



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL
TERRITORY**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

(Reference: Annual and financial reports 2005-2006)

Members:

**MR R MULCAHY (The Chair)
DR D FOSKEY (The Deputy Chair)
MS K MACDONALD**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

WEDNESDAY, 29 NOVEMBER 2006

**Secretary to the committee:
Ms A Cullen (Ph: 6205 0136)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

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

APPEARANCES

Chief Minister's Department	1
Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services	1

The committee met at 3.36 pm.

Appearances:

Gallagher, Ms Katy, Minister for Health, Minister for Disability and Community Services and Minister for Women

Chief Minister's Department
Harris, Mr Mike, Chief Executive

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

THE CHAIR: I call the committee to order for the first of the public hearings into annual and financial reports for 2005-06. Today, we have before us the Minister for Women, Ms Katy Gallagher, who will be addressing the relevant parts of the annual report of the Chief Minister's Department relating to the women's portfolio. Notwithstanding that the witnesses are, I think, rather familiar with the process, I do need to read you the following notification.

The committee has authorised the recording, broadcasting and rebroadcasting of these proceedings in accordance with the rules contained in the resolution agreed by the Assembly on 7 March 2002 concerning the broadcasting of Assembly and committee proceedings. Before the committee commences taking evidence, let me place on record that all witnesses are protected by parliamentary privilege with respect to submissions made to the committee in evidence given before it. Parliamentary privilege means special rights and immunities attach to parliament, its members and others, necessary to the discharge of functions of the Assembly without obstruction and without fear of prosecution.

While the committee prefers to hear all evidence in public, if the committee accedes to such a request, the committee will take evidence in camera and record that evidence. Should the committee take evidence in this manner, I remind the committee and those present that it is within the power of the committee at a later date to publish or present all or part of that evidence to the Assembly. I should add that any decision regarding publication of in camera evidence or confidential submissions will not be taken by the committee without prior reference to the person whose evidence the committee may consider publishing.

May I also say for the benefit of committee members and other members who may be joining committee members that, in relation to questions taken on notice, it is the responsibility of each witness, in consultation with the departmental liaison officer, to check the transcript and respond to the questions. Responses to questions taken on notice are required within five full working days of receipt of the proof transcript. Supplementary questions from members need to be provided to the committee secretary within two full working days or by close of business on Friday, 1 December 2006. Responses to supplementary questions are required within five full working days of receipt of the questions.

I welcome the minister and officials and invite the minister, if she wishes, to say some introductory words in relation to the annual report for the area under examination. I remind witnesses appearing of the need to state their name and the capacity in which they appear when first speaking so that Hansard has that information for recording purposes.

Ms Gallagher: Chair, I will not make an opening statement, I have an appointment at 4 o'clock, so I think that perhaps we should go straight to questions. It is not relevant to this reporting period, but the Office for Women has moved out of CMD and into the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services. There may be a crossover between officials, but we have both sets here.

THE CHAIR: I have a couple of questions, minister. The first relates to page 66 of volume 1. Why are only three of the six key objectives reported on for 2005-06?

Ms Gallagher: Maybe it is because it is a snapshot. I cannot answer that question. I would imagine it is giving a bit of an indication, but not a full report. You are right: there aren't reports against the six objectives of the plan. I cannot answer that.

THE CHAIR: Related to it, are you able to give us any advice on the progress achieved with objectives 2, 3 and 5 in the same period, 2005-06?

Mr Harris: The minister is quite right. To the best of my knowledge, there was emphasis on the objectives which are referred to here as opposed to the others, so we have, effectively, reported on major contributions. I do not know off the top of my head the progress on the other three, but I am happy to get a report and provide that on notice.

THE CHAIR: So that you will take that on notice.

Ms Gallagher: We do report very comprehensively in the ACT women's plan action plan which we put out every year. This is half of one page. That has 40 pages of detailed reports on how we are performing against the plan which I am happy to table, but not until the end of the hearing in case there are more questions.

THE CHAIR: It may do, but are you happy to take on notice my specific question as well?

Ms Gallagher: As to the point of taking it on notice, it has a report against all six.

THE CHAIR: Including 2, 3 and 5?

Ms Gallagher: Yes. It is a full report. This book reports against those six outcome areas. Yes, we could take it on notice, but we would just be providing that to you.

THE CHAIR: All right. That may satisfy the answer.

Ms Gallagher: I am sure it will. It is very detailed.

THE CHAIR: If you look at the same area, the annual report states that

20 applications received funding for projects in 2006 under the women's grants program. Can you indicate to the committee how this figure compares with previous years? What is the total amount in funding that these 20 applicants will receive, comparing that with previous years?

Ms Gallagher: It is the same amount, \$100,000. It is the second year that this grants program has been operating. I imagine we could also provide that to the committee throughout the hearing. My understanding is that both years the program has been oversubscribed. There have been applications for about \$400,000, on which we provide around \$100,000, usually to around 20 projects. There are two different streams. There are special projects for which you can get up to \$15,000 and there are capacity building projects, small projects, for \$3,000. The grants vary but there are usually around 20 organisations. There have been no reductions to that program.

THE CHAIR: Minister, would it be possible to get a list of the unsuccessful applicants that made up that additional \$300,000?

Ms Gallagher: I do not know. I imagine we would have to ask the organisations which had applied and were unsuccessful. It is pretty public when you are successful. I think that would be a fair bit of work. We would have to go back and contact every organisation that wasn't and ask if we could provide its name to the committee.

THE CHAIR: I assume that when you lodge an application—

Ms Gallagher: It is not necessarily a public document. They lodge it with the department and then they get knocked back.

THE CHAIR: I would have thought that there would be an assumption that it could be made public if you were announcing them.

Ms Gallagher: That is probably something we can do for the next round, which we are going out on the weekend with. For the last two rounds it would require us to go back and contact all of those organisations, of which there are many.

Mr Harris: There may well be some privacy issues attached to their applications as well.

THE CHAIR: That wouldn't have arisen if they had received the funds.

Mr Harris: I am not intimately familiar with every application, but it is not beyond the realms of possibility that an application was refused for reasons of incompatibility.

THE CHAIR: With?

Mr Harris: Law or probity or a range of other reasons.

THE CHAIR: I haven't asked for the reasons. I am just wondering if we could see which organisations missed out.

Mr Harris: No, but the content.

Ms Overton-Clarke: The other thing that I would add is that it wouldn't necessarily tell you whether those projects ended up being funded or not, because the ACT government has a wide range of grants programs and they may well have picked up funding in another grants round.

THE CHAIR: Yes, but I don't quite fathom the reluctance. If it is in relation to the particular programs that we are talking about—

Ms Gallagher: It is a workload issue for me. I don't mind if the organisations say, "Yes, we are happy for you to forward our name and what we put a bid in for to the committee." I am saying that it would be quite a lot of work and I don't know really the motivation. There is an independent panel of the ministerial council that meets. I do not decide these grants.

THE CHAIR: No, I understand that you take advice.

Ms Gallagher: I approve the panel's recommendation, but it is an independent committee, usually a member of the ministerial council on women, usually someone from the Office for Women and perhaps a non-government person. I am not sure if there was. I think that is usually the mix of the panel which goes through these and gives them all a very detailed rating and then an approval. I guess I am just trying to see what would be the benefit of going back and contacting 100 organisations, at the worst, to ask them whether their bid for \$3,000 can be forwarded to the committee.

Ms Overton-Clarke: The other issue around it is that some of them are very small organisations and, particularly at this time of year, have voluntary boards, and within the time frame it would be difficult to contact some of them and get that information.

THE CHAIR: I do not understand. What is the principle, in terms of government, that requires you to have to go and get their consent to do so, given that you are happy to publish and promote the ones that do receive grants? What different procedures apply there?

Ms Overton-Clarke: We haven't told them in the application that, if they are unsuccessful, we will be releasing that information.

THE CHAIR: Right, but it does not work that way normally with government. Normally there are exemptions from publication for certain things that are of a commercial or security nature or cabinet-in-confidence. We are in an era where there is meant to be transparency in government and accountability.

Ms Gallagher: This isn't a conspiracy, Mr Mulcahy.

THE CHAIR: I am just saying that the normal pattern should be one of openness.

Ms Gallagher: But they didn't get anything. Openness and transparency when you receive public funds, but these people did not receive anything, so that we would be publishing the bunch of losers who didn't get a grant.

THE CHAIR: My interest and the committee's interest is in exploring accountability and that is the purpose of this hearing. We are looking at what organisations received and were denied support.

Ms Overton-Clarke: We would have needed to have told all applicants that all of that information would be released, because it is very unusual to do that. The default, if you like, is that you publish the successful applicants because they are the ones receiving the funding.

THE CHAIR: All I am asking for is the names of the organisations that have been knocked back on projects.

Ms Gallagher: There may be individuals. For example, it may be the name of an individual as well.

THE CHAIR: There could be individuals, yes. If you're not willing to provide it, I can only note it and we can just take advice on that. I just thought it would be in the interests of the work of the committee.

Ms Gallagher: Leave it with me. I am not trying to withhold information from the committee. I don't know if you are seeking the unsuccessful applicants for every grant program across government or just the women's grants program.

THE CHAIR: No, I am focused on this for today.

Ms Gallagher: Yes, for 10 minutes on the unsuccessful. I can't see why you are focusing on the Office for Women as though there is a bit of a conspiracy against particular women's groups, perhaps.

THE CHAIR: No. I don't think that questions from the committee ought to be seen as some conspiracy. We are in the business here of eliciting information. I am aware of the time, Dr Foskey. I am also aware of the reluctance of the witness to give the information.

Ms Gallagher: We will wait for your media release, Mr Mulcahy, and I will be able to respond to it.

THE CHAIR: No, I am asking this quite seriously in the context of the hearing.

Ms Gallagher: I know you are asking it seriously and I have answered seriously. I can't see what would be the benefit and we haven't sought the permission of individuals and organisations to provide that information, when they are unsuccessful at getting public funds, to an Assembly committee. I think that is a legitimate response. If the committee is of the view that they would like to make a recommendation in their report that we, as part of the application process, also include the note: "Your application may be made public even if you are unsuccessful. Are you happy with this?" I'm happy to respond to that, but at the moment we haven't done that and I think that it is probably unfair for individuals and organisations who are unsuccessful to then go and provide that information without their permission.

THE CHAIR: All right. But you have indicated you will consider our request.

Ms Gallagher: Yes.

THE CHAIR: The annual report states that 114 women were listed on the ACT Women's Register as of 30 June 2006. That does not sound like much movement from when we talked about this last year, and I think even the year before. Is that growing at all? Is there any improvement on this?

Ms Gallagher: I think you are right; I do not think there has been big growth in the ACT Women's Register. It is an area that we would need to look closely at, to see that it is actually serving the purpose that it was started for. We expanded the ACT Women's Register so that women could list for non-government boards and committees, but from my discussion with women's organisations and the Ministerial Advisory Council on Women I think that perhaps it has not lived up to everything that it was meant to do. Whilst women are listed there, the use of the register as a place to find women is not clear. I think we need to respond to that and look at whether there are better ways of providing a place where women can list their name and be contacted for appointments to boards and committees once they are on there.

THE CHAIR: Taking you to page 67, the annual report says that, in 2006, 64 per cent of graduate trainees in the ACT public service and 62 per cent of participants in the Take the Lead senior officer development program were women. I was just wondering how these figures compare with previous years. It is 64 per cent of trainees and 62 per cent of participants.

Mr Harris: We have always attempted to get as high a participation rate as possible every year. I do presentations to these programs—all of them—and always have done, and the mix has been high. The mix has been at least fifty-fifty on every occasion that I can recall. I do not have the exact statistics, but I can get you the exact statistics for the previous year.

THE CHAIR: All right; that would be good.

Mr Harris: But I think you will find they are not much different.

THE CHAIR: All right.

Mr Harris: Can I go back to your first question about the three objectives?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Harris: Because I can clarify that.

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Harris: The six objectives of the women's plan are actually spread across all agencies. CMD was responsible for only three. That is why we have reported on only three.

THE CHAIR: Right.

Mr Harris: The others are reported on by other agencies.

THE CHAIR: They will come up within the context of their annual reports.

Mr Harris: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Okay, that is good. Thank you. And you will take the other question on notice. If your instinct is right that there has not been any growth in that, do you see that as a challenge? Is there a reason for that? Is it the same problem as with the register?

Mr Harris: I would suspect 64 and 62 are probably highs in the program. As long it is at least fifty-fifty, I think that is a reasonable outcome. The more important issue is that in two of our most significant training and intake programs we have a very high proportion of women participating in those programs. The Take the Lead program is essentially the program that puts emphasis on training our middle managers to progress to the next and more senior levels. To the extent that we have such a high participation by women in that program, all things being equal, that would lead to a higher number of women participating at the higher levels of the public service. And the situation is similar for our graduate program. The higher the percentage of the intake, the more of them are going to run through the system in later years.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Dr Foskey.

DR FOSKEY: I have got probably five minutes. It says on page 14 that priority areas for the Ministerial Advisory Council on Women in 2005-06 included housing, childcare and health. I wonder in what manner the council and the minister made representations on these issues in the past year to other members of the ACT government. If you could give me some specific examples, I would appreciate that.

Ms Gallagher: Yes, sure. These priority areas for the council were established through a planning day that they held when the newly formed council was put together. They felt that there were probably about 20 priority areas, but when they tried to prioritise the priority list they came down with those three, and running the women's summit.

The council have been very proactive around the area of women's health, in particular. They have put out a number of media releases in support of certain decisions. This is not just locally, but federally. They have also made media statements when they have been against certain decisions. They have certainly corresponded with me about some of the decisions in the budget around community health facilities and immunisation programs. Housing was a key topic of the women's summit. They have sought information from, I think, the department of housing about a number of issues of interest to them.

In the childcare area, I have attended their meeting and talked to them at length about the childcare planning that goes on here in the territory—some would say lack of it—in terms of pulling together the places, the land and the providers and about some of

the pressing areas that they see for childcare in the territory. They are a very active council. They are a voluntary council, of course—not paid. There is a lot of work involved. It is led by a dynamic chair, Hilary Russell, and deputy chair, Amy Haddad, and a number of women’s organisations are represented on it.

I know they have also sought briefings from within the public service on a number of matters of interest to them. They have provided me with a budget document and I attend their meetings when I can. That is just it in a nutshell. I do not know if there is anything more specific you would like.

DR FOSKEY: Unfortunately, I do not have the time to pursue that. I will just move on. If something else turns up that you would like to add, that would be good.

Ms Gallagher: Yes, sure.

DR FOSKEY: I am interested in how the budget cuts have affected the office. You said it has moved over to DHCS. Is there a discrete staff grouping that works on women’s issues? Do they have other duties, and what are they? Are there any other impacts of the restructure on the office?

Ms Overton-Clarke: The ACT Office for Women moved over holus-bolus, if you like, to DHCS, and it retained its status as an office for women. At the first ministerial council meeting, I spent a bit of time talking about what it meant to be part of the broad human services department and assured them that it would still have a whole of government focus—which indeed it does.

In terms of how it works within the department, it has two senior executives who are responsible for it—me as the executive director of policy and organisational services, Adam Stankevicius, who is the director in charge of the area, and then through to the chief executive. It sits with a couple of executives, rather than just one in the Chief Minister’s Department, but in terms of the staffing functions they transferred over as was.

DR FOSKEY: I take it Sue Hall is no longer there.

Ms Overton-Clarke: That is right. Sue Hall was previously the director in the Chief Minister’s Department who was responsible. She remained in the Chief Minister’s Department. It was her choice, I should hasten to add. And there are two new executives.

DR FOSKEY: Page 66—the famous page 66—outlines some of the ACT government’s progress in implementing the ACT women’s plan. I note that a number of indicators of success are mentioned in the plan. Could you indicate how these indicators were tracked in 2005-06? Is there any statistical evidence that the status of women has improved in the ACT over that year? And are there any government reports showing that?

Ms Gallagher: Agencies need to report against the women’s plan in their annual reports. We also have the action plan, which goes through every indicator within the plan to say what has been done.

DR FOSKEY: Was there an action plan in 2005-06? It was not on the web. We went looking for it and could not find it.

Ms Gallagher: Yes. I do not know why it would not be on the web. It is certainly there. I think we are about to finish—no, we will be doing that at the beginning of next year. I am launching something for women in December. But this does go through everything in a very detailed way—what needs to be done, how it will be done and who will do it. And then it reports specific actions against each agency responsible for them.

Is there any evidence that the status of women is improving? I think that is probably a difficult question to answer. If you ask people who work in the non-government sector on matters to do with violence and safety issues for women, you would have to say no, there has not necessarily been a significant improvement. There have been improvements in the sense of there being more housing and extra capacity for sufferers or victims of domestic violence at particular times of the year. Those organisations would tell you that, yes, there has been improvement in some areas, but the rate of violence is still high.

If you talk with people from the Rape Crisis Centre they will tell you that they have had more people coming to see them than ever before. It is a bit hard. There are certainly good things happening, particularly across the ACT government and particularly around housing and accommodation specifically. In the area of representation of and recognition for women, we are doing well. We have just less than 50 per cent of women on boards and committees that the government has responsibility for. We are really prioritising putting women into those positions and getting representation on boards.

Around economic security and opportunities, we have commissioned a piece of work to look at the impact that WorkChoices may or may not have on women—to make sure that we are monitoring that from the ACT's point of view.

I cannot sit here and say that against every indicator things are going better than they were last year, but there is work going on under all of these areas. In some areas there are fantastic things happening, but pressure still exists in other areas.

DR FOSKEY: Yes, and, to be fair, the ACT government is not totally responsible for all that anyway.

Ms Gallagher: Yes.

DR FOSKEY: Because we work within a context.

Ms Gallagher: Yes.

DR FOSKEY: But I was just seeing—

THE CHAIR: I think the minister said she had an appointment at four o'clock.

Ms Gallagher: I can go a couple more minutes. I am sure they will wait.

THE CHAIR: All right.

DR FOSKEY: Thanks. In 2004 there were statistics on ACT women. I do not know if that derived from the census or how you get that together.

Ms Gallagher: Yes, it was.

DR FOSKEY: Is there a plan to produce another one of those? Is there a next lot of statistics? That is really a useful document.

Ms Gallagher: Yes. I think that was my idea, actually.

DR FOSKEY: Well, congratulations.

Ms Gallagher: I am not trying to take credit for it.

DR FOSKEY: You can; you should.

Ms Gallagher: It came through the committee. I think it is part of building an understanding of the women we represent across the community. Compared to other jurisdictions, there was relatively little demographic information. That was part of one of the recommendations of the select committee on women a number of years ago.

I am trying to pull together a range of things that we do for women and make that information better available to the community. One of the things that came out of the women's summit was this. We brought everyone in and sat them around the table. They had a bitch about this and a bitch about that. When you actually sat them down with chief executives of departments, they were able to say, "Well, we are doing something around that." To me, what came out of that was a lack of communication between government and non-government about what we are actually doing for women. We are trying to pull together a range of information and make it more available to the community. I hope that demographic data will be part of that. When the census stuff comes out, that will be very useful, up-to-date information if we do not have any capacity ourselves.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

Mr Harris: Mr Chairman, I can answer that statistical question that you asked. The comparable figures for the previous year were that in the graduate program 66 per cent were women, so it was higher, and in the Take the Lead program it was 53 per cent.

THE CHAIR: So one down and one up?

Mr Harris: One was up and one was down.

THE CHAIR: Thanks for that. We will now adjourn. I thank you, Minister, for the extra time. I am sorry we were late starting, but under standing orders I did not have a quorum until 3.37.

The committee adjourned at 4.58 pm.