually have one point for receiving all the complaints. That is a very standard practice for any service delivery organisation. You want to make sure you know what is happening, where things are not working as well as you would like and then how you focus on improving them. Certainly that has been the focus of how we deal with those complaints.

As the minister said, the complaints vary enormously. They can be from both our tenants and external parties. They can be about work undertaken by a contractor. They can be about grass unmown. They can be about anything really. They are all treated the same, in that we actually write a response to people, let them know that it has been passed to the responsible housing officer for that housing officer to look at and there is a time frame for the formal response to be provided from there. Then that is actually tracked to make sure that the response is provided within that time or, if it is not, that that person is notified they do need to move forward with it. It is one of the really easy measures we took to improve customer service delivery.

In terms of the circumstances you are talking, they are probably far more complicated than most. We would have a look to see whether we could work with other agencies such as the rangers or the police about the behaviour. That property is one of our properties. It is adjacent to a reserve. We would probably regard it as a relatively attractive property for many of our tenants. So we would be actually saying, “The issue is not an issue with our property. The issue is about behaviour of other members of the public and should be dealt with by other organisations.”

I would hope that we would have notified the rangers of the activity taking place and if there was particularly a public nuisance we would also want to make sure that we notified the police that that was an issue. We would also encourage the tenant to do exactly that. If it is insurmountable and causing severe distress, we would have a look at what we could do, but certainly in that circumstance our first response would be to see what other organisations could do to deal with the issue because it certainly does not sound like it is actually an issue with the property in terms of being too small or too large or anything like that.

We are happy to take the details of that out of session, if you like, but certainly the principle behind the Complaints Management Unit is making sure that we have a central registry of complaints that we can actually track where complaints are up to and that we can actually make sure that overall we are meeting our time limits in terms of making sure we respond. It is good customer practice. I will not say it was universally welcomed, but I think everyone does appreciate it now because it is really important to know what your workload is, what you need to respond to, whom you need to get in contact with and what issues you actually need to address.

I suppose the other avenue that people can take is: we do have a very large, I will say now, joint champions group. It is significantly standard from when we first started it, which I think is a fantastic effort. Within Housing ACT, they are very excited that we

had so much interest from our tenants in participating in such a group. So there is the possibility that someone may be wanting to have a talk about one of their joint champions representatives. Do we have a list of them?

Ms Sheehan: That is a good question, because the members of the group were reluctant to have a complete list published, but they are very happy for us to distribute information between members of the group.

Mr Hehir: We can also put them in contact with a representative if they would like to talk to somebody to take up systemic issues with us as a department.

THE CHAIR: I understand Mrs Burke has a supplementary to this—I am not sure about Dr Foskey—but I am formulating another question in relation to it in my head at the moment.

MRS BURKE: Minister, thank you very much for the comprehensive statement you gave at the beginning. I will talk about stock a little later because it still is of concern.

Mr Hargreaves: I certainly look forward to the conversation.

MRS BURKE: I know you will.

Mr Hargreaves: I will not be rough on you, though.

MRS BURKE: I will not be rough on you either. That is not what this is about. It is about giving customers satisfaction, and that is what we are all here for today of course.

I have written to you and you will receive today a formal letter from me. Attached to it will be 17 formal complaints from right across Canberra, and you are aware of all of them. You are aware because these people have contacted you and your department before I did. Many of these problems have been going on and now are part of the probably 1,680 complaints that you get.

From where I sit, from what I see, trying to take all sides on this and look at it from a down-on perspective—and I hear what Mr Hehir is saying—and looking at what we can do, I will tell you what people are saying. They are fed up with the talking; they are fed up with the buck passing between housing and the police; they are left in the middle trying to cope with a situation that is affecting—and, minister, you will know this—whole streets.

It is public tenants who are also being affected, not just private—and we have had this debate before—but whilst ever we are the landlord of 11,500 properties it is our responsibility and your responsibility, as minister, to make sure that people can live in the quiet enjoyment and peace of their own home. What are you going to do to firm up tenancy agreements to ensure that those people blatantly and repeatedly flouting agreements begin to abide by them?

Mr Hargreaves: There are a couple of things I would like to take issue with. Firstly, it is not my responsibility as a landlord to do these things at all any more than it is the

Real Estate Institute or private landlords' responsibility to ensure that either.

We have extraordinary agreements with our tenants. Their responsibilities in terms of quiet amenity of everybody else are quite clearly articulated in that when we have them sign up to these things. What do we do about it? I hear Mrs Burke being particularly critical of 17 out of 11,500 tenancies. I do not hear a proper putting it into perspective bit here.

MRS BURKE: But it is affecting hundreds of people, remember, not just 17 people. I just needed to clarify that. Thank you, chair.

THE CHAIR: I like to run hearings by allowing members to ask their questions uninterrupted and by allowing ministers and officials to answer uninterrupted.

MRS BURKE: I needed to correct the record.

THE CHAIR: You can add a little bit afterwards, but do not interrupt while the minister is answering.

Mr Hargreaves: The issue about this is that there are processes and programs in place, at considerable cost to the taxpayer, to intervene in these particular situations. We have got everything in there. We have got relationships, MOUs with various people—mental health, the police—we have mediation services, we have client services visits to remind people of their obligations. And there is a process which is worked through with our tenants, the first one being a visit. Hopefully, people's behaviour changes. If it does not, we go to the next level. It gradually escalates and it can escalate as far as a request to the Residential Tenancies Tribunal to remove people by eviction.

I have to say we do not have the power to evict people, and this is seemingly the only solution that Mrs Burke sees in respect of the 17 cases that she asked for. I do not see any suggestions coming forward. We have programs going. In each and every one of these cases these programs kick in. I reject vehemently the notion that people are being chucked from one part of the bureaucracy to another. I reject that out of hand. The officers themselves and the police officers we talk to and the mental health crisis team are all dedicated to getting a result.

You cannot do it over night and you cannot go to somebody and say, "Stop your aberrant behaviour," and they say, "Okay, we will." In every single case, you cannot do that. As I say, each of these cases is unique; each of them has a unique solution; and each of them, as they escalate, comes closer and closer to the RTT.

Quite appropriately, Housing ACT and I, as the minister, have no role to play in kicking somebody out of their house. We have every responsibility, which we accept for our tenants, to try to make their lives and those of the people around them agreeable, but I do not have any more extra responsibility than the Real Estate Institute or other landlords do—and I repeat that—but we still shoulder a responsibility to the wider community to try to make sure that people can live in quiet enjoyment in their life. Otherwise we would not be spending so much money of taxpayers' revenues in doing these programs.

One of the other solutions that I had put forward to me by Mrs Burke and others is: “Let us move them; move them out.” Some cases, in fact, are subject to management initiated transfer. What happens then is that they move from one part of town to another. “Where is the solution?” Where is it?

If we evict them, what happens is that quite often there are children affected very adversely by this—the children who would normally have half a life at least at school when they have got a disruptive place at home. We have interventions from children and family services; we have interventions from our own officers in the wholeness and the completeness of that family. If we move them, we transfer the problem to another part of town because the supports are different on the other side of town. We disrupt the children’s education totally.

On the one hand, some of the associations which apply to these people say it is a good idea to disrupt them, but we need to do that with balance. So we do not take management initiated transfer lightly at all.

I reject the notion that we are not doing everything which is possible. I invite anybody who suggested otherwise to come up and tell me how it is they would solve the problem because I am sick and tired of hearing criticisms of my officers, with no alternative suggested. If people have got an alternative, then let us hear it. If not, have the guts to shut up.

MRS BURKE: Thank you, minister. The issue is that we are skirting around the issues.

Mr Hargreaves: No, we are not.

MRS BURKE: I let you finish.

Mr Hargreaves: No, you did not.

MRS BURKE: Let me finish. The memorandums of understanding that you talk about are not worth the paper they are written on because it is a piece of paper. It is not happening in practice.

THE CHAIR: Mrs Burke, I would ask you to phrase it as a question rather than a statement of opinion.

MRS BURKE: I am trying to get to that, but it is very frustrating to sit here and the minister to sit there and accuse me of not trying to offer solutions.

Mr Hargreaves: You have not offered one. Do it now.

MRS BURKE: The problems have been going for years and years. I have offered to work with you. When have you ever contacted me or Deb Foskey of the crossbench about a bipartisan approach to this problem? I have never said to evict would be the answer. What I put to you is: how many people do you know that have been forced to move as a result of anti-social behaviour? How many people have been advised by

your department to move? I know this to be the case: your department are frustrated. I know that. Somewhere we have got to stop walking around this issue.

Why are you saying “different supports on the other side of town”? Why? I will talk with Ms Gallagher this afternoon about mental health issues and people living with mental health in public housing or in the community. It may be a support thing. I have offered solutions, and I think it is disingenuous of you to sit here saying I have never said anything positive.

THE CHAIR: Let us not get into that.

MRS BURKE: The minister wants to answer the question.

THE CHAIR: Answer the question, but this is not the floor of the Assembly; it is not a place to have a debate backwards and forwards either.

Mr Hargreaves: The question was: how many people have contacted my office and said that they have to move? The private sector, I presume she is talking about, or people next door?

MRS BURKE: No, public housing.

Mr Hargreaves: Public housing. The short answer to that is very, very, very few. I would have to be guessing because I would have to go back and check a couple of years worth, but very, very few. It would be fewer than ten. In fact, it would probably be fewer than five.

I have explained to the committee some of the processes which apply. I am happy to go through the whole process if you want me to, through the officers giving you chapter and verse on this. But there are processes which come into play. I have heard no suggestion from Mrs Burke—no suggestion, and let the record show it—of what she would do to solve these people’s problems.

She says, “I will work with you collaboratively or in a bipartisan way,” and that we can work with the most incredible collection of cliches under the sun, but that does not count. These pieces of paper are worth something—they establish a relationship—and I reject the notion that they are not.

I now remember, too, that we can apply to the Residential Tenancies Tribunal for conditional orders. This is where we are getting pretty heavy with people. Then we go to the Residential Tenancies Tribunal and say, “These people’s behaviour is pretty bad. We would like to have the tribunal okay their eviction or the movement of these people.” They say, “Sorry about this; you cannot.” Then what?

I challenge Mrs Burke not to say she will work with me collaboratively and in a bipartisan way but to give me five concrete ways in which this problem can be solved.

MRS BURKE: For six years, I have.

THE CHAIR: There has been enough bickering between you two.

Mr Hargreaves: So far I have got not one. I shall put out a press release to that effect. The challenge is: five concrete ways of fixing it. We have five concrete ways that we approach it.

MRS BURKE: Which are?

Mr Hargreaves: Read the annual report.

THE CHAIR: She is asking you.

MRS BURKE: You said there were five. I was asking for clarification.

Mr Hargreaves: We have got interventions; we have got client service visits; we have got the police visits; we have got the blitzes that we have on public housing properties; we have anger management programs; we have mediation; we have conditional orders; and we have approaches to the Residential Tenancies Tribunal. My count on that one was six.

THE CHAIR: As exciting and as fun as this is, I would actually like to move on. With the CMU tracking process—I do not know whether this is a good idea or not—is it your intention to actually publish the data in the annual reports about the types of complaints at all as a table?

Mr Hargreaves: We had not given it that kind of thought. There are a couple of things about that one. The CMU, as an entity, is only fairly new and so the data is collected over a fairly short period of time. We will take that quite seriously under consideration. I would be quite pleased to see it as a recommendation to come from the committee actually because that will give us a reminder. We will have a look at it and see.

It would be helpful if, for example, we knew how many were unmown grass, how many were light bulbs, how much was this that and the other. We do not have a difficulty providing the information. Remember that the unit is fairly new. I am quite happy to do that, but we need to talk to Treasury about the format. Treasury lay out the format for all performance indication and so we need to have that chat with them.

THE CHAIR: I do not want to take up more time on this, but I would say that I still think that this department has one of the better laid-out annual reports. I note that in the past, and with this one as well, you have attached a number of the recommendations and Assembly reports. It is in easily readable format. It might be useful to have it there without having it in such a way that it would actually make the person who made the complaint identifiable.

Mr Hargreaves: On that point, I would like to acknowledge the work that Sandra Lambert has done with her troops to get this report in a readable and digestible fashion. We can give you rough figures now, if that would be helpful to the committee, and we will include exact figures in the next—

THE CHAIR: I was looking for something to refer to.

Mr Hargreaves: It gives you a perspective if you want it.

THE CHAIR: That would be fine.

Mr Hargreaves: We will do it next year for you.

Ms Lambert: There is another mechanism in terms of complaints which is quite removed from the line areas. That is an area called Advocacy, Review and Quality. If people are dissatisfied with housing—and that seems to be the suggestion around the numbers that you have there, Mrs Burke—that is a unit that reports directly to me and to Mr Hehir. It has nothing to do with the executive directors of line areas. People do use that as an avenue to come to me when something has not been resolved to their satisfaction.

MRS BURKE: What was that again?

Ms Lambert: Advocacy, Review and Quality. That area is headed by Meredith Whitten. That is a direct line to me which is quite separate. Often that area looks at the processes and the line areas and provides me with advice around ways things might be improved.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Dr Foskey.

DR FOSKEY: I will open up a different line. Good morning, everybody; it is nice to see you. I just want to give a warning that I am afraid there will be a lot of questions put on notice from me because I can see that I will not get many answers.

Mr Hargreaves: My only warning about that is about the time it takes to respond if there are too many, but we will do everything that is humanly possible to comply.

DR FOSKEY: We could go for short answers now and I could get through heaps of them. At the time the annual report was written, there was work going on on the renegotiation of the intergovernmental agreements on housing. I was wondering whether you develop two different positions in case there might be a different government—as there is—at the federal level. Now, when you are looking at the COAG meeting regarding the intergovernmental agreements on housing, is there any chance that you could indicate the proposals that the ACT government is taking to those negotiations and the key concerns that the ACT government has with what have been the intergovernmental agreements on housing?

Mr Hargreaves: Firstly, within the context of the commonwealth-state housing agreement and other agreements, at the commonwealth and housing ministers council we put positions unitedly by the states and territories—essentially a plan. We put that to a housing ministers conference in Darwin. Mr Brough did not bother to show up; he sent Senator Scullion in his place—who probably agreed with what we were doing, only to have his minister make him do a back flip. Mr Brough then indicated to the states that he wanted to tender out into the private sector all of the provision of public

housing and that sort of thing. We found that abhorrent. To our absolute delight, we find that Mr Brough is no longer with us. Nor is the government that he served. Their attitude to denying people in need access to appropriate housing has now gone with them.

The position that we put before will be re-put. We have had conversations with the shadow housing person in a former life. We do not know, and we will not know until the end of this week, what minister we are going to deal with in the new Rudd government, but we will be talking to our colleagues and we will be putting the position that it is the responsibility of the territory and state governments to work collaboratively with the federal government on these outcomes.

The big thing, though, is that mistruths were perpetrated by Mr Brough and Senator Scullion around housing numbers. Certainly some of the states had reduced their numbers. The accusation was that the ACT had done so; this was incorrect. The numbers that Senator Scullion was using were incorrect. When this was brought to his attention, he issued an apology and retracted it, because the ACT in fact has improved its numbers.

Therefore, the attitude of the commonwealth towards the territory is slightly different in terms of their acknowledgement that we are doing big things around public housing—not only around the numbers, but also around the effect. Our main aim is this. It is not a case of collecting marbles in a jar—which is what some people's fixation on numbers represents. It is about the quality of life for the people who are in the system. It is about the 11,500 people and giving them a springboard. That was our biggest objection with what the commonwealth was proposing, but Ms Lambert will give you some information on that.

Ms Lambert: Let me just let you know the processes that are used and indicate to you that in this particular housing agreement the ACT punches well above its weight. There is a group that sits under the housing ministers advisory council called the Policy Research Working Group that is chaired by Mr Hehir. That group has worked collaboratively with all the states and territories on putting forward a plan in relation to the commonwealth-state housing agreement into the future. That was what we provided when the commonwealth asked for a whole range of submissions around different ways to do the CSHA. Mr Hehir can provide you with the details of that plan; we can easily provide you with that. But it is an area where we have had significant leadership. The states and territories have worked very closely with us in relation to that, and we have had a fair influence in setting that agenda.

Mr Hehir: It is important to note that the Australian government are also represented on the Policy Research Working Group and, until the caretaker period, have been very active participants in the work of that group. The PRWG had the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute undertake a series of evidence-based research over an extended period of time, I think in excess of 10 years, on housing—both very specific issues and very broad issues.

In conjunction with AHURI, the PRWG developed a research synopsis which informed the development of a series of policies. That synopsis was used as the basis of the state and territory six-point plan; everything within the state and territory six-

point plan is consistent with the evidence found in that synopsis and is seen to be reflective of evidence-based research, which we believe is the best way in moving forward.

At one point the Australian government minister directed his department not to participate further in the development of proposals. It was appropriate at that point for the Australian government not to remain involved. It was at that point that state and territory officials began developing the six-point plan for consideration by state and territory ministers. That proposal led to the ministers.

My understanding is that there is an intention to move forward. The PRWG will be talking very soon. With a new government, they will be able to re-engage with the process. We will be able to find out what their view is on the work that we have undertaken. We have not stopped working. As you would expect in an election period, we have been looking at what options were available from looking at the evidence that we had and how we would try and put that forward for our chief executives' consideration in the housing ministers advisory council.

Yes, we clearly had a look at both options, but in the end we are putting forward a proposal to our chief executives for their consideration, based on the outcome of the election. They will then decide whether that goes forward to ministers. We will talk with the Australian government officials as soon as we possibly can about that.

DR FOSKEY: I am sure the committee would like to see the six-point plan and the submission.

Mr Hehir: I can give you the rough—

Mr Hargreaves: It is not a submission per se, Dr Foskey; it was a position put to the housing ministers council in Darwin. I am the chair of the housing ministers council at the moment. Rather than give you a copy of a submission to a ministerial council, I will give you the detail that we provided, which is the collective thoughts of the eight jurisdictions that went forward to Darwin. We will give you a copy of that—which puts the six points down—for you to have a look at. We can tell you now what they are if you want.

Mr Hehir: I can give you a quick synopsis.

DR FOSKEY: No; I think we need to cover more areas. If you do not mind, that would be good, but I am also cognisant that I am not even a member of this committee.

Mr Hargreaves: It will be a one-pager.

THE CHAIR: I am quite happy for you to ask questions on it, Dr Foskey.

MRS BURKE: Chair, could I please make a comment? I do not want to get hung up on this because I think I have said—

THE CHAIR: Comment or question?

MRS BURKE: No; it will be a question. I want to table something for the committee to demonstrate the actual increase or decrease of stock numbers. I am happy to do that, and you officials can have it so that you know where I got my information from.

Mr Hargreaves: We know that. We have got it.

MRS BURKE: In real terms you have increased properties by 27 while you have been in office.

Mr Hargreaves: Their figures are wrong.

MRS BURKE: Are they? I will still table it for the committee. Anybody can say this is wrong. Minister, why has it taken so long to redevelop Fraser Court, Burnie Court and Currong apartments, and where are we up to with this as at today?

Mr Hargreaves: I might take the opportunity of correcting that set of numbers. Madam Chair, I will provide to the committee, under separate cover, copies of the actual stock movements between 30 June 1987 and 30 June 2008, which are the correct figures. I advise the committee that the numbers that Mrs Burke has just tabled are the very numbers that Senator Scullion had to apologise for putting forward, indicating that they were wrong.

Burnie Court precedes the arrangement with Hindmarsh. This is a fairly large project; it does not pop up out of the ground overnight. There are planning issues that had to be addressed in terms of the height of some of the construction in that place. In my understanding, those are things that have been resolved; now it is a case of getting on with the job. As far as we are concerned, that is as much as we can be involved in. We just await the conclusion of that particular construction to realise the amount of money due to the territory. With respect to Currong—

MRS BURKE: And that was about three million, I notice from the report. Is that right—something like that?

Mr Hehir: The Lyons site—

MRS BURKE: It does not matter; I can look in the annual report. I was thinking aloud.

