



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

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

(Reference: [Annual and financial reports 2012-2013](#))

**Members:**

**DR C BOURKE (Chair)**  
**MR A WALL (Deputy Chair)**  
**MS N LAWDER**  
**MS Y BERRY**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**FRIDAY, 8 NOVEMBER 2013**

**Secretary to the committee:**  
**Mr T Rowe (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

<b>Community Services Directorate.....</b>	<b>1</b>
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## **Privilege statement**

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*Amended 20 May 2013*

## **The committee met at 2 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

Forester, Ms Robyn, Director, Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

Manikis, Mr Nic, Director, Community Participation Group

Whitten, Ms Meredith, Executive Director, Disability ACT

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

Collett, Mr David, Senior Director, Asset Management Branch, Housing and Community Services ACT

Duggan, Mr Frank, Director, Housing ACT

Hubbard, Mr Ian, Senior Director, Finance and Budget

**THE CHAIR:** Good afternoon everyone, and welcome to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Health, Ageing, Community and Social Services for its inquiry into the annual and financial reports 2012-13. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you, Mr Rattenbury, and your relevant directorate officials for attending today. This afternoon the committee will be examining the following areas: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs, Ageing and Housing. Can I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement that is before you on the table. Minister, could you and your officials confirm for the record that you have all understood the privilege implications of the statement?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes, thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** I remind you that the proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes and webstreamed and broadcast live. Minister, before we proceed to questions from the committee, would you like to make an opening statement?

**Mr Rattenbury:** No, thank you, chair. I would be happy to go straight to questions.

**THE CHAIR:** I shall kick off then with a substantive question. Minister, can you tell us about the success of the chances program?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes.

**Ms Howson:** Would you like me to take that?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes.

**Ms Howson:** The chances program is actually a proprietary name. It belongs to Capital Careers, but it represents a program that we are now calling the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander job readiness support program. We have had the opportunity to conduct two pilots of this job readiness program. That pilot has included the opportunity for vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults to participate in vocational training and a range of other programs that increase their opportunity to secure employment or continue their training.

The program is one which provides overarching support, holistic support, for those individuals through a family-based approach. It is a program that recognises that in order for people to concentrate on their educational attainment, we need to help them address a whole range of other distractions, if you like, that might be preventing that from happening.

The program is designed around ease of access to the training opportunity, access to transport, the creation of a peer esprit de corps around a group of people that are pursuing their goals together. There is a range of individual support around people setting their goals and assisting them to achieve those. Furthermore, the children in the family attend the education setting with the parents, and while they are in that setting they are accessing homework clubs or after-school programs. There are meals provided and then the family is able to return home at the end of the evening and can get on with the rest of their week.

It was a very successful program in terms of attendance, engagement—particularly, as I said, for families with vulnerabilities. The program has been able to demonstrate that a number of those participants have gone on to further training, being more confident in being able to present themselves to job interviews. Of course, there are some positive outcomes for their children in terms of the presentation of other role models and seeing their parents participating in something in which they are successful.

As a result of the evaluation of that program, we are being supported by the government to fund the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander job readiness support program. I think we have funding for the next four years. We will soon be going out to tender for the providers for that program.

**THE CHAIR:** Can you take us through a little bit more about the tender process that you go through?

**Ms Howson:** Certainly. I might refer to my colleague Ms Robyn Forester. Robyn has recently joined the Community Services Directorate as the director for the new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs office. Robyn has come in to have a fresh look at the program and has taken a keen interest in defining the specifications for that tender.

**Ms Forester:** The tender process for the new job readiness program is currently being developed, with the goal for it to open towards the end of November. The program will build on the successes of what has happened with the pilots but also will look at the additional services that can be wrapped around that to ensure that we have success. I think the most important thing about the chances program is providing that opportunity for vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to be job

ready and to have that opportunity to progress not just for themselves but for their family as well.

What has happened with the previous pilots is that we have looked at some of the outcomes from there. We have looked at what they undertook as part of that program to develop something that is going to be successful into the future. The tender that will be going forward will be looking at the consortium approach of bringing a number of providers together to be able to deliver a program that is going to be successful. The training will be around the wraparound services and so forth. But we want to ensure that through that tender process we get the right organisations with the right skills to deliver the right programs that are not only appropriate for what the program is about but also culturally appropriate for the individuals that will participate in that process.

**THE CHAIR:** Are you going to use open, select or single select?

**Ms Howson:** Open.

**Ms Forester:** Open.

**THE CHAIR:** Is the program running at the moment?

**Ms Howson:** I think the last program has finished. There is not a program that has restarted at this stage, Dr Bourke. The next round will be dependent on the outcome of this tender process.

**Mr Manikis:** As I can recollect, I think it was earlier this year that the final program—it was around February-March.

**MS LAWDER:** Could I ask a supplementary question? Just on that chances or job readiness program, can you tell us about the take-up rate of the program and how you measure the outcomes?

**Ms Howson:** There were 30 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants in the two pilots.

**Mr Manikis:** The evaluation took the form of three surveys. The first survey was conducted with the participants on the first day, I understand. There was a survey about a week or so into the 15-week program and then one at the end of the program. From recollection, the survey measured expectations by the participants, what they wanted to get out of the program. It also measured where they were at in their life in terms of education and employment. A report has been provided or developed, and I am sure that could be made available.

**MS BERRY:** Does the report contain what the 30 participants are doing now, whether they are going on to additional training or employment?

**Mr Manikis:** Because it was contained to the time they were on the program, there was not a longitudinal aspect to the evaluation. Anecdotally, I can say that there were several very good outcomes in terms of further training and employment.

One of the strengths of the chances program was that it involved representatives on its steering committee and who were involved with the program from different sectors—the hospitality sector, the construction sector and also the public service, the admin. There was an attempt to be able to put people through that program and then get an assessment of where their interests lay and then have them pathwayed into their interests. If it was in the hospitality industry, they would be picked up to do some training or work experience there. That was the idea for the set-up.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Just to clarify, Ms Berry, we will provide that evaluation report on notice to the committee.

**MS BERRY:** That would be good. Does the report identify sex and age of the participants? Does it go into that sort of detail?

**Ms Howson:** We certainly have that information about the participants, so we could provide that to you as well.

**MS BERRY:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Still on the program, successful programs in Indigenous affairs are often person specific, place specific and organisation specific. What sort of risk assessment have you done to ensure that if the successful tenderer has not run the program before, you will get the same level of outcome?

**Ms Howson:** That is a very good question, Dr Bourke. I would say at this point we have not done a formal risk assessment, but in any transition of a pilot into a sustained program we would be looking at how we would actually manage that transition. Most importantly, the evaluation itself has pointed us to learnings around what we have taken out of the pilot that would need to be incorporated into the tender process.

With respect to part of the assessment of the providers, given that in this particular model it is a consortium of a number of providers, there are organisations that have expertise in the provision of family support. They would need to be involved along with, obviously, the registered training organisation that would be a big part of the program. There are also Aboriginal organisations or individuals that will provide access to cultural education for the children in the families, if that is the right way of putting it—people that come in and support the families to feel good about who they are and how to feel positive about themselves and their heritage.

We would have to ensure that, as I said, consortia were able to work effectively together and that the governance around that was something we had confidence in. Having said that, we have already demonstrated that it is possible that it does work with the pilots. So if you get the right players around the table, it can provide a very good service model for these families.

