



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, AGEING,  
COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL SERVICES**

(Reference: [Annual and financial reports 2011-2012](#))

**Members:**

**DR C BOURKE (Chair)**  
**MR J HANSON (Deputy Chair)**  
**MR A WALL**  
**MS Y BERRY**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**THURSDAY, 4 APRIL 2013**

**Secretary to the committee:**  
**Mrs N Kosseck (Ph: 620 50129)**

**By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory**

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

**APPEARANCES**

**Community Services Directorate..... 151, 184**

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*Amended 9 August 2011*

## **The committee met at 2.01 pm.**

Appearances:

Rattenbury, Mr Shane, Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Housing, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and Minister for Ageing

Community Services Directorate

Howson, Ms Natalie, Director-General

Sheehan, Ms Maureen, Deputy Director-General

Overton-Clarke, Ms Bronwen, Executive Director, Housing and Community Services

Collett, Mr David, Senior Director, Housing and Community Services

Tibbitts, Ms Alice, Director, Housing ACT

Whitten, Ms Meredith, Executive Director, Policy and Organisational Services

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

**THE CHAIR:** Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Health, Ageing, Community and Social Services inquiry into annual and financial reports 2011-12. Today the committee will be examining the following components of the Community Services Directorate annual report: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs, ageing, housing, and community development policy. We will commence with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs. There will be a short break at approximately 3.50 pm in order for the Minister for Community Services to join us.

Could I confirm: have you read the privilege card lying on the table in front of you?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes.

**Ms Howson:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Before we proceed to questions, minister, would you like to make an opening statement?

**Mr Rattenbury:** No. I think it is best if we focus on the questions the committee would like to explore.

**THE CHAIR:** I will kick off with a substantive question. With the elected body, what is the nature of the consultations that you have had this year with them?

**Mr Rattenbury:** I think they take place at a number of levels. Predominantly I have met with members of the committee, both outside of the hearings process and when they have conducted a number of their sessions here at the Assembly. I have come and spoken informally with them. Then there are, of course, the formal processes

around the elected body.

Of course, we received earlier this year their latest report. I received that during January. And the government is preparing a response to that at the moment, which will shortly be available publicly. So there is that very formal side of it through the elected body's report. The government will make a whole-of-government response to those recommendations, because those recommendations cut right across government, of course, across each of the directorates. As I say, then there are the more informal things which also often just include my running into members at things like events around the multicultural festival, where we had the Indigenous showcase. Some of those connections are as important as the formal meetings, I think.

**THE CHAIR:** So that is the 2012 annual report you are talking about?

**Mr Rattenbury:** I was referring to the report of the elected body that they released—

**THE CHAIR:** For 2012?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes. The other thing I should mention is, of course, I was referring to simply my own interactions. Of course, through the Community Services Directorate, a new office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs has a whole range of other ongoing contacts and consultation processes that have taken place.

**THE CHAIR:** And when will you be tabling that government response?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Soon.

**MS BERRY:** I have a question regarding the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traineeship program. Can you tell me whether you do any follow-up work with the trainees after they have completed their programs and what kind of feedback do you receive from the trainees about the program?

**Mr Rattenbury:** I might ask Mr Manikis to answer this.

**Mr Manikis:** The traineeship program started off this year with 20 individuals. We are down now to 14 that are working through their cert training. We, as part of that traineeship program, provide placements in directorates, where they secure a position. So they have a full-time, paid position where they spend four days a week, roughly, in the workplace, and then a day doing their training.

Really, from the outset, what happens is that we have got the trainee in the workplace who develops the relationship with the workplace and is supervised and managed that way. We support centrally the costs involved in that traineeship program during the first 12 months. Also what we do is provide the mentoring program, the social program for the trainees as well.

Once they graduate, what happens is that they get secured in their positions in the workplace. And there is an expectation that staff development becomes part and parcel, just like everyone else in that workplace, of their personal development plans and what have you. We did trial, a couple of programs ago, an additional year that we

were getting funding from DEEWR for as a follow-up, to provide post-traineeship programs for 12 months, to assist trainees to further their training or educational attainment and what have you. However, that funding has ceased from DEEWR. And what we do now is: the resources come from the respective workplaces that they are in.

**MS BERRY:** And I wonder whether you could clarify: can you tell me whether it is the trainees who have received the leadership program grants?

**Mr Manikis:** No, the leadership grants program is a separate, discrete grants program that is available to the community per se and that puts together programs that assist individuals in the community, potential leaders who are identified by the community and others. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community elders might identify potential leaders coming up or the people that run the Indigenous organisations that have people that work with them whom they have identified as potential leadership material might identify them. They have the opportunity to support those people to further their skills in that area through the leadership grants program.

I can give you some details about who has been successful this time round in the leadership grants program. They include the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre that is based out at Yarramundi Reach that received close to \$40,000 to put 25 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through their very effective programs that they have got out there. They will be doing that in the next year. So that is an example of what we use the leadership grants for.

The trainees do have quite a bit of resource that is wrapped around them. And that includes whatever they use from us, which comes to us largely from DEEWR, the commonwealth. We also put some funds in as well. And then there are the resources that are available in the normal scheme of things in the workplace. They are available to all other staff as well in terms of managing and upskilling people in the workplace after that point.

The whole idea of the traineeship is about opportunity and getting people into the workplace in the first place, giving people the opportunity to work for the ACT public service in a way that they probably may not have had the opportunity to do so in the open selection way.

**MR WALL:** A supplementary. Mr Manikis, how are the candidates for the cadetship program identified? Are they existing employees of the ACT public service or—

**Mr Manikis:** No, they are not. It is a traineeship program as opposed to a cadetship program, the difference there being, of course, that they are employed on a full-time basis from the outset for 12 months. It is treated a bit like a probation period. It is by application. We advertise the traineeship program being opened at a point in time in the year. People apply, and we get groups of people referred on from Erindale College, from CIT, from Winnunga, from other places like that around town. We have a group of 50, 60 candidates there.

We go through a basic selection process. And at the end, we pick the 20, which is what our system can cope with, because we have got to identify vacant positions in

directorates as well at any given time. As much as we would like to have more, it is also about a balance with the vacancies, because it is not a traineeship in the traditional sense where you train people and then you say, "Go out and find your own job." It is about securing a job and putting the onus back on the individual as a reward. "You complete this training for 12 months and you get yourself a job." In fact, it is a promotion from an ASO1 to an ASO2. That is the deal at the end of the 12 months.

**MR WALL:** What has the retention been like for graduates of the traineeship program?

**Mr Manikis:** It is about 60 per cent over the programs that we have held to date. And there are reasons that vary between going back to country, finding out that after a few months, or even a couple of years in the ACT public service, "It's not for me. I'd rather work in the private sector." And we have had a few of those.

The other one is also working for the commonwealth. Some of our trainees have got promotions into the commonwealth as well. So there are various reasons. Personal reasons is another one for not being able to hold the whole 100 per cent.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Manikis, I am not sure that you actually said when the next round of the leadership and cultural grants will be promoted. When is that going to happen?

**Mr Manikis:** I think it is about August-September that we will go back out. August will be just into the new financial year. We will put out notification to the community that they are available.

**THE CHAIR:** And how do you go about informing the community that these are available?

**Mr Manikis:** There is the print media that we utilise. It is the Indigenous network as well and writing directly to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community groups, also in the *Canberra Times*.

**MR WALL:** I have another supplementary. Mr Manikis, I understand volume 2 of the report shows that there has been a decline in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders employed in the ACT government workforce. How is the declining figure impacting on the ACT's employment strategy for Indigenous people, and what impact is a 60 per cent retention rate having on achieving the goals of Indigenous employment?

**Mr Manikis:** What page?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Can you specify the page?

**MR WALL:** Page 252.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Perhaps I can jump in there. I do see the percentage decline there. What I can say is that, as at 13 March, which is when we last checked in preparation for these hearings, the ACT government employed 258 staff that identify as having

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background. That makes up around 1.2 per cent of the ACT public sector workforce.

I note that, as part of the employment strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, we set a target of 233 employees at 30 June 2012 and 283 by 30 June 2013. So the ACT government did meet the 2012 target. But as you can see, we are a little below the 2013 target at this time. In real numbers, that is where we are at practically at the moment. As you can see from those numbers and the more recent figures, it is going up. But we are a little behind the target we are aiming for.

These are only for Community Services, not for the whole of government, the figures that you were looking at in the report. Of course, there are some agencies that have higher proportions and lower proportions than that. It is an ongoing issue.

**MR HANSON:** The genealogy project, minister, is referred to on page 54. It has been going on for a while now. There are two stages referred to. Can you outline where we are at in terms of stage 1 and stage 2 and what is actually being delivered?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Certainly. In the 2010-11 budget, \$100,000 was allocated over two budget years to conduct the genealogy study so that we give a tangible account of Aboriginal family histories in the region. This is in the context of the fact that the ACT government recognises the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the Canberra region. The work that has been done involved interviews with 29 Aboriginal family representatives from the Ngunnawal, Ngambri and Ngarigo groups and, as a result, the collection of over 2,000 primary source records verifying and documenting that over 5,000 individuals are descended from at least 130 mostly Aboriginal key ancestors.

An initial project report was released on 6 September 2012, just six months ago. I am due to receive the final project report shortly. The final report and the family history books include content that cannot be released without permission to publish personal and private information. As you can imagine, some of it has been quite revealing for members of the community. It has perhaps questioned some of the knowledge that people thought they had. It has drawn out different information to what had previously been understood. Some of it has been quite emotional for the people involved in the study.

**MR HANSON:** So in that context, without identifying individuals, are there people who are claiming that they are Ngarigo, Ngambri or Ngunnawal who apparently are not or thought they had a local connection and do not? The intent of this, I thought, was to try and resolve some of these issues that had been playing out in the Indigenous community for a while. I am just curious as to whether this is actually going to result in any resolution of those issues or whether we are still going to see, I guess, the competing claims by various groups and individuals.

**Mr Rattenbury:** I think that is an interesting question. There is no doubt that the study has brought greater clarity. I think it has also, as I just touched on, opened up some new questions as well. In terms of a neat and definitive drawing of a line or a settling of a singular position, I do not know that that is going to be the case. I am not sure that it is the government's place to necessarily assert a conclusive outcome. I



think it is a really important phase for members of the community to receive this information and discuss amongst themselves the consequences of that information.