Mr Hehir: It was well in excess of that. Certainly with Lyons—and in a minute I might throw it to David Collett, who is the director of our asset management area—the agreement has been signed. We are working with that. There are formal planning processes that need to be gone through. My understanding is that we should have leases issued now. We are well and truly down the path. We would expect activity early next year in terms of actual work on the ground. But as to the detail of the actual development, the design of the units and all that sort of stuff, we are in consultation with the ACT Planning and Land Authority as the joint venture members. Members from Hindmarsh and also from our department sit on that joint venture committee; things are progressing well.

MRS BURKE: It has been a long time coming—seven years.

Mr Hargreaves: A bit of patience would be good about now.

Mr Hehir: In terms of Fraser Court, we have terminated our negotiations on that joint venture. We were unhappy with where the negotiations were going so we terminated that. We have developed an alternative proposal; that is being worked up. We anticipate being able to realise that proposal within this financial year.

MRS BURKE: Can you elaborate on that? Is it to put the proposal out as an RFT for redevelopment or joint venture?

Mr Hehir: We are having a look at a different response in this case. We would anticipate being able to realise the value of that site this financial year.

Mr Hargreaves: In the process of dealing with the Fraser Court issue, one of the imperatives that made us go down this track was that we were not going to realise the return of the territory which was appropriate for the site. It would have been irresponsible for the government to have continued down that track. The difference between what we were going to receive and what we are going to is about \$3 million or \$4 million. It would have been irresponsible for us to have continued down that track when you consider that we put the \$3 million or \$4 million extra that we get into more housing stock. That will proceed as quickly as we can get it.

MRS BURKE: And Currong?

Mr Hehir: I might ask David Collett to talk about the detail of that. I think it would be fair to say that, when we took it out, we were very unhappy with the prices that were offered for that site—for Currong. Therefore we decided not to pursue a joint venture with that at that point in time. I will get David to talk about what the market conditions were—and the market response—and what we are doing to address that.

Ms Lambert: Just before David does that, I could just add that, as Commissioner for Housing, it is clearly my responsibility—and my responsibility alone—to make sure that we get value for money for government. That is what must drive us in that. There have been examples in the past, which the committee would be well aware of, where value for money was not delivered to government. While some of these may have taken a while, that is a part of the negotiation process and that is a part of the work that we do.

We go into these negotiations in good faith, but my officers must make sure that government gets an appropriate return and that the negotiation and the joint venture deliver appropriate value for money to government and, of course, to the ACT taxpayer. Sometimes these do take a while, but when we take sites out to market and they do not give us the value that they are required to give us in terms of the CSHA and so on we need to go back to the drawing board. But we are very comfortable with the work that is occurring, particularly at what is now called Lyons estate rather than Burnie Court; we think that will deliver a very good return to the territory.

Mr Collett: I will give you some concrete details to support what was being touched

on by the minister and the chief executive. The unsuccessful attempt to sell part of the site at the former Burnie Court development was in part due to the road configuration that had been established by the planning and land management agency, without the involvement of Housing ACT. It reduced the return and increased the cost of the development. It has been necessary to vary those road arrangements—to surrender the leases and have them regranted. As Martin referred to, those leases were issued by the land development authority a fortnight ago; they are now in place, so we can move forward.

We have also anticipated a territory plan variation to pick up in the changed demand for housing on that site and to allow the inclusion of retirement living, as well as apartment living, to service the Woden town centre as that area grows in terms of employment. As you would know, territory plan variations take a significant period of time. We have had to work through a range of planning studies over more than 12 months to address the issues that the ACT Planning and Land Authority have raised through that process. In the last week, we have signed off the planning studies that support a territory plan variation, and they will be submitted.

As Martin stated, the development of the plans for a retirement village—the community facilities, the supporting arrangements, the car parking and all of those things—are an area that needs very careful consideration. Those plans have been the subject of work between us and the Hindmarsh Group, which has had more experience in the operation of retirement villages on a number of sites, including Grange. That has been progressing with the architects over the last 12 months. Yesterday I signed off the papers for the DA, the development application. That will be lodged with the territory and it will be advertised prior to Christmas. As Martin says, that will allow work to start on site early next year. We are keen to do that.

The issue is that we are working with the private sector. The private sector are very careful about these developments; they want to maximise their return. And we need to maximise the return. That influences the number of units that we take out of the development or can afford to purchase with the returns from those developments. If you look at the period of time that large private sector developments take—such as the Avenue on the corner of Barry Drive and Northbourne Avenue; the Metropolitan, which you would all be aware of; and even Hindmarsh's current development in Woden East—you will see that these are the sorts of times that the private sector takes to make sure that they are consistent with the market cycle, that they have a product that will sell well and that they can thoroughly maximise their return.

In a joint venture structure, we are working with our private sector partners; we take account of their view about timing, about the process that we need to go through and about maximising development potential and returns from the sites. That is the purpose of going into these joint ventures—so that we can increase the return to the territory above what we would gain in a sale process.

MRS BURKE: Thank you. Just a quick point of clarification: will those buildings be razed to the ground or are you going to redevelop them as buildings?

Mr Hargreaves: Which ones?

MRS BURKE: Fraser Court.

Mr Collett: With Fraser Court, we tried very hard, through a series of work processes with our joint venture partner, to refurbish the existing buildings.

Mr Hehir: It was not a joint venture partner.

Mr Collett: Sorry, you are absolutely right—through our preferred tenderer. We did not in the end keep the joint venture arrangements. We worked very hard with the preferred tenderer on that basis to try and reuse the existing buildings. At the outset, their advice was that there might be some value additions in retaining the existing buildings. Certainly in terms of the energy that was embodied in the developments, it would have been a good ESD outcome to refurbish the existing buildings. There are a number of technical issues, though, and the more work we did the more concerns were raised. In the end, we took the smallest block, we fenced that and we did an amount of exploratory demolition work to get a really good handle on the issues—from the waterproofing of the roof right through to the internal plumbing and hydraulic systems.

MRS BURKE: So basically it will be demolished?

Mr Collett: On the basis of that work, we have changed course. It did take time to explore that, but it has demonstrated very clearly, to our satisfaction, that it is not cost-effective to refurbish those buildings; therefore we anticipate that the outcome will be demolition of the buildings.

THE CHAIR: What happens with the materials from the demolished buildings?

Mr Hargreaves: They are recycled.

Mr Collett: They will be recycled. Some of our recent developments have achieved fairly significant reuse of the recycled materials on the actual site, and we will be looking to do that.

MRS BURKE: Chair, I have one final question.

THE CHAIR: Just before you go onto that, we are almost at the 10.30 mark. We have got an hour set aside for multicultural affairs; I was wondering about whether or not the—

Mr Hargreaves: Do you want to cut it in half, Madam Chair?

THE CHAIR: Yes—and whether Housing would be able to stay for another half hour.

Mr Hargreaves: I do not know about that.

MRS BURKE: Minister!

Mr Hargreaves: They have all got buses to catch—no, sorry, walk; they are poor.

THE CHAIR: I will take that as a yes.

Mr Hargreaves: One small thing, though, Madam Chair: when you are talking about the change of government, we need to appreciate that the former Prime Minister was a public housing tenant; he occupied a house in a public domain. And, I have to tell you—looking at him in a picture in the *Canberra Times* this morning—he has travelled by public transport as well. That is what I call leading from the front.

MRS BURKE: One final question before morning tea: obviously you are making approaches to reduce debt—

Mr Hargreaves: Yes.

MRS BURKE: I know that we have had this debate before. I would argue at the 500 and say go 200, catch it early rather than, you know—

Mr Hargreaves: Yes, we do that.

MRS BURKE: I think you were going to think about doing that. My concern is that, if we look at page 52 of volume 1, the level of debt over the last 12 months has, if anything, escalated slightly.

Mr Hargreaves: Yes.

MRS BURKE: From under 1.2 to about 1.6. From note 4 at page 209 of volume 2, I notice that, when we look at the percentage of tenants' accounts in arrears, the target was 90 per cent but you have reached only 71. You said that was because of a poor start at the beginning. The question is: having recognised that, we still seem to see an increase in the debt. It continues to be of concern to me where—

Mr Hargreaves: Okay, we understand the question.

MRS BURKE: Thank you.

Mr Hargreaves: Mr Hehir will answer it for you.

Mr Hehir: We have had this conversation on a few occasions, so my comments will not be of any surprise to you. We are the housing provider of last resort. We house people with some very significant problems. You are right: the debt level did increase over that year. Quite frankly, there were a number of other reform projects happening within Housing ACT as well as working with some very difficult clients and clients in very difficult circumstances in terms of that. What is pleasing to see—we do not just concentrate on those clients with more than 500 levels of debt; as soon as a client has a debt level, the housing manager is notified that there is a debt.

MRS BURKE: What level would that be?

Mr Hehir: It can be one cent.

MRS BURKE: Okay.

Mr Hehir: Our system will send a notification at that point—within a week and a half of that is effectively what occurs. So we do know where people are. What has been, from my point of view, quite a significant effort—I apologise for going slightly beyond the annual report in my answer—is that we had a 7.9 per cent reduction in the number of people who owe us rent between 30 June 2006 and now. That is quite a significant step forward. We still have a number of people who have quite high levels of debt who we are working very hard with. Where families are involved and where there are issues such as gambling, drug addiction and all sorts of things, it is very difficult to turn around. We do not believe that the appropriate response is to make those families homeless.

MRS BURKE: I am not suggesting that for one minute.

Mr Hehir: No. I just—

MRS BURKE: They need support.

Mr Hehir: I mean our response is support.

MRS BURKE: Yes.

Mr Hehir: Our response is to seek their engagement; our response is to make sure that we work with them to do that. For the 2006-07 financial year, we still collected in excess of 99 per cent of our total rent.

MRS BURKE: That is all right.

Mr Hehir: I had the opportunity to meet with the President of the Real Estate Institute of the ACT and one of his real estate professionals, and they were quite impressed. I think they were surprised, but they were quite impressed that we collected that level of rent, particularly from some of our client base who are in very difficult circumstances and struggle to make ends meet.

What I can say—and again, it is outside the period—is that consistently for the last six months we have seen a decline in our level of public rental housing debt. Yes, it did take us time to work up to that figure. We do not ignore people less than that figure; we do work with them. But that was a figure we chose as being a watershed figure in terms that they really need to be on a formal agreement at that point. We continue to work with people and we continue to increase the numbers. It is hard work; it is slow. We will have to take some of these people to the tribunal to get a conditional order on their rent, but that is a process we are prepared to go through.

One of the reasons we collect in excess of 99 per cent is that we continue to work with people. Our housing managers do receive debt training. We are actually developing—we may even have implemented it; Maureen will know better than I—the next range of high-level debt training courses for our housing managers. It is something that we pay attention to. It is something we have worked with. But we know that it has a significant impact on our tenants and we also know that it will take some time to bring that level of debt down.

I can say very confidently that for the past six months we have seen the public housing current rental debt decrease consistently every month.

THE CHAIR: We have gone past the allotted time. Questions on notice that have been indicated are required to be in by close of business on Friday. We will have any further questions on notice to you then—not your responses, but questions to you.

Mr Hargreaves: You are going to give us the questions by Friday?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Hargreaves: Then we have got three days?

THE CHAIR: It is the usual process. Yes, the usual amount of time. I ask people to be back by 11 o'clock. Then we will continue on with Housing for another half hour and then we will go to multicultural affairs. Mrs Burke, we are having a private meeting.

Meeting adjourned from 10.36 to 11.01 am.

THE CHAIR: Okay, we will resume. Mrs Burke, you have some further questions, I understand.

MRS BURKE: Yes, I do. I would like to congratulate the government on the energy efficiency moves for public housing.

Mr Hargreaves: Thank you.

MRS BURKE: As I said, the department has made some efforts to improve energy and water efficiency in the ageing housing stock. Dr Foskey is here; she will like the answer to this one, hopefully. Please advise the committee what progress has been made on this project and when it is envisaged that the program will be complete—or will it be ongoing?

Ms Lambert: What page is this on?

MRS BURKE: I do not have a particular page reference at this stage.

Mr Hargreaves: It is about how we are doing all those wonderful things with energy efficiency changes in public housing, such as putting insulation in walls. Do you want to know about how we are doing them or what we are going to do?

MRS BURKE: I think you have told us what you are going to do, but maybe you can just let the committee know—

Mr Hargreaves: It is early days.

MRS BURKE: Okay, when are you commencing?

Mr Hargreaves: It is on page 171.

MRS BURKE: Thank you; I apologise for that.

THE CHAIR: I remind you, Mrs Burke, and the minister and officials, that we do not need to talk about the second appropriation today because we will deal with that tomorrow.

MRS BURKE: Yes.

Mr Hargreaves: In that case, there is not much to say.

MRS BURKE: It is referred to on page 171—

Mr Hargreaves: No. The amount of money in the second appropriation—and I am not going to talk about it—is just to augment and keep going with what we are already doing. I do not think, Madam Chair, that we can actually separate the two in total, so if you could allow a bit of latitude, that would be nice.

THE CHAIR: Having said that, I am allowing leniency.

MRS BURKE: Can I make a clarification. There is mention of what I am talking about in volume 1 of the report, on pages 171 and 172, as has been alluded to.

Mr Hargreaves: Yes, that is the page number I gave you just a minute ago.

MRS BURKE: Well done!

Mr Hargreaves: Yes, I know. Could I ask Ms Sheehan and Mr Collett as a collective to respond to you.

Ms Sheehan: The water and energy savings trial was begun about three years ago, as a trial only at that stage, from the Essential Services Consumer Council, and Housing ACT was very pleased to participate in that trial. At that stage it provided a grant of \$30,000 to the YWCA to enable that trial to begin and to be concluded. As a result of that trial, we have moved forward with it as a permanent program. One of the very interesting things about the trial and the program is that it identified that the major contributor to the costs is not necessarily just the fabric of the building, which is something that we might have thought at the start; it is actually the behaviour of tenants, and indeed anyone in the community, in the way that they use energy and water. That is a very important thing for us going forward, and we will be building education into the processes for the future. I will now hand over to David Collett to give you a bit more detail.

Mr Collett: In fact there are three streams to the work we have been doing to date, and which have positioned us well to take up the government's initiatives around both energy and water, about which we will be able to answer detailed questions tomorrow morning in the second appropriations hearing.

With respect to the three elements of the work to date, firstly, there is what we have

been doing in terms of energy efficiency through the process of our facilities management contract. So in the course of our work around our properties, the work goes on as business as usual. Secondly, there is the trial that we did with the YWCA, which Maureen referred to; and, thirdly, there is the work we have done with the Essential Services Consumer Council in making changes to individual properties where particular tenants have experienced problems with energy costs, and as a result their supply of energy has been threatened.

Probably the most significant work is the “business as usual” work we have been doing. You will see that the annual report records the fact that we have installed douse valves and dual-flush systems in almost 2,000 of our properties. So as we go in to do major plumbing works, the wet area upgrades, the kitchen and bathroom upgrades that the minister referred to in his opening comments, we will take the opportunity to bring the houses up to standard. We prefer the douse valves, which are overall flow restricting valves, because they can’t be tampered with by the tenant. They also provide a better level of water pressure—they restrict the flow but not the pressure—in shower heads and in sinks.

We have also been able to produce some material, using the various agencies and working closely with the Essential Services Consumer Council, advising our tenants about the management techniques they could use—building on the comments Ms Sheehan made about there being a strong management component to all of these things. This has given us a good understanding of what efficiencies we can drive within our portfolio, but it is around water directly, conserving water, it is around water as a major consumer of energy in terms of heating it, and it is around heating for our premises as well. So that has given us the data and statistics on which we have been able to build an implementation plan around the second appropriations, which we will talk about tomorrow.

DR FOSKEY: Page 7 of volume 1 refers to the housing allocation system. You will remember, Mr Hargreaves, that in the 2006-07 estimates committee we had a conversation about what impact the ongoing decrease in market renters would have on housing revenue.

Mr Hargreaves: It is stencilled on my mind.

DR FOSKEY: It was suggested—I am not sure by whom—that if market renters disappeared the ACT government would have to find about \$20 million, and at that stage you did not know where to get that from.

Mr Hargreaves: That is right.

DR FOSKEY: What impact are the changes to housing allocations, to the whole system, having on Housing’s bottom line? Has the ACT government anticipated how it will make up for this revenue gap? Does the ACT government know yet what the impact of the eligibility changes has been on the people who no longer fit into the new criteria for reasonably prompt housing allocation?

Mr Hargreaves: I will get Martin Hehir to give you a lot of the detail that you will need in order to answer that question. The government made a quite deliberate

decision to provide housing assistance to those people in dire need. All the people on the housing waiting list are actually housed. They might be spending 40 per cent of their income but they are actually housed. We believe that the issue about housing is more than just having a roof over your head; it is part of a complex social issue for a lot of families, and we need to address that first.

Against that background, we have taken a very conscious decision, as I say, to look at those people, because people in really dire need were waiting for years, and that just was not on. So we have changed that. We recognise that there will be people who will not be able to get on the waiting list, but they are actually housed, and we have other supports in our community to assist those people. But in respect of the numbers, I will pass over to Mr Hehir to give you some details about that.

Mr Hehir: The market renters within Housing ACT continue to make up about 15 per cent of the total portfolio. You can see that in the statement of performance in volume 2, page 208. That figure for Housing ACT has been stable for four or five years and remains relatively stable. I will talk in broad figures at the moment. We will see about 700 to 800 people leave public housing annually. The majority of those people move to rental, either here or interstate, although some do move on to home ownership. So we are seeing that the majority of people are progressing through; the provision of public housing has enabled them to stabilise their lives and they have moved to a point where they can move to a different location or a different area and pay rent. One presumes they are paying rent at less than 30 per cent; otherwise they would choose not to leave.

What we have seen over the years is that our actual numbers of market renters, however, remain relatively consistent. Again, the summation is that we are seeing our tenants progress to the point where they can actually increase their level of rent to the point where they are paying market rent. Not all of our market renters pay a significant sum; some of them are in bedsits, some of them are in one-bedroom flats et cetera, which have relatively low levels and not a lot of privately provided stock numbers, so there is a bit of an issue there.

We are not seeing a decrease in our rental income at this point. The practice, certainly for the four years that I have been involved in Housing ACT, has been that we have had a priority allocation system. We have recently amended it and looked at doing it differently. We have not seen a significant change to our level of market renters in that time. It does remain a concern; it is a concern across Australia. We do know that with increased targeting we are picking up people with quite significant problems which go beyond just being poor. There are a lot of other social issues that can be involved. That certainly takes its toll in terms of our client focus, our work with our tenancy managers and our client support coordinators. They work with Community Services to make sure that we try and find supports for those tenants.

I am not anticipating a significant change, certainly in the short term. In terms of future policy changes, other changes will not be in place for a couple of years due to the timing of the collection of information and the requirement for sustained income. The level of income identified is well and truly above a level required to pay market rent. Again, I would not anticipate a significant reduction in our level of market rent from that actual policy change. So it is something we will monitor. It is something

that we have been very clear with our minister we will keep him informed on. At this point we are not seeing any significant impacts from that. In fact, what we are seeing—and we are happy to see this—is people who are provided housing getting the opportunity to get education, get a job, participate in society and now, to the great joy of my financial controller, also pay more rent for the property. In a way, it is what we hope Housing delivers.

DR FOSKEY: It is a question I will probably keep asking because it is obviously one which—

Mr Hargreaves: Would you like us to photocopy the answer and bring it again next year?

DR FOSKEY: No, it might be a different figure next year, Mr Hargreaves. On page 49 of volume 1, I note that there has been a reduction of 40 staff, a reduction in operating costs to bring them down to national benchmarks and savings of \$14½ million.

Mr Hargreaves: Yes, and the purchase of 25 properties as a result.

DR FOSKEY: That, too. That can be part of the answer, perhaps. Has the ACT government measured the impact these job losses have had on service delivery? What was Housing's benchmark prior to this efficiency drive and what is it now?

Ms Sheehan: In making the savings of the \$14.5 million, we did have the target of reducing 40 positions. We did not just reduce the positions willy-nilly; we looked at areas of service delivery where we would deliver services differently. So there was a substantial saving in the area of shopfront services for ACT government. In order to maintain services to our tenants and to applicants, we consolidated the shopfronts into one shopfront at Nature Conservation House, but then we instituted a very expansive outreach program. That means housing managers use other government offices around Canberra so that tenants can come in in their own locality to meet with housing managers.