**THE CHAIR:** Returning to where I started, what would have been the risks involved in going to a single select rather than open tender?

**Ms Howson:** I think an issue for us is the value of the contract and the procurement

guidelines that point us in that direction.

**THE CHAIR:** \$800,000, in other words?

**Ms Howson:** That is right.

**MS BERRY:** I notice that many of the services aimed at Indigenous Canberrans are provided through CSD, but they are not listed as a direct responsibility of the office of Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander affairs. What is the relationship between the office and these programs, and do you play an active role in forming their delivery?

**Ms Howson:** I am sorry, could you repeat your question?

**MS BERRY:** A number of the services that are aimed at Indigenous Canberrans are provided through CSD and are not listed as the direct responsibility of the office of Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander affairs. So what is the relationship between the office and these programs?

**Mr Rattenbury:** I think that is a very interesting point around the way Indigenous affairs matters are treated in the ACT. Obviously, right across the government there are service delivery points, whether it is in Health, unfortunately corrections, and CSD. The role of the office specifically is to ensure that within the agency we have expertise and a focal point. From my perspective as the minister, I am looking for the office to be the one looking across government, identifying problem areas, making suggestions—playing that role—so that we have a dedicated focus that can feed out not only into other parts of the CSD agency but right across government.

**MS BERRY:** Are there plans to move any of that service delivery within the office, or will it mostly just have an advisory, overseeing kind of role?

**Ms Howson:** The office, as I said recently, has been redefined in terms of its role. It has three core areas of focus. One is supporting the government with strategic policy advice. We do that through mechanisms like reports on closing the gap, which have been presented publicly, as well as supporting the development of policies like the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander justice agreement.

The second area of focus is in relationship management, which is to essentially, through the office, build confidence within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in their relationship with government, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body in particular, to engage the community on decisions that are being made that impact directly on them.

The third area is generally around improving our capacity to respond, in a service delivery sense, to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. That may go to areas like support for the cultural centre out at Yarramundi Reach and also working alongside employees in the workforce that need advice on how they should engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the things they should think about in relation to their service delivery planning.

Against those three elements that is the value that this office will provide. We have



been working with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body on particular features and tools that we should be progressing over the next one to two years. For example, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander whole-of-government agreement would provide some coherency to the Aboriginal community on the overall intent of government support for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our city, how we would assess the success and impact of the range of investments in support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and how we might report on that more coherently and in a way that is meaningful to the members of that community. That is one example of the work that the office will be doing over the course of the next couple of years in that broad support role.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Lawder.

**MS LAWDER:** I would like to ask about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traineeship program. How many participants were there in the reporting year? How many completed the traineeship? What kind of interaction and follow-up is there with the participants and the employer at the completion of their placement?

**Ms Howson:** This program is a really important element of our overall approach to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment within government, and through government funding by extension. In terms of the detail of that, Nic, would you like to take that question?

**Mr Manikis:** The traineeship program for the period of the annual report—there were 21 participants, as I understand it. At this stage, I think 13 completed. The differentiating feature between the traineeship program that we have got here in the ACT and most other traineeships is that there is a guarantee of a job at the end of it. It is a 12-month program and the participants commence on the understanding that if they get through the 12 months, which is characterised as a probation period but also a period for them to get the training, they are guaranteed a job.

The 21 trainees were placed in the different directorates. With the guarantee of a job at the end of it, we encourage the workplace to provide support and supervision, because that is where they will land at the end of 12 months. The program has been going for several years now. This time we got eight, but we started with 15 participants. Around three drop out during the course of the 12 months, mostly for personal reasons. We understand that to make a success of this program—it has been relatively successful—pretty strong supports need to be in place, whether it is mentoring or work done with supervisors and managers around cultural training for them, as well supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the workplace.

**Mr Rattenbury:** A small clarification: there were actually 22.

**Mr Manikis:** Twenty-two.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Given Mr Manikis is going off memory, not notes, we will forgive him for that small one, but just for the sake of clarity.

**Mr Manikis:** Thank you, minister. Apologies for that.

**Mr Rattenbury:** That is quite all right, Nic.

**MS BERRY:** He is usually not far from the fact.

**MS LAWDER:** It is a reasonable attrition rate. My feeling is that additional supports and, as you said, mentoring may be required in future.

**Mr Manikis:** If we analyse the reasons going back, it has been personal family business, people needing to go back to country, that has stopped them from continuing with the program. That is the major reason for opting out of the program. We have had participants who have been in Canberra for a while but they have family in other country and feel pretty lonely. They do not have family supports. It is around that need, as we go forward, to work a little bit more around putting in supports for those people.

**Ms Howson:** If I can just add to that. As to the length of time over which this has been occurring, the program is designed on entry level ASO1 and promotion to ASO2. As we all know, the number of jobs at those levels are becoming fewer and fewer. We are probably at a point where we need to look at other mechanisms. One of the things we are very interested in exploring through the purchasing arrangements that government has in place is the opportunity for Aboriginal people to be employed by non-government organisations that are in receipt of government funding for delivery of services.

That is one of the areas that we will be extending. We have had enormous success with that through our Total Facilities management contract that supports the repairs and maintenance program within Housing ACT. Through that program we have been able to secure quite a number of positions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I think we are at a point, Ms Lawder, where we have to think a little bit more outside the box because it is not just about employment within government.

Nic has also talked to me about engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people while they are still at school and getting a better sense of their aspirations and the sorts of things they are interested in doing. We have recently started having conversations with the Education and Training Directorate around some very specific programs that they have in place to support young people in their transition from high school and college into work or tertiary education or vocational training and, particularly for that group that are interested in vocational training, seeing if we can do some more work around matching jobs to that investment of their time and energy so there is more motivation to complete the program and, while they are going through that vocational training, having some work experience in play, getting a really good feel for the culture of the workplace and being able to support those young people through that process.

So we are exploring a range of other elements and looking to see if we can improve that. I have just been passed a note regarding the Spotless-Total Facilities management contract. We have a target of achieving 10 placements by 2013-14, and we already have nine in play.

**MS LAWDER:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** As there are no supplementaries we will move on to another question. Minister, I want to talk about the intersection with JACS—Justice and Community Safety. I understand the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander juvenile incarceration rate has dropped, as well as arrests and charges brought against adults. Have you got a perspective on that, minister? Perhaps the success of the Aboriginal justice agreement as a model for a wider government agreement has been relevant here.

**Mr Rattenbury:** I think there have been a number of factors that have played out there. There is a good level of discussion that goes on between Justice and Community Safety and Minister Burch's portfolio, obviously. She is the responsible minister for Bimberi. There are good connections there. The provision of the after-hours bail service has been an important part of keeping young Indigenous people out of custody and ensuring that they have, essentially, somewhere else to go—if I can put it colloquially—that is, providing a safe alternative place that does not mean going into Bimberi in particular. In terms of the specifics there, that has been very important.