**MR HANSON:** Having said that, government does take a role in that the government has said that it is Ngunnawal country as opposed to Ngarigo, Ngambri or something else. There are also roles played by Ngunnawal elders, as an example. The government does take a role in welcome to countries, the elders council and so on. I think it is incorrect to say that it is something the government does not have a role in.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Your point is a fair one. I guess the observation I was trying to make is that I think we need time. We are going to give this as a tool to the families. I think there is an important role there for the community in the first instance to analyse that work. I think the government's reaction to that should come some time after that and there is a space there to allow community reaction. I think there should be anyway.

**MR HANSON:** So who gets a copy of it then?

**Mr Rattenbury:** The family members will be given the relevant segments.

**MR HANSON:** So they get their bit?

**Mr Manikis:** It is not so much a bit but a book about their family. The members will get anything from about 200 or 300 pages to about 3,000 pages, depending on the level of documentation that has been generated in the past about their family group and what has been churned up by the genealogists. They will get a bound book. It is also about what they have contributed as well along the way. We have spoken with and worked with the 29 family groups in developing that and they will get that. It will be a bound version, but it will be a living group of documents. The whole thing just does not end when the genealogy study ends. The idea is that it is a resource for that family into the future as well to build on. New information may be churned up some time in the future about things that have happened that can be added to that book.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, you mentioned at the outset that the genealogy project included not just the Ngunnawal but the other groups as well.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes.

**MR HANSON:** Is that a recognition that they are local to this country or not? What does that mean? I thought before that the government's position was that there was just the recognition of the Ngunnawal people. Now you are saying that there are other groups that have been involved in that genealogy project.

**Mr Manikis:** The decision of the day by the government was that the genealogy study would be for those groups that identified with the area, no matter who they were.

**MR HANSON:** They claimed; therefore, they were included?

**Mr Manikis:** They claimed, yes; self-identification. The government has proceeded along the lines of a policy decision taken when there was consensus back in 2002. That position still holds. This provides the tools for the families to come together and

to reassess that consensus. Over the last few years there has been a more vocal contribution in this area, as you would be aware. Going forward, whilst we still are applying the consensus policy of 2002, until the community can come back, whenever that may be—hopefully in the near future—and there is acceptance that there is, indeed, Ngunnawal, Ngambri and Ngarigo, I am sure that the government of the day will take the views of the community coming forward saying, “We’re living side by side.”

**Ms Howson:** I think the short answer to your question, Mr Hanson, is that there were no families excluded from participation. In fact, I think families were invited to participate. There was no set position in relation to what particular group, cultural group, a particular family associated with.

**MR HANSON:** Just as a follow-up, there is one group that I believe is taking court action against the government. Is it Ngarigo that is threatening court action? Are you across that?

**Mr Manikis:** There is a family within a group—there are many families in the Ngarigo group—and there is an application before the administrative and civil tribunal around that issue. That was struck out last year and I am not sure if it has been resurrected.

**MR HANSON:** Thanks.

**MR WALL:** Minister, on page 63, volume 1, it talks about the Bimberi cultural program. I was just curious as to how many participants have been through this program and what the take-up rate and success of the program have been.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Whilst I realise that this is in the CSD annual report, it is actually the responsibility of Minister Burch. I am happy to take the question on notice if you prefer or if there is another place you would like to take up that question.

**MR WALL:** If you would not mind taking that one on notice. I have another substantive one I would not mind asking.

**Mr Rattenbury:** That is fine. We will be able to get those numbers for you and provide them back.

**MR WALL:** I am assuming the next one is the same. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander liaison officer—I believe that also falls under Mrs Burch’s portfolio?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes. Just on that, Mr Wall, if I might, in having this ministry in the ACT government—and it is why the elected body report which I was talking to Dr Bourke about earlier is a whole-of-government response—many of the ministers do have responsibilities. There are obviously a lot of programs in Health. The nature of this ministry particularly is to cast an overarching eye on some of these things and also to be an advocate within government to ensure some of these issues are carried forward on behalf of the community. Perhaps you are wondering why I am not able to address some of these specific issues. It is because they do sit across government.

**MR WALL:** I understand that. It has been complicated on my part as well to get across where the boundaries exist. Saying it is more of an overarching eye—it has come to my attention that there is a substantial amount of funding that is provided toward Indigenous or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs in the ACT which cover corrections, Health and education. Obviously it has been a substantial amount of money and we are seeing very, very slow improvements in the outcomes. Do you feel that we are getting, essentially, good value for money in the investment that the ACT government is making in closing the gap? What areas do you highlight where improvements need to be made?

**Mr Rattenbury:** You have touched on closing the gap. For my mind, that is the key set of benchmarks that we must measure ourselves against. I think they are accepted as the benchmarks that are the most appropriate. They are the ones that the elected body are looking at as their primary set of parameters around which to gauge progress.

I think the ACT has demonstrated some good results in a number of areas, including reading, where the gap has decreased in all years except year 7, but for years 5 and 9 the gap has approximately halved. With numeracy, the gap has decreased in all years except year 7. The third area I would mention is tobacco smoking during pregnancy. The gap decreased slightly, just one per cent, between 2007 and 2009, but nonetheless it was a positive improvement. To pick up the second half of your question, clearly there is a bit of an issue around year 7 on those first two benchmarks. That is an area where the figures obviously suggest there is some further thinking to do about what the gap is there.

The other thing I would observe, of course, is that it continues to be an issue that, whether it is at Bimberi or in the Alexander Maconochie Centre, Indigenous people continue to be over-represented on a whole range of indicators. Right across government we have got a lot of ongoing work to do. That will be the nature of the response that I will table shortly in the Assembly to the elected body—both agreement with a number of the recommendations and an acknowledgement that there is still work to do.

**MR WALL:** Minister, you just mentioned briefly the NAPLAN results that show improvements in years 5 and 9, but year 7 continually seems to be slipping. What support is given to non-government schools in addressing these issues?

**Mr Rattenbury:** I would probably have to seek some information from the education directorate on that. Do you want me to give that to you on notice?

**MR WALL:** You can take it on notice; thank you.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Certainly.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, perhaps you could advise the committee of the volatility of data around Indigenous outcomes within the context of closing the gap vis-a-vis the small population we have in the ACT?

**Mr Manikis:** For quite a few years now that has certainly been a feature of many

reports that have come to us from various national studies and what have you. It is very difficult to have statistically valid measurements for the ACT due to the small numbers that we have here. Also, the data that is not collected contributes to the fact that we simply cannot assess trends as a result of that. If we are talking about some of these targets in the COAG closing the gap regime and also in the overcoming Indigenous disadvantage report that comes out every two years, we find that the ACT does not feature. For example, taking mortality rates as a performance measure, if you have two or three deaths in one year and three or four in the next year the percentage really does not tell you much in terms of trend because of the actual numbers involved.

**Ms Howson:** This whole issue of data, though, is really fundamental to improving our policy development process. It is something that the strategic board and the subcommittee of the strategic board have been working on for some time so there is elimination of these, if you like, purely statistical impediments to us being able to identify trends with such a small population. It has been an impediment to progression. I will ask Maureen Sheehan to talk about what we are trying to do in the development of the national data context and where we might be able to go with it in future.

**Ms Sheehan:** In my capacity as the chair of the Housing and Homelessness Data Working Group, I was a member of the national Indigenous reform agreement data working group, so I had the opportunity to work with other jurisdictions on the data issues from the time of the national Indigenous reform agreement in 2007. We were able to look at the trajectory of change that is needed across the 10 years or 20 years of the closing the gap agenda to actually close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage. One of the difficulties that we find in all jurisdictions, particularly given what we have heard about the small numbers and small sample sizes in the ACT, is that it is not a static thing that we are closing in on across 10 years or 20 years, because it is a comparative measure which is the gap between outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and outcomes for the non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. So as, over time, there are improvements in, say, health, education, housing and safe communities for the non-Indigenous population, the gap that we are trying to close may actually increase.

So what jurisdictions are trying to do really is improve the data collection across the Aboriginal population as well as the non-Aboriginal population and try and work out what is the trajectory that you need to close the gap over the period. And what that means is looking at what is the number of people who have to actually have improvements over the period and then looking at where are they most likely to be living. You might need different measures to close the gap in different circumstances. For example, if a relatively small number of people live in remote populations, then, if you put all of your funding into trying to improve outcomes for people in remote populations but you do not do anything in urban environments, such as Canberra, where the commonwealth government has not been forthcoming in extra funding, you will not necessarily close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage.

So in trying to capture the data, we have to understand how many people we are actually talking about who would be the difference between closing the gap and not closing the gap and then be in a position to capture data about them in the places

where they live—and then apply funding to them where they live so that we can actually close the gap. So it is the data challenge and directing the services in the right place, and then being able to capture the data in those places as well. It is not as simple as just being able to count it.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Ms Howson, you mentioned a subcommittee of the strategic board. Could you tell us who, how, when and why?

**Ms Howson:** The why is acknowledgement of a need for a whole-of-government approach to improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of our community. That is the why. Bringing directors-general together to focus on those issues is important. The subcommittee was established so that the strategic board could be assured that there would be that level of focus across government.

The what is informed by essentially a series of themes that we have decided are important, which we have determined as a result of presentations around the data that is available and our performance in particular areas. The themes that we have focused on are early childhood development—number one—youth engagement and youth involvement in the youth justice area.

There is economic participation, and the subset of that is employment, particularly the focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment, either through the levers of government or within government. An example of that within my directorate would be with one of our largest contracts, our total facilities management contract. As part of negotiating that contract, we have negotiated targets around the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, specific targets that need to be achieved under that contract. Our view was that we would lead by example, and we will be promulgating that model to other aspects of government procurement as we roll out. That is just an example of where the work that we are doing in that strategic board subcommittee leads us.

We are at the stage at the moment where we are doing a bit more of a deep dive analysis into each of those areas to understand better what the issues are. The next stage will be working up some initiatives that we, as a group of directors-general, are intending to drive forward as a result of that examination.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Any supplementaries?