We also have our gateway staff going out to community centres and, importantly, to homelessness services and to the child and family centres, to deliver outreach support for applicants. That means people can fill out application forms and get information out in the community. We consider that to be an improvement in service delivery rather than any type of reduction in service delivery.

We also looked at our back-of-house functions and our administrative structures. We consulted extensively with staff in Housing ACT on the structure of our organisation and, as a result of our consultation with staff, we moved from a four-region structure to a three-region structure and saved some management positions. We also looked at other administrative functions so that we achieved some administrative efficiency, and that is entirely appropriate.

In terms of what the ACT costs were compared to national benchmarks, at the time of the budget the costs of providing services in Housing were 170 per cent of the costs of the national benchmark. That is why the government had asked Housing ACT to

become more efficient. We have been very careful, in making our administrative efficiencies, to maintain services. I spoke earlier about the outreach functions. I did not mention housing managers—the staff who actually look after tenancies. We were very careful to make sure that we maintained the number of housing managers so that there was no reduction in support for tenants.

That was a very important decision that we made. So we maintained the number of housing managers, we improved our delivery of the gateway function, which is the entry portal into public housing, by implementing an outreach function, so that people receive services out in the community where they need them. That is a definite improvement in service delivery. We became more administratively efficient. When the report on government services is published later in the year, having made those changes and those savings, we are very confident that the community will be able to see a very clear reduction in our costs and a very close move towards national benchmarks.

MRS BURKE: Probably the perennial question that comes up from time to time from me is about total facilities management, which is something I am very keen about and interested in. I am obviously pleased to see that we have moved back to a single provider. I understand there have been some teething problems there. Hopefully those have been bedding-in problems, minister. I think that is going well now, according to what you are saying here.

Mr Hargreaves: It is going gang busters.

MRS BURKE: Let us go to volume 2, page 208, the statement of performance and accountability indicators. I acknowledge note 3, but let us look at point (j), “Percentage of properties undergoing refurbishment within agreed program milestones”. The target was 90 per cent and the actual result was 69 per cent with a variance of minus 23.3 percent. That was obviously of concern. There was a slow start to the beginning of the year; why? How did the process improve, and why?

Mr Hargreaves: Mr Collett can give you a fulsome answer.

Mr Collett: The challenges for us in bringing those figures closer to targets, which we think can be achieved in the long term, or can be bettered in the long term, were both internal to the department and also with Spotless. I think we have mentioned before that we are the only jurisdiction in Australia that runs a total facilities management program, from the call centre right through to the overall budgeting and the performance targets around getting a split between responsive and planned maintenance. Certainly, whilst Spotless provide maintenance services to other jurisdictions, it took them some time to come to terms with the way in which the practices work in the ACT and our expectations of the contract.

We did significant work with them in terms of their internal management, in terms of getting them to better understand our key performance indicators. In some instances we had a mismatch between our performance indicators, the outputs that were reported here on page 208, and the performance indicators of the contract, against which their performance was either rewarded or debited. It is that work that has been instrumental in improving the Spotless performance.

In our own terms, the use of HomeNet to ensure that properties were quickly allocated after they came back as properties, the streamlining of the interface between our vacants team, the total facilities management contract team and our allocations group within the tenancy group, were also an area that we looked at. Those improvements have been made both with Spotless and, importantly, within Housing itself.

MRS BURKE: For how long have they had the contract now?

Mr Collett: We are coming up to 2½ years into the contract.

MRS BURKE: And was it a three or five-year contract?

Mr Collett: The contract provides for an initial three years, with the option for an extension for two two-year periods.

Ms Lambert: And we will be assisted in our evaluation of that by the Auditor-General, who will be looking at the TFM contract next year. We look forward to that because it is quite an innovation and we are very keen to see an external person have a look at these processes as well.

MRS BURKE: I think that is positive and of course it was under a former Liberal government, the outsourcing and contracting TFM. I did always make very clear to the minister, and the minister before Minister Hargreaves, that I was concerned about two because I thought there was a lot of wastage in money. Whilst we have spent \$25 million so far with Spotless, hopefully—

Ms Lambert: It is a very tough contract and it requires that not just base standards are met, so it is quite a different contract in terms of other contracting out and, as we have said, it is a single provider. We have had a very high-level group working with us, including members of the business and legal community, in the shepherding through, if you like, of this particular contract. We look forward to the auditor having a look at it next year so that we can do a bit more benchmarking around it—

MRS BURKE: I will be watching that closely because I do have a keen interest in it working well for the government to get the best return on investment.

DR FOSKEY: If Spotless does not respond in what is regarded as an appropriate time, are there any financial or other—

Ms Lambert: Yes, there are.

MRS BURKE: As I said, I am familiar with the machinations of what goes on, so I will be watching closely to see that it works for all concerned, and in particular the tenants who are obviously at the receiving end of it, and that is what we are about.

Mr Hargreaves: Against the background of course that the contractor is providing maintenance services to nine per cent of all properties in the ACT; we have got to remember about the scale of this particular exercise—

THE CHAIR: You said nine per cent?

Mr Hargreaves: Yes, nine per cent of every property in the ACT is public property.

MRS BURKE: But they are a national, multinational company so hopefully they are well equipped.

Mr Hargreaves: I do not disagree with what Mrs Burke is saying at all. I guess all I am saying is that we need to recognise that a lot of the other companies around the place are only doing contracts which are exponentially smaller. The experiment, if you want, with Spotless having one TFM contract across the whole of the ACT with 11,500 properties, plus possibly some of the community housing ones, is a really big exercise and so far they have delivered quite well.

MRS BURKE: Okay; that is good to hear. We will wait and see what the A-G has to say. On page 54 of volume 1, total facility management, it is noted that Spotless has also completed over \$430,000 worth of insurance work to 350 properties. Is there any way that you could break that down for the committee? I know that some of those would be—and I am not sure of the percentage—as a result of malicious damage and I am just wondering how we manage—

Mr Hargreaves: No, we cannot—

MRS BURKE: Not in that category?

Mr Hargreaves: No, we cannot.

MRS BURKE: What happens with malicious damage then?

Mr Hargreaves: Mrs Burke, it really depends on the scale. For example, a hole in a door is malicious damage, but if it is put in there by a child it can be regarded as fair wear and tear. But if a house is burnt down and arson is determined then you have got malicious damage. So it is very difficult against the size of it, really, to say—

MRS BURKE: I think we would pretty much know what was a child and what was malicious damage.

Mr Hargreaves: No. Your question was the extent to which the damage is insurance paid, paid work, and that which is applicable to malicious damage. That is the difficulty. Mr Hehir can explain.

Mr Hehir: We have a category called tenant responsible maintenance. So where we identify that the damage is above fair wear and tear, we identify that to the tenant and we suggest to the tenant that they should get it repaired. If they fail to repair it or get it repaired, we will ask our total facility management contractor to undertake that work. We request payment and where it is not paid it is raised as a debt on that tenant account.

MRS BURKE: So what would the majority of the \$430,000 worth of insurance cover?

Ms Sheehan: The majority there are force majeure, acts of nature. We had flooding and damage with the ice storm last year, which affected, of course, a lot of buildings in the ACT. We also had inclement weather just after Christmas last year and we had a lot of water damage then. The other one is one-off fires that happen in properties. Sometimes that is the result of nature; sometimes it is other things that go on in the properties. It is very important to us that we do make the insurance claims because, of course, that is extra money that comes back to us that we are able to put back into maintenance of our properties.

Mr Hargreaves: Every now and again, too, Mrs Burke, things happen. In fact if you are an avid reader of the *Canberra Times* you will recall that there was a car that came off the road and went into a property recently.

MRS BURKE: Yes.

Mr Hargreaves: That was an insurance claim.

MRS BURKE: Are we seeing an increase or decrease on previous years or is it pretty steady at around that figure; is this a usual figure?

Mr Hargreaves: You are closer to God than I am; maybe you can predict it.

Ms Sheehan: The acts of nature I guess are something that you cannot exactly predict, so obviously in the year of the bushfires there was a huge insurance component. Last year we had two very unusual events: the storms, in January I think it was, and then the ice storm.

MRS BURKE: Yes, I realise. I was just interested to know how it is impacting upon the department.

Mr Hargreaves: If we could do that we could predict the end of the drought.

MRS BURKE: No, that is right. I am just wondering over previous years—obviously not a crystal ball in your hand.

DR FOSKEY: Can I ask a question about community housing?

Mr Hargreaves: Yes.

DR FOSKEY: Excellent. After some change last year as a result of the ACT 2006-07 budget all community housing providers were required to reach stage 1 of accreditation by 27 December and so far as I know no funding assistance for this process was provided. I am interested in whether all community housing providers met this deadline, what percentage did or did not, and what is the next stage in the accreditation process. I do have a couple of questions after that.

Ms Sheehan: The first part of the answer is that in fact funding was provided for accreditation. The way that that was undertaken was that, because accreditation is done through the New South Wales community housing accreditation unit, the

department concluded the negotiations with that unit to undertake the accreditation and then, as the invoices come through to particular community housing providers, grants would be made to community housing providers. That has been very clear in our discussions with community housing providers.

The second part of the answer is around who has achieved accreditation. Havelock Housing Association, which is the largest provider, achieved reaccreditation during the year. The other providers are working towards accreditation. So the community housing providers that are in that process at the moment are ECHO, which of course is our newest cooperative, the Tamils and TAS Housing. All of those organisations are working towards accreditation.

DR FOSKEY: So did that mean that that deadline of 27 December 2006 was extended?

Ms Sheehan: I think “deadline” is a very strong way of putting it; we were working with organisations to have achieved the first stage by then. There was never an intention that there be a punishment for not achieving it; the intention was to achieve accreditation in due course, working through the stages, in order to assure the quality of services to tenants. We are continuing to work with the organisations.

Mr Hargreaves: Dr Foskey, when I became minister for housing in 2004 one of the things we did in early 2005 was to talk to all of the sectors of housing going through housing ministerial forums. One of them was on community housing provision and a whole lot of stuff came out of that. The need for amalgamations, for example, came out of that. The need for restructure within the community housing sector came out of that. The need for more targeted government funding came out of that. And the need for a more professional approach came out of that.

What we have seen happen since then is that the sector has very significantly restructured itself. I would like to take the opportunity at this point to put on the public record the appreciation of the government to all of the people involved in the community housing sector because of the way in which they have gone about it. The best example of this success is ECHO, I suppose, because it is so clearly and crystally defined. They have achieved synergies by two organisations coming together. The next step, of course, is for them to apply for and receive accreditation. If an organisation applies for accreditation and does not get it, let me assure the committee and members that the government will work with that organisation to overcome those difficulties.

We want a strong and vibrant community housing sector, and that is why we have put \$50 million worth of revolving credit in it. That is why we put 132 head leases out there—because we have faith in the sector—and I think it is just that little extra inch now to go to finish the mile where we get them up and get them accredited. We are not saying, “If you don’t do this by a certain date a sanction will apply.” What we are saying is, “We want a vibrant sector so let us work together to get it.”

MRS BURKE: I just have one final question, minister, on page 167, volume 2. We are looking at total current assets. The financial statements indicate that an overall loss of just over \$3 million was sustained in 2006-07 from the sale of properties,

which compares with a figure of plus \$1.134 million in 2005-06. Could somebody give an explanation on that one?

Mr Collett: The loss on the sale of properties is an accounting treatment and it compares what was—

MRS BURKE: I love that term.

Mr Collett: You are more used to hearing it from Mr Hubbard than from me. It is the difference between the book value, or the value that we are carrying an asset in our accounts for, and what is realised at the sale. We have a process of valuation of our properties that we do on an annual basis and, whilst we are confident about the overall level of valuation, fluctuations in the market over the course of the year, geographic differences between the areas in which we are selling the properties, the level of tenant improvements and the neighbourhood and presentation of the houses will all result in slight variations between the price that is achieved at auction and what the asset is listed for on our books. That is a reflection over this period of the market. We saw quite significant movement in terms of prices and it was a bit of a crystal ball exercise for our valuation people to determine what the value would be in a fluctuating market.

MRS BURKE: Doesn't that seem a rather large overestimation or overvaluation of properties? That is a pretty big figure.

Mr Hargreaves: Not over the size, no.

Ms Lambert: It is against a total value of the portfolio of \$3.5 billion.

MRS BURKE: And that has in itself increased. That was why I was searching through all these papers. That has increased overall, hasn't it? They are the total value?

Ms Lambert: Yes, because the value is going up.

MRS BURKE: But what it is saying here is that there was an overall loss in the sale of properties—

Mr Collett: No, no.

MRS BURKE: So how can the value be up there?

Mr Collett: No. I might not have explained myself clearly enough. We have the properties—

MRS BURKE: Perhaps Mr Hubbard may want to come on down.

Mr Collett: I will have another go.

Mr Hargreaves: You do that at your peril, Mrs Burke. You have been warned.

THE CHAIR: Can I also remind you that you are going to need to be brief because we do need to move on to the next—

Mr Collett: The properties are valued annually.

MRS BURKE: Correct, yes.

Mr Collett: It is the increase in the value that represents the increased value of the portfolio. That is why the \$3.5 billion has increased up to that figure, because annually the properties are revalued. So we do not lose money in terms of that line in the accounts.

MRS BURKE: The proceeds of sales are down for 2006-07?

Mr Collett: No, the proceeds of sale are not down; the result of the sales differs from the valuations that have been determined.

MRS BURKE: The written-down value are you talking about?

Mr Hubbard: I will take that one. David is right. I think he almost got his CPA membership with his explanation there—that we actually have on our books an independent valuation of what that block of land is worth.

MRS BURKE: Sure.

Mr Hubbard: As David was saying, there are fluctuations from one year to the next depending on the market for different properties. On the whole, when there is a rising market we do quite well against our valuations. Then, on the other hand, as properties are going down, we typically make a slight loss on our residential properties. When you are looking at something of the size of Lyons, of that block itself, they are quite unique blocks, they are very large and the fluctuations around the valuation of that is really determined by the market for apartments at any one point in time.

So when we are doing negotiations with the private sector party we have to pitch the price for that to have a joint venture based on the valuation of that property in the market. We went out and got independent valuations for Lyons, and those independent valuations at that time showed that there was a difference between what we had the property valued at on our books compared with what the market was prepared to pay at the time of the negotiations. And that is the difference in the value. So David is right: the only real valuation of the property is when you take it to market—and the market told us what it was worth.

MRS BURKE: So that is the \$3 million relating to the Lyons estate?

Mr Hubbard: Yes.

MRS BURKE: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I would like to thank the minister and officials. The minister still has to stay; he does not get to go. We will move on to multicultural affairs. I welcome

Mr Manikis. I also welcome Mr Pratt, who assures me he has got an hour of questions—

Mr Pratt: No, no; I do not have an hour's worth.

THE CHAIR: but he is not going to get an hour's worth of questions.

Mr Hargreaves: Ordinarily I would seek to make a statement around multicultural affairs because it is a portfolio. I am, however, in the interests of time, quite happy to seek leave to have the statement I was going to read incorporated in *Hansard* and made available for committee members. That will serve the purpose.

THE CHAIR: That is fine.

The incorporated document appears at attachment 1 on page P84.

DR FOSKEY: We know that the Office of Multicultural Affairs is now located in the Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre. Were the community groups in the centre consulted before the office moved in?

Mr Hargreaves: Dr Foskey, can I just say to you, firstly, that it is not the community groups that determine the occupancy of the building. The government is the landlord and it was our belief that there would be considerably greater synergies achieved if we could have the Office of Multicultural Affairs live and work within the community that it serves. So that decision was taken.

DR FOSKEY: Perhaps you could tell me the progress—whether the entire Office of Multicultural Affairs has moved into the centre—and also give me an indication of how the government and the non-government organisations are working together. Are they meeting in corridors? Has there been an impact on those relationships?

Mr Hargreaves: Firstly, we need to understand that prior to the office moving into the centre there were a number of ways in which the office kept in contact with the communities at large. They were in constant telephone communication with individuals and groups, in constant email contact with individuals and groups and the officers of OMA appear at almost every community multicultural function on every weekend of the year and most nights. They actually walk with the communities that they serve. What we have seen now with them coming into the centre is further opportunity for those people who have office space in the centre to have physical access to the office. What we are seeing here is an extension to the very, very extensive communication mechanisms which applied hitherto.

The centre was established by Jon Stanhope to be the central point to which people could come for a multicultural experience, and that included the provision of support services by them. It is not appropriate, in my view, to have the Office of Multicultural Affairs located a vast distance away from what is essentially the nerve centre of multiculturalism in the city and I believe that their presence in that centre adds credibility to the ACT's claim to be the centre of multiculturalism in the country. Next question, please.

DR FOSKEY: I just wondered if there was anything to add there.

Mr Hargreaves: No.

DR FOSKEY: It is good you are allowing me to ask another question. On page 39 of volume 1 it says that the ACT government funded a program that looked at increasing the sustainability of multicultural non-government organisations through strategies to increase membership and financial resources. I would be interested to know who did that work, which groups were involved and what the outcomes were.

Mr Hargreaves: Okay, a very brief bit of background. You would be aware that in previous years we put a lot of money out into the sector to the ACT multicultural councils. They provided us with a service which was decidedly unsatisfactory and we took the money back. We had the multicultural summit, which gave us directions. One of the directions that the communities wanted us to go in was the one to which you refer now and so we invested moneys out of that particular program to achieve a communication with communities on that. Mr Manikis can give you more details on that.

Mr Manikis: I think the program that you are referring to is one that governs the leadership youth forum that was delivered by the Canberra Multicultural Community Forum, which is a community organisation. It was provided with \$7,000 in funding. They launched that program on 29 May. They advertised it in June and delivered it on 11, 12 and 14 July. There were three lots of—

DR FOSKEY: Is that the one? We are talking about the same thing?

Mr Manikis: Yes, that is the one.

DR FOSKEY: Good.

Mr Manikis: Yes. There were three four-hour workshops.

Mr Hargreaves: Let the *Hansard* show that Dr Foskey pointed her finger to the printed word and they had instant communication.

THE CHAIR: Let us not slow things down, please.

Mr Manikis: That community organisation received \$7,000. This was one of the seven programs or projects that flowed out of the multicultural strategy, as I said, funded to the tune of \$7,000 and launched on 29 May 2007. It was advertised in June for people to come along to the community groups. It was delivered on 11, 12 and 14 July and comprised three four-hour workshops to address the roles and responsibilities of executives in incorporated organisations. I understand that they were very well received, those workshops. In fact, the forums reported that they were very well attended and that they will be doing, off their own back, some follow-up sessions.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Pratt.

MR PRATT: Just a supplementary, please, if I may, on the multicultural centre and the office space. Was it announced by the government that when the Notaras Centre was established there would be government office space included there?

Mr Hargreaves: No.

MR PRATT: Why is that the case now? Are you running out of space elsewhere?

MR SMYTH: And why is Mr Manikis nodding his head to say yes?

Mr Hargreaves: Not as far as I was concerned.

MR SMYTH: You are shaking your head now.

THE CHAIR: Mr Smyth—

Mr Hargreaves: Mr Smyth, if you give us a chance to answer instead of being so blatantly rude, it would be nice.

MR SMYTH: Well, you are the one that—

THE CHAIR: Order! Mr Smyth, we have actually maintained a civil tone throughout the morning and I would prefer it if we actually continued to maintain that. I would ask you, as I have done before, not to interrupt the minister when he is giving answers. I have asked the minister to extend the same courtesy to members of the committee, as well as members visiting the committee and asking questions. It has not always been complied with as much as I would like on both sides, but I ask that the general principle be adhered to. Thank you.

Mr Hargreaves: Madam Chair, in response to Mr Pratt's question, the emergence of the multicultural centre as a collection of multicultural activities is the first in the country. It is an evolving exercise. Some people have occupied the premises. Some have left and some people continue. Within the context of the multicultural community we constantly strive to see how we can keep the connections going to make sure that we actually empower smaller communities, to energise the smaller communities and to teach the smaller communities to be self-reliant.

Decisions are taken from time to time about how that can happen. One of the decisions we have taken about that is to say that we want to have the Office of Multicultural Affairs operate more closely with the communities. If you go and visit a public service office, it is quite clear that you do not go to that public office with the power shift in your favour. It is like going to somebody else's home. The multicultural centre is the home of all communities. When people come and talk to the Office of Multicultural Affairs they are not actually approaching a bureaucratic monolith. They are actually talking to people who work and live with the people they serve. We have had a positive result on that.