In the broader sense of the Aboriginal justice agreement, the new version, of course, is being prepared. There has been cooperation both in my role as corrections minister and with my Indigenous affairs portfolio hat on as well. There have been some good discussions there. To underline the success of the justice agreement, the fact that the elected body has now approached government and said, "We'd like a whole-of-government agreement like the justice agreement," to me speaks to the value and the success of the agreement. That is now in development. I think it will be a slightly different model in the sense that the justice agreement has a lot of points in it. In fact, I think the new version of the justice agreement may well be a shorter, more focused document. Certainly, some of the feedback I have had is that there was so much in the last one that perhaps there was not the focus that was needed. The new version may well turn out slightly differently.

**THE CHAIR:** Could you just talk us through how that new Aboriginal justice agreement is being negotiated?

**Mr Rattenbury:** It actually sits with the Justice and Community Safety Directorate. I am not able to go into the full detail but, as the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, I have had conversations with JACS because I wanted to know what was going on and to get a sense that there was a good, strong process in place. Certainly, from the information I have had, there has been extensive consultation. Some of that has been directly with recognised stakeholders. Others have been facilitated through the elected body, which I think was quite a positive approach as well because that created an environment in which people felt more comfortable to come and talk about it.

**THE CHAIR:** You would see that as a model for the development of a new whole-of-government agreement?

**Mr Rattenbury:** It certainly inspired the new whole-of-government agreement. We are still working on this, but from the discussions I have had with the elected body about this, in some ways the whole-of-government agreement should be very focused. In my mind, we perhaps only want four or five areas in a whole-of-government

agreement so that we get a focus and can actually push that right through government to focus on some specific areas perhaps of highest need. If we end up with a document that has got 70 points in it, in my view, there is a much greater danger of it ending up on the shelf as a great document that does not get the attention it deserves. Whereas if we have got a handful of areas that require focus it will be one that can be on a cabinet agenda and it will be one that agencies know they have got responsibilities to fulfil under in a much more focused way. That is still a point of discussion. That is a view I have put. Certainly, members of the elected body have agreed with that, but we are having a think about it as we start to work it out and see what it looks like.

**THE CHAIR:** What areas would you want to see in a whole-of-government agreement?

**Mr Rattenbury:** That is a very good question.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Mr Rattenbury:** You are on a roll. I have been reluctant to spell it out thus far in that I have wanted to leave the space for it to come from the elected body. Of course, they have their strategic goals.

**THE CHAIR:** Sure.

**Mr Rattenbury:** I am expecting, in some ways, not a lot of variance between what the elected body put forward as their priorities and what government would take on board as a whole-of-government agreement. Given the elected body have done the work to get to that place—they have consulted on it and they have formed that as their strategic priorities—it makes sense for government to largely pick those up and continue with them, but I think there is scope for further discussion on that at this point.

**THE CHAIR:** Good answer.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Still talking about JACS and incarceration, do you have any background on the success of the Indigenous guidance partner in the restorative justice unit, which has a direct effect on juvenile incarcerations?

**Mr Rattenbury:** I have not got anything specific with me at the moment. I would have to have a think about that.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay. Maybe you can take that one on notice.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes, sure.

**THE CHAIR:** Any supplementaries?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Dr Bourke, will you be here during the corrections hearing?

**THE CHAIR:** No.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Okay. I will come back to this committee with an answer to that question, and it might be something we take up further in the corrections hearing as well.

**THE CHAIR:** Only if asked.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Indeed.

**MS BERRY:** I have a question regarding NAIDOC Week, where we celebrated the 40th anniversary of the Aboriginal tent embassy. Knowing the history of the tent embassy and its relationship with previous federal governments, what do you think the prospects are for the tent embassy under the new federal government?

**Mr Rattenbury:** I think it probably will just continue on. It has now become such an important symbol and an important focus for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community that I would hope the federal government would not decide to pick that fight, frankly, because to do so would simply be antagonistic. We are seeing a very interesting role regarding the way the federal government are setting themselves up now to take on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs in Australia. My hope would be that, whether that turns out to work or not, their focus will be much more in that space, and dealing with the various positive agendas they are putting forward. Various members of the committee will have different views on whether the model the Prime Minister is setting up is correct or not, but I would hope to see the energy going into that space. Certainly that is what we would encourage. I have been invited to attend in Sydney next week a roundtable being hosted by Twiggy Forrest on Indigenous employment. I am going to go along. I am a bit unsure at this stage whether there will be much focus for the ACT, but I would not miss the opportunity and, if there is scope for the ACT to be involved in a partnership like that, we should be represented at that meeting.

**THE CHAIR:** Coming back to that question, minister, with regard to your view of the new federal government's arrangements for driving policy in Indigenous affairs, how would you compare and contrast it with what we do in the ACT?

**Mr Rattenbury:** My impression so far—and this has come in some ways through informal discussions with people I know who are working in the federal public service—is that what we are seeing, as members may be aware, is a centralising of resources into Prime Minister and Cabinet. As I understand it, from across a range of agencies, people who are working on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs are being consolidated into PM&C. I understand the Prime Minister's stated intention on that is to put a significant focus on the area, which, certainly on the face of that, is very welcome.

The informal discussions I have had with people in some of the commonwealth agencies is that they are concerned because things are being stripped out of some of the commonwealth agencies, and you are seeing a delineation of programs along lines that are somewhat arbitrary. I think there is a debatable point here in the sense that, with a program that looks at, say, alcohol and other drug issues, teams are being split

in half because some of the resources are now having to go off to PM&C whilst the remainder of the program sits with, say, the health agency. I am uncertain at this stage whether that is the right approach or not. But, clearly, the Prime Minister has set this path, and we can only hope that he is right, because it is creating a significant change.

**THE CHAIR:** You might like to comment on the advisory mechanisms that the Prime Minister has established in comparison with what we do with our Indigenous elected body.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Certainly, there has been some real comparison drawn in the ACT with the elected body, which, of course, is voted for by the community. We will be having new elections in July next year—work that you started yourself, Dr Bourke, in your time as minister, to move the election to coincide with NAIDOC Week, which I think will be a very positive development. Certainly, in discussions I have had with people, we see this as a way of having much higher participation amongst the community in the ACT in the elected body elections.

What we have seen out of that is that, with the current membership of the elected body, it is quite a diverse group. They represent a range of the full spectrum of people who make up our Indigenous community in the ACT, and I think that is a very positive thing. I think they have credibility in the community because of the grass roots approach. I know there is some controversy at the federal level around the direct appointment of individuals and the hand picking in some ways. Again, time will reveal whether that proves to be a successful approach or not.

**MS LAWDER:** I have a supplementary question. I notice that on page 156 of the CSD annual report recommendation 180 is about changes to the election process for the elected body. It is marked as “complete”. What kind of measures were introduced to increase participation in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body elections?

**Mr Rattenbury:** As I said I think the primary change at this point is the shift to conducting the election in NAIDOC Week. Work is still being done on this. In fact we were having a discussion about it only last week, if I recall correctly. The intent is that obviously there are many community events taking place. So one of the key features is that we will be taking polling booths out to those community events where the prospective voters will be, rather than having them simply in an office somewhere in the city where people are less likely to go.

What has not been determined yet is exactly which events they will go to. That is a discussion that will take place with the Electoral Commission as they conduct the election. But I imagine through the course of the week, and from the preliminary discussions we have been having, there will be six or seven major events at which the polling will be available.

The other aspect—I have talked to the elected body about this—is that the numbers who voted last time were, frankly, less than we would like. I have also talked to the elected body about them being ambassadors, and simply talking to their community and saying, “Hey, you should get involved”—whether it is to vote for that person again if they are running or just to be involved. I understand they have taken that role

on with some energy.