**MR WALL:** I have a very vague one. Because of the nature of the ACT, particularly in the Indigenous community, we see a lot of people from as far as the South Coast and rural New South Wales coming into the ACT and accessing some of the Indigenous services here. Is there any data collected or captured showing what kinds of cross-border populations are accessing services in the ACT, and how is that managed?

**Mr Manikis:** It is certainly not captured in a central database. It would be on a service-by-service basis or program-by-program basis, I would imagine. If we are talking about school attendances from Queanbeyan to Erindale College, for example, I am sure there would be information captured in that way. The health system in its normal course of collecting data would also capture that, but I do not think it is in one

central database.

**MR WALL:** So it is not being captured as Indigenous data or cross-border data?

**Mr Manikis:** No, not that I am aware of.

**MR WALL:** It is just mixed in amongst all the data. Okay.

**THE CHAIR:** We might move along to ageing now, if members are happy, unless they have more questions on Indigenous affairs.

**MR HANSON:** That is fine.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, can you tell me about the aged care facilities in Belconnen and what needs assessment there has been for Belconnen? Is there a shortage of aged care in Belconnen compared to, say, central Canberra?

**Mr Rattenbury:** This is an issue that I cannot give you a detailed answer on, Dr Bourke. Residential aged care is actually a commonwealth responsibility, so it is not something that the ACT plays a significant role in. So the sort of question you are asking is not saying that it has been done by the ACT government, to my understanding.

**THE CHAIR:** What representations would you have made to the commonwealth with regard to aged care on these issues?

**Mr Rattenbury:** The Minister for Health actually has portfolio responsibility for this in the ACT. I feel as though I am starting to go around you here, but that is the way it works in the ACT government. In some ways, again, the age care ministry in the ACT government is not unlike what I was describing to Mr Wall earlier about the role of Indigenous affairs; it is that same sort of advocacy and overarching look at it.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay. Let me put it another way: have you had any representations about a lack of aged care in Belconnen?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Not specifically. I think there is a general acknowledgement that the aged care sector is under pressure with the changing demographics of our community, which I think we are all well aware of. There is obviously an increasing demand. Do you have the figures?

**Ms Whitten:** I do have the figures.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Thank you.

**Ms Whitten:** Part of my responsibilities is the Office for Ageing. In terms of the ageing population, in the ACT people over 60 represent about 15 per cent of the population, and we anticipate that by 2030 the over-60 population will be about 22 per cent. Obviously the demand for services in this area will change over that time. My understanding in relation to aged care in terms of places in the ACT or identification of sites within the ACT is that the Economic Development Directorate probably has

more information about that than we do.

**THE CHAIR:** Given that that proportion is increasing, how does that compare with other capital cities?

**Ms Whitten:** We did some work on this a little while ago, back in 2011, when we were developing the strategic plan on positive ageing. I think it is fair to say that, as the baby boomer generation ages across Australia, there are similar trends being experienced in each jurisdiction. If you would like more information, we could get that for you.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Questions? Sorry—were there any supps? No? Okay.

**MS BERRY:** I am interested in the age-friendly city survey that was conducted in 2011 and the results that were gathered. Can you please go through the priorities that were suggested by the respondents in a bit more detail?

**Ms Whitten:** I will just give some context around why we did that survey. In 2011, the ACT government, through the Office for Ageing and the Minister for Ageing, developed a strategic plan for positive ageing in collaboration with the ministerial council on ageing. As part of that process we identified that one of the objectives that the government would like to achieve is to become a member of the WHO age-friendly city network. As part of our membership of that network, one of the key aspects of our work is about demonstrating how we engage with older people in our community. We have been able to demonstrate that through the fact that we have completed a strategic plan on positive ageing, which involved a lot of older people in the ACT, and also that, in 2011, we had the first older persons assembly, which is reported in the annual report.

The survey is a way of identifying what the needs of older people are in the ACT. We engaged the ANU to conduct that survey. One of the issues that were identified in that survey was in relation to transport. The government has a commitment in relation to the lowering of the age for the gold card from 75 years, for example, for transport, down to 70 years. Obviously that is something that the government is currently considering. So transport was one issue, and that is important for older people to have access to the community. In terms of transport, the government is also undertaking completing a procurement around a smart card for a taxi subsidy scheme. The taxi subsidy scheme is important to assist older people particularly, and people with disability, to access transport options in their lives if they cannot use public transport. That is one of the other aspects of the survey that is being looked at.

We are also working through some of the other recommendations from the survey, and it will inform the development of all the planning for the next older persons assembly.

**MS BERRY:** Are there any plans to follow up with the respondents or the aged care community to see how things have tracked since the survey was undertaken?

**Ms Whitten:** In terms of our membership of the age-friendly city network, one of our requirements is to demonstrate that we have engaged with the community on a regular

basis. Our next survey, which will be in about 2016—it is every five years—is the way we are going to be doing it.

**MS BERRY:** Just one more, if I can. Can you please explain some of the other benefits to the ACT of being a member of the WHO global network of age-friendly cities?

**Ms Whitten:** One of the benefits is being recognised as a city that is age friendly. Canberra was the first capital city in Australia to be identified as an age-friendly city. There are other towns in Australia which are members of the network, such as Melville in Western Australia. It gives us an opportunity to network within Australia nationally, and also internationally, to see what achievements are occurring in other countries and jurisdictions.

**MR WALL:** A supplementary. You mentioned in there a couple of times the older persons assembly. Is there a date set as yet for the next one to be held this year?

**Mr Rattenbury:** No, there is not. The program is being worked on, and there will be something in the later part of this year. That is the intent at this point.

**MR WALL:** So there will be one held this year?

**Mr Rattenbury:** In October-November. There is just not a specific date yet.

**Ms Whitten:** Can I just build on that. In terms of the older persons assembly in 2011, in preparation for that older persons assembly we actually held a briefing session of all the delegates. What was useful about that briefing session was for people to understand what their role is in an older persons assembly. When 70 people attended in 2011 it was really getting to be clear about how the assembly would operate and also—because it was held in this building—to be clear about what the protocols were. Our minister was the speaker for that older persons assembly.

What was important about that briefing session was the pre-briefing session for the Assembly for people to understand some of the issues, some of the programs that the ACT is currently providing. One of the opportunities that have arisen this year is, through a suggestion from COTA ACT, to hold a conference this year. That is what the plan is for this year—to hold a conference prior to the next assembly being held. That is the reason why we do not have a date yet for that assembly.

**MR WALL:** From the assembly that was held in 2011, I understand that there were 24 recommendations. How many have been implemented, and what recommendations are still outstanding, if any?

**Ms Whitten:** The way to answer that is to say that those recommendations were really important in terms of informing the next action plan under the strategic plan for positive ageing. That is the way that we have looked at implementing those recommendations.

**THE CHAIR:** Question, Mr Hanson?



**MR HANSON:** Thanks. On page 48 it refers to the Office of Ageing, including supporting seniors grants sponsorships and so on. I am just wondering what number of applications have been received for the grants and sponsorships and what has actually been provided in terms of them—how many, what they were for and what is the full total of that?

**Ms Whitten:** I do not necessarily have at hand the number of applications, but in the annual report we do actually publish the grants. That is in volume 2. The total value of the grants program is \$100,000, and the maximum value for each individual grant is \$15,000. One of the grants, for example, was for the Bangladeshi Seniors Club. We can provide a table or list of those grants if that would be helpful.

**MR HANSON:** Yes. What is the difference between a grant and a sponsorship?

**Ms Whitten:** The grants are for one-off events, so they can only be for a particular purpose, to be spent within that 12-month period. The sponsorships are usually for a lesser amount—over a number of years but for a lesser amount.

**MR HANSON:** Okay.

**Ms Whitten:** That is explained in our application form which we send out.

**MR HANSON:** Yes. In terms of the number of applications you have got, do you have a quantum in terms of being able to approve 10 per cent of them, 50 per cent or close to 100 per cent? What is the delta between the number of people applying and the amount of grants and sponsorships that you can provide?

**Ms Whitten:** It is really about the value of the program. If we have got \$100,000, that is the quantum that we put in. The process is that we look at the grants through an independent assessment process, and it will depend. For example, in the 2012-13 program, 18 grants were approved within that amount. It is really a matter of just seeing what is possible.

**MR HANSON:** I understand that; you have got a finite budget. I am just trying to get an understanding of whether that is meeting the need. With \$100,000 and 18 successful applicants, does that get close? Were there only 20 applicants or were there 480 applicants? What is the quantum?

**Ms Whitten:** We will have to take that one on notice.

**Ms Howson:** Mr Hanson, broadly, across the directorate, most of our grants programs are oversubscribed. There are generally more applications than there is capacity.

**MR HANSON:** Yes, and I guess that is normally the case. It is just that I am trying to get a measure of by how much—what the quantum is.

**Ms Howson:** We will take that specific question on notice.

**Ms Whitten:** I do have the answer to how many applications we received. It was 39 applications.

**MR HANSON:** Thirty-nine.

**Ms Whitten:** And it looks like we had 21 grants that were—

**MR HANSON:** So about half.

**Ms Whitten:** Yes. I wanted to just correct the record on that.

**MR HANSON:** Okay. That gives me enough to go on with. Thanks.

**THE CHAIR:** I will take a supplementary on that. Within those grants, the ones that were not successful, I would be interested to know how many were actually acceptable within the guidelines of the grant.

**Ms Whitten:** I will have to take that one on notice, thanks.

**THE CHAIR:** Because there is a difference between having a greater demand than the pool and having applications for grants which are unsuitable.

**Ms Howson:** Can I just make a comment there? When we conclude our grants programs, we generally do an assessment in terms of oversubscription and issues like whether or not the applications actually hit the mark. That helps us redesign the communication around the grants program the following year.

**Ms Whitten:** Could I add that we do have a grants portal, and if an application might be suited to another grants program, we usually act in terms of referring an applicant to another grants program.

**MR HANSON:** Where is that amount set—the \$100,000? Is it a budget decision of cabinet or is it an internal decision? Who makes that decision?

**Ms Whitten:** My recollection is that the grants program has increased through a budget commitment, but that was from \$85,000 to \$100,000, and that was probably about three or four years ago. It was 2009, I think. It is a defined program and it is a government commitment.

**THE CHAIR:** Any more supps? Mr Wall, a substantive question.

**MR WALL:** Thank you. I would like to go back briefly to the age-friendly city survey that was conducted. How long was the period in which the survey was carried out, and how were the survey results collected and returned back to government? Was it online, written?

**Ms Whitten:** My recollection in relation to that survey was that, because we are talking about surveying older people, we used a number of methods to meet their needs. It was a combination of online and hard copy surveys.

**MR WALL:** Sorry, how long was the survey period, Ms Whitten?

**Ms Whitten:** I will have to check that. Sorry; I did not bring that level of detail with me.

**Mr Rattenbury:** What I can tell you is that around 2,000 Canberrans over the age of 60 years were surveyed—just to give you a sense of the scale of the survey as it is noted in the report.

**Ms Whitten:** I can confirm that it was open for two months, and it was online, postal survey and senior card members. We worked through COTA ACT in terms of distributing the survey.

**MR WALL:** What were the main areas of concern that were raised as a result of the survey?

**Ms Whitten:** I talked previously about transport.

**MR WALL:** So transport was the standout?

**Ms Whitten:** And housing, I think, was another aspect.

**Ms Howson:** Mobility issues associated with transport. They were the most significant concerns for older people. And limited access to social activities. There was some concern about social isolation that came through in the survey results.

**MR WALL:** How is that information to date being used in developing policies and programs? Was it used at the forefront of new policy?

**Ms Whitten:** Yes. We talked earlier about the strategic plan on positive ageing and that we have developed a new action plan. As part of developing that action plan we worked in consultation with the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing. We have also put in place an age-friendly city network across government; COTA ACT and MACA are on that committee. It is that mechanism that we use to engage directorates about these issues that have been raised by older people and how they can build them into their programs. And each directorate reports their achievements against the strategic plans, action plans, in their own annual reports.

**Ms Howson:** One example of specific activity that we have designed as a result of this information is Grandparents Day, which was held last year around Lake Tuggeranong. Those days are designed to encourage older people and their families to come out to the community and to ensure that there are service providers participating in those events and those days so that people can connect up with groups, social networks and other services that they might need. That is one example of where it translates into a specific action.

**MR WALL:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** More questions on ageing? Mr Doszpot.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Thank you. My question is on the lease/licence scheme for long-term lease, under affordable housing assistance.

**THE CHAIR:** We were doing ageing, Mr Doszpot. We have not got to housing yet.

**MR DOSZPOT:** It is part of ageing—what I am asking about.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay; that is all right. I am just clarifying for you.

**MR DOSZPOT:** This is affordable housing for older people and what assistance has been given. Six applications were received on 30 June. Were all six applications converted to purchases?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Just bear with us a moment, Mr Doszpot. We will get the right official to assist you with that. Could we have the question again, Mr Doszpot, now we have the right people?

**MR DOSZPOT:** Under the lease/licence scheme for long-term lease, there were apparently six applications received. I am asking how many of the applications were approved.

**Mr Collett:** Of those six, a number are still under consideration, a number were withdrawn, and one has gone through to purchase. Another one is in the final stages. Our expectation is that there will be a second soon.

**MR DOSZPOT:** And that purchase was approved when? What time frame?

**Mr Collett:** I would have to provide the date for you. It was some months ago, but I am not sure of the exact date. I would have to check that.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Looking from July 2012 to current, how many properties have been purchased under the lease/licence scheme?

**Mr Collett:** One, as I said.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Did you say with one other potential in the pipeline?

**Mr Collett:** One other is in the final stages. Arranging finance for people in retirement and meeting the eligibility criteria is not an easy matter. The six referred to people who had applied for material and the application kits. Some of those did not proceed; others failed to meet the criteria.

**THE CHAIR:** We have segued rather neatly into housing at the appropriate time. Minister, what growth has there been in public housing over the last five years, and what is planned in the new division of Molonglo?

**Mr Rattenbury:** We will just get the right personnel to the table.

**THE CHAIR:** Would you like the question again, Mr Collett?

**Mr Collett:** That would be very helpful.

**THE CHAIR:** My question was: what growth has there been in public housing over the last five years, and what is planned in the new division of Molonglo?

**Mr Collett:** Taking the questions in reverse order, if I could, we are in close contact with the Land Development Agency to secure land which is appropriate to a range of special needs of our housing tenants or special programs that are funded by the commonwealth and require particular housing types or locations. The relationship with the LDA has been quite successful for us because it has enabled us to purchase plans before they are taken to auction or to sale. We pay the valuation for the properties unless there are some special conditions or circumstances that apply, but it does mean to say that we can select blocks that are most appropriate for our tenants' needs and for our construction practice.

To date, the land that has been identified for purchase and that has been purchased has all been in Gungahlin. To date, we have not identified land that we would like to purchase in Molonglo. If we do in the future, I am sure that the processes that we have established with the LDA would apply equally well to Molonglo. Given the nature of the subdivisions and the nature of the sites, our expectation is that the land in Molonglo will be of a higher price, and we are likely to take less land in Molonglo than we have in Gungahlin.

In terms of the growth of housing over the last five years, five years ago there were 11,454 public housing dwellings, and at the current time there are 11,840-odd.

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** The biggest growth over the last five years has really been because of the injection of nation building money from 2009, which resulted in 421 dwellings. Of that, a large number were, as Mr Doszpot started to allude to, aged persons units. One of the arguments that we successfully won with the commonwealth was that we wanted to address secondary homelessness and we wanted to be able to downsize older persons from large houses into affordable and new two-bedroom units. The uptake was very strong. In terms of addressing aged persons housing and also being able to bring double the number of units that were required under nation building into the public housing stock, it was very successful, because the ACT contribution was land entirely, which meant, as I said, that we could give double the number of units that we were required to under nation building. That has really been the biggest growth over the last five years.

**THE CHAIR:** In terms of growth around Canberra, where would you be identifying the greatest areas of need for public housing?

**Mr Collett:** We have got strong demand from our tenants for accommodation in Belconnen and in Gungahlin. As I referred to in my previous answer, the focus of our activities with the Land Development Agency and the Economic Development Directorate has been identifying land in those suburbs.

**THE CHAIR:** Is the percentage of public housing in the central Canberra area dropping?

**Mr Collett:** It is falling slightly but, having said that, it is significantly higher than our distribution across the whole of the metropolitan area. Whilst the percentage of public

housing in inner north and south Canberra has been a strong feature of the public housing scene or the social housing scene in Canberra for decades, and it serves our tenants well in terms of giving them access to transport, employment and services, what we are seeing is an increasing desire on the part of our tenants to be close to family, other services and contacts and support outside the inner Canberra area.

**THE CHAIR:** How are you managing that transition?

**Mr Collett:** As I said, we are well served by the geographic distribution of public housing. We do not have the western suburbs ghettos or western suburb enclaves of public housing that characterise some of the other capital cities. The downside with that is the age of our stock. The average age of our stock is 29 years, and that is moving us back to a period of construction when standards were significantly lower, both in terms of the amenity of the properties that were provided and also in terms of the form of construction, the requirements for maintenance and, particularly, the energy efficiency of those dwellings. As Ms Overton-Clarke mentioned previously, the strategy has been to look at providing housing to a very high standard, both in terms of amenity and in terms of energy efficiency, for our tenants in the most cost-effective way. That has often been in the form of aged accommodation—and to move older tenants out of under-occupying three and perhaps four-bedroom houses on large blocks.

We are moving consistently with general social trends towards smaller blocks, more compact houses and lower maintenance and higher energy efficiency for our stock.

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** Plus, because of our demand being at either end of the spectrum these days, if you like—either for two-bedroom places or for four and five—and having a predominance of three bedrooms as part of our stock, we really need to change the demographic of our stock. It is not just about the age of the buildings and the size of the houses; it is really being able to change to more efficient use for what our tenants want.

**THE CHAIR:** Isn't that demographic change what is happening across the western world?

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** It is demographic change, but it is also because of the people that we house. Because we target those who are most in need, the demographic of the family types on our waiting list can be families with a large number of children or singles. It is really not just demographics across the western world and ageing. That, as Mr Collett said, is a lot of our current tenants. It is also being able to meet the demand for those who are most in need.

**THE CHAIR:** But the capital region is going to be one of the most populated inland regions within Australia within 20 years. I think the projection is up to 600,000 people. How does that figure in your planning?

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** We have a residency requirement in terms of people having to have lived in the ACT itself within six months. In terms of that cross-border aspect, we only house Canberra tenants. In terms of the demand, and increasing demand, there will always be demand for public housing. We do have a segmented waiting list,

and we allocate to those who need it most.

**THE CHAIR:** Supplementaries?

**MS BERRY:** Thank you, chair. I did have a supplementary on that. You mentioned that you were looking at working with EDD about seeking land for public housing in Belconnen. Is that what you said?

**Mr Collett:** Belconnen and Gungahlin.

**MS BERRY:** Is that something where you have an idea that there is land available or is that something that would be happening in the future?

**Mr Collett:** In the past we have purchased in west Belconnen. We are currently purchasing in Gungahlin, and we will continue to look at the land that is becoming available in Gungahlin to see which of the sites meet our needs and our construction program.

**MS BERRY:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** No more supplementaries? A substantive question, Ms Berry.

**MS BERRY:** Thank you. I have a question regarding the tenant participation grants. I know that the tenant participation grants were often awarded to pay for individual social access costs like CIT fees. Were any grants awarded to tenants to run activities or programs intended to build stronger communities in their neighbourhoods, particularly in high-density public housing developments?

**Ms Tibbitts:** Of the participation grants that were granted, there is a proportion which is for groups. Some of them are groups of tenants that are operating within public housing. In the Bega, Allawah and Currong apartments, there is an art program. It is a smaller proportion than what used to be run under the old tenants-initiated grants program but yes, there is still availability for group grants.

**MS BERRY:** Can you give an example of some of those projects that were funded? What is it that they are actually doing with those grants?

**Ms Tibbitts:** Sure. Art classes were one of them. There was also an access to art program which enabled people to access artistic programs out within the community. There was also a migrant women's group, and that was around a group of migrant women who actually identified different areas within the community that they wanted to go and visit. They would have a social-type outing to Floriade or to the art gallery or something like that.

**MS BERRY:** Are there others that you can identify, besides the Bega housing?

**Ms Tibbitts:** I would have to take that on notice.

**MS BERRY:** Thank you. And how is the program advertised?

**Ms Tibbitts:** The program gets advertised through the *Chronicle*, in our tenant newsletter, and in open public forums that we have.

**Ms Howson:** I might ask Ms Sheehan to make some further comments on that.

**Ms Sheehan:** The tenant participation grants were completely reformed about two years ago because the focus of the grants previously had really been assisting tenants to participate with each other and focusing very heavily on the multi-unit complexes. That is a good thing; it is a good thing for tenants to have social interaction. But what we were very keen to do was assist tenants to participate with other members of the community, which was really the whole focus of social participation, so that public housing tenants are members of the community generally, like everyone else is. For example, to enable children to participate with other children in sporting groups, a tenant participation grant could pay for a sports club membership and soccer boots and soccer gear, things like that. The grants have been very successfully moving in that direction.

Ms Berry, you mentioned paying CIT fees. That is another excellent example, because that enables a public housing tenant to gain some educational experience. That could potentially lead to employment as well. The idea is participation in the community generally. Social activity is one form of participation, but it is only one form of participation. That has really been the success of the grants and the reason that we have changed them.

**MR HANSON:** I have a number of questions about the flow in and out of the housing stock, waiting times and the reason for people being in tenancies. I will start with the 1,105 public housing tenancies that were ended. There is some explanation that it is a transfer between public housing properties. I am just wondering, though, how many were due to eviction. It does refer to a number of evictions for breach of tenancies and for a variety of other reasons. Do you have a number around that?

**Ms Sheehan:** I think there were 88 evictions in 2011-12, 400 transfers, 515 vacated.

**MR HANSON:** How many were moved on because of not being eligible anymore, based on income and so on? Was that a factor there?

**Ms Sheehan:** Not in 2011-12, no.

**MR HANSON:** For the process of managing evictions, the 88, is that a consistent number or is that a high number? Are you making any particular effort with regard to evictions, or is that just a kind of standard number?

**Mr Collett:** We work very hard to ensure that we have a minimum number of evictions. Of course, eviction is only taken as a last resort. We take the view that whilst ever the tenants are prepared to work with us, we are prepared to work with them and to move forward, particularly around repayments. If they will go on an agreement, if they will make some payments on a regular basis to reduce their debt, we will avoid eviction.

In answering the question previously, Ms Overton-Clarke was referring to the number



of abandonments, including evictions. The total number of evictions in the period of the annual report was, in fact, 17. That is reasonably consistent with other years, although it is an area that we continue to focus on in terms of reducing those numbers.

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** Sixty-five were abandoned and 17 were evictions in total.

**Ms Howson:** I just want to underline that evictions are our sort of tool of last resort and there are a number of programs in place to assist in early identification of issues, whether they be in relation to the tenant's relationship with other members of the community or whether it is about their own living skills and their capacity to maintain their tenancy. So a number of triggers will be exercised in order to respond to that. And we try as much as we can to ensure that we keep our public housing tenants housed.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Mr Hanson, just one other thing before you go on, and that is the information for the reporting period. I think, in terms of your line of questioning, in the subsequent financial year, the one we are working through now, there has also been a program to identify what might be classed as the highest income tenants. The previous government took a decision to target some of those tenants for moving on, shall we say—those who were able to perhaps afford to move into the private rental market—to enable us to bring others in at the other end of the list. It is through that process that a range of households have been identified. Some of them have taken up the shared equity offer. They have purchased their home. Some have simply moved on into the private rental market and some will go through a process of eviction if we cannot find another solution for them.

**MR HANSON:** If someone has got an income that is beyond the threshold—I think \$80,000 was the figure—I thought they would be asked to pay market rent and you would not actually evict them.

**Ms Sheehan:** No, it is the market rent people that we are identifying, to be able to understand which ones have a sustainable income over two years that is more than \$80,000. And we have been working, if you like, down from the highest amount—

**MR HANSON:** And you will send them an eviction notice? How many fall into that category, of the 17?

**Ms Howson:** It is quite a comprehensive process of moving to that point.

**MR HANSON:** Understandably.

**Ms Howson:** It is probably—

**MR HANSON:** I guess you have got the bottom end and the top end. You have got people who are not meeting their tenancy agreement through behaviour issues or not paying rent, and you have got others at the top end who are, I guess, wealthy enough to move on. I am just trying to get a sense of that 17. Are all 17 non-rent payers or are they—

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** Seventeen have moved on after being sent notices—of their

own accord, as the minister outlined. There are 53 at the moment whom we are expecting to move to eviction.

**MR HANSON:** How many?

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** Fifty-three.

**MR HANSON:** This has been a topic of discussion before. One of the arguments for not moving on people who are paying market rent is that they help subsidise the stock. Is that a bit of a change in attitude—that the sense is that we want to move them on to make the stock available, as opposed to keeping them there so that it subsidises the other stock? It seems to be a bit of a change in approach.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes. I think there are some who will still be paying a higher level of rent. It is about identifying those tenants, in particular, who have made progress over time through more stable employment, those kinds of issues, where we do want to free up some stock where we can move on those most able tenants. I think that is more the intent of the policy. Does that answer your question?

**MR HANSON:** Yes, I think so.

**MR WALL:** In the process of identifying a tenant that has breached the threshold for two consecutive years and before evicting them, are their current circumstances taken into consideration—as to health issues, approaching retirement age, their financial position? Although they may be earning over the \$80,000 threshold, they may have significant financial burdens elsewhere.

**Ms Howson:** Thank you for asking that question, because there is quite a tiered approach to the decision to execute an eviction, which, again, would be at the very end of the process. A number of the tenants that have been identified in this context have, through their own volition, made choices to move on or made applications to purchase the home in which they live. There is also an assessment process which involves external advisers to be able to make a judgement about the sustainability of the income and whether there might be changes in life circumstances, as you pointed out, such as approaching retirement, that would need to be taken into account. Otherwise, we would find the same person coming back onto the public housing waiting list in a short period of time. There is, most certainly, a very comprehensive process of assessment before we move.

We are also engaging with the tenants and inviting them to bring forward as much information as they possibly can. We have been, I think, very cautious in our decision-making approach around a final position of issuing any notice for eviction.

**MR HANSON:** For people who are evicted who are the ones who have not been paying the rent or who have behaviour issues, what support services do you provide? Do they become homeless or how do you monitor that to make sure that that does not become a further problem?

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** The first point is in terms of the support that we give them before it moves to eviction. What we do is ensure that we do as much as possible to

stop them getting into debt, because it tends to be debt that, in the end, is the major reason for eviction. We absolutely recognise that it is important to work with tenants to ensure that they understand the whole rebate process. Each tenant is charged market rent until they put in, at the moment, a six-monthly rebate process. We are moving to 12-month rebates to minimise that sort of paperwork that tenants have to undergo. If they find it difficult in terms of being able to understand and meet those financial requirements, we work with a range of support agencies like Care Financial Services.

As well as our housing managers and client support coordinators, we have a team called ISSC, which is “improved support, stronger communities”, who are, if you like, intensive case management officers who work with clients on issues that they have in being able to sustain their tenancies. That is within the public housing sphere. We also fund, through another program, a sustaining tenancy service, which sits with our central access point, which works with private, public and, indeed, homeowners to sustain their tenancies across the whole housing spectrum.

Combined with the homelessness service first point, which is located in this central area—all those services work together with Care, with Conflict Resolution Service, to ensure that there is knowledge around applications and support, being able to help people within their tenancies when those do not work and also from homelessness into public housing or other forms of tenancy.

**MS BERRY:** Regarding the eviction of a public housing tenant if they meet the two years and the threshold income, what is the time frame for that person if all the boxes have been ticked and they do not meet a public housing tenant requirement? When do they have to move on?

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** It is up to about a year in total. First of all, there is, as Ms Howson was saying, a very rigorous assessment process, and that takes quite a long time in terms of being able to get all the information together and do the assessment of that, both from our end as well as from the tenants’ perspective. If a decision is made that they need to be asked to leave, there is a 26-week period eviction notice that they are given. We work with them both at the beginning of that time and then through that period to help them find some other form of tenancy or shared equity to be able to buy their house. So it is really up to a year’s period that they are given the full notice.

**MS BERRY:** Is there an easy way to describe the assessment process? Is that anywhere?

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** Yes, we do have criteria.

**Ms Howson:** We can provide you with a copy of the information that we provide tenants, which is set out in a fairly simple and structured form so that they understand the process they are about to go through.

**MS BERRY:** Thank you. That would be useful.

**THE CHAIR:** Is that information available on the website?

**Ms Howson:** It is.

**Mr Rattenbury:** We will send it through anyway, to save you searching for it.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Mr Wall.

**MR WALL:** Minister, the annual report shows that 57 per cent of people were housed within 90 days that were applying for priority housing during the reporting period. What is the average waiting time for applicants for priority housing? Is there a target that exists of housing people within a certain number of days of applying?

**Mr Rattenbury:** There is not a specific target in terms of that question. As to the average waiting times as at 1 April 2013 for the different categories, it was 142 days for priority housing. There has been a slight increase in recent months. We have had a very high level of demand, so it has gone up.

**MR WALL:** What is the longest that someone could expect to wait on the priority housing list?

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** The shortest time?

**Mr Collett:** The longest time would be for those tenants who have very specific requirements. That may be on the basis of their family size—although not the family size alone but combined with the need to be close to particular services, the need to be close to support or other family members, the need for a particular design of residence or, in one particular case, a sensitivity to a range of building materials. In the absolute worst case, someone might be on our priority waiting list who needs a special house constructed for them. It is not the norm, but you asked what would be the longest that somebody might wait. It might be around us identifying a block that is suitable for construction of a dwelling which is designed specifically for the needs of a particular tenant.

**MR WALL:** Is that a common occurrence?

**Mr Collett:** No, it is very unusual. There would only be one or two in any calendar year. But you asked what the longest would be. The longest, I guess I am saying, is influenced by the need to provide quite specific purpose dwellings for a very small number of people who are on our priority waiting list.

**MR WALL:** How long does that process take, from experience?

**Mr Collett:** There is no simple answer to that. It would depend on what the needs were. If somebody needed, for instance, to be close to the Canberra Hospital, it would mean that we would either need to find a vacant property which was suitable for their needs in Garran or the immediate surrounds or we find a block and build on that. It would vary in every case. The question was: what is the longest somebody would wait? The longest would be around the purchase or the construction of a specific dwelling for them.

**Ms Sheehan:** If I could add: it would be important to understand that people would be receiving other support from Housing and Community Services at the same time. Most commonly they would be receiving support from a homelessness service, which would be in a stand-alone property with outreach support. They would not have their final home, but they would be receiving support from Housing and Community Services.

**MR HANSON:** A supplementary?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, you mentioned that there has been an increase in demand. Is that just for priority or is that across all the categories?

**Mr Rattenbury:** No, it is across all the categories. I should say that in the intervening period I had a look at the figures. They do bump up and down a little bit. If we go back to December, we were at 141 days, in January we were at 149, in February we were at 145 and we are now back to 142. So it does move around a little bit.

**MR HANSON:** The total number of people waiting is about 1,800; is that right?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes. I am sorry; we are up over 2,100 at 4 March.

**MR HANSON:** It seems to have gone up a little bit since the annual report then.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes.

**MR HANSON:** Quite a bit actually—200.

**Mr Rattenbury:** That is what I was referring to—that there has been a bit of an increase and we have had that increase in demand.

**MR HANSON:** Have you explored the reasons for that increase? Do you know why it is increasing? Is it expected to increase or is that just part of a sample?

**Ms Howson:** In the two years that I have been associated with this directorate there has been a consistent trend up in terms of the number of people coming onto the waiting list. We do not discriminate; people come onto the waiting list and they are accepted regardless of circumstance. I think it is tied in with the general housing availability issue across Canberra.

**MR HANSON:** Yes. I note your report actually says that much of the pressure on the public housing system is a consequence of longer term issues associated with private rental affordability. I guess ipso facto that if the numbers are increasing that would suggest that the private rental market is perhaps becoming more difficult; it is certainly not easy.

**Ms Howson:** It is a trend that our colleagues in every jurisdiction are experiencing. Waiting lists are going up for public housing tenancies. It is essentially a reflection of the availability of affordable housing.

**MR HANSON:** Of affordable housing. That seems to be getting worse in terms of availability of affordable housing.

**Ms Howson:** It is a national trend.

**MR HANSON:** It is a national trend. But it is certainly marked here, I suppose.

**Mr Rattenbury:** It is interesting. I happened to run into a real estate agent I know recently who said that there had actually been a bit of a dip in rental prices in the ACT. In the debates we see in the Assembly all the time there are various indicators. I think the long-term trends are there and then you hear these other bits of statistics in between that are suggesting different things.

**MR HANSON:** It might depend on where and what measure in the market it is. Is it the bottom end or—

**Ms Howson:** The ACT, however—I will ask Ms Sheehan—basically has the highest availability of public housing per head of population of any jurisdiction. In that sense, while it is increasingly under stress, we are doing better than other parts of Australia.

**MR HANSON:** It is interesting whether that is a good thing or not. We would like to get to a situation where there is a lesser need for public housing.

**Ms Howson:** Yes.

**MR HANSON:** If there is still a demand there, it does not really matter how much you have got. If you cannot keep up with that demand for public housing, if that seems to be increasing, then we seem to be treating the symptom rather than actually identifying what the underlying problem is. That is what I am looking at here: what is your feedback loop, I suppose, from public housing to say: “Look, this demand is going up. What are the other mechanisms available to government within the remit of affordable housing, rental subsidies and so on to try and get people away from the public housing market and get them into the private market?”

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** One of the pilot projects we are doing with ACT Shelter is to explore, at the very bottom end of the community housing market, how we can look at expanding the range of products there. There are a number of people who are eligible and apply for public housing who will not necessarily end up getting it because there will always be people of higher priority who are allocated housing. We recognise that in this city there tends to be only a small amount of low-cost rental, which is really what we are talking about.

One of the solutions, we think, is working across public housing and with community housing providers to see if we can have a better range of products in that line. Community Housing Canberra is exploring itself the extent to which it can offer a product range which is below the traditional affordable housing; affordable housing is 74.9 per cent of market rent. It is beginning now to have got to a size where it can actually step into that marketplace, which sits in between, if you like, public housing eligibility and community rent. We are working closely with EDD and across both

community and public housing to see what the opportunities are in that broader spectrum.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, what do you think would be the impact upon this market of a 20,000 federal public servant job cut after the next election?

**Mr Rattenbury:** If we think back to 1996, at that time it clearly had a significant impact on housing affordability in the ACT. Housing became much more affordable.

**MR HANSON:** So you are saying that that is a good thing, minister?

**Mr Rattenbury:** I am not saying that at all. I am saying that is an observation of fact.

**MR HANSON:** I would note that that is a hypothetically motivated political question, Mr Chair. If you want to keep this as a collegiate and good-natured committee hearing that is seeking to address the issues affecting housing, it probably would be in all of our interests if you did not just try and raise speculative political arguments.

**THE CHAIR:** Are you giving evidence, Mr Hanson, or are you asking a question?

**MR HANSON:** I am making a comment.

**THE CHAIR:** The comment would be that this is a reality which has already been postulated by the federal opposition, so it is something that the minister needs to consider. He has got charge of a public housing program, for which he says there is considerable demand. He has just talked about the contrast between public housing rents and the private rental market. I asked him what impact a change in the federal government, which could result in the loss of 20,000 public service jobs in this town, might have upon his portfolio. I think it is a particularly relevant question, thank you, Mr Hanson.

**MR HANSON:** May I have a supplementary, then, Mr Chair?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, you may.

**Mr Rattenbury:** I thought I might add, in light of the conversation, that it is unclear. The interesting question is what the demand impact will be. If the jobs go, will people leave Canberra? So there might be less demand on public housing. If people are unemployed, there might be more demand on public housing. There is a whole range of scenarios you can envisage.

**MR WALL:** For clarification, it is a national attrition which would see the job trend continue as it is now.

**MR HANSON:** A supplementary, minister—

**THE CHAIR:** Let him answer Mr Wall's question first.

**MR HANSON:** I actually got the supplementary, thanks. Are you aware that there are already a significant number of public service job reductions and are you also aware

that the stated coalition policy is 11,000 jobs by natural attrition across the whole of the public service across Australia? That being the case, would you like to provide some guidance on that? Or we can just move on and stop this political nonsense, if you like.

**Mr Rattenbury:** I would be happy to move on.

**MR HANSON:** Let us do that then.

**MR WALL:** If I may, I want to ask a supplementary on the previous area that we were discussing relating to rental rebates. It was mentioned that there are a number of tenants who are in receipt of these. I think the report also states that 92 per cent of tenants in public housing are in receipt of a rental rebate. Why are the other eight per cent not eligible for this scheme?

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** Because their income is too high. They are the ones who we charge market rent to.

**THE CHAIR:** As there are no further supplementaries, I will move on to another substantive. Minister, can you tell me about the sale-to-tenant and shared equity schemes?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Is there a particular aspect that you wanted to explore or just a general—

**THE CHAIR:** Just general to start with, and we will take it from there.

**Mr Rattenbury:** The general premise is that some of the public housing tenants have lived in their properties for a long time and they feel a real sense of ownership of the property. They feel very wedded to their neighbourhood. They have their support network around them—neighbours, friends, those sorts of things. So it comes back to the earlier discussion we were having—with some tenants, their life circumstances improve through training, employment and those sorts of issues. So it is designed to enable people to stay in their community and to remain connected to the house that they perhaps spent some considerable time in. Perhaps they have grown an extensive vegetable patch. It is all those kinds of very important things around people being able to have continuity in their life. That is the underlying premise. That is the opening question. I am happy to go into the details of how the scheme works if you wish.

**THE CHAIR:** Please.

**Mr Collett:** The terms under which properties are made available for sale to tenants are published in a fact sheet which is available for tenants who want to inquire about the possibility of taking advantage of that program. We send out a package, along with details about how they might go about getting a valuation and finding the information they need in order to make a decision about whether they want to purchase the property or not. We also give them information on what sorts of properties would be available for purchase. After they have got their affairs in order, they make application for funding—in the case of the sale-to-tenant program, that is independent of us—and they would go ahead and purchase the property at valuation.



You asked also about the shared equity scheme. For those tenants who are in a position to or are on the verge of being able to purchase their own homes and for whom the amount of the loan represents a barrier, we have a program called shared equity, which is our equivalent of a program that operates in a number of other states and territories, in which the department will hold up to 30 per cent of the equity in the property, meaning that the tenant only has to borrow 70 per cent, at the most, of the value of the property. They are able to pay off the 30 per cent equity that the department holds in tranches over a number of years and to eventually acquire the full ownership of the property. Whilst they are entering into the shared equity program, they are responsible for the maintenance as well as all the outgoing on the property.

**THE CHAIR:** You mentioned valuation. How is that obtained?

**Mr Collett:** We have a panel of valuers. They are all qualified and accredited valuers who give us a sworn valuation. It is not unusual for the purchaser to get an independent valuation in order to provide confidence for themselves that the value of the property is accurate.

**THE CHAIR:** So you pay for the valuation, but if they want another one they have to pay for it?

**Mr Collett:** They would have to pay for their own valuation, yes. We do have some charges associated with the sales program which cover off our costs. So yes, we would arrange that. We would carry that out, but we would recover those costs if the tenant goes ahead.

**THE CHAIR:** You mentioned some charges there. What are they?

**Mr Collett:** There is an introductory charge for them to make an initial inquiry, and then there are further costs if it goes ahead.

**THE CHAIR:** What is the scale of those?

**Mr Collett:** I will give you those. I will get those figures for you so that I get them accurately, but they cover off a number of our costs in preparing the property for sale. It is a question of getting property reports and getting the documentation that is necessary to support a sale in the ACT jurisdiction as well as the valuation that I referred to.

**THE CHAIR:** Of course, they would have to pay stamp duty as well?

**Mr Collett:** Yes, but that, of course, is independent of us and would apply to any property transaction in the ACT.

**THE CHAIR:** But that is less because it is being reduced?

**Mr Collett:** That is right.

**MR WALL:** A supplementary, Mr Chair. Mr Collett, you mentioned that the

valuations are done by qualified people. Are those people in-house employees, or are they contracted or tendered out?

**Mr Collett:** No. As I said, we have a panel of valuers. On a three-yearly basis we go out to the valuation industry and get proposals from companies who provide those services in the ACT, and we engage some of those to carry out our valuations. They do valuations both for our sale-to-tenant program but also for our auction program. We sell some properties that are not suitable for public housing tenants independently of sales to the tenants. And there are also our acquisitions. They would be the areas in which we would require property valuations to carry out our business.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Mr Chair, sorry, but before Ms Berry starts we need to clarify an earlier answer, if we might.

**THE CHAIR:** Of course.

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** I advised the minister incorrectly. In terms of an objective towards those who are most in need and our target, I advise you that on page 379 of budget paper 4—so in each year's budget papers—we have a strategic objective of appropriately housing people most in need. We have a percentage of allocations housed within 90 days that were in greatest need. So as part of the budget papers, we do actually have a target, if you like, for those—

**MR HANSON:** Can you say what that target was?

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** The target rises from 2012-13, being 95.5 per cent, to 97 per cent by 2017-18.

**MR HANSON:** We are currently at 57 per cent? Is that right?

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** Within 90 days? I would need to get the exact figure of where we are at.

**MR HANSON:** That is what is said in the annual report.

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** At 2011-12?

**MR HANSON:** Yes. So you do not know whether it has trended up or down since then?

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** I cannot tell you offhand, no. I will get you that advice.

**MR HANSON:** The target is a bit different from the reality, isn't it?

**Mr Rattenbury:** I am not sure. We should check that for you.

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** Yes.

**Mr Rattenbury:** I gave you that average figure of 142 days. Averages, of course, could be distorted. So in terms of that target's achievement, we should take that on

notice, Mr Hanson, and get you a definitive answer. I think that would be the best approach.

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** In the annual report, on page 352, the target for 2011-12 was 84 per cent. And you are right: the actual result was 59 per cent. So it was a 30 per cent variance.

**MR HANSON:** Right. You put the target up by 10 per cent in the budget papers?

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** The target has risen to just above 95 per cent in the budget papers, yes.

**MR HANSON:** I look forward to estimates then.

**Mr Rattenbury:** It is good to stretch oneself.

**MR HANSON:** We will dance this merry dance again.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Indeed.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Berry.

**Ms Sheehan:** If I could just clarify, there are two different issues. One is the proportion of our allocations that go to people in greatest need. Budget paper No 4 and the annual report record that over 95 per cent of allocations go to people in greatest need. The different target, which is the lower target of 85 per cent, is of people who are in the priority category—how many of them are housed within 90 days. Because we have such a high number of our allocations going to people in priority—that means that across all of the allocations that we make, over 95 per cent go to those in greatest need. And that is a different measure.

**MR HANSON:** Right, so they are two different figures?

**Ms Sheehan:** Yes, a different measure from what percentage of people in the priority category can expect to be housed within 90 days. It is quite a different—

**MR HANSON:** Okay. And of those people who are waiting in the priority, 57 per cent of them—

**Ms Sheehan:** That is right. We had a target that 85 per cent would be housed within 90 days, and we were unable to meet that target. But overall, across all of our allocations, over 95 per cent went to people in greatest need.

**MR HANSON:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Berry.

**MS BERRY:** I might ask a substantive, if that is okay?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**MS BERRY:** I know that many of my colleagues, and sometimes my own office, receive complaints about public housing tenants or neighbours. I am looking at the improved support—stronger communities initiative on page 76. Can you take us through the actions that the office has undertaken over the reporting period to better respond to complaints?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes, Ms Berry. I also receive quite a few letters about—

**MS BERRY:** You are one of my colleagues. I count you in as one of my colleagues, minister.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes.

**MR HANSON:** Do you?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Indeed. We obviously do get quite a few complaints. I think that is reflective of the fact that some of our clients, some of our tenants, are people in the community with complex issues. Our approach to antisocial behaviour is based on working with tenants to sustain their tenancies. Ms Overton-Clarke spoke earlier about the supporting stronger communities program. Once these issues arise, the housing manager will—it is again a tiered approach. It is dealt with by the normal housing manager in the first instance. If they identify more significant problems, or if the problems escalate or continue, the tenants get moved through a more intensive engagement program. That would be perhaps the shortest and simplest way to describe it.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. The committee will now adjourn for a short break.

**Mr Collett:** Chair, just before we rise, could I provide some information that was requested by Mr Doszpot in a question that he asked earlier?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, if it is brief.

**Mr Collett:** He was interested in the date at which the one loan-licence agreement that we have executed to date was settled. I can report that that was on 3 December 2012.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Collett.

**Meeting adjourned from 3.51 to 4.04 pm.**

Appearances:

Barr, Mr Andrew, Deputy Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Sport and Recreation, Minister for Tourism and Events and Minister for Community Services

Community Services Directorate

Overton-Clarke, Ms Bronwen, Executive Director, Housing and Community Services

Collett, Mr David, Senior Director, Housing and Community Services

Gotts, Mr Robert, Director, Community Sector Project

**THE CHAIR:** Good afternoon again and welcome to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Health, Ageing, Community and Social Services inquiry into annual and financial reports 2011-12. We are resuming with the Minister for Community Services.

Can I confirm that you have all read the privilege card lying on the table before you and that you understand the privilege statement?

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Before we proceed to questions, minister, would you like to make an opening statement?

**Mr Barr:** No, I will not, but I will allocate my time to Mr Collett to provide us with some new information from a previous hearing.

**Mr Collett:** Thank you, minister. I mentioned in response to a question from you, Dr Bourke, that we charged a fee for both our sales to tenant program and our shared equity program to cover our costs in preparing properties for sale and indicated to you that it was in two parts. I can confirm the amount of the two parts now. The initial payment is \$300, which covers the cost of a building report and a pest inspection, both of which are required in the ACT. A second payment of \$700 should the tenant proceed with the process is to cover the cost of the valuation. So it is \$300 initially and \$700 finally for covering our out-of-pocket expenses, if we can put it that way, in preparing the properties for sale.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. I will kick off with a question. Minister, can you tell us what work is being done on community sector reform, particularly given the changing community sector environment?

**Mr Barr:** Indeed, I will go—

**MR HANSON:** A surprise question, that one. It is a shock to get that one.

**Mr Barr:** It is. In a minute, I will get the team to outline a little detail on the process. But there are a number of areas of focus, I think the highest profile of which obviously is reform in anticipation of the NDIS. But there are also other areas of reform around red tape reduction, around developing capacity within the community

sector. There are, I think, some tremendous opportunities around Shared Services Procurement-style reforms as well that the community sector can benefit from and opportunities to work more closely with government, particularly around procurement, and so being able to access some of the more competitive pricing the government can get for certain elements of community sector activity that are perhaps common across any organisation seeking to deliver services.

We have, I think, a pretty robust discussion group within the community sector who are particularly focused on reform. There is the opportunity through red tape reduction also to work not only to improve the interaction between territory government and community sector organisations but also allow organisations to reform some of their own processes to streamline their operations. That work, I think, is progressing fairly well. There are some opportunities to tie in whole-of-government reforms to this process too. And I have raised a number of those in the Assembly, obviously, in response to questions that have been asked around extending some of the principles of reform that we have begun in the business sector into the community sector.

The things I am talking about there include issues of licensing, working with vulnerable people checks et cetera, that certainly impact on the community sector, and there is capacity, I think, to improve the way government offers services but also to work with the sector themselves around improving their own practices. Does anyone else want to add further?

**Ms Howson:** Perhaps Mr Gotts, who is working very closely on this, can answer.

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** Just before I hand over to Mr Gotts, I think one of the most important pieces that have happened over the last 12 months is the equal remuneration case for the non-government sector. And certainly we were one of the first jurisdictions to sign up to the case, along with the federal government. And that has provided certainty for workers in the community sector, and payments have already been made. They were due in December and they have been made from the ACT government and, through us, from the commonwealth government. And that was an enormous piece of work that really culminated over the last 12 months. So I will just hand over to Robert Gotts to explain in a bit more detail the initiatives we are currently undertaking in terms of the reform and the work that we are doing with our community sector partners.

**Mr Gotts:** Thank you, Bronwen. To build on what the minister said, essentially what we are doing is we are looking at the different ways in which government interacts with the community sector and then we are taking each of those facets of interaction, as you might call them, and looking to see how can we improve the experience of the relationship from the community sector's perspective, how can we reduce the cost of the relationship, again from the community sector's perspective, and what can we do to use the mass that government represents, if you like, to bring that to bear on behalf of the community sector. That relates to some of the purchasing-type potential as well.

I guess the final facet of what we are doing is how can we work with the sector to get them to realise greater value within themselves of the services that they offer. So what can we offer as a catalyst to improve their ability to deliver services to the community? Our activities are in those four areas.

**THE CHAIR:** You talk about red tape reduction, minister. What is that precisely going to mean for community organisations?

**Mr Barr:** Many different things. Partly it is around reporting requirements to government, partly it is around streamlining our relationship with the new Charities and Not-for-profits Commission to ensure that not-for-profit and community sector organisations in the ACT only have one set of reporting requirements so that information that is produced does not need to be duplicated between two levels of government. I think we were one of the first jurisdictions to sign up to that.

I am also pursuing some reform within ACT government, because there are a number of organisations that either have multiple contracts with CSD or multiple contracts with CSD and with other ACT government directorates. And so I think the goal ultimately would be, rather than having this series of different arrangements with different areas of ACT government, each community sector organisation could ultimately have one contract with ACT government that may obviously have different reporting requirements around funding under particular programs.

There will always be a need to collect a certain level of data and provide a certain amount of information and level of accountability around public funds, of course. But there are certainly ways of improving how that information is provided, how frequently, and what data sets it informs, in order to allow ultimately a better allocation of what are limited public resources to achieve the particular outcomes that we are looking for. They are just a couple of examples.

But I am interested also, in the context of our red tape reduction work that I commenced as Economic Development Minister, in speaking with a number of the stakeholders, the chamber of commerce, for example. There are a number of large community sector organisations who sit on the board of the chamber of commerce such as Communities@Work, LifeLine, who are major employers and have quite significant budgets. It was interesting to pursue the work in the context of small and medium-sized business and to be able to link in the community sector red tape reduction work with that other work. Bringing that together, I think, has provided some opportunities to get some more holistic reforms through government but also with the organisations themselves and how they interact with one another and with the business sector.

**THE CHAIR:** And you mentioned Shared Services Procurement work. What do you specifically mean there?

**Mr Barr:** This, again, has got two elements. One relates to opportunities for community sector organisations, particularly smaller ones, to work together to share some of those back-of-house responsibilities, activities that will enable them to focus more of their resource base on their clients and the community needs that they are funded to meet. I think there are some economies of scale that can be generated there. The community hubs and the co-location of community organisations in themed hubs at various parts of the city allow for, in very practical terms, some shared front of house, shared access to photocopying, all that sort of stuff that is essentially administration for organisations.

Then there is a subsequent question for us around how we as government go about procuring certain services. Once again, we are looking at that. And then, as I mentioned in my earlier remarks around community sector organisations being able to access some larger government procurement of—an example there might be—telecommunications services where we can access some of those services at a much cheaper cost than if an organisation was simply to go out and get a mobile phone contract, say, with one of the telcos.

**MR HANSON:** What is your time frame for getting this done?

**Mr Barr:** I think reforms of this nature are necessarily ongoing. But I recognise the need for some early wins. And so I have indicated in the context of red tape reduction and regulatory reform, I would like to see an annual or possibly twice-a-year red tape reduction bill that the Assembly could consider. I have already made some announcements in relation to reporting requirements for CSD financial reports to move to an annual basis. I have announced a commitment around ACNC streamlining processes.

We have held a number of discussions with a variety of community sector organisations, both individually and collectively, through a red tape reduction forum and in the conversations I am having as minister. I have invited ideas from the community sector in relation to areas that they perceive that their relationship with government in terms of reporting requirements et cetera could be enhanced. And we will progressively work through those issues.

So reform is already enacted. There is more to come I would anticipate in this space. Sometimes reporting requirements are driven by resolutions of the Assembly. They come out of hearings like this. People request further information in a particular area and obviously that request in and of itself generates activity from the directorate to then have to go back to organisations to seek further information. You have to be constantly vigilant, I think, around what sort of information you are collecting, what requirements you place on organisations. Whilst we may have, with the best of intent, wanted information as legislators to be able to make informed decisions, that always comes with a regulatory cost.

**MR HANSON:** It does. Many of the issues you have raised here are concerns that have been raised with me as I have met with the community sector as well. But another issue is the duration of contracts.

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**MR HANSON:** Have you looked at that as well because—

**Mr Barr:** We certainly are, yes, absolutely.

**MR HANSON:** having to put in submissions year after year for the same thing, essentially—

**Mr Barr:** Yes, I agree. I think there is scope for reform there. It is an interesting



balance in terms of how long is too long for a contract. I am of the view that, for organisations that have over a number of decades been delivering high-quality services, you can certainly risk manage the necessity to put those organisations through regular assessment processes. We have a pre-qualification work underway now where organisations are going through that process. That, I think, means it is a once-off process and then they are pre-qualified.

Ideally, that information should be centrally available across all ACT government agencies so that different areas of government do not have to constantly go back to community sector organisations and say, “Where is your?”—the five or six most commonly asked questions are probably around public liability insurance, annual report information and the like. We should have all of that centralised. ACNC plays a role here too in the context of how that information can be available. Again, ideally, it would be nice if the CSD pre-qualification process was then accepted across all ACT government agencies. We are working towards that. We want to ensure that organisations do it once and do it right, and then we can then have an effective way of reducing the administrative burden on those organisations.

**MR HANSON:** In terms of these reforms, these are micro reforms, you could say. Have you looked at the sector to map where it has got capacity issues, where there are gaps in service and where there is duplication in services being delivered? Have you done that body of work or, if it is ongoing, what is the plan?

**Mr Barr:** There are a number of ways to respond to that. Firstly, I think we would all acknowledge that need evolves in the community and will change quite rapidly over time. I do not think there is ever going to be a moment when you can say, “Yes, everything is perfectly mapped and it will all flow perfectly.” But you certainly can undertake exercises, such as we are in the middle of now, in relation to sector development. National issues flowing down clearly in the disability sector present opportunities. There will be some markets created. If you are a believer in markets leading to a more efficient allocation of resources, Mr Hanson, you would see that that would certainly be the case in the disability sector over time. It is a big change. It is a big transition for a number of organisations who would be used to just receiving a block funding arrangement to suddenly move to a circumstance where their clients are in the driver’s seat and making the decisions on access.

**MR HANSON:** We have had a number of discussions in other hearings about the NDIS.

**Mr Barr:** Yes, I do not doubt that. The issue also is to then look at evolving demographics in the city and migration patterns. As we know, community needs will vary depending on socioeconomic background, the ethnic background of arrivals et cetera.

**MR HANSON:** I get all that. I suppose what I am asking is what you are doing in response to that. As you say, it does evolve. Are you comfortable that the sector as it is currently broadly positioned is addressing the need as it rests currently and in future or is it structured in that way because that is the way it was 10 years ago? The risk, perhaps, of continually funding people—if that change occurs in an area where the demographics change—and we continue funding childcare programs in areas where

the demographic is now teenagers—

**Mr Barr:** Indeed. We have had experience of this in education provision in my time in this—

**MR HANSON:** I recall.

**Mr Barr:** Indeed. There is never perfection and there never will be. There will always be some unmet need. The question that I grapple with as minister is to what extent do our funding systems allow for flexibility for organisations to respond and to what extent do organisations have the capacity to respond? My initial feeling, not that long into this portfolio, having spent a little bit of time working in it in a previous life, is that certainly the sector has evolved from the early 2000s when I last had a role in this area, but the pace of change is growing and there are clearly going to be significant challenges, particularly pertinent in the disability area but beyond that, coming in the next few years. The pace of change will increase. There will be challenges for the sector. It will not stay the same. It will have to adapt and government at this level will have to adapt with it. So will, I presume, depending on the final landing spot for some of these national reforms, the commonwealth government.

**THE CHAIR:** A substantive question, Ms Berry.

**MS BERRY:** Thank you, chair. I wish to talk about ways that the Community Services Directorate has adapted to changing needs. On 15 March you announced that you had appointed the first lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex council.

**Mr Barr:** That is true.

**MR HANSON:** That is an acronym!

**MS BERRY:** I understand that the directorate will be supporting that work. Can you tell us a little bit more about it and when it will first meet?

**Mr Barr:** The first meeting is this Friday. I have met with the chair and deputy chair. It would be fair to say that there is an extensive agenda for the first few meetings. That extends from seeking advice in relation to the gender issues that Minister Corbell has raised recently in the context of government response to the *Beyond the Binary* report through to seeking some further advice on the success or otherwise of some existing government campaigns and community campaigns in relation to combating homophobia in schools and in sport.

There are, I think, opportunities for business development, tourism and events—that is a further subsection of consideration—and there are a range of discrimination issues that I think will need to be considered in light of, again, changes federally that I believe have now been introduced into the House of Representatives. That is just a snapshot. There is going to be a lot more work.

The thing I was going to say I am fairly pleased with is the breadth of the agenda initially. My worry is that with so much work will we be able to get it all done over the next few years? As to the advisory council, we sought expressions of interest from

the community. There was a really strong response to that. One of the hardest tasks was selecting the initial 12 people. I think there is really strong prospect of some positive outcomes.

The government has a policy objective around social inclusion. We are backing that in terms of resources for organisations like Diversity ACT but equally, in ensuring that we have a policy response that is not just in the community sector, it is broader than that. The signs to date, I think, are very encouraging. I am really looking forward to the first meeting tomorrow. I anticipate the advisory council will meet as a full council every couple of months. Judging by the agenda tomorrow, they will need to have about a dozen subcommittees. They are going to be very busy people. It is terrific to see that level of passion and engagement. Ultimately, the goal is that this city will be the friendliest city for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer people.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, you mentioned the government campaign to combat homophobia in sport. How successful has that been?

**Mr Barr:** It is only in the initial stages, so we have only just provided funding. We have been working with a couple of sporting organisations—hockey, in particular. In Victoria, hockey had taken a lead with their human rights commission program. They were one of the first sports to volunteer. I have been particularly encouraged, though, by a number of other sports wanting to be involved. The AFL and rugby union have also expressed interest, and basketball.

I have had some initial conversations with Lauren Jackson and David Pocock, both of whom have been quite public in their stance in relation to these issues within their own sports. I certainly look forward to working with them and, indeed, other high-profile athletes in the ACT to take leadership roles in this area. But it is not just at the elite end; it needs to be around community sport as well. In fact, I think that is perhaps where the greatest focus needs to be. But it clearly helped by having high-profile role models at the peak of their respective sports being as vocal as Lauren Jackson and David Pocock have been.

**THE CHAIR:** A brief question, Mr Hanson.

**MR HANSON:** Where are we at with the public arts scheme?

**Mr Barr:** The public—

**MR HANSON:** Yes, the per-cent-for art—

**Mr Barr:** That is not me.

**MR HANSON:** It is not you? You do not roll that one out?

**Mr Barr:** Minister Burch is the arts minister.

**MR HANSON:** It is Minister Burch, is it?

**Mr Barr:** Yes, she is the arts minister. I can only add that I think the contribution of the lights at Manuka Oval to public arts in the territory is a fine example. People have described them in that way—

**MR WALL:** To anyone with a building background, they are a little bit crooked.

**Mr Barr:** They are stunning. In addition to being the best lights in the world, they are, I think, architecturally very interesting.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Wall, do you have a substantive question?

**MR WALL:** I will defer my substantive question to Mr Hanson.

**MR HANSON:** I look forward to the lights being public art.

**THE CHAIR:** Before I adjourn, I would like to remind members that the committee has resolved that supplementary questions are to be lodged with the committee office within four business days of receipt of the proof transcript from this hearing. The committee asks that ministers respond within 10 working days of the receipt of those questions. Answers to questions taken on notice are to be provided five business days after the hearing at which they were taken with day one being the first business day after the question was taken. The committee's hearing is adjourned. Thank you, minister, and thank you, officials.

**The committee adjourned at 4.30 pm.**