MR PRATT: What percentage of the office space is currently taken up by OMA? I understand that the National Multicultural Festival has now established a project office for the festival planning. Is that correct?

Mr Hargreaves: The provision of support for the multicultural festival, Mr Pratt, has been there for an awfully long time.

MR PRATT: Okay.

Mr Hargreaves: There is not anything new about that.

MR PRATT: What percentage of the —

Mr Hargreaves: I am not quite sure which percentage you want us to refer to. We will have to go and do the calculations. We are happy to do that.

MR PRATT: Do you have a waiting list of groups seeking office space?

Mr Manikis: Not at this stage.

MR PRATT: Not at this stage. If you do, would you seek perhaps to transfer the government offices out?

Mr Hargreaves: No.

Mr Manikis: No.

MR PRATT: Okay.

Mr Hargreaves: No. One of the things that we are conscious about, remembering that we started from the position of having nothing or—

MR PRATT: I take your point on the communication. I take your point on that.

Mr Hargreaves: Yes. The thing, too, is that before the centre was established, we either had no accommodation for people and they were operating out of lounge rooms—the Lao association, for example, is a perfect example of that—or they were in substandard accommodation like the old Griffin Centre. We have established the centre. We had a case in the last 12 months where one group moved out because they could not afford anything. They had premises elsewhere and they could not afford both, so they made a choice. Somebody else moved into that space. We also have the occasion where people will share rooms because they only need a certain amount of space. There are synergies there, too.

If we are really successful at this we will get to a stage where we have a problem in accommodating every group that wants to be accommodated, remembering that we have got 97, or something of that order, different ethnic communities in the town and about 160 or 170 different organisations which support them. For us to have a building to accommodate all of those 170 organisations, it would be just too big. I think we have made a great start with the centre. We will have to address that as the years go by.

MR PRATT: As long as you have accommodated all the major players and as long as

you have got some sort of capacity reserve in mind. You would not want to be—

Mr Hargreaves: On that point, Madam Chair—and I think I understand the importance of Mr Pratt’s question—a lot of the really major players are already looked after. For example, the Greek community are looked after. The Italian community are looked after. However, the smaller groups, like the Lao community, the Hmong and the Sudanese are not. They are the people who really need to come closer. These are the people that access our services more than the others, not in their number, but they have a greater need.

To give a contemporary example, the Sudanese access the Migrant Resource Centre quite significantly. So there is the synergy of having them in the centre. Their training in communication, fundraising and putting on activities to support themselves comes out of OMA, but their English language training and their preparation for jobs and getting jobs and things comes out of the MRC. That is where your synergies actually occur there.

MR PRATT: Right.

Mr Hargreaves: We need to make sure that those little ones are looked after.

MR PRATT: With the centre itself, the provision of public information about what is going on in the centre, I have had feedback from community groups that they would like to see better services made available to publicise activities in the place and to better coordinate the groups. Do you have something in mind there?

Mr Manikis: Just on that front, several or a few months ago we did issue a pamphlet that was done by our communications area. We publicised generally what the centre was about and we are now looking at ways of best communicating the ongoing programs that change from time to time in the centre, whether it is exhibitions or other events that take place there. We have also worked together with various community groups to put activities on at the centre. We have tried to publicise those activities through our email network, which is a regular distribution activity that we have in the office. It goes to all the community groups. That works both ways. What happens in the centre itself gets distributed—I think it is on a weekly basis—to all the community groups. Also, if community groups have got events or activities that are occurring, we use that email network distribution system as well. So it works both ways for us in the centre as well as for community activities.

Mr Hargreaves: There is another bit of stuff the committee might like to know, and you, too, Mr Pratt, I am sure. We have talked with Dr Foskey about this. One of those projects that we had, one of the other projects in the same line, because it came out of the summit and out of the strategy, was capacity building within the organisations themselves, how they go about fundraising, how they go about marketing themselves and how they go about working in the community. That addresses part of the issue.

A lot of the activities that happen over in the centre are actually generated by the community themselves. They are not generated by the centre. The Chinese-English language program is one that comes to mind. It is up to that community to market themselves. It is not up to us to put out a bulletin board and say, “Come along to this

sort of thing here.” It is up to them to do it.

So what we are actually about is empowering them and training them and doing some capacity building work to put them on a footing where they can do those themselves. For example—and you know this yourself—we have Friday prayers for the Muslim community there. It is not really up to the centre to advertise that that is an activity that happens. It is up to the Muslim community to actually make sure that everybody who is of the Islamic faith and people who are genuinely interested know that it is there. We need to have a partnership between ourselves and them to make sure that that information does get out. But it is not actually our responsibility to put it out there.

MR PRATT: Can all the groups access one point of information somewhere to know that there is something occurring so that they can prevent clashes, for example?

Mr Hargreaves: Yes.

MR PRATT: Have you got all that stuff squared away?

Mr Hargreaves: Yes.

MR PRATT: Because I am getting feedback that that is not well run and that the coordination of these things is still a problem.

Mr Hargreaves: I am not getting that feedback.

MR PRATT: Okay.

Mr Hargreaves: I am not suggesting for a second that you are not getting it, but I would appreciate your letting me know.

MR PRATT: Sure.

Mr Hargreaves: You could go straight to Nic. I am quite happy to address that.

MR PRATT: I will tell you more about that later, then.

Mr Hargreaves: Yes, happy.

MR PRATT: On the question of funding, I appreciate, by the way, the briefings I got from you recently, minister and Mr Manikis, about project funding and that phasing that you have been going through now for some time looking at how that can be better managed.

Mr Hargreaves: Yes.

MR PRATT: I understand where you are going and I think that is probably a good direction, but on the question of core funding, as you know, a couple of years back everything revolved around core funding.

Mr Hargreaves: Yes.

MR PRATT: I know why you have taken the steps that you have taken. Once you sort out the project funding plan, will there be consideration given again to reintroducing or looking at some sort of core funding to give some of these more plausible groups a bit of a leg up for their operating funds?

Mr Hargreaves: Just to update you on this particular phase, and for the record, Madam Chair—because other members will not be aware of the information and I will not go into the detail but I will go into the generality—I indicated to Dr Foskey’s office and Mr Pratt that the government was in a three-phase program about capacity building. It took back the funding and asked the communities out there what they wanted us to do and go forward with. That was the result of the summit, and the multicultural strategy came out of that. We moved forward with the government having funding and doing project funding in the first year and we are now seeing the benefit of that. That was intended essentially for the communities to tell us what they wanted and let us get on with it.

The second phase of that, which is the phase we are in at the moment, is having a combination of core funding, if you wish, and project funding. As a result of the programs that we ran last year and we now know, three other programs have emerged. I can get Nic Manikis to give you some details about that, if you like. What we are doing about that is providing funding to the multicultural sector to deliver on those three programs. Included in the amounts of money—I have forgotten how much they were; about \$7,000 each—was about \$7,000 for each of the programs. That is \$20,000, and remember that we had 70,000. We have got a mob of very round figures here. The other 50,000 will go out by way of core funding.

We want people to move forward and to be able to do this. We are not putting the lot out and saying, “You look after yourselves at this stage.” We are saying, “The multicultural community requires certain things to happen. Here we are. We will fund those projects directly but people will get the money to do core capacity for that.”

The way in which that money is being distributed out into the community has been through a tender process. There were three applicants for the issue, I will not name them. Obviously one of them was successful; one of them was not. But there was sufficient value in what the third wanted to do for us to ask the successful tenderer to fold in to some of the work that that organisation was doing and work in partnership with this third person, this third organisation.

The only thing holding up a public announcement for this is the final tick by Procurement Solutions as part of the tender process. All of the evaluation is done. Every piece of paperwork that needs to be done has been done. It is just now waiting for the delegate of the Procurement Board to sign off on that and then out we go. That is the second stage.

The third stage will be for the government to determine what projects it wants done from feedback from the community itself and then give out funding to the community in total. In other words, we do not actually put a value on a particular project. We would say, “These are the outcomes we want.” From what the multicultural community tells us, we are looking at going down three-year funding for that so that

we have got some guarantee of continuity of funds and activities.

What is in my head is the possibility at the end of next year perhaps—I have not really got a date in my head—of having a summit again to refresh from the last one. I have not got anything firm in my mind about that yet. That is just a thought that I might have, but that is where we are headed. I think we are probably about a week away from being able to do that announcement. As I was saying, the only thing holding it up is getting the delegate to sign off on it. We have all done it.

THE CHAIR: Can I just give notice that we are over time, but I will give it another five minutes.

MR PRATT: Thank you for that. I appreciate that.

Mr Hargreaves: I will give you some exact figures if I can, Madam Chair? \$29,000 is for the core funding and \$45,000, that is, three sets of 15,000—I thought it was 7,000 but I was wrong—for the projects.

MR PRATT: In terms of the core funding, if I understand you correctly, the tendering of the core funding is now pretty much aimed at one or two major umbrella groups. Is that correct?

Mr Hargreaves: No. We wanted any group at all who can bring together various groups to be able to deliver the project.

MR PRATT: Yes. That is what I mean by umbrella.

Mr Hargreaves: Yes, but they do not necessarily have to be an established one, a consortium order being fine.

MR PRATT: Yes.

Mr Hargreaves: I will give you an example. We could have had, say, the MRC and Companion House, for example, come together and say that they want to do something like that. We would have seriously considered that. We would have said, “Okay. You do it under the auspices of the MRC because they are an incorporated body.” That fixes up the Procurement Solutions problem, and so we move on. Interestingly, not every group that can call itself a collective or a lobby group or a peak group did apply for that support.

MR PRATT: Therefore, under the new regime, once you get this squared away—and I know that the Sudanese are getting some assistance with a number of the centres now; I am aware of that—

Mr Hargreaves: Yes.

MR PRATT: what chance does, for example, that particular group, the south Sudanese group have of getting some core funding to give them something to operate with? In terms of their youth—

Mr Hargreaves: I understand.

MR PRATT: You know about the youth program, of course?

Mr Hargreaves: Yes, I do understand. I understand exactly where you are coming from.

MR PRATT: That may attract project funding.

Mr Hargreaves: Yes.

MR PRATT: But so that the convenor does not have to sit in the lounge room and not get some phone bills paid—

Mr Hargreaves: Yes, I understand exactly what you are saying.

MR PRATT: do you have any plan for that sort of contingency?

Mr Hargreaves: We do not provide core funding to individual organisations out there. We only provide project funding in terms of the multicultural grants process. In one of the projects we have been doing some capacity building with the communities themselves. To some of the peak groups we are saying, “Part of the money we are giving you is to make sure that these people are self-sustaining.” The taxpayer just could not afford the amount of money for all these groups to do that.

MR PRATT: Clearly.

Mr Hargreaves: What we are doing, in fact, is giving them the wherewithal to do it themselves. For example, it worked with the Lao community. The Lao community have something like 300 to 400 people right across Canberra and they were operating out of a lounge room. They are not any more. They are operating out of an office, sharing an office in the multicultural centre. They can apply for things like assistance to buy a photocopying machine or those sorts of things in the multicultural advance process. We advise people to look at the grants portal to see where they can go and to talk to Nic about what access to grants funds we can give the people to let them go. But we are not in the business of core funding individual community groups.

MR PRATT: Given the social priority of the concerns that the Sudanese community has with their young men, do you identify them as a priority, and what sort of assistance might you be able to give them against the back of that regime of funding?

Mr Hargreaves: I cannot answer your question about the amount of assistance because I have not actually had a conversation with the department about it.

MR PRATT: So they have not put in a submission?

Mr Hargreaves: I can put this to you. We do regard it as a priority. We do not believe, however, that just throwing money at them is a solution for it.

MR PRATT: No.

Mr Hargreaves: For example, we work with Companion House particularly around some of the young men's groups, and the cooking class is one that comes to mind instantly. Again, it is about capacity building. We had exactly the same problem when the Afghans came to town and we had the same problem when the Vietnamese came to town.

MR PRATT: The Vietnamese, yes.

Mr Hargreaves: The young blokes were the ones that went into crisis more quickly. We had the same problem there. We have relationships with the police multicultural liaison officer who goes and talks to these people. It is about addressing their initial culture shock and then actually giving them the wherewithal to move forward. This comes back again to where OMA is sitting. If they live and work and function within the communities themselves, they are actually seen as an assistance mechanism and not a handout.

MR PRATT: May I ask just one last question?

THE CHAIR: How long do you estimate the answer will take?

MR PRATT: I reckon the minister could give a really beaut answer in 30 seconds.

THE CHAIR: Okay.

MR PRATT: We have talked before about the MACMA and I do not want to go back into the history of that, but given that really this is the only government in the country at the federal, state or territory level that does not have an advisory council dealing with the multicultural community—you might have indicated that you are still thinking about this, actually—have you had any more thoughts on where you might go with this issue? Are you likely some time down the track—

Mr Hargreaves: Yes. I would like to correct the record just on one spot. The federal government does not.

MR PRATT: Yes, they do.

Mr Hargreaves: It does not even have a minister for multicultural affairs.

MR PRATT: The outgoing government did have an advisory council.

Mr Hargreaves: In fact, at the last ministerial council, the eight ministers—

MR PRATT: It had an advisory council.

Mr Hargreaves: actually had to drag Mr Andrews kicking and screaming to put the word “multicultural” back into the lexicon. We do not think he really did. We just think he gave us lip service. But we did not.

MR PRATT: My advice is that they had an advisory council.

Mr Hargreaves: Well, I am telling you —

MR PRATT: Anyway, I will check it out. If they did not, they should have.

Mr Hargreaves: They did not take multiculturalism particularly seriously.

THE CHAIR: Stop yelling.

Mr Hargreaves: But the answer to your question, for the record, is that we did not have a MACMA; we never had a MACMA. We had a Chief Minister's advisory council on multicultural affairs. It was to him as the Chief Minister.

MR PRATT: Yes, I know that now.

Mr Hargreaves: It was not to me. I believed that I did not need the assistance of a bunch of people who did not represent the wider community and definitely did not represent the smaller communities. All they did in the space of 12 months was to have a few arguments and a quite a number of meals on the government. I did not need them when I was going to walk with the community themselves to teach myself about it. I have had conversations about where I am going, Mr Pratt. We do have one, actually. We have one with the Muslim Advisory Council.

MR PRATT: Yes, but that is narrow scope.

Mr Hargreaves: The thing is it is episodic. It is as long as the Muslim community feel that they need to have that access to me. We have not had a consolidated multicultural community up until the time I took that stuff back. We found that there were certain little groups who were collecting together, but they were not representative of the lot. In order for me at the moment to constitute an advisory council, if you like, we would need to consider how that would be constituted, not the process, but by whom. Do we, for example, allow people to elect somebody to represent them on this sort of thing? If you take, for example, the Pacific island groups—

MR PRATT: Why not?

Mr Hargreaves: There are seven of them.

MR PRATT: Why not, minister?

THE CHAIR: Order!

MR PRATT: Why not?

Mr Hargreaves: Because you would end up with an advisory council of 45 people and it would not be functional.

MR PRATT: No, not 45, but surely you could take a cross-section from the four or five peak bodies and you could elect people.

Mr Hargreaves: Well, at the moment, yes. I actually I have conversations with those people regularly, like the six ministerial forums that I had before. Actually, I think in this financial year we have had about four or five of them anyway, and we will continue that into the future. But I have to say that I am to be convinced that the multicultural community has got its act together in terms of peak advocacy. You know, right now the Migrant Resource Centre is underfunded by 50 per cent because the federal government took its money away. I am not picking on this one. It went right round the country. So they are in rebuild mode.

We have got the issue around the Multicultural Council which will find resolution fairly shortly. We have got the forum to take into account and then we have got other groups which we need to consolidate. I am not closing the door, but it is not very widely open at the minute.

THE CHAIR: On that note, I would like to thank you, minister and officials, for your attendance today. For the benefit of Mr Manikis and Mr Pratt, if you want to submit further questions on notice, Mr Pratt, you need to do that by close of business on Friday. The answers to questions on notice will have the usual turnaround time.

Mr Hargreaves: Wednesday.

THE CHAIR: The following Wednesday. Thank you very much for your attendance today.

Mr Hargreaves: Madam Chair, before we close, may I please express my appreciation to Sandra Lambert and the officers of the department, particularly Housing ACT and the Office of Multicultural Affairs. They do an enormous lot of work. This is the best annual report, I believe, that has been provided. They do some great work and I wish to say thank you very much to those people.

THE CHAIR: And so say all of us.

Meeting adjourned from 12.11 to 2.05 pm.

Appearances:

Gallagher, Ms Katy, Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Health, Minister for Children and Young People, Minister for Disability and Community Services, Minister for Women

ACT Health

Cormack, Mr Mark, Chief Executive

Foster, Mr Ron, Chief Finance Officer, Financial and Risk Management Branch

Trompf, Ms Linda, Acting Executive Director, Policy

McKinnon, Ms Irene, Executive Director, Business and Infrastructure

Norrie, Dr Peter, Director of Clinical Services, Mental Health

Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services

Ford, Ms Lois, Executive Director, Disability ACT

Hardy, Ms Rosalie, Senior Manager, Therapy ACT

Whitten, Ms Meredith, Director, Advocacy, Review and Quality

THE CHAIR: Welcome, minister and officials. I am not going to read the privilege statement because it will take up half the hearing if I do so. Copies have been circulated to people. If you do not understand what it means, can you please say so when you appear before us and we will explain it to you. But I am sure you are all intelligent people and capable of understanding the privilege statement. Minister, would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms Gallagher: Thank you, Madam Chair. I understand we only have an hour put aside for this, so I am happy to proceed to questions. I should just flag with the committee that I may need to leave. I have hopefully timed it for the break, but I might need to leave for 10 minutes.

THE CHAIR: I am sure we can be flexible around that, minister. We might start by asking a few questions on the second appropriation so that we can get that over and done with.

Ms Gallagher: Yes, sure.

THE CHAIR: Is that all right?

MRS BURKE: That is all right.

THE CHAIR: I understand it was passed on to you by Mr Mulcahy that that was going to be happening.

MRS BURKE: I understood that ruling was overruled.

THE CHAIR: No.

DR FOSKEY: No, not at all. You can do what I did and put your questions in written form.

MRS BURKE: Yes, I will do that.

DR FOSKEY: That is what I have done, so I have not got any questions to ask on that.

THE CHAIR: If there are no questions on the second appropriation, we will move on. Mrs Burke, would you like to ask some questions?

MRS BURKE: I certainly would. Good afternoon, minister and officials. I turn to page 95 of the annual report, strategic indicator 21, emergency department timeliness. I would also ask you to turn to page 110 because I am hoping that somebody can clarify some of the 2006-07 targets, which look completely different on both of those pages. The results are exactly the same. This correlates to further confusion I have had from an FOI received which bear out the figures on page 95 as opposed to page 110.

THE CHAIR: Can you explain what you mean by the difference regarding the FOI?

MRS BURKE: If we look at page 95 and the 2006-07 targets, we are referring here to triage categories. The figures for emergencies seen within 10 minutes are 80 per cent and 77 per cent. That is the same on page 110. If we look at emergencies seen within 30 minutes, the target is 60 per cent on page 95 and a 47 per cent result. It is 75 per cent on page 110 and 47 per cent and so on. Could you explain that?

Mr Cormack: The targets on page 110 refer to the official targets by the Australian College of Emergency Medicine, so they are targets that we can aspire to. The targets that we report against in our strategic indicators are targets that we set ourselves in the budget paper process. On page 95, those are targets that we put into the budget papers. I acknowledge that there is some confusion between the two but that is—

MRS BURKE: Which are you working to, minister?

Ms Gallagher: Which are we measured against?

MRS BURKE: Which are you personally working towards?

Ms Gallagher: We are working to both. With the ones we set ourselves, you are not going to go from 47 per cent to 75 per cent in one year, so they are targets we set ourselves in the budget paper. We are measured nationally against the ones on page 110, and they are the targets we are hopeful of meeting in the not-too-distant future. But we certainly will not meet them within a year.

MRS BURKE: I think that needs to be made clear. I assume the committee would be happy if in future reports—

Ms Gallagher: We have just made it clear, but if you want us to put “budget paper”—

MRS BURKE: No, in future reports because even—

Ms Gallagher: as opposed to “national benchmark”—

THE CHAIR: Can I interrupt both of you for a moment. I remind you, Mrs Burke, of the principles I was applying this morning and I remind the minister and officials that it would be nice if we can conduct this in a cordial manner, allow the minister to finish answering the question before we move on and then you can ask further questions and also seek clarification et cetera. But if we can try to conduct ourselves nicely, it would be appreciated. Minister, what were you saying?

Ms Gallagher: I had finished.

THE CHAIR: Okay.

MRS BURKE: Thank you, minister, but it does create some confusion for people reading this report. You need to make it very clear in future reports, if you would, exactly the information that Mr Cormack has given. I think it would be valuable. That is all I have to say.

Ms Gallagher: In response to that, if the committee were to recommend to the government along those lines, the government would consider it.

DR FOSKEY: I am interested in the issues around junior doctors. That appears on pages 113 and 114. I am aware that there is often a reliance on junior doctors, especially to staff emergency. Given that you have the goal of minimising overtime demands on junior doctors, I would be interested to know what kind of hours junior doctors are working at the moment and what incentives there are for them to work those hours or whether it is part of their training. In other words, what arrangements apply and how do you plan to minimise the overtime demands upon them?

Mr Cormack: The question of junior doctors and their working hours is a matter of national and international concern. I guess there is a balance to be struck in the rostering of junior doctors, or any doctors for that matter. It is important that we keep our hospitals and health services adequately staffed to meet the anticipated demand, so we do need to ensure that we have sufficient staff on board. We also need to recognise that there is an international and national shortage of medical practitioners and we have to compete vigorously for that scarce resource.

The other thing to balance, particularly when you are talking about junior doctors and registrars, is that they do have to meet training requirements, and those requirements are for a certain number of hours in certain work areas and clinical rotation. So there is a balancing issue there. The question is probably more about what we do to manage it. There are a couple of things there. In 2006-07, we established the medical appointments and training unit. That unit was established to bring together and consolidate the rostering and management of all of our medical practitioners and their appointments so that we could ensure that we have a sufficient supply of doctors to meet the anticipated demand.

The other key point is that, in the current certified agreement with ASMOF, the Australian Salaried Medical Officers Federation—and we are coming towards the end of that agreement—we have inserted a safe working hours clause within that agreement. That has forced both parties to consider best practice rostering

arrangements to ensure that we are able to achieve that balance that I have described. It probably is not a complete answer to your question, but it is a matter of balancing the needs of the hospital to be appropriately staffed and ensuring that we are able to manage a scarce resource, which is medical officers.

DR FOSKEY: What kind of length of shifts are we talking about here?

Mr Cormack: The shifts for junior medical officers can vary. Some of them are part time. The minimum standard shift would be eight to 10 hours. Some of them are rostered on for longer periods than that. On top of that they may be asked to do overtime if they are involved in a particular case or if there is a surge in demand. At times they are also required to be called back to duty if there is an unexpected absence or if they are required to attend a peak in demand. So it is a variable shift length. I can't give you figures here today on what the average shift length is for junior medical officers.

THE CHAIR: Is there anything further on that?

DR FOSKEY: Perhaps you could get back to the committee on that.

Mr Cormack: I am happy to do that.

THE CHAIR: Minister and Mr Cormack, this relates to a different area. As you are aware, the committee is conducting an inquiry into crystal methamphetamine. As part of that inquiry we have been looking for figures and information on funding of alcohol and drug programs and a breakdown of where that goes. We have not been able to find it. Have we just missed it? Is it in the annual report or is it not actually specifically spelt out?

Ms Gallagher: A further breakdown from what the budget papers would provide, so down into funding to non-government agencies?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Gallagher: I am sure we can provide that for the committee.

THE CHAIR: That would be useful, thank you.

MRS BURKE: I need to express for the public record my disappointment that we are only going to have a fairly short time to discuss health, given that it is the biggest budget since self-government. I do express my concern; however, if I do not get through everything today, I will have to put questions on notice.

Ms Gallagher: I attend for what I am called for. I was called for one hour, and that is what I am here for.

MRS BURKE: I was not saying anything else, minister.

Ms Gallagher: I just want to respond on the public record. That is a matter that only the committee can determine.

THE CHAIR: Mrs Burke is aware of that, minister.

MRS BURKE: We will not go into the ins and outs of that now, but a majority Labor committee wanted—

THE CHAIR: Do you want to ask a question or would you like somebody else to ask a question instead?

MRS BURKE: I will turn to page 9 of the report and we will have a look at risk management—rising costs of medical malpractice indemnity. People may also want to turn to page 56 of the report—the supplies and services financial report. If we look at the insurance costs there for 2006, we see an increased insurance premium for medical malpractice, from \$13,985,000 to \$23,019,000 in this financial year. It attributes the increased insurance premium to medical malpractice. Can you give the committee some information on that? Why has it risen so greatly? What efforts are being made to limit the increase? Is ACT Health in any way able to cap the increase?

Ms Gallagher: I will let Ron Foster give the detail, but in terms of capping any increase, that is impossible. We need to provide for whatever liabilities may lie ahead, and to try and cap that would put the territory at a significant disadvantage in terms of being able to meet potential future costs resulting from any action taken in relation to a whole range of matters within the ACT health system.

Mr Foster: The rise in costs as advised to us by the ACT Insurance Authority is based on work done with their reinsurers, and relates to the cost of actually insuring for matters that were potential claims against ACT Health. That rise in 2006-07 in fact occurred the year before but was paid directly by ACT Treasury, so we have not had a rise in the last two years in medical insurance costs. Certainly, it had to be reflected in the accounts that year because Treasury passed it on for us to pay it in 2006-07, while they had actually paid the higher cost in 2005-06 already.

THE CHAIR: Why did Treasury pay the costs in 2005-06?

Mr Foster: It was just the timing of when the increase became advised by ACTIA to the government. So they chose to pay that rather than pass it through us at that late stage in the budget process. We really are subject to the work done by ACTIA and the reinsurers, and the overall world insurance problems around what the costs are for insurance.

THE CHAIR: are you saying, Mr Foster, that it is not necessarily related to the number of malpractice claims but to the insurance market at the time?

Mr Foster: They are probably questions best answered via the ACT Insurance Authority, but there will be factors associated with the difficulties that were experienced in the insurance market in the early 2000s.

THE CHAIR: Clearly, but is the level of malpractice claims a component of that?

Mr Foster: That certainly could be. The ACT insurance market is fairly immature

and as more information is gathered over the years it will become a more understood market for insurers as well as us.

MRS BURKE: I can perhaps help you there. On pages 4 and 5 of the Insurance Authority's report they noted an operating loss of \$11 million and put a lot of that down to other factors such as claims for hail and storm damage. But they said that a number of large claims—and this is really what I want to focus on today—emerged, especially in medical malpractice, where case development has increased by 32 per cent. Indeed, on page 9 of that report it is stated that there are escalating claims costs due to poor risk management in agencies. What are we doing to manage this? They are talking about escalating claims so it is a bit of a concern.

Ms Gallagher: In fact, ACT Health, I believe, has led the way across the ACT government in proactive risk management strategies in terms of potential future liabilities. I am sure Mr Cormack can take us through them, but they include the establishment of a patient safety area within ACT Health, our clinical risk frameworks, which you have been briefed on, the implementation of RiskMan, which has recently won an award in terms of how successful it has been. That, as you know, enables every employee to log on and note a risk, if they think it is, whether it be the hours they work, the supplies or equipment they use or something they have seen. That actually can alert, at the earliest possible stage, potential risks that might exist across ACT Health. From where I sit in the government, and I see things across a range of agencies, ACT Health is really leading the way.

MRS BURKE: Minister, thank you for that, but that is still concerning, even if all those good things are being implemented. I am not sure about time for each one—when they started and for how long they have been running. But it is quite clear that medical malpractice case development has increased by 32 per cent. Is it too early to tell with some of the things that have been implemented? Clearly, there is an increase of 32 per cent. I am just not sure, having regard to the positive things that you have said have been implemented, why we are still seeing an increase.

Mr Cormack: I think it is fair to say that a lot of the risk management initiatives that the minister has described have built up gradually over the last couple of years, whereas a number of the claims that form the basis of insurance premiums and insurance cost build up over a longer period of time. The initiatives that the minister has outlined have been funded by government over the last couple of budgets and they will take some time to achieve a significant turnaround in the cost of insurance. There is a lead time with all of these things.

A similar example is the approach that ACT Health took to the management of occupational health and safety and injury prevention and management. About three or four years ago, we made a significant investment, again supported by the ACT government, in the prevention of physical injury and other forms of injury in the workplace. It took some time before we saw a turnaround in the premiums. You can see that reflected in the annual report—that the investment in those risk management strategies that was made some years ago is now starting to achieve a turnaround. We envisage that, in the case of medical malpractice and medical indemnity, we will start to see over time a levelling off and an improvement in the cost of insurance due to our better approaches to risk management.

MRS BURKE: I was not actually talking about the insurance premium costs; I am talking about the increased case development of 32 per cent. So it is the cases that are increasing—malpractice cases and a case development increase. If you need to take that on notice—

Mr Cormack: It is the same answer. The same approaches are required to deal with any increases in medical indemnity that are required to manage the risk—that is, we need to encourage doctors and nurses to be able to notify, in a trusted environment, risks to patient safety. We need to have mechanisms in place to have those complaints investigated appropriately and fairly. Then, over time, you get a more open system that is dealing with risks to patient safety in an effective and proactive manner. So it is exactly the same.

MRS BURKE: But that is not happening currently, Mr Cormack.

Mr Cormack: As I mentioned before, it is a factor of time, Mrs Burke.

THE CHAIR: It is a time lag; that is what you are saying.

Mr Cormack: Exactly. It takes time to achieve returns on those sorts of investments.

DR FOSKEY: I want to congratulate the people who put together the report on providing some information in the section on ecologically sustainable development, because that is usually a paragraph with scant detail. It is good that you have documented the use of water, energy and so on. I want to congratulate you on that in the hope that other agencies might look at doing the same. Have you set yourselves any targets for reducing some of these levels of use? Certainly, you document your average use—you have reduced, for instance, greenhouse gas emissions. But there is nothing that says you are going to try to do that even more in the future.

Mr Cormack: I might call on Irene McKinnon, our Executive Director of Business and Infrastructure.

Ms McKinnon: While it is not documented in the annual report, we certainly are working to continually reduce the targets on energy and are specifically working now with the ACT government climate change group in TAMS. We are actually in the process of really setting the continued targets that we will be aiming for with water, energy, fleet management—all of those. We are progressing that.

DR FOSKEY: There are such huge volumes of use of energy and whatever that it is a bit of a challenge.

Ms McKinnon: It is, yes, and we continually actively work with the likes of ActewAGL, et cetera, and other benchmarking areas as well to continually set ourselves new targets and continue down that path.

DR FOSKEY: Have you experimented with the use of alcohol substances that can be used for hand washing instead of water? I believe doctors need to wash their hands for several minutes to ensure cleanliness, but I was just wondering whether you are

exploring alternatives.

Ms McKinnon: We work with the infection control area of the hospital on any of our environmental services like that. Dr Dugdale, who is here, would probably be better than me to answer that particular question. But with anything like that, with water usage, et cetera, we work with the infection control area of the hospital to make any improvements there.

MRS BURKE: You were talking about infection control. Can you give us an update on the situation at the Canberra Hospital and Calvary in relation to the management of infectious diseases and the control and management of those on site? I know there have been some difficulties, so I would like an update on those.

Ms Gallagher: I do not think there have been any difficulties—not that I am aware of.

MRS BURKE: I think a patient was parked in a corridor or in an alcove at some stage. This refers to the nurse issue.

THE CHAIR: But not infectious disease.

Ms Gallagher: I have had no reports of anyone parked in a corridor. As you would be aware, as I think we discussed at the time, all infection control procedures were followed in that case. I am just recalling whether or not I forwarded to you a copy of the infection control guidelines and policy procedures. I am not sure whether I did. At the time, I certainly thought of doing it. Whether that actually translated to—

THE CHAIR: Would you like to provide that to the committee as a whole and we would be happy to receive that.

Ms Gallagher: Sure. Again, this government has led the way in terms of improving infection control within our public hospitals. We have employed an infection control nurse. I think there are 1½ of those that work across the hospitals. We test every positive blood culture that is received, unlike any other jurisdiction, to my knowledge.

We have very low rates of hospital acquired infection. Correct me, but I think we are the second lowest in the country. We have very eminent staff heading up our infectious diseases area. In an ideal world and in ideal buildings, you would be able to do a bit more. We do the best we can with the infrastructure we have got.

As to specific problems that there have been, I am not aware of any problems there have been in the hospital due to—

MRS BURKE: I think Professor Collignon raised them some time ago and I was wondering—

THE CHAIR: Can I suggest that—

Ms Gallagher: If I could just respond to that. Professor Collignon raised the issue of having single rooms for patients. Everybody knows that the ultimate way you would build a hospital these days is to have patients in single rooms. In fact, we do very well

in terms of keeping our hospital acquired infection rates very low. Our returns to theatres are very low. We do absolutely very well. There is no issue with infection control that is not being managed appropriately, apart from the fact that we do not have a lot of single rooms.

In relation to the single rooms being used as admin areas, which I think was another part of Professor Collignon's comments, in fact it was the previous government that turned single rooms into office space. It has been our government that has actually put those back into ward space, as I have provided Mrs Burke with to a question on notice.

THE CHAIR: I might say as well, for everybody's benefit: if people have a specific area of concern, could you please relate to it rather than speak in general terms. If there is an allegation of something which could be done better, then the minister and officials need to know what that is so that they can respond appropriately, because they cannot just talk around generalities.

I might ask a question now. Minister, I refer to pages 6 and 19 of the report with relation to reform on smoking. Can you and your officials provide further details about this area and what is being done?

Ms Gallagher: Tobacco control, I think, is your general question. There is some work that is still under way. We have of course introduced the legislation that backs up the compliance testing. We are currently investigating a further range of measures on tobacco control, the most contentious one of those being smoking in outdoor public places. We are just in the process of finalising that work for the government's decision early next year, I would imagine now, the way the cabinet agenda is looking.

We are also looking at the Canberra Stadium and further looking at advertising products at point of sale and things like that. So we are moving progressively forward to tighten up our tobacco control measures.

THE CHAIR: When you say "Canberra Stadium", it is supposed to be smoke free within the stands, is it not?

Ms Gallagher: It is smoke free within the seating areas but, the area directly in between the seating areas, where you go and buy food and drink and children play a lot, is not smoke free. It is within the actual seating of the stadium. What is being looked at is outside of that complex. Not allowing smoking within the seated area includes the kiosks and places—

MRS BURKE: Where the food is.

Ms Gallagher: Yes.

DR FOSKEY: I refer to pages 194 and 195, which refer to consumer feedback. It looks as though there have been quite a large number of complaints in relation to access, communication, corporate services and professional conduct. But I am wondering about the feedback that people receive. It looks, from page 195, as though there is not a lot of positive feedback, except in relation to treatment. So I am wondering whether that is an area that could be improved.

Ms Gallagher: I am sure it could.

DR FOSKEY: How then?

Ms Gallagher: I have to say, from where I have seen the complaints across ACT Health, I am happy with how they are being handled. I guess you would like to see fewer complaints. But in terms of complaints handling, once they have been made, I am very happy with the way they are handled.

In fact if you take the Canberra Hospital as an example of that, if a complaint is received by the hospital or by me, more often than not a phone call is placed to that person pretty much straight away, issues are discussed with them and a resolution sought to be worked out for further discussion, if that is required. Access is difficult.

In terms of the complaints I would get, that would be the biggest area of complaint, as it would be for other MLAs. We would like to see that reduced, and that is why we are working very hard on improving access, particularly at the Canberra Hospital where—

THE CHAIR: It does actually say that it has a higher level of complaints about corporate services.

Ms Gallagher: In the table it does say there are a number of them.

DR FOSKEY: What kinds of things would come under that heading?

Ms Gallagher: That is probably—

THE CHAIR: Probably people complaining about their bills?

Ms Gallagher: No. I would imagine, looking at the number of them—and maybe this is a bit of a one off—it would be around paid parking.

DR FOSKEY: That would be interesting to know. I wonder whether there is any way of confining it?

Ms Gallagher: Yes.

DR FOSKEY: That one should go down then. Now they will be complaining about not enough car parks, I guess.

Ms Gallagher: We are opening another 562 tomorrow. Hopefully, that will go down too.

THE CHAIR: I understand Mrs Burke has a supplementary.

MRS BURKE: Just on that: in terms of complaints—and I am happy to talk to you about this as well, minister—I have been approached by somebody who works within ACT Health who will not give me his name, but I can show you the full email that

I have received. Maybe this is a reflection of some of these complaints that we are hearing here. His insistence is of a corporate culture that exists within ACT Health and the fear, if anybody speaks out to try to make change to the system or the area where they are working, of reprisal. We hear this constantly.

As I said, I am more than happy to show you this email because it did concern me. What would your thoughts be on that? I hear from time to time about the culture. Is this reflected here?

Ms Gallagher: The majority of complaints that I receive are around access. It may be about surgery being cancelled or having to wait for a more urgent person to go before someone and then not realising that is what has happened. It is around communication of treatment rather than the treatment itself. They would be, by far, the majority of the complaints.

In relation to a culture existing where staff do not feel able to talk, I have not come across that personally. I have received probably one or two emails from staff who are unhappy with their work situation, and I have to go on information that is provided to me. But I do look at things like separation rates, complaints within particular areas. We do know, when we are looking at separation rates, we are doing much better than we have ever done before; so we are doing something right. Staff are staying and they are choosing to stay. There are a whole load of jobs outside ACT Health where people could work if they wanted to and they are not choosing to.

Looking at it globally across the agency, I would say I cannot see that that is an issue. However, in a workforce in excess of 5,000, it would be, it does not surprise me that there are one or two people that may be unhappy in their work environment and may not feel able to discuss that with their supervisor.

MRS BURKE: How could we improve that? Is there anything that comes to your mind now?

Ms Gallagher: We have riskman, for example. Individuals can go on and lodge something or do something and raise an issue. My experience with the health workforce more than any other workforce that I have ever come across is they do complain and do raise issues. Any manager in ACT Health will tell you they do raise issues. They have to be very carefully managed because if they are not managed we are not able to deliver a service. In my experience, right down to admin people, cleaners, enrolled nurses, nurses, doctors—that goes without saying—all certainly feel very able to complain.

The assurance I would give a person, if they came to me, is that I would look into things. I would look very carefully into any issue like the one you raised, and I would take advice on it. I have been working with the agency now for over a year, and it does not have a culture of bullying or harassment or not listening and not responding to staff—in fact the opposite, I would say. We do look at this very closely in terms of staff surveying and responses. Through that way, we do look very closely. That is a very thorough way of drilling right down to individual units to have a look at what is going on and responding if we need to in those areas.

MRS BURKE: I suppose, like anything, we could always improve—continual awareness of staff.

Ms Gallagher: I have to go on the fact that we are attracting staff to the area. We have got more doctors and nurses than we have ever had. People are staying. Our acting chief nurse does a fantastic job of dealing with issues as they arise day by day and responding. In particular, we have had a very hard winter, as you know, with staff being unwell, coinciding with school holidays, staff working long hours. That was very well handled in terms of looking after the staff as best we could when we were asking so much of them.

We have awards for achievements. Every year we have the nursing awards; we have the quality and healthcare awards. I know the general manager of the hospital and the acting chief nurse do rounds of the hospital every day almost—I think, daily—to any wards that they may need to go to, to talk with staff. It is very hands on.

MRS BURKE: I do not specifically mean the hospital. I am not—

Ms Gallagher: I know. I am using TCH as an example. It is where the largest workforce exists. But again I have to go on the data and the reports that I see. I would certainly not sit here and accept that there is a culture of harassment and/or fear in ACT Health. I have seen nothing at all to prove it exists.

MRS BURKE: Our concern is that somebody would raise that. I ask a question, on page 100, in regard to clients discharged from ACT government hospitals. It is in regard to discharge plans. Accountability indicator is:

Proportion of clients discharged from ACT Public Hospitals to a Community Health Program who have a completed discharge plan.

The target was 50 per cent; the result was 29 per cent. I do notice that the explanatory note says:

The shortfall was due to incomplete staff compliance with new reporting requirements. 3rd and 4th quarter data reflects Calvary discharge plans only.

What happened there?

Mr Cormack: Discharge planning is an ongoing issue for hospitals; we can always improve in that area. I guess it is only in recent years that we have set specific accountability indicators, and we have set those up to ensure that we have got a target to aim for and that we have got our performance being measured against it. So part of this is about accountability.

The other side of the story is that we did a lot of work on implementing an effective discharge kit about a year and a half ago. As you can imagine, across our hospitals there are between 70,000 and 80,000 people who are separated each year from those hospitals, and we have had to work hard to improve staff compliance with the new guidelines.

These guidelines are relatively new. The training and change management process is ongoing. I am very disappointed that we did not get to our target but I am certainly advised that we are making significant improvements in that area, and that remains an area of priority for us.

MRS BURKE: Thank you for part of an answer, but I think that it is very concerning because a discharge plan is a really critical component. Obviously, as you all know probably better than I, people are being readmitted or not readmitted to hospital in the future, depending on the wellness of that patient exiting hospital. You talked about accountability indicators at the Canberra Hospital being fairly new.

Mr Cormack: No, I did not say the Canberra Hospital I said accountability indicators.

MRS BURKE: Here it says:

3rd and 4th quarter data reflects Calvary ...

They managed to do it. Why not at the Canberra Hospital?

Mr Cormack: I cannot specifically answer why they have not done that. We have identified there that there is an issue with incomplete staff compliance with new reporting requirements. This is a relatively new indicator, and there are certainly some compliance issues there. The access improvement program is redoing the whole discharge planning process because we recognised that there was a problem with compliance. We recognise there is a problem there and we are working to fix it up.

MRS BURKE: It is not a particularly good answer. It seems to be a little laid back answer for something that is really critical when one part of the system can manage it and another cannot. Have Calvary been doing this reporting on this particular indicator longer than TCH? Where did the discharge kit come into it? This is a serious issue where we are falling down in an area where it is really critical.

Mr Cormack: I recognise that. We are working to rectify that. I am not denying that there is a problem there. It is also a lot easier to implement change in a relatively small hospital such as Calvary than it is in a larger hospital such as the Canberra Hospital. There are significantly more separations, two to three times the separation rate and two to three times the amount of staff to put through the training requirements. I am not saying that is an excuse. I am not saying I am happy with the outcome. We are doing things to rectify it, and I hope to be able to demonstrate significant improvement over the course of this financial year.

MRS BURKE: Minister, with respect, is that not a failure of management itself then?

THE CHAIR: Mrs Burke—

MRS BURKE: You said you were not going to talk over the top of me.

THE CHAIR: No, I did not say that.

Ms Gallagher: Mrs Burke, what you do not understand or do not appear to

understand is that management's job is, when a problem is identified, to respond to it and fix it. That is exactly what Mr Cormack just said. They have identified a problem, an administrative problem with compliance in terms of reporting. It has been identified and it is being fixed.

MRS BURKE: That is for two quarters.

THE CHAIR: We have actually covered this area now for a quite a bit of time.

Ms Gallagher: We will wait for the media release on that, but in terms of whether I am satisfied—

MRS BURKE: This is about people; it is not about media releases. That is totally disingenuous of you, absolutely rude.

Ms Gallagher: I speak from experience, I have to say.

MRS BURKE: I am glad you can laugh. Ask the people who—

Ms Gallagher: You can look very sincere, but I do speak from experience of having dealt with you for a number of years. What I am saying is the answer that was given is—

MRS BURKE: Another area that you are letting the community down.

THE CHAIR: Mrs Burke, please stop it.

Ms Gallagher: As I said, I will read about that in your next media release. But what I am saying is a problem has been identified and it is being fixed. And that is what you do in health. When problems are identified they are fixed.

DR FOSKEY: I would like to move on to mental health. I have one question in relation to the improved relationship with ACT Housing, which is listed as a priority on page 119, second dot point from the bottom. I am interested to know whether that is actually occurring, because I heard about this from the Housing ACT side too. Is Mental Health ACT working with Housing ACT to investigate alternative models of community housing for people suffering a mental illness, as the Standing Committee on Health and Disability recommended?

Ms Gallagher: Yes, sure. That is in addition to our step up, step down facility.

DR FOSKEY: Given the targeting of ACT Housing now, I would be fairly sure that there would be perhaps more tenants with mental health issues. One of the things that we are told is that there will be a much more joined up delivery of services. I am pretty sure that that would be required as well.

Ms Gallagher: Yes.

Ms Trompf: Certainly the issue of working closely with Housing for people living with a mental illness has been an ongoing priority for us over recent years. We have

made some significant progress in that regard. We have an MOU with Housing ACT that provides a very effective way for us working together. Housing ACT has also put into their program some special provisions for people with a mental illness. That includes reducing requirements for rent so that they can remain tenants if they have to go in as an inpatient or for rehabilitation for any length of time.

There is shared training between housing providers, housing managers and Mental Health. We provide some training to housing managers and also providers of housing to enable them to work more effectively with people with a mental illness. Mental Health ACT also now has representatives that sit on the housing committee that allocates priority housing based on need. That is another way of getting the needs of people with a mental illness more effectively addressed.

As you are probably aware, we are also looking at a number of projects that have been conducted in other jurisdictions around how housing, mental health and community organisations can work more effectively together. We are looking at what aspects of those we might be able to utilise to enhance what we are already doing with Housing and our community organisations.

Another thing that we have been doing a fair bit of work on in the last 12 months is around providing some step-up, step-down 24-hour supported accommodation for people who need that level of support. The government has provided funding in the last two budgets for us to progress that. We hope to have a service for young people and a service for adults operational early in 2008. We have worked with Housing to identify appropriate properties for those services; we are also working with community organisations that will be contracted to provide those services, working closely with Mental Health ACT.

DR FOSKEY: Thanks. One of the issues that have been raised with me by the mental health consumer community concerns the release of patients from acute facilities after 3 pm on Friday afternoons when it can often be really difficult to arrange accommodation and support staff. That was another recommendation of the standing committee; I wondered if there has been any movement upon that following the government's response.

Ms Trompf: I might have to hand over to Dr Peter Norrie.

Dr Norrie: I am a senior consultant psychiatrist and director of clinical services for Mental Health ACT. This clearly is a very important issue. The inpatient units now comprise the PSU, 2N and also the Older Persons Mental Health Inpatient Unit. It is a difficult balance between providing a level of care for people that are coming into the service through the latter part of the week and making sure that there is adequate discharge planning through the week for patients going out. My role particularly looks at endeavouring to make sure that discharges are planned prior to Fridays, particularly Friday afternoons. There have been some occasions when, to have the best services available for people coming into the weekend, it has been necessary to make discharges earlier than planned, but that is then accompanied by the full support of the CAT team through the weekend to ensure that people are looked after.

DR FOSKEY: How long have you been making this special effort, Dr Norrie?

Dr Norrie: Over the last 12 months there has been the operation of an actual discharge planning service that both the director of operations and I have been involved with. It is probably worth adding as well that the team leaders of the PSU and 2N—the adult services probably cover most of your area of concern—now meet by teleconference regularly at 3 o'clock each day to review the patient numbers in the wards, look at ongoing discharges and make plans into the early evening and overnight for patient care.

THE CHAIR: Did you say that applied to both Canberra Hospital and ward 2N?

Dr Norrie: Ward 2N at Calvary Hospital; that is right.

DR FOSKEY: Have you gathered any feedback on how this is working or do you plan to?

Dr Norrie: On anecdotal comments, the most positive feedback—an area of problem which would come through reporting to me would be that if there was an area of big concern the staff will usually come through the team leaders directly to me—is that calls to me in the latter part of the day have decreased significantly over the last two to three months. I believe that we have got a plan in place that is working well.

MRS BURKE: Can I follow up with that one, Dr Norrie? Page 98 of the report refers to “Accountability indicators”, “Patient activity”. Accountability indicator (f) refers to “The proportion of clients seen at an ACT Health community facility during the 7 days post discharge”. I am presuming that means from the inpatient situation or ward.

Dr Norrie: Yes.

MRS BURKE: It looks as though the sentence is not finished there. We have seen a decrease, or rather not meeting of the target, of some four per cent.

Dr Norrie: Yes.

MRS BURKE: I know that targets are there to attain, but what concerns me is that again it is a critical factor in the continuing wellbeing of that person and prevention of another episode or readmission. What happens to those people who do not get seen? Are they falling through the cracks? Where do they go and what happens to them?

Dr Norrie: There are two factors that probably need to be mentioned here. Firstly, there are four community mental health facilities that are referral sources for our patients on discharge, and in the interim time there is the crisis and assessment treatment team. The goal, obviously, is to ensure that patients, especially those who have had previous contact with our community mental health services, are reintegrated back into their team within that week.

The big issue this year has been the reduction in case managers. Recruitment has been a factor there. Mental health nursing people, psychologists particularly, are short Australia-wide. There have been very active efforts, supported by ACT management,

to recruit positions, but that does remain an issue given that the CAT team are the resource that actually supports those people beyond seven days, because clearly it is important that the service maintains itself.

THE CHAIR: Does that shortage in the workforce also relate to not enough being trained in the first place?

Dr Norrie: I could comment more fairly on that in terms of psychiatrists, because I am intricately involved in that. My knowledge in terms of other disciplines within mental health services is that it is an area that most disciplines are struggling with significantly in terms of training, but there are also significant efforts being put in—not only outside the ACT, but within the ACT in terms of the University of Canberra's psychology courses. So there is an active effort to look at supporting people coming into the mental health arena.

MRS BURKE: I would like to put on record my thanks to all the people that work within the mental health sector, particularly Mental Health ACT, who I have a lot of contact with given the shadow portfolios I have. I thank you. It is an extremely challenging area and obviously one that you are still grappling with. My main concern is, again, that we are not having people falling through cracks anywhere and that somehow those people will be picked up by other services, if not directly by an ACT Health community facility.

Dr Norrie: I would be honoured to take that back to our staff. Thank you.

MRS BURKE: Thank you.

Mr Cormack: Could I just add that there is an important point when interpreting the result, and that is that a number of these people—I think you have just alluded to it, Mrs Burke—are followed up by private practitioners and choose to be followed up by private practitioners. We are not necessarily in a position to force people to be followed up at one of our community health facilities.

MRS BURKE: No, sure. But don't you track them through exit surveying? Wouldn't you know—and wouldn't the data be reflected in here—that they had gone to private—

Dr Norrie: That figure covers all discharges.

Mr Cormack: That is right.

Dr Norrie: So Mr Cormack is correct.

MRS BURKE: Yes. So again there is a shortfall, whether they are going to private or not?

Dr Norrie: Yes. Nonetheless, my point about CATT follow-up remains, because we have a shared care arrangement with most of the private psychiatrists in the ACT.

MRS BURKE: But I take on board your points about the difficulties in getting staff

and case managers in.

DR FOSKEY: Can I ask one question while you are there, Dr Norrie? Compared to last year's annual report—for those who are interested, pages 213 to 214 of last year's report—pages 140 and 141 show an increase in the number of applications and approvals for electroconvulsive therapy. I am interested in why this is. Does it have anything to do with a change of rules regarding ECT that passed as legislation here in this Assembly—the year before last, I think?

Dr Norrie: Dr Brown and I discussed this significant area in the last couple of weeks. Given the change in legislation that did come through, there is a very small number affected by that legislation—only two in the 2006-07 year. But the general applications for ECT which I believe you are referring to have increased. We have—

DR FOSKEY: When you say general, what does that mean?

Dr Norrie: Rather than the emergency applications.

THE CHAIR: Ones which are not done by a court—ones which are not determined by a court.

Dr Norrie: The applications for ECT are reviewed by the Mental Health Tribunal. The emergency applications have to come through Dr Brown. The rise in applications for ECT, we understand in looking at our data, reflect an increasing confidence in the use of ECT again through the psychiatric profession. This is always an area of mixed opinions and mixed views, even amongst those in psychiatry. However, there is very strong evidence to suggest that acute and major depression responds very effectively to treatment with ECT, and our consultants have moved to applying for ECT to allow treatment before the person is significantly more unwell. The other factor relates in part to the increased services that we are now providing in older persons' mental health, particularly with the opening of the Older Persons Mental Health Inpatient Unit and the increased vigilance in that area in looking after depression in the elderly.

THE CHAIR: Are you aware if there has been a similar rise nationwide?

Dr Norrie: In my college of psychiatrists role, I chair what is called the board of practice standards; the psychiatric treatments advisory committee report through to me and I can advise that that is a trend throughout Australia and also throughout New Zealand.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. We will break for afternoon tea. Questions on notice from both members of the committee and members visiting the committee can be submitted up until close of business on Friday. The department will have the normal turnaround time in answering those questions. I thank all the officials from Health who have appeared before us today.

Meeting adjourned from 3.08 to 3.30 pm.

Appearances:

Gallagher, Ms Katy, Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Health, Minister for Children and Young People, Minister for Disability and Community Services, Minister for Women

Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services
Lambert, Ms Sandra, Chief Executive
Hehir, Mr Martin, Deputy Chief Executive
Ford, Ms Lois, Executive Director, Disability ACT
Whale, Mr Andrew, Director, Disability ACT

THE CHAIR: Welcome back. There should be copies of the privilege statement for those of you who were not here this morning. I am not going to read it out; most of you are aware of the implications of privilege when you appear before a committee of the Assembly. If you want an explanation, you can flag that with one of us, but I am sure you are intelligent enough to be able to understand it.

For the information of the officials, any questions on notice from committee members or members visiting the committee will be with the committee by close of business on Friday, so we will get those to you. I understand that Dr Foskey has already submitted the rest of her questions from this morning, so you should have the Housing ones already. The usual applies for answers to questions on notice and answers to questions taken on notice. Minister, do you wish to make an opening statement?

Ms Gallagher: No, thank you.

THE CHAIR: I might start by asking if you could give us an update on young people living in aged care nursing homes and what we are doing to assist in that area.

Ms Gallagher: I will ask Ms Ford or Mr Whale to answer the detail of the question.

Ms Ford: We had, I think, 54 people with a disability under 65 living in residential aged care. Of those 54, we had four who were under 50 and 11 who were under 55. Our first commitment in year 1 was to assist those people living in residential aged care and offer them the opportunity to have some enhanced support. The intention would be that by 2009-10 they would move out of residential aged care into appropriate accommodation support. These were the negotiations and the time lines agreed with the Commonwealth.

Of the 11 people that we have assessed, only two want to move into more appropriate accommodation. The rest would like to stay where they are, for a whole range of reasons. This year we are looking at a diversion of four people from residential aged care and also offering additional support to four other people under the terms of our contract. We are on target with that. As you know, we have had an open round of funding. The people that will be likely, either through the diversion program or the additional support program, have been assessed through their process. We are on target with that; the assessments have been done. Because they are a priority for us, we would be likely to go beyond the four, but that is on target, and we will know the outcome or the prioritisation from that assessment later next week. People will know

the status of their assessment by early December.

To add to that, I should say that the ACT has had an excellent record in diverting people from residential aged care. We have got supported accommodation within Disability ACT, supported accommodation through Koomarri and some through Centacare. We also have some through Hartley Lifecare—and also the Dorothy Sales Cottages. We have been working to that over the years, and that is demonstrated in the number of people that are interested and perhaps moving on now.

THE CHAIR: Just for my information, because I do not know, where are the Dorothy Sales Cottages?

Ms Ford: Dorothy Sales Cottages are in Hughes. They are a property owned by the National Brain Injury Foundation, but the service is provided by Centacare. They deliver to seven people with a disability living there and one respite bed. Sorry: to correct that, I am not sure if it is eight and one respite or six and one respite. But there are a fair number of services that are delivered to people who otherwise would have been in residential aged care.

THE CHAIR: Fantastic. Thank you.

MRS BURKE: Welcome to those who have just joined us for this session. I want to go to page 14 of volume 1. I am interested in knowing a bit more about the future directions framework for ACT 2004-08. There are three parts to the question. Has the evaluation that was commissioned in March this year been completed? If so, what were the outcomes? I note that the report is due to the chief executive in late 2007. Has that actually been done? And what progress has been made to improve community partnerships, and how many community partnerships are there currently? If that is too much for you—

Ms Lambert: I will start with the evaluation. The evaluation has not been given to me yet; it is with the future directions oversight group. I have had some conversations with the community sector about the process of feedback, though, because of course they have asked me some questions about it when I have my regular meetings with them. I will get the report and the recommendations formally from the oversight group, which is co-chaired. There is a community chair; Mr Hehir is the other chair. So we have a co-chairing arrangement, and we have members of the community as well as departmental and cross-departmental representation across government. I will then provide a summary of that report and my response or the department's response to the recommendations. The report will focus on progress to date but it will also be giving us some very good guidance, I hope, around the next steps and how we work and build a service system in such a way that everybody feels they have a place in it if they have a disability.

MRS BURKE: Are you on target to meet the time line of late 2007?

Ms Lambert: I am assuming so; I am assuming that I will get the report.

Ms Ford: Yes. As far as I know, the finalisation of the report is with the evaluation team; they will be sending it to the oversight group very shortly. The oversight group

is ready to send that straight on to Ms Lambert when it is ready. We appear to be on target at this point in time.

Ms Lambert: The other thing I have asked the evaluation team to do—and it is an international evaluation team—is to have a good look at the community governance model. We are the only jurisdiction that really is doing this, and it is not easy: it is quite complex and quite tough to do that, particularly with something as extensive as disability services across the community. We are seeking some advice on ways that we can strengthen and develop that model further into the future. We have talked at conferences and so on about this model: people are interested in it and they have not seen it happening in their jurisdiction. It is an innovation. I want some advice on the strengths of that, where the areas of weakness are, and how we might progress that model into the future. It is one that we remain committed to.

MRS BURKE: Minister, can I ask something as a supplementary to that; it is linked to that. I would be keen to know the process the department undertakes to consider the future cost of disability. It is a bit of a bottomless bucket, as I think it has been referred to by the former disability minister. Beyond that and the programs which already provide services which are excellent—schemes where, say, the disabled get personal assistance like wheelchairs and so on—what process does the department undertake to consider the future cost of disability?

Ms Gallagher: A very comprehensive one. In fact, you will see in the budget that has just passed the injection of \$15.7 million into Disability. That was based on projections of what we know at the time and what the unmet need is as we are now. As with Health, we have got support to look at a way forward in the future to predict what sort of dollars are going to be needed. That is based around a comprehensive analysis of data from people we know about now and people we know about who are going to come into it in the future. That is kids who are at school at the moment and will be leaving school in the future, but there is also a component of people, for example, with acquired brain injury.

It is a very comprehensive analysis that is being done so that we are prepared. In fact, we have done so much work in this area that, prior to the election of a federal Labor government, we had almost reached agreement with the commonwealth on a way forward under the commonwealth-state-territory disability agreement which included quite significant sums of money, based on that growth data.

MRS BURKE: You should have better luck now that you have a Labor federal government.

Ms Gallagher: We had almost reached agreement. We are hopeful that the commitments from Labor, which were not dissimilar, will support an in-principle agreement.

MRS BURKE: Thanks, minister. Just on that one, you mentioned children and acquired brain injury patients or clients. What about a situation which really concerns me, the ageing situation—parents who are ageing who have children with a disability?

Ms Gallagher: Yes. There is a lot of work that is being done around that, too. It is a

key priority area in terms of future funding. Some of the money—some of that \$15.7 million—will go to people in that position. I have had long discussions with Carers ACT about this. I do not know if people have seen the ads that they are putting on TV around respite care for older parents, but it was a key priority area of the commonwealth in our discussions as well, and I do not imagine that the new commonwealth government will change that. The priority areas are respite, accommodation, support for older carers and looking after kids leaving school, plus the bucket of unmet needs that we already know exists.

THE CHAIR: Dr Foskey, you wanted to segue back to an area that Mrs Burke was touching on?

DR FOSKEY: I decided that the best strategy would be to deliver an omnibus question. I am interested in a number of reports and processes that are underway as reported in the annual report. If I list those, I wonder if you could let me know the status of them and if they are—

Ms Gallagher: As we go or at the end?

DR FOSKEY: At the end would be best; otherwise someone will ask a supp and I will lose it altogether.

Ms Gallagher: Okay.

DR FOSKEY: And, if they are publicly available, could you say whether they can be made available to this committee.

Ms Gallagher: Sure.

DR FOSKEY: There are the service delivery platform after public comment; the Disability Advisory Council final report; the out-of-home care redesign project; an evaluation of the caring for carers supporting action plan; the mid-term evaluation and future directions 2004-08; the business perceptions survey that the ANU is or was conducting; the review of government as a provider of direct support services; and the funding plan that Disability ACT and Treasury are working on. There are quite a few, aren't there?

Ms Gallagher: I can cover off a couple of them. The funding plan—those discussions are just ongoing. There is not an agreed funding plan into the future yet; that is part of the work that is being done.

Mr Hehir: The funding plan was actually a large part of the basis for the \$15.7 million; I think there was substantial agreement to a significant portion of it.

Ms Gallagher: To that amount.

Mr Hehir: There was agreement to a level; conversations continue with Treasury in terms of the rest of the funding plan.

Ms Gallagher: So with the funding plan, the first part is that it is at 15.7 million and

apparently there is a—

Ms Ford: Precis of it on the website.

Ms Gallagher: There is a brief outline of that on the website. The review of government as provider has not yet been completed to its final form. I would want to see that first, but the intention would be to make that available, because there has been so much community engagement with that piece of work: it has been quite a long piece of work, and a very important piece of work, so we would certainly be making that available. The out-of-home redesign project—that is in relation to the office.

THE CHAIR: That is the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support. It is out-of-home care redesign. That is not here.

Ms Gallagher: We are not doing the office today, are we?

THE CHAIR: No.

Ms Gallagher: No. Are we doing Disability?

DR FOSKEY: Disability and community services.

THE CHAIR: This comes under Ms Porter's committee.

Ms Gallagher: As to the DACT final report—DACT have given me a number of reports; I think that report is available. Yes, it is on the website. The other ones—service delivery, caring for carers, the mid-term evaluation and the business one—someone else might answer about those.

Ms Lambert: The service delivery platform one is a public document. That is, if you like, a replacement for our strategic plan. It is a public document; it is on the website, I assume. We have a particular document that we can provide copies of to the committee—a hard copy. We are happy to do that. Earlier I talked about the evaluation of future directions in response to Mrs Burke's question; that is in its final stages.

DR FOSKEY: Will it be public when it is finished?

Ms Lambert: There will be a summary document, and my response or the department's response to the recommendations will be public. There will also be briefings for everybody who provided input to that document. The evaluation of caring for carers is currently being reviewed; it will be consulted with carers, because it will be an action plan. We expect that that will be around in early 2008. The business one—Lois?

Ms Ford: The business perception survey—we have condensed that because it was rather a large survey with a lot of numbers. We have condensed that into a presentation which we use now when we go off into the community. We are happy to make that presentation available if you would like it. We have just condensed it down to key points and areas for attention.

DR FOSKEY: Like a PowerPoint presentation?

Ms Ford: It is a PowerPoint presentation, yes.

Ms Lambert: I think that is all of them, Dr Foskey.

MRS BURKE: I probably have another one, workforce development. Did you have that?

Ms Ford: Strategy. That is on the website as well.

MRS BURKE: You have got part 2, I think, haven't you? Stage 2 included the development of an implantation plan and establishment of new programs. Where is that up to now?

Ms Ford: Is that workforce strategy?

MRS BURKE: Yes.

Ms Ford: Yes.

MRS BURKE: So the whole strategy is there?

Ms Ford: Yes.

MRS BURKE: Are we past stage 2 now? There are no dates in here.

Mr Whale: Yes, the paper was finalised in May. There was further consultation over how it would be implanted. We have set up a working group, which is co-chaired with community representatives. It is across the whole sector. It is not just a Disability ACT strategy. There are 12 areas where there are recommendations around strategies, both short term and long term, and that is all in the paper which is on the website. There is also a summary paper on the website.

We have now had two meetings of that working group and there is another one next week. We are identifying priorities to take to the community because this is a sector response. There is no point in the government or the community saying that this is the way forward. The sector has to agree on each of those ways forward on each of the strategies. So we are prioritising those and we are taking those to the sector in very public forums and meetings early in the New Year.

MRS BURKE: So early in the New Year you will start to make what you are doing a bit more widely known. That is good.

Ms Lambert: It is a fairly widely owned document. The sector talks to me regularly about it. It is actually reasonably well known in the sector and they are very happy with them and very keen to work with us in implementing it.

MRS BURKE: That is fine. You are preaching to the converted and your own, aren't

you? We need the public to really know more about what is going on and make them more aware. That is my real emphasis, and I might follow on with the Business of Music on page 15. Firstly, I want to express my huge thanks for the support that you have given to all people with a disability who are trying to make their lot in life better, particularly no more so than TJ James, the local musician. I think that is a fabulous program and I really commend all of you who are involved in that. I notice on page 16, at the top, the Performing Arts Alliance. Perhaps somebody would like to tell me where that is up to.

Ms Ford: Certainly. Part of the work that we were doing with Mr James is that he was to put together, or has put together, a very brief proposal for how we could bring together performing artists across the ACT so that there is a network of support, but also about building the disability sector in, not as a separate part of the performing arts but building it into the whole performing arts community. Mr James is now working with Lead and also within our own department to refine the construct of the alliance. He is doing a lot of work talking to musicians, artists and performing artists to see the level of interest, which seems to be quite high. He will then get the support through Lead, which is a very appropriate organisation to do this, to then bring together that alliance. So we are looking at probably the first half of next year to start getting some real robustness around that.

MRS BURKE: That is a fantastic effort. Well done. We will see more, maybe, than Mr James out there doing stuff and going to colleges and schools and/or places where there are people with disabilities.

Ms Ford: Yes, certainly.

MRS BURKE: Excellent. Well done.

Ms Ford: I must say that the ACT inclusion awards have also been another vehicle to profile different artists, both locally but also nationally, with a disability. We always take great pains to ensure that we have a good line-up of artists who have a disability who can showcase their talents at that venue.

DR FOSKEY: Just as a supplementary, have you looked at social enterprises as a way of proceeding to provide employment?

Ms Ford: Yes.

DR FOSKEY: I know the mental health community is exploring that.

Ms Ford: Yes, definitely. We have looked at the social enterprise organisation as well as through the Business Leaders Innovation Thoughts and Solutions Group—BLITS. That group is looking at social enterprise and a range of other opportunities to promote employment. That role is purely around promotion. It is the commonwealth's responsibility. That funding comes from the commonwealth and it is their responsibility to do that. BLITS is there to build on some of the opportunities that are there, and social enterprise is one of the areas that they have been looking at quite closely.

DR FOSKEY: I was at the launch of JACKmail, which Ms Gallagher launched. Is the department involved in that and are there any other prospects? JACKmail is a young man—

THE CHAIR: Yes. I am looking confused, sorry.

DR FOSKEY: Jack is a person. He is a young man with very profound disabilities. His mum is a strong disability activist so I guess that is partly why she has set up a little—

Ms Lambert: It is a courier business.

DR FOSKEY: Yes, that is right. It is just a model and I am just wondering if it can be replicated.

Ms Ford: Certainly. Quality of life grants assisted them in establishing some of the plant that they needed to do that. Also, Mrs Richards will be working with Disability ACT in developing family networks. She has done some training around that and we supported her to get some additional information education. She will be working with us in the New Year and separately working with families in the community to assist them to build their natural support centre and look at ways in which they can create opportunities for themselves. We will be supporting her to do that.

MRS BURKE: Minister, Dr Foskey mentioned expansion of that. I think it is in Victoria or Melbourne that a lady set up—this was in tourism and hospitality—a cafe. Schools have done it here.

Ms Gallagher: Well, Mental Health has one over in the health building. They run the cafe.

MRS BURKE: Yes. Can we expand on that to make that more widely known? What could we do?

Ms Gallagher: Well, as Dr Foskey said, Mental Health is looking at this in terms of what is known as social firms. I guess the thing we need to be conscious of, though, is that the ACT government again has responsibility in particular areas, and disability in employment is not one of them.

MRS BURKE: No.

Ms Gallagher: I think our role is better focused on support, mentoring and seed support through the quality of life grants, as we did in JACKmail, rather than creating our own—

MRS BURKE: I was not suggesting that.

Ms Gallagher: or getting into the funding of the establishment of particular businesses, which is a commonwealth area of responsibility. Having said that, we are looking at it under the health portfolio.

MRS BURKE: And maybe to engage the private sector, too, as well. That is a tough one.

Ms Gallagher: That is what the BLITS group does. They have done a lot of work and engaged significant members of the business community to be a part of that.

MRS BURKE: Yes. Just on the back of that, then, page 16 mentions the post-school options expo in May. Were you pleased with the outcome of that and what will spin off from that expo? What do you expect will be the outcome?

Ms Gallagher: Well, I must say that I have only heard good things coming from this expo. I hope good things come of it. I have not had any negative feedback from it. I think this is a very important area. There are particular times where there is opportunity for breakdown and family crisis when dealing with disability. Often that can be at different times, going into school, leaving school, moving into new accommodation arrangements and things like that. One of the criticisms around the country has been around information and provision of information and understanding about what services are there, what is funded, who does what and what you are entitled to.

So I think, again, all the feedback I have had—I do not know if Lois wants to add anything to this—has been positive. I think a real area of pressure for us has been dollars to support people leaving school and that is why, again, quite a large part of the new money will go into post-school transition. That, I think, has been a particular area of difficulty for families and for Disability ACT, who have not been able to respond as they would like at that particular point in time for those individuals.

MRS BURKE: Thank you.

DR FOSKEY: Could we move on to another area?

THE CHAIR: Yes, we can. I was just commenting on the program that has been on ABC TV about the people with disabilities going to Egypt and how inspirational that is.

Ms Ford: Yes. It is excellent.

THE CHAIR: Well, I found it inspirational, anyway. Sorry, Dr Foskey.

DR FOSKEY: Well, I would like to move on to community services and homelessness.

Ms Gallagher: Yes, sure.

DR FOSKEY: But not if you or the committee—

MRS BURKE: I have probably got a couple of questions. I wanted to ask a couple of questions on two different areas, but maybe we will lead on from employment to accommodation. I just really want to know and get an update from you in regard to

accommodation, but more specifically group home accommodation. You know that I am a big fan of Abbeyfield. I hope and wish that that is going well, and maybe that might be replicated. What about group homes? Obviously we need to offer options where we can, but the reality is that it may not be as forthcoming as it was. There are concerns, and there have been for a while, minister, that people are concerned that group homes will be phased out completely. Will that ever be an option once people are moved on? Some houses have gone, I think?

Ms Gallagher: I think the only concern that has been raised with me has come through this role of government as provider where some people were concerned that the government was looking to get out of the business of provision of group home support.

MRS BURKE: Yes, I think that was it. It was the support side, was it not?

Ms Gallagher: That is the issue. I would say that we do offer that choice. In fact, I think almost 50 per cent of people living in group homes are living in homes run by a provider other than Disability ACT. So Disability ACT probably still provides 50 per cent of the accommodation support. Is that right?

Ms Ford: That is right.

Mr Whale: It would be a bit higher than that.

Ms Gallagher: A bit higher, but around that. So the non-government sector in this area is very significant to us and that is across a range of different providers. Of course, Disability ACT also provides, I think, to that very difficult end with very complex clients that other NGOs may not be able to support. In the terms of the role of government as provider, the work is ongoing. I met with the families over a year ago and I gave the commitment that choice would remain, that there was choice, that nobody was going to be booted out of anywhere, but that it was time we had a look at who did what, and that is the work that is being done.

My view is that the government will never—not this government—outsource accommodation services. We cannot outsource the risk for many parents of the choice of provider. I also believe that we should not be the provider of last resort or seen as the provider of last resort and I do not think we are seen that way. We will always be the provider of last resort as well for those emergency cases that come, but we aspire to, and do, provide quality accommodation support to people with a disability. My view is that there will be a mix. There may be some movement within the providers, depending on the outcomes of some of this work, but the role of government will be maintained.

THE CHAIR: While we are talking about accommodation for people with a disability, I might go off slightly and ask about the services that are provided, if it is in your area, as respite or programs provided for siblings of children with a disability. Does the government run any such things?

Ms Ford: We do not have any specific programs within Disability ACT, but there is a strong base in Carers ACT and also through the department in the policy work that is

done around carers. There is carers' week and there is significant work done with siblings of children with a disability and children who are caring for parents with a disability.

MRS BURKE: Minister, just a question—it is an ongoing question—about individual support packages. Page 19 of volume 1 states:

In February 2007, DACT released a revised individual Support Package policy.

You released with that a manual. It is going to be a difficult area. The advice to me—and it may help you—is that this still lacks some flexibility in terms of meeting the needs of people and seems to be very rigid in some areas. Are you continuing to look at that, have you pretty much arrived at where this ISP issue is going to stay or is it a shifting sand issue?

Ms Gallagher: No. My view, and I have not been told anything else, is that this work is finished. We have released the new policy. I think the issue can be, and is, difficult, but more flexibility has been built in in response to people who received individual support packages raising issues. One I can think of was around equipment, for example. But we must remember there are millions of dollars in this individual support package program and that needs to be acquitted. It is not just the case of giving upwards of \$100,000 to someone and saying “Spend it on whatever you like.”

MRS BURKE: No, I am not suggesting that.

Ms Gallagher: My view at the moment—and I may stand corrected—is that we have tried to build in flexibility through this manual as far as we can go. To go any further would, I think, start to create difficulties around equipment and the acquittal of public funds. So it is about as good as it is going to get, I reckon. That is my view.

MRS BURKE: So have you included increases and advancements in technology in computers and that sort of thing?

Ms Gallagher: Yes.

Ms Ford: The quantity of life grants this year and in previous years are an opportunity for people to get a small amount of money to assist them—up to \$5,000, actually—with technology and equipment. The ISPs themselves are not the only way in which people can get additional funding.

Ms Lambert: We did go through, really, a two-stage process with this. We did go through a significant consultation and came out with the paper. We got quite a bit of feedback from the community that it had not gone far enough for them. So we then went into more negotiation and, in fact, were commended by the Disability Advisory Council for the way in which—not me personally, but officers—that consultation had been approached and the outcome that we had achieved. So there has been a lot of working with people to make it as flexible as we can within the guidelines that we must work in.

MRS BURKE: I have got two more questions on disability. I was going to go to

transport, but Mr Whale is sitting there. You are the transport man I take it?

Ms Gallagher: He has a background in transport.

MRS BURKE: I want to talk about wheelchair accessible taxis. I am presuming that you know that there are issues and have been issues around one particular taxi company. I understand that four new cabs were purchased which replaced taxis with multiple problems caused by old age. Four new cabs were modified in Sydney but Canberra would not register them and he was told they had to see the unmodified taxis. I am not sure if the ins and outs but I am very sure that you know what I am talking about.

Ms Gallagher: This is TAMS matter.

MRS BURKE: Okay.

Ms Lambert: It is.

Ms Gallagher: It is, yes.

MRS BURKE: Again, though, how do you deal with the issues of transport for people with a disability? Does it all have to be dealt through TAMS or is this another occasion where departments need perhaps to work better together?

Ms Lambert: No, it is not. The Disability Advisory Council is key to TAMS advisory processes. I am sure that the chief executive of TAMS will be able to tell you about that. There has been quite extensive consultation. When the system was revised I was on the original group, but then, in terms of the implementation, that is a TAMS responsibility and the DAC does feed directly into that.

MRS BURKE: All right.

Ms Gallagher: I met with the DAC yesterday and they raised this as an issue that they remain interested in.

MRS BURKE: It is a nice way of putting it, I suppose. I have one last question and I think Dr Foskey is quite keen to move on if she comes back into the room. I will cite an example without trying to raise individual cases, but it does illustrate the issue I am talking about. Page 20 of volume 1 of the report states:

Future Directions
Promotes an inclusive society
In partnership with PWD-ACT, launch a three-year program on I-Day 2007 that aims to raise awareness about disability across the ACT community.

When was that? It does not give a date there? Has that happened yet?

Ms Ford: The international day of disability is 3 December.

MRS BURKE: It is on 3 December?

Ms Gallagher: Sunday.

MRS BURKE: Thirty years married on that day, I will remember that.

Ms Ford: On the Sunday, for the second year running now we have a Sunday fun day in Glebe Park, which is our accessible-to-everybody event. We usually would have that on the international day, but it falls on a Monday and the federal government signalled very early in the year that they were going to be having extensive celebrations on that day. So for us the only celebration we are having on that day is actually a breakfast, which in our view probably would not have been the best spot we could have chosen, but it was the way that we could, in the ACT, celebrate. But we have got quite extensive celebrations on the Sunday. Of course, as you know, we would normally also be celebrating with our inclusion awards. We shifted those back to 2 November, again because the federal government decided to have their awards on that day and so as not to conflict for people with disability.

Ms Lambert: They are inaugural awards, though.

Ms Ford: They are inaugural awards. They took a leaf out of our book and have decided to have their awards.

MRS BURKE: I will mark that one up. I guess that on the back of that, then, some while ago—and you may have all read this—there was publicity in the north side *Chronicle* about a well-known sporting club. I do not want to sort of single them out per se, but it does raise continuing questions in this day and age that there still are places that do not have wheelchair access or ramps. Hopefully, international day of disability will once again help to promote that. What more can we do across the territory, minister, than is being done? Are you aware of particular places in terms of making things mandatory for governments to insist that people meet access and egress issues?

Ms Gallagher: I think there has been an ongoing issue around national standards and national legislation and how it applies particularly to community organisations or not-for-profit sectors around how they can improve access. I think that from the government point of view we do very well. We are bound by the standards or the legislation around that.

In terms of renovations or upkeep to community buildings that we own, I know it is always at the forefront of those applications in terms of supporting people with extra funds. There are quite significant grants around, for example, infrastructure grants for people who need that. But this has been ongoing since 1988, really since the Disability Discrimination Act came in and set a new way forward. I do not think there is an easy answer. I look favourably on people that apply, that write to me and say that this is an issue.

MRS BURKE: That is private organisations, or are you talking about not-for-profit or—

Ms Gallagher: No. I would restrict it to the community sector here, particularly

community organisations that we have a responsibility for. I think the government has a responsibility to support community organisations. Those community organisations may run because of a government grant; therefore there is that relationship between us. I do not see that same responsibility to the private sector.

MRS BURKE: Are you working with them to—

Ms Gallagher: I would look at individual cases that were raised with me.

MRS BURKE: Yes. Forgetting the money issue, how are we working with the broader community in terms of businesses and organisations? Rather than the big stick approach—

Ms Gallagher: It is through BLITS mainly.

MRS BURKE: BLITS, yes.

Ms Ford: There is a lot of work done through BLITS.

Ms Gallagher: And the inclusion awards.

Ms Ford: And the inclusion awards.

Ms Gallagher: Things like the inclusion awards.

MRS BURKE: Has BLITS increased? Have you got an increased involvement with BLITS?

Ms Ford: We certainly have. In fact, this year after the inclusion awards we are just doing our 2008 strategy with that. It is a fairly small group of committed people that are on BLITS. We will be looking next year to how we broaden, I guess, that out and the ways in which that could be possible. But we have had an excellent response from businesses and have worked quite closely with some businesses to make sure that they are not just disability accessible but friendly, that they are particularly encouraging of people with a disability as customers and as suppliers. Then there are the employer and employee aspects of it. So it is a small initiative that is growing quite fast. Businesses have been very receptive. Certainly our business perception survey will enable us in a couple of years time to measure the baseline of that and we will be able to feed back into that.

MRS BURKE: I was hopeful through that, too, that that would be another opportunity to talk about employment, so that you can draw on it.

Ms Ford: Certainly, and that is certainly a big part of it. You cannot get away from that because that is what people with a disability want. What BLITS does is build on initiatives that are already existing. For an example, through the inclusion awards where many of those winners of the awards are demonstrating a real commitment to employing people with a disability, and more particularly about employing people with disability, we continue to keep in contact with them, to support them, to promote them and also use them to talk to other businesses. So it is a growing thing and at the

moment I would say it is going as well as we would want it to be going at this point in time.

Ms Lambert: And recently the chamber of commerce devoted one of its business after business events exclusively to disability awareness and it was a very, very successful event.

Ms Ford: It was—over 100 people attended so—

Mr Hehir: I think the other way that works is with both the private sector and some of the community groups which own their own properties. The building code of Australia has been updated to reflect the disability accessibility standards and, while that only applies to new buildings in full, there is a provision within the building code so that when you reach 50 per cent refurbishment the building code applies. It is not 50 per cent in one hit; it is a cumulative thing. So we could do 10 per cent in each of five years and when you hit 50 per cent the building code is to apply and they will actually go in and make sure you have updated all your fire safety, disability access. So there is a provision that in the longer term you will certainly have all buildings fixed up to meet the disability standards.

MRS BURKE: Is that widely known?

Mr Hehir: Certainly people enforcing the building code know it.

MRS BURKE: I am sure, but I guess it is just pulling all the pieces together, isn't it, either through BLITS or through all the other good things that are happening?

Mr Hehir: With community organisations and also the private sector, where they are looking at undertaking works it is one of the things that their architects will talk to them about. Also the professional building industry is well aware of what the guidelines require and what the triggers are in terms of what gets you towards that 50 per cent, how much work has been done. And because you have to put in a development application there is a trigger for a formal assessment as they go through that development application process.

MRS BURKE: It is really important, though, before they get to that 50 per cent that they realise what they are heading to, so to help them along that path is important.

Mr Hehir: Certainly. On all the projects I have been associated with the architects are very clear up front: this is the trigger point, or not, and this is what the impact of that trigger point is.

MRS BURKE: Thank you.

DR FOSKEY: I want to ask about the concessions review, minister. Can you tell us what groups have made submissions to the review?

Ms Gallagher: Sure. This is the one that you moved the motion in the Assembly about. I do not know if you have caught up, but I received the first draft of that report today and I have asked for an extension to tabling next week just because I want to

read it and get across it and see what people have said.

DR FOSKEY: So it will not be tabled next week?

Ms Gallagher: No. I sent my staff down to speak to your staff about whether or not you would allow me to table in February so that I had the opportunity to read it before I tabled it.

DR FOSKEY: Okay. I have not heard about that yet.

Ms Gallagher: If you are not in agreement I can have a look at that as well.

DR FOSKEY: No, I just have not heard.

Ms Gallagher: It was only this morning, because I have only just received it and I want to have a look at it. Because it would be required to be lodged today for cabinet on Monday, it would mean that I would not be able to read it. It is not your timetable; it is the cabinet timetable that I am stressing about. I have to take it as a submission to cabinet and I need to get across it before I do that—and the only opportunity to do that is next Monday, which means I have to push it out the door today.

But my understanding is there was quite significant community consultation. Things that the community said, on just my first reading of it, were, not unsurprisingly, that there should be more in the concessions programs but that they were a bit complicated and a bit misunderstood across ACT government; that it was not a well-understood program; five agencies have some sort of concession program sitting under them—ACT Health, education, Treasury, TAMS and DHCS—and that that has led to some of the confusion. So these are the issues, I understand, that have been raised and I just want to work out a bit of a way forward as well.

DR FOSKEY: I was interested in whether there was a group that was more active in terms of letting their concerns be known and whether there were groups that perhaps did not have as strong a voice and that was taken into account.

Ms Gallagher: I can certainly provide you and the committee very quickly with a list of who was involved.

DR FOSKEY: That would be great. That is all I really need.

Ms Gallagher: I just do not have that in the top of my head.

DR FOSKEY: Pages 30 to 31 of volume 1 report that there have been significant service delivery improvements as a result of the \$1 million efficiency saving in the SAAP sector. I would just like to know what evidence there is for that—

Ms Gallagher: Bold statement.

DR FOSKEY: unusual statement, given that usually governments tout the fact that they have spent more as being the positive outcome.

Ms Sheehan: The reason for that statement is that we have actually increased the quality of the accommodation and support services that are provided to homeless people. The way that we have done that is that we are gradually moving away from the old-fashioned idea of a refuge; where you have congregate living arrangements, and particularly where there are children involved, that can be very, very stressful for the mothers and the children. We have been able, through the consolidation of and reforms in the public housing system, to provide public housing properties on a head leased basis to the SAAP organisations and thereby move families, particularly—but also single people—into standalone accommodation, but we have also done it for single people as well. That increases the quality of the crisis support during a time when people are needing to have a bit more space to address their own issues rather than having to deal with the stresses of other families and other children that might be living with them.

That has been a very important move that we have made and an example of where we have done that very successfully would be with St Vincent de Paul. St Vincent de Paul's family services ran two old-style refuges and what we have done there is to bring another six—I think; it might even be seven now—properties into the family services mix and we have now provided accommodation for one additional family, but at the same time St Vincent de Paul have made considerable savings in providing that service. St Vincent de Paul have been very supportive of the changes that have been made and they are really leading the way at looking at how you can provide support in a different model and make considerable savings. Just recently they were able to share with us that they think that it is going so well—and a number of services have approached us with this as well—that they feel that they could take on more standalone properties and provide support to more families within the existing workforce that they have. So it is a very successful model that works extremely well for the families and the single people involved.

The other important thing that we have done there—and this is again working in partnership with public housing—is to establish a transitional housing program. This is a really marvellous partnership with public housing. There are properties that are going to be redeveloped or that may be sold because they have reached the end of their serviceable life for long-term public housing. They will stand vacant for a number of months and we have been able to utilise those properties as a transitional housing program. In this instance, families and singles that have been accommodated in the SAAP service system have a choice. If they have been able to address many of the issues which have caused their homelessness and are only needing quite minimal support, at their own choice they can choose to move out of the SAAP environment, which is quite an intensive level of support, into the transitional housing program, where they receive a small amount of outreach support from SAAP services. Again this has been a very popular program and a very successful program and we have been able to introduce about 20 additional public housing properties into that program, providing services for up to 20 families and individuals.

I suppose a summary is that the service model that we are trying to introduce to reform service provision is to give individuals and families more choice about how they are supported when they are in crisis, and the choice is that they can have a greater amount of support when they need that support. If they feel that they can do with less support, they can choose to move into the transitional housing program. By

introducing more properties into the homelessness service system they have choices about having support in a standalone property which can better suit their needs and the needs of their children very often.

DR FOSKEY: So how is this million-dollar efficiency saving therefore being gained and what, beyond the bed services, have had to be cut to achieve it?

Ms Lambert: Before Ms Sheehan talks about that, I would just remind the committee that the SAAP sector was not operating at capacity and we had some services that were simply at about 40 per cent occupancy rate, so we have been working with the sector to ensure that there is as close to full occupancy as there can be. I say that because there are sometimes, particularly in the congregate model where that still exists, some issues around having a particular mix of people within the particular area. So in terms of what we did we have been focusing very strongly on having as full an occupancy as is practicable in the service system as well.

Ms Sheehan: Thank you, Ms Lambert. We particularly saw that problem in youth services where in a congregate living arrangement a couple of very young children with very complex needs could go into a service which should have accommodated eight young people but because of the complex needs of those young people it was simply not possible to bring other children or young people into the other six beds; whereas, in the reform services that we have now put in place with the Salvation Army instead of having that large number of children in one property we have a number of smaller cluster properties and they are able to provide support to that full number of children that we would have previously been able to do with such intensive needs of those children.

DR FOSKEY: Are there any groups that are missing out that you could identify as a result of these changes—for instance, any particular age groups and young people that because of the sort of separation policy are not being served?

Ms Sheehan: The absolute direction from the minister was that in making the cuts we were not to reduce the amount of accommodation and support places and so we were able to achieve that in the way that I described earlier, which was to look at what things are inherently quite costly. It is inherently quite costly to have a lot of people on one site, because of the intensity and the complexity of need and the extremely high staffing levels that you need to have so many people managed well on one site. When you move to the more diverse environment, you dispel a lot of the intensity.

I come back to the example that I was giving earlier of what happens if a woman and three or four children escaping domestic violence go into a refuge with three or four other women and their children escaping domestic violence. You can just imagine the intensity, the complexity and probably the chaos that ensues in that sort of environment. How difficult it is to address the needs of yourself and your own children when you are trying to cope with the stress of all the other mothers and all the other children. So the St Vincent de Paul model, moving to standalone properties, is able to support more families, more children and with a lesser amount of support dollars because you are actually getting rid of some of the complexity in the problems just by moving to that different service model.

DR FOSKEY: Given there is a requirement for more properties by the sounds of it, are you still able to accommodate the number of people who present for those services?

Ms Sheehan: The properties are provided through the public housing route and we have done that on the longer-term basis for the family services but also on the shorter term to medium-term basis for the transitional housing program. If you think about the total public housing stock of being at about 11,500, if we put 10 more properties on a long-term basis into the crisis end of the system it is a very small proportion of your total stock but you get very good outcomes and you really can increase the capacity of the crisis response.

Then when you come to the transitional housing end, where you have got properties that are awaiting sale or redevelopment, you are not housing anyone from public housing at that stage, so if you can have an alternative use for it, which is the transitional housing program, it is completely a win-win situation; it comes at no additional cost to public housing, really no additional cost to the SAAP services because the SAAP services move families and individuals out of the intensive support into the less intensive model, and they do that within their existing resources.

So it is just a question of looking in a more innovative way at the resources we have available to us and how we can provide those in a better way to people in a way that is more appropriate to their needs and a way that better suits them.

Ms Lambert: You asked about a problem area. In my position I think that the hardest area to deal with is young people and homelessness, and we have got a range of projects dealing with that. We work very closely with the youth coalition on this and Meredith Hunter chairs a working group that looks at options for young people. We were successful in getting funding from the commonwealth government for some innovative projects, one of which deals with the issue of couch surfing, which is often the way young people get into homeless situations, and it looks at ways to intervene with that population before they become part of the SAAP system. So we are working pretty hard with schools and with others to try and deal with young people, to try and divert them, if you like, from the SAAP sector. That project is working. I have not met with Barnardos recently but they are the community organisation that is running that.

The other thing we have trialled—again with the service sector supporting us, and Barnardos run this program too—is a stairwell model in our multiunit properties so that we have a model that has a community within. We are looking at ways that young people can live there, supported by it, with one of the flats turned into a community support system. We have, if you like, a structured living arrangement for them with community support. I think that is the hardest area to deal with.

MRS BURKE: Following on from Dr Foskey and the \$1 million savings, you were saying that Housing ACT are picking it up through transitional housing. Obviously I welcome that too because you know my feelings about properties standing vacant for a long time. It is such a waste, so it is good to hear that. That is that side of it. The other side I would say is people like St Vincent de Paul and Barnardos. Have they picked up this funding or are they now being expected to run that on the funding they

get from elsewhere?

Ms Sheehan: St Vincent de Paul have changed their service model for family services. Barnardos have received additional funding for these stairwell models and they have also received additional funding for our innovation and investment grants which relate to a service supporting young people coming out of youth detention.

MRS BURKE: So how many of that million would you have redirected then into other services? What I am trying to ascertain is: is it lost from the sector or has it been—

Ms Gallagher: We took \$1 million out, we got some commonwealth money and we put some money into the second appropriation.

MRS BURKE: All right. You say we are moving away from the congregate model and I have to say that I have been to many of the refuges and I do not know how some of these women do it with the children and the issues that are there. It was a roof over their heads and some people like it; it may get back to choice. What is happening? Some of those are winding down now because of the way that the new models are coming in. What is going to happen to the workers, the staff that were there? Is provision made for them to be utilised, with all that experience?

Ms Gallagher: Yes, they still work. They just work in a different way, I guess.

MRS BURKE: Okay. Obviously you are approaching them as perhaps you move away from the refuge model?

Ms Gallagher: Very much so, yes.

Ms Sheehan: Yes, and I would not like to give the impression that there is no call at all for congregate living. There will always be a small amount of congregate living required, particularly if it is a question of the 24-hour support that is needed. Obviously—I suppose it is obvious—a family with children would not want a support worker living in their home with them, but in crisis for a short amount of time that can be really quite appropriate. So we will always have some call for congregate living but you might find that it is two families living together rather than five families living together.

MRS BURKE: Yes, I understand.

Ms Gallagher: Can I just list the organisations who have made a submission so that we do not take it on notice?

THE CHAIR: Sure.

Ms Gallagher: The Essential Services Consumer Council, CARE Credit and Debt Counselling Service, ACTCOSS, Healthcare Consumers Association, Council on the Ageing, Aerial Taxicabs, the Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Association, EnergyAustralia, ICRC, National Seniors Association, People With Disabilities ACT and the YWCA Canberra.

DR FOSKEY: That is on the concessions?

Ms Gallagher: Yes.

THE CHAIR: We have gone over time but there was a desire to discuss Therapy ACT. Mrs Burke, you wanted to talk about Therapy ACT. What do you want to do, because we would not be able to spend very long on it, and it will be with the minister's indulgence, given that we are going over time.

MRS BURKE: Thank you. I thought we were going until five again but it does not really matter. I will not take that much longer. It really is with regard to page 21, Therapy ACT and some of the services it provides for ACT residents. I would like to have an update on the autism services offered.

Ms Gallagher: What about them?

MRS BURKE: I think when we spoke at estimates there were some concerns around the funding of Therapy ACT and the—

Ms Gallagher: Who does the assessments was I think the issue Mrs Dunne raised.

MRS BURKE: Yes, it was the assessments and then from my perspective it was not so much the assessments but the ongoing therapy. Doing the assessment is one thing, as we all know, but following it through with the therapy was the issue—whether the right sort of therapy was there and we have got the specialists that we need—

Ms Whitten: You did raise those issues, Mrs Burke, at estimates and there were questions on notice in response to some of those issues, particularly around assessments. We could table that information again if that would be helpful.

MRS BURKE: No, I am just requiring an update. Has the situation altered any since that time or are there any more additional comments you would like to make about how the service is operating now?

Ms Whitten: I will ask Rosalie Hardy, who is the senior manager of Therapy ACT, to provide you with an update on that.

Ms Hardy: Around intervention for children with autism national best practice guidelines have recently been published and Therapy ACT, the Department of Education and Training and the autism and aspergers association are working together to look at how we would implement those recommendations around early intervention. We work very closely with education around the classes, autism intervention units and the autism learning support units, where children with autism are placed within the education system. We work on that with mainstream teachers to assist them to implement programs and to provide advice.

MRS BURKE: Is funding still an issue for you? I know it was an issue before—I know you are smiling, minister—but I did ask whether funding was a problem. I will ask you: do you see that there is still—

Ms Gallagher: Demands are still there, yes.

MRS BURKE: I have not refreshed my memory in here, but has there been an incremental increase in the funding to autism services particularly, or just to Therapy ACT?

Ms Gallagher: There has been in previous budgets. I do not know the details of all of them, but there were certainly a number of autism specific initiatives in previous budgets. The diagnosis rate continues to increase, so we are seeing more children. When I look at some of the issues it is often the non-autistic children who have just as significant needs in relation to therapy. I would say probably speech therapy is the most in demand and that covers a whole spectrum of children—I should not use the word “spectrum” there because it will be confusing—children with a range of disabilities. You would say that the need for speech therapy is probably more significant, if you were listing a priority; there is demand across all of the fields.

MRS BURKE: Do you have that sort of a breakdown of the clients by category, if you can put it that way, of what the minister is alluding to?

Ms Gallagher: Many of your questions have gone to that and it is difficult because a child with autism will also be a child who may need speech therapy, who may need physiotherapy. That is the difficulty in trying to separate it out into categories. But I think that data would probably be quite useful and it is something that in my discussions with Therapy ACT and the department is something I would like to understand a bit better.

MRS BURKE: I think that is the key: we need to understand what we are dealing with to be able to deal with it.

THE CHAIR: We have gone over time, so I would like to thank you, minister and officials, for appearing today. As you are aware, the *Hansard* will be sent to you for you to check it for accuracy. I do not think there is anything else I have to say.

DR FOSKEY: Questions will be put on notice.

THE CHAIR: I did say that at the beginning of the session—by close of business on Friday.

The committee adjourned at 4.39 pm.

Incorporated document

Attachment 1

Document incorporated by the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Housing and Minister for Multicultural Affairs

Speaking notes for Minister Hargreaves – DHCS 2006-07 Annual Report Estimates – November 2007 Multicultural Affairs

Madam Chair, it gives me great pleasure to be here today to talk about our achievements in multicultural affairs in the 2006-07 year.

Highlighted in the two volumes of the 2006-07 Annual Report of my Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services are the many achievements of our Government, which will benefit our city's multicultural community.

Through policy direction and program implementation, the ACT Government is committed to the enhancement of this vital sector.

Over the past year, once again, we have a lot to be proud of.

This includes the *2006-2009 ACT Multicultural Strategy*, our continually developing and hugely popular annual National Multicultural Festival, the continued vibrancy of the Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre, the ACT Muslim Advisory Council, our involvement in assisting migrants through the Work Experience and Support Program, Citizenship Ceremonies and assessing overseas qualifications and funding of the multicultural sector through the community grants program.

2006-2009 ACT Multicultural Strategy

The Government delivered the *2006-2009 ACT Multicultural Strategy* after in-depth consultation with the multicultural community.

It offers practical solutions to the issues and concerns raised by community groups, individuals, government agencies and peak bodies.

It has 10 key themes addressing issues including *human rights, access and equity, ageing and aged care issues, cultural and religious acceptance, language policy, leadership and governance, migration of parents, settlement services for newly arrived migrants, terrorism and young people.*

Some implementation of the Strategy has been through seven key projects which address specific issues raised by the community in the consultation process.

The seven projects include: a Pre-Employment Preparation Program; Capacity Building of Community Groups, Work Experience and Support Program (WESP), English Language Classes, promotion of Traineeships and Apprenticeships as a pathway to employment, improved governance & leadership in community groups and a contribution to a Youth Forum.

Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre

The tenants of the Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre – seven peak bodies and 25 community groups, along with other hirers of the facility and visitors combine to make this a hive of activity.

The variety of community events, meetings, the changing displays in the exhibition gallery, all combine to make it a truly multicultural experience.

Recently, the satisfaction survey of the Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre's tenants indicated that 100% of the tenants are happy with the conditions and usage of the Centre.

It also found that both tenants and general users of the Centre stated they were very happy with the location of the centre, its proximity to public transport, its opening hours and its security.

A great result.

ACT Muslim Advisory Council

The current Council began in 2007 with an extended membership to include women and young people of the Islamic faith.

The members of the Council provided salient advice on a range of matters affecting the ACT Muslim community members.

Also they were involved in a range of community events offering leadership to their community members and involving the broader community too.

National Multicultural Festival 2007

In February this year more than 140,000 people were involved in the Festival. About 45,000 individuals attended the Food and Dance Spectacular.

Each year we keep refreshing the content of the Festival and it keeps getting better and more exciting with more things to do and see - with the true mark of the Festival being the involvement of more individuals from the multicultural and wider communities.

There is ample opportunity for community members to be involved through the volunteer program, holding a stall at the Food and Dance Spectacular or proposing an event to be included in the program.

Administration of the community grants program

In 2006-07, a total of \$250,000 was provided to more than 150 multicultural community groups to help cover the costs of running language programs, radio programs and cultural initiatives.

Assisting Migrants

My Government has continued to assist migrants in a range of ways. The most significant of these are the Work Experience and Support Program (WESP), administering the Citizenship Ceremonies, and assessing overseas qualifications.

Being independent is one of the fundamental factors of successful settlement in a new place.

The WESP program assists migrants to become more job-ready in the Australian context and therefore more marketable here.

Securing a job is a huge step on the pathway to independence.

We organised a very successful Multicultural Youth Forum.

I really appreciated the participation of the young people of the ACT – I appreciated how they proffered and discussed ideas; how they interacted with me and with each other; and how they offered solutions to their concerns which I will be able to take into my sphere of thinking and to act on as appropriate.

In concluding I take this opportunity to assure the ACT community that multiculturalism and support for every multicultural community group in this city will continue. The ACT Government will continue to address all issues and challenges that confront Canberrans from diverse cultural backgrounds to ensure that they are able to productively participate in the community life of our city.