I think that, with time, as the elected body is becoming better known and people are seeing its engagement with government and, hopefully, seeing that government listens to the elected body and takes it seriously, within the community there is a sense that it is worth participating. Certainly, I have tried very strongly to convey a sense that, from my perspective as the minister, I see the elected body as a key group for informing government. In that way, I have tried to support participation in the process as well.

**MS BERRY:** Regarding the number of people who participated in the election, is the decision to change the way the elections are held by taking them out to the community to increase that participation?

**Mr Rattenbury:** That is the primary intent, yes.

**MS BERRY:** I think that is a fantastic initiative—something we can probably learn from and do more of.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes.

**MS BERRY:** I also want to ask about how the elected body is going since its election in the last 12 months or so. How has it been going with its relationship with government?

**Mr Rattenbury:** In some ways you should ask the elected body that question.

**MS BERRY:** I am asking about it from your point of view.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes, certainly. As I was just touching on, I have certainly conveyed to the elected body that, coming in as the minister, I see them as a key conduit to government. They are not the only conduit. Obviously, there are groups that I go and see personally and that, obviously, the directorate has contact with. I do not think the elected body claim to be the sole representative by any sense. We have the United Ngunnawal Elders Council, which plays a different role, and then the various other groups around town.

With the elected body, if I were to try and frame things, I would say that things are improving. They have all gained experience by being involved. They have been very positive about what is essentially the estimates-style process that they have had. I do not know if you know the format, Ms Berry, but, essentially, the elected body sits where you are sitting now.

**MS BERRY:** Yes, I think I came down last time for morning tea with them.

**Mr Rattenbury:** The directors-general come and sit on this side of the table over the course of a couple of days, and a very significant discussion goes on. A lot of it is very detailed, quite specific, and trying to work through specific issues. I think they have found that a particularly valuable process—the direct access to the government agencies. At the same time I am sure they would say there have been some teething

issues and things that have not quite worked. We continue to try and improve those things.

**Ms Howson:** From the perspective of the administration, I have often reinforced with Mr Little how effective I think his impact has been in terms of ensuring that the bureaucracy itself is thinking through the perspective of the elected body in what we are doing. He sits on the subcommittee of the directors-general strategic board—the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander subcommittee of that board. He is a very active participant and, I think, very much influences the shape of the discussion and has been very effective in communicating what is meaningful to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in those discussions. That would be a perspective that I would bring.

I know that the elected body have distributed responsibility for portfolios across the board. They are respectively individually very actively engaged in each of the agencies that has been assigned to them for responsibility. I know in the case of the Community Services Directorate that Di Collins is responsible for our portfolio, and I regularly see her in our organisation, working things through with the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. She is a key conduit for us in terms of canvassing new policy discussions and issues.

One of the things that we are working on at the moment is our out-of-home care strategy, and the elected body have been very supportive of the discussions that we have needed to have in that respect, for example. I think that, increasingly, the impact is evident. I personally think that the annual report hearing-type process with the elected body is unique to Canberra and is something we should be very proud of in terms of the influence and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people having a voice in the machinery of government.

**MS LAWDER:** Can you tell me about the status of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander justice agreement?

**Ms Howson:** This is an agreement that is the responsibility of the Attorney-General, so it is a question that should probably be referred to Justice and Community Safety, Ms Lawder. From our point of view, in the Community Services Directorate, and in my role on the subcommittee that I mentioned previously, it is very close to being finalised and prepared for submission to cabinet, I believe. It has certainly built on the previous agreement in terms of the consultation process and the focus. The minister mentioned earlier the breadth of the agreement. I think it has become much more focused and targeted, and we have a key role to play in the context of diversion of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the context of that agreement.

**THE CHAIR:** A supplementary? Would you like another question, Ms Lawder?

**MS LAWDER:** No.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay. With the focus on vulnerable families, some of whom are Indigenous, and the whole-of-government strategic broad focus, can you just talk us through where the process is up to and what sort of on-the-ground difference it is making.



**Ms Howson:** Certainly. The project that you refer to, I believe, is the working with vulnerable families project.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms Howson:** Just this week, the director-general coordinating committee met to receive the evaluation report, which was undertaken by Dr Mark Evans from the Australia and New Zealand School of Government. I will mention just two headline measures, if I may, two headline statements from that evaluation. One is that the service model represents international best practice, particularly around the concept of a genuine co-design process with families and individuals that we are working with. In other words, we have started with the family around their objectives and the things they need from our service system, as opposed to the other way around. It also said that notwithstanding that it has been a very short period—we have only been working with these families for four to five months—the outcomes at this point are outstanding. We are very pleased with that evaluation, as you can imagine. The next challenge for us is how we actually move this from being a fairly small cohort to starting to take it out to a much larger group of families.

The key features of the model are, as I have already said, the co-design approach; the use of a lead worker that is actually chosen by the families—in other words, they are working with somebody they trust and respect—and the opportunity to develop an information profile on the family so that they communicate to the people they are working with the story, their story, in a way that they are comfortable with and that is captured in a form that is easy for them to communicate as they move through this process.

The other finding of the evaluation, of course, is about what the families have been able to demonstrate in a very short period of time. They were selected essentially because they had multiple needs and were in a state of crisis. Within four to five months, they have moved into what we refer to as a stabilised position where they can make better informed decisions and can engage more effectively with the services that they need.

**THE CHAIR:** How many of those families are Indigenous?

**Ms Howson:** I might just check this, Dr Bourke, but I believe that it was two of the 10.

**THE CHAIR:** I presume the evaluation is going to be published at some stage?

**Ms Howson:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** In the evaluation, did they look at participant satisfaction?

**Ms Howson:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Did they look at worker satisfaction?

**Ms Howson:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Could you tell us about the worker satisfaction?

**Ms Howson:** Worker satisfaction was very high. The workers, in particular, commented about it. In fact, there is a quote in the evaluation report from one of the lead caseworkers that it was the best professional experience that they had ever had in their entire working career.

**THE CHAIR:** That is a strong statement.

**Ms Howson:** It is a strong statement. With the nature of the supervision and practice support, it is very much around the concepts of communities of practice, if I can again use a term. Just ask me more questions if I am using terminology that you do not understand. Essentially, having professionals being able to come together on a regular basis, share the experience of working with the families and problem-solve together has been enormously rewarding. And that professional peer-based approach has built the confidence of these individuals to be able to continue to work with a very challenging group of people.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, what is the rationale for this piece of policy space? What is your understanding of that, particularly with regard to Indigenous families? In other words, what sort of outcomes do you expect in the long term?

**Mr Rattenbury:** I think there are a couple of focuses. Obviously, the primary one is to get the best possible outcome for the families, to move them from what is often a place of crisis along a spectrum of improved life outcomes, whether it is health, mental health, employment or staying out of incarceration—all of the sorts of things that affect the families that we see in this part of our community. The other part of it, which is quite real for government as well, is that it is very expensive to have a process where families bounce between services. Some work has been done, and there are a couple of case studies, that identifies the amount of government resource that is put into some families or individuals. It is enormous amounts of money. If we can have a family or an individual put into a stream that is more effective, that is obviously a better outcome for government as well, from an expenditure point of view. So it becomes a bonus: by having a good outcome for the families or the individuals, the government also needs to spend less money.

**THE CHAIR:** Supplementaries? No? Perhaps you could talk about the level of resourcing needed to do this kind of work. Is it greater than what you are already putting into these programs or are there already benefits coming from that sort of cross-sector working?

**Ms Howson:** Dr Bourke, that is something that we are about to explore in more detail as we move into this next phase. It is important that we actually do a much more detailed cost-benefit analysis of this approach. It depends on whether we take into account some of those longitudinal issues that the minister just referred to or whether we look at a short-term arrangement.

We initially considered the journey of a particular family that had been touching on different health, education, justice and community services programs, multiple times,

and essentially revisiting the same programs because of again getting into crisis consistently. We extrapolated that if in fact we were able to make those connections more seamless and more efficient in terms of their intent, we could potentially save thousands of dollars per family simply by doing what we do but doing it in a more coordinated fashion. Our hypothesis is, of course, that if we are able to do this detailed cost-benefit analysis, we will be able to demonstrate to government that the logic of investing in early intervention and prevention, investing in tools that allow us to better assess the needs of families and investing in a workforce that can do the sort of work I have talked about in this co-design methodology—that we will, in a sense, if not save the government more money, be able to demonstrate better outcomes for the investment that we are currently making.

**THE CHAIR:** Given that many of those little boys will have a significant risk of incarceration later in life, you are going to be saving not just thousands but hundreds of the thousands, as I am sure the minister would appreciate with his other hat on.

**Ms Howson:** There is some very interesting research coming out of New South Wales. That is a longitudinal study, looking again at individuals around their life course from the time they were young children taken into out-of-home care settings to the time when they are young adults in the corrections system. The amount of investment by government in those individuals goes into millions. Those sorts of studies are, in a contextual sense, quite informative.

**THE CHAIR:** Are there more questions on this area? All done?

**MS LAWDER:** One more question?

**THE CHAIR:** Of course.

**MS LAWDER:** It is a lot less tangible than some other things. I notice from some of the community grants that Wanniasa School had a grant to have a bush tucker garden and an exchange with a New South Wales school. I am just wondering how that is going. Is it viable into the future?

**THE CHAIR:** That would be in your electorate, too, wouldn't it?

**MS LAWDER:** That is right.

**Ms Howson:** I think we would need to take that on notice, Ms Lawder—the detail of that particular grant and feeding back on the impact of that. If you do not mind, we will make some inquiries and come back to you on that.

**MS LAWDER:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** No more? We might move on to ageing. I note that Mr Doszpot has joined us as a visitor. Welcome.

**Mr Rattenbury:** What are you implying, Dr Bourke?

**THE CHAIR:** I implied nothing; I was merely making an observation. If you two

want to start sparring before we even get there, that is not going to happen. I will kick off. Minister, can you tell me more about the plans for an age-friendly city conference in 2013 and another older persons assembly in 2014.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes, certainly. We have just had the age-friendly cities conference, probably about three or four weeks ago, now, Dr Bourke.

**THE CHAIR:** Fantastic.

**Mr Rattenbury:** It was very successful. We had an oversubscription of people who wanted to come. We could not fit in everyone who wanted to come. We did have people come from all over the country. We invited people from right around Australia. We had over 40 local governments from across Australia as well as five state governments in attendance. We also had a couple of international experts, including Dr Alex Kalache, who was instrumental in launching the World Health Organisation's active ageing policy framework in 2002 and also the World Health Organisation's global movement on age-friendly cities in 2006. In that sense, we had perhaps one of the world's foremost experts in the area join us. I think that participants found it very useful to have such expertise there.

In talking to the participants, both during the conference and afterwards, I think people found it very interesting, very rewarding. We followed it up the next day with an informal session, which I led, on establishing an Australian network of age-friendly municipalities and cities. Whilst it is very much in its infancy, there was a real desire amongst the jurisdictions that were represented to actually have that informal network begin. It is not to say that we are putting massive funding or anything into it at this stage; it is really just creating the mechanism for people to keep talking to each other. This was one of the key outcomes from the conference: they made such strong connections, they wanted to keep that going—the sharing of ideas, the good experiences, the less successful experiences, and all of the things that you get out of that kind of event.

**THE CHAIR:** Perhaps you could share with us some of those less successful experiences, now that you have mentioned some.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Dr Bourke is asking about some of the things that other jurisdictions share with us that had not gone so well.

**THE CHAIR:** Learning from other people's mistakes is always interesting.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes, essentially.

**Ms Howson:** We might need to take that on notice.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Flowing on to the second half of your question, Dr Bourke, which was about the next older persons assembly, the original intention had been to host an older persons assembly during 2013, but in advice I received from the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing, they proposed that we have this conference first and that the older persons assembly be deferred to 2014. They saw it as a sequential thing where having the conference first would inform them, give them additional ideas and

knowledge. So that is the way we have set it up.

The older persons assembly at this point is pencilled in for October next year, around the international day for older people, just drawing that connection. One of the aspirations we had with the conference, and we indicated this in the application documentation, was that those who wanted to come to the conference have in mind to come to the assembly next year so that we start to build a cohort of people who get to know each other, continuing conversations and working through issues.

**THE CHAIR:** In your thinking as minister around the outcomes of that age-friendly city conference—you have already talked about the network: were there any other key points that were interesting and new to you as minister?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Unfortunately, I was not able to attend the whole day. I did go to Dr Kalache's presentation, which was quite fascinating. His key message, which speaks to the whole of government, in a way, was when he showed a graph which essentially was people's quality of life. It was a visual, so it is going to be hard to explain, but essentially it was a curve where up to about the age of 30 people went up in terms of life skills and life ability, and then they started the long, slow decline towards the later years. His observation was twofold: one was that, in the first instance, the better opportunities people have early in life, the higher their curve went; the second thing for government to think about was how we essentially flatten out that curve so that people's quality of life does not deteriorate as rapidly as otherwise—so that people retain mobility, functionality, health and happiness for a more sustained period. That was a very interesting way of thinking about how it works at a macro level—and then, of course, the government policy that you can put in place to achieve that.

**Ms Howson:** If I can go on, I think that is particularly pertinent with an ageing population and the challenge all governments have around the cost of supporting health systems. What this research did show was that people were able to stay out of what Dr Kalache referred to as the disability threshold. Their capacity to age in place or stay at home until later years in life, to live independent of support of government, was really evident if there was an investment for active ageing from early years but particularly in early adult life.

**Mr Rattenbury:** One other observation he drew out of that is that with an ageing population, people are with us for longer. So a key part of staying above that disability threshold was people being able to be part of the community for an extended period of time, enjoying it and also contributing rather than necessarily just becoming a source of needs, if I might put it carefully.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Supplementaries?

**MS BERRY:** No.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Yes. Minister, I would like to extend my congratulations to the department and to you for the age-friendly cities initiative. I thought it was excellent. Originally I only had time to go to one session but I attended three sessions, and I got a lot out of it. Like you, I spoke to people in between the sessions. Taking

Dr Bourke's point, with respect to the positive ones that I was aware of and that I have learnt a lot from—positive rather than negative aspects—the Rosedale community hub I thought was excellent, and I think it is worth having a closer look at it. I thought the intergenerational week, Auburn City Council, was interesting. It had some great ideas. Of course, our own Hawker College intergenerational project also got a very good innings. So, congratulations. I do have questions on it as well. The question is: having initiated such a great activity, how can you put some of the lessons to work? What is the priority in looking at some of the most suitable options that we have seen that could be incorporated into Canberra?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Mr Doszpot, thank you for your comments. I am glad you did enjoy it. I think all participants did. Everybody got something out of it—different things, but something. One of the things that I am keen to see happen, and part of the reason we facilitated the discussion on creating a network, is that I would like to see another city host the next event in about two years time and to start working towards that. I think we have started something now that, hopefully, will create a legacy. That is certainly something we will be encouraging.

The ACT government have taken it on to facilitate this network at the beginning to try and build it up. There are some things happening through COTA as well. This came out of a discussion we had on the subsequent day. COTA are doing something similar, so we are trying to pull all those threads together into something that has an ongoing legacy. In terms of some of the specifics that came out of the conference, Ms Whitten has joined us, and I suspect she may have a few comments she wants to add.

**MR DOSZPOT:** What sort of budget can be allocated to any of these initiatives that you are looking at?

**Mr Rattenbury:** It may not be that we have a dedicated Office for Ageing budget, but, in fact, work that is done through TAMS. Having that portfolio myself I am very cognisant of those connections, and of making sure that the money we are spending over in TAMS meets the needs of older people. Some of it can be as simple as making sure that there are seats, benches, for people to rest on at bus stops. I had one request out at Weston Creek where some older people said to me, “The bus stop is halfway up the hill. We can get there, but can you put a bench halfway up so we can have a rest?” That is a very—

**MR DOSZPOT:** You have read my next letter that I am about to send to you, I think.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Indeed. So some things like that are very simple and do not require a big budget or a big program. It is just trying to think about how we use the resources we have more effectively for older people.

**Ms Whitten:** I was the executive director responsible for the Office for Ageing during the reporting period and attended the conference just for the morning; I was not able to stay. It certainly was a very exciting day. I think that is a credit to the organising committee, including the Office for Ageing, in terms of bringing it together. It was the first national conference of its kind and there was a sense of excitement during the day.

In terms of where we take it from here, we have already got the commitment in the

parliamentary agreement to the older persons assembly, which the minister has already identified we are looking at holding in October next year. The way we have been working in the Office for Ageing over the last few years is that we do it with the community. We have had organising committees for the conference and the previous older persons assembly. So we can take the lessons learned from the conference, take a community approach, a collaborative approach, and work that through in terms of the preparations for the next action plan under the strategic plan for positive ageing. The current action plan finishes in mid-2014. Also it will inform how we will work towards the older persons assembly next year. I think Mr Manikis has some more details about some of the presentations at the conference on the day.

**Mr Manikis:** In the context of taking it forward, a couple of the initiatives that were presented have already been highlighted. There certainly were many others that we have captured. For example, the Clarence City Council in Tasmania have an ageing advisory committee and they have service providers as well that do a lot of work around their positive planning, like we do here. The Clarence City Council are very active. They have a community volunteer service. The City of Port Phillip look at the model of keeping people, in this case over the age of 55, connected at a neighbourhood level. They have a program called linking neighbours.

There were about 10 of these initiatives that we pulled out of that conference. Of course, in the ACT the demographics are different to demographics around Australia. It is about putting some of those ideas that are being implemented in other areas to our advisory council, who can look at those initiatives and see if they can be prioritised, ready perhaps to be presented at the older persons assembly in October next year and then, after that, there is whatever comes out of that in terms of initiatives and activities going forward. That would then inform what we do in this space.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I think it is important that we do have a look at not just leaving it to the older persons assembly but giving them some framework to work around—what sort of budget, whether it is through TAMS, education or ageing. With all the combined activities of various departments where the ageing element is concerned, I think we have got the wherewithal to do some interesting things. In Canberra, we can implement some of these things perhaps even better than some of the host cities that we are talking about because of our unique community. I would ask that a budget figure be looked at so that when it comes time for the older persons assembly to look at the broader aspects, they have got some framework to work around.

**Mr Manikis:** Sometimes, with putting a dollar amount on creativity, you do not get the best in terms of initiatives. People can be constrained if it is defined. So it is a bit of a chicken and egg situation.

**Ms Whitten:** As we have talked about, we have taken a collaborative approach in terms of the positive ageing responsibilities of the ACT government. One of the effective aspects of it has been setting up a network which involves all the directorates that have some responsibilities with working with the older population within our community. It has been very collaborative. In a sense, although there is no specified budget, we do bring together the resources from the various directorates. We work with the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing and COTA ACT, and we have got a good working relationship. I think that is a positive thing that we can take regarding

the next steps in terms of what we are doing in the ACT.

**MS LAWDER:** Following up on that, I am interested in your views arising from the liveable cities or the age-friendly cities and any work you might be doing around liveable housing and around incorporating facilities to deal with people with hearing loss, because hearing loss is one of the most common age-related impairments.

**Ms Howson:** Ms Lawder, I will start on that and I might encourage my housing colleagues to elaborate if necessary. There has been a key focus within Housing ACT on developing appropriate housing for people to age in place. A priority in any of the stock renewal that is underway is that we are creating homes that would suit the needs of older people; and, as they get older, they feel confident in terms of both safety and their capacity to stay at home. We are also building those properties in congregate settings and, in many cases, creating community spaces so that we can encourage people to develop a neighbourhood, a community, within those settings—again, for all the good reasons around positive ageing.

The selection of the location of those properties is also an important planning issue for us as we think about easy access to facilities, to transport, for people to shop, and also community centres where there is a range of other activities they can participate in. That is within a social housing context.

The directorate also participates in the broader strategic discussions going on across government around the city plan and, again, the needs of older people—and certainly regarding our focus in the discussions around the broader strategic planning process that goes on across government and similar sorts of issues around those features. There was a second part to your question.

**MS LAWDER:** Hearing loss accommodation in a built environment.

**Ms Howson:** I must admit we do not have any specific initiative that focuses on that in particular. However, again within social housing, we do have occupational therapists that assess the needs of people with a disability. I am not sure if that extends to fire alarms and things like that. Maybe Mr Collett can comment on that. Further to that, of course, with the introduction of the national disability insurance scheme, there is the opportunity for individuals to be able to propose a reasonable need for someone with a hearing disability to be able—

**MS LAWDER:** Not if it is age related after the age of 65.

**Ms Howson:** It would then be through the aged-care system. But up to the age of 65, people with a hearing loss could put in proposals through their planning process that would see features built into their homes that would support them to be able to live an independent life.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Can I ask a supplementary on that last one?

**THE CHAIR:** We will move on to Ms Berry. She has a substantive question and she has not had a go yet.



**MS BERRY:** I was just looking at the ACT seniors grants programs. We obviously get a lot of benefit with a small financial commitment. Could you go through in detail what the simple eats for seniors program entailed, on page 331?

**Mr Rattenbury:** I think I have actually been to this program, if I am thinking of the right label. The intent of this program—

**Ms Whitten:** I can answer that question, if it would be helpful. It was a grant to Nutrition Australia for some cooking classes during seniors week. I am not sure if the minister—

**Mr Rattenbury:** That is right. I actually went to that program. It was actually terrific because we had quite a range of seniors who came along, including some older men, particularly, as the target group, who have found themselves by themselves and with limited cooking skills. The instructors were terrific. They were giving the older people good advice from a nutritional point of view and also they had very simple recipes. They actually cooked up a lunch, which I joined them for. It was very tasty and also simple. People were having a good time. They were also making some connections. So it was serving at those couple of levels.

**MS BERRY:** I think that is a great idea. For such a small amount of money, to be able to provide that assistance is great. I see on this funding list there are quite a lot of small organisations. What kind of grants acquittal process are they required to complete?

**Ms Whitten:** With most of our grants they are small amounts of money. We have a simple acquittal process so that we know that they have spent the money on the grant area that they have said they spent it on.

**MS BERRY:** Is there any sort of training and support in helping them to actually meet those obligations? I know you said it is simple.

**Ms Whitten:** In terms of the application process, we use a SmartyGrants program in terms of putting the information in. We ask applicants to describe what their grant is about, so we try to streamline the acquittal process in order not to mean that organisations need to put a lot of time into accounting for the money that they have spent. So it is as simplified as we possibly can make it.

**Mr Rattenbury:** On that SmartyGrants application, we use it for a number of things, including recently the nominations to the ministerial advisory council. It also tracks where people have started an application process and perhaps not finished it. One of the things that the Office for Ageing does in these cases is make contact with people from time to time and ask them if there have been problems, and why they have not continued with their application, which is a way of going to some of the issues you are touching on—where barriers exist that are precluding people.

**MS BERRY:** How many people participated on the day? Was the cooking program just on a day or was it over a period?

**Mr Rattenbury:** If I recall correctly, it was over a number of weeks; it was a six or

eight-week program.

**Ms Whitten:** I think we can clarify that.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes, we will check that. Certainly, from my conversation with the participants they knew each other. They got to know each other over a period of time, so it was clearly—

**MS BERRY:** And what was the meal?

**Mr Rattenbury:** They made a very nice apple crumble as a dessert, which even I managed to make, and I am not the greatest cook in the world either. I learnt a new recipe that day myself.

**THE CHAIR:** Any supplementaries on this or requests for recipes? No? Ms Lawder, a substantive question, please.

**MS LAWDER:** I would have liked to have requested a piece of apple pie, but you cannot have everything.

**THE CHAIR:** Next time.

**Mr Rattenbury:** It was a few months ago, I am afraid.

**MS LAWDER:** On page 70 of volume 1 it talks about ACT seniors e-news. I am just interested to know what arrangements may be in place for those people that do not have a computer or use a computer. Is it sent out in a hard copy format as well?

**Mr Manikis:** Yes.

**MS LAWDER:** How many do you send out? What is the subscription rate?

**Mr Manikis:** I do not have the numbers here. It does go out in hard copy as well as over the computer. I can get those numbers for you.

**MS LAWDER:** Thank you.

**MS BERRY:** I have a supplementary on that, if I could, chair.

**THE CHAIR:** Go for it.

**MS BERRY:** There is substantial use of both e-news and social media in engaging with older people. Is there any data or evidence that this is widespread amongst seniors, and are we able to measure that? I know it is a difficult one to measure, but is it being measured?

**Mr Rattenbury:** There are certainly measures around participation of older Australians using the internet. I was in a discussion in the last few days in which somebody referred to the “silver surfer set”. There is no doubt that a large group of older people have taken very well to the internet. I think we all know anecdotally that

many people have taken up Facebook and Skype as a way of tracking their kids and grandkids. There is good participation. Undoubtedly, there are barriers. Certainly over in TAMS, Libraries ACT runs a series of programs to help people learn to use the internet. It is quite basic; it is about how to navigate with it and the like. The government has in place programs but, of course, there will always be some issues of people not accessing it, and that is where we need to retain hard copies of various things.

Similarly with the seniors card, we have talked about whether we could make that a more online thing to enable it to be updated more regularly than once a year. I think there is scope to do that, remaining mindful of the fact that that will not work for everybody. That is why there will still be some hard copies provided and made available.

**Mr Manikis:** We do not do a survey or post distribution as to who read and who discarded the hard copy or who actually opened up the newsletter. We do not have those hard figures.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Can I have a supplementary on that, Mr Chair?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Have you got figures, though, of the actual numbers—your subscribers, I guess, is the term—both electronically and in hard copy? Can you give us figures on how many people are being sent it?

**Mr Manikis:** Certainly, and I can give you the numbers for the previous question.

**Mr Rattenbury:** I think we have taken that on notice. We do not have it today, but we will take it on notice.

**MR DOSZPOT:** That is what I was getting at. You do not have the numbers now?

**Mr Rattenbury:** No. We will check that.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Thank you.

**MS BERRY:** Just one more supplementary on that, chair: is increasing older persons' access to ICT part of the strategic plan for positive ageing?

**Ms Whitten:** I can answer that one. In terms of the strategic plan on positive ageing, one of the key themes of the plan is around information and communication. One of the first initiatives that the Office for Ageing established was an online portal for seniors, which is hosted through our directorate website. In terms of getting some numbers about usage, not necessarily knowing who the final user is or their age, we do get statistics on the access to our websites.

As part of the action plan for 2012-14 we have some key performance indicators in relation to ICT training. They are attributed to our education and TAMS directorates. In each of the annual reports we are—as is every directorate—required to report on

progress against the actions under the strategic plan. At the back of our volume 1, for example, we have got the report from CSD on what we have achieved in the reporting period, as TAMS and the other directorates have as well. There is a lot of information which we report on and then we collate it at a later stage.

**THE CHAIR:** A substantive question, Mr Doszpot.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Thank you. Minister, in volume 1, page 180, it states that the directorate funded a question regarding perceived safety in the Canberra and region social and market survey which was conducted during February and March 2013. The results indicated that older people feel slightly less safe than their younger cohorts. Can you tell us how was that survey distributed and how many people the survey was distributed to?

**Ms Whitten:** We conducted a baseline survey with the ANU back in 2011. What we are doing this year is actually conducting smaller surveys which are focusing on particular events which we know older people attended. My recollection was that it was a particular event. I might take that on notice and get you the details that you have asked for.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Okay. If you are still doing surveys I guess you are not in a position to make definitive decisions on what you are going to do, but do you have some understanding from what you have got so far as to what you intend doing about solving the problem?

**Ms Whitten:** I have some information about the surveys. I just missed the question about the problem.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I was saying that I do not expect you to have the definitive answer or solution that you are proposing, but do you have some idea of how to address the issues that have been raised so far in the first survey?

**Ms Whitten:** In the 2011 survey one of the main areas of interest for older Canberrans was around transport and mobility. In terms of the action plan that has been developed for 2012-14, that has been an area of focus for some directorates that have responsibility for transport. That information is provided in their annual reports. In the 2013 smaller surveys we have had 438 responses so far. The surveys were conducted during Seniors Week, which included events at the Botanical Gardens—that was the Botanical Gardens family picnic day—and also the Canberra lifestyle and retirement expo, which I think was in May. We got 438 responses. On our question around age friendliness, 47 per cent of respondents thought that Canberra overall was a very age-friendly city, 39 did not have a particular view and four per cent thought Canberra was not at all age friendly. So that was four per cent of the survey recipients.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Mr Doszpot, I believe your question was to some extent directed at personal safety, that sense of fear of crime and the like.

**Ms Whitten:** I am sorry.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Yes.

**Mr Rattenbury:** There are a couple of specific things I might inform you of and then we can see if there are further questions from there. Certainly, Housing ACT has an investment program of improving security for older people—so the provision of screen doors that are lockable and those sorts of things so that people feel safe opening their front door if there is a caller. CSD has an elder abuse hotline which people are able to call if they feel they are in a position where they are vulnerable to that kind of abuse. Housing ACT has a program of calling older people during times of particular emergency. So there are a number of things in place that the government operates.

The other thing I would add on a more general level is that there is always, of course, the challenge of perception. What we have seen in all the crime statistics in recent times is that crime is falling in the ACT, but, nonetheless, people unfortunately do still feel unsafe at times. There is the challenge, I guess, of the disconnect between perception and perhaps reality in a place like Canberra where we are pretty fortunate.

**MR DOSZPOT:** My last question on this topic is this: how will you then communicate the fixes, if you like, to the problems that have been addressed to alleviate some of the concerns of people that something is being done about it and not only seen to be done about it, and that you do address some issues that they raise as a concern? It is both a psychological and a practical implementation problem.

**Mr Rattenbury:** The practical things that I just spoke about will be advertised—for example, through the Housing ACT newsletter to tenants. There will be notices about the services that are available for those sorts of security programs. The elder abuse hotline will be advertised through various channels. I guess it is the usual things of trying to find the right place to communicate to the audience and let them know that those things are available and then, hopefully, taking advantage of them when they have the need.

**MR DOSZPOT:** That was my last one, but there is a supplementary to that. I guess it relates to all of the things we are talking about of how to communicate with a community that is not as e-ready as we think they are, quite frankly. I visit a lot of the retirement villages. There are people there who are quite e-savvy—they understand computers—but, living in retirement villages, not all of them have access to computers.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Sure.

**MR DOSZPOT:** There might be 40 or 50 people and only a couple of computers. I know it is a difficult question, but how do we address those issues?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Hopefully I did not overstate it at the beginning of my earlier comments, but certainly I am very aware that, despite there being a bunch of people who are e-savvy, there are plenty who are not. You could probably almost draw a direct line of age and correlation with e-savviness in terms of comfort levels. The Office for Ageing has a whole range of other connections through the seniors clubs, the various social networks and the retirement villages. There are a range of other channels that we use. I think it would be fair to say that the office is very aware of the

issue that you are raising.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Thank you.

**Mr Rattenbury:** The other thing that did get launched during the year is the Silver Memories radio station, which is actually an initiative of ArtSound ACT. There is government funding to support that. It is a dedicated streaming program. It uses digital opportunities, new technologies that have emerged there, to create a dedicated program for older people that actually gets played out to retirement villages around Canberra at this stage, but potentially across the country, of course, with digital technology. They are playing older music and are talking about things that are of interest to a rather older demographic—the 70-plus crowd.

**MR DOSZPOT:** The Beatles!

**Mr Rattenbury:** I think it was even more nostalgic than that, from the bits that I heard, Mr Doszpot. Interestingly, through the emerging technology there are new opportunities as well. That certainly has had a good reception. And it is a Canberra initiative.

**Mr Manikis:** As to distributing information through the radio, the government supports not only that specific one but also the multicultural radio programs, and there are over 100 of those. They get to the more senior members of our multicultural community, for example, with messages in their own language. These are the people that have not picked up the language over the years or are newly arrived but are seniors. That is another avenue that we utilise.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Lawder, a supplementary.

**MS LAWDER:** Thanks. I just want to follow up something that I think Ms Whitten alluded to about transport, when you talked about transport. I have a question about community bus services. Are you aware of any concerns in relation to a lack of or a reduction in the number of community bus service programs or a reduction in the numbers or the accessibility of those buses?

**Ms Whitten:** In 2008, I think it was, the ACT government commenced its funding of community buses with the six community service organisations. I think that those six buses have been replaced during the years. I think we still have that number. In fact, we have added one: the minister launched the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander bus during NAIDOC Week this year. The other point to make is that the Environment and Sustainability Directorate, I think, are currently conducting a review of community transport. That is reported in their annual report, particularly in the strategic plan on positive ageing section of their report. That review, I think, will end sometime next year. So we are looking at that at the moment. There are other models that are available internationally and we will see what is best in terms of the ACT.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Can I have a supplementary on that?

**THE CHAIR:** I have got a couple of supplementaries and then we will go to it. Just coming back to the talk about computer access in retirement villages, do you know

much about wi-fi access in retirement villages? That is probably pretty fundamental in being able to utilise an iPad, a portable piece of computer equipment which would be very useful for retired people.

**Mr Rattenbury:** The ACT government does not have responsibility for the regulation and supervision of retirement villages, of course, so it is really only anecdotal. I do not know whether my colleagues have a sense of it. Other than it being a good idea, Dr Bourke, I do not think we have got any data on that.

**THE CHAIR:** I will leave that then. And coming back to your discussion under previous questioning with regard to perceptions of crime, despite these falling statistics that you talked about, minister, what are some of the factors that are feeding that perception of crime?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Unfortunately, from time to time we do see people talking up the prospect of crime in the press, in politics and the like. In some ways, that community fear is fed by those public conversations. Often, they are, unfortunately, inaccurate. The attorney, of course, presents the quarterly criminal justice statistics summary. All of the trends in the ACT show that we have a decreasing level of crime across a range of areas. I think the only areas that we see increasing are sexual assault related offences, and there is a whole separate discussion about that. But burglary, assault, theft and those kinds of crimes are falling.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, minister. Mr Doszpot, you had a supplementary?

**MR DOSZPOT:** No; my supplementary has passed, thanks.

**THE CHAIR:** All right; we will move to substantive questions. Minister, Grandparents Day.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Can you tell us about Grandparents Day—what happened and what is going to happen?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Grandparents Day took place just two weekends ago. It took place adjacent to the seniors club in Tuggeranong. It moved this year. It is only the second year we have had it. Last year it was held in the Tuggeranong town centre park. This year it moved probably about 400 metres, but we put it right next to the seniors club, which also provided basic facilities in terms of power, toilets and the like.

The intent behind Grandparents Day is to provide an opportunity for grandparents to socialise together and also to bring their grandchildren along and have a day of it. There is a range of grandparent-oriented entertainment as well as child-oriented entertainment—things like face painting and the like for children. It is really designed to be a fun, friendly family day out where grandparents and their grandchildren can come together and celebrate. There was a great selection of entertainment this year. Our former colleague John Hargreaves was resplendent with his ukulele group as well as his old 45s stand. Mr Hargreaves played a big part in the celebrations this year. The new format this year raised a few questions, but it is one we are keen to continue with.

One of the other initiatives we are exploring as part of that is grandparent awards to recognise grandparents for their contribution to the community. We are working on that in partnership with the seniors clubs rather than simply making it a government thing. I conveyed the view that I would like it to be done in partnership with the seniors clubs so that there is a sense of community ownership of the awards as well. Hopefully, we will have that in place for next year.

**THE CHAIR:** You mentioned grandchild-attractive entertainment. What sort of grandparent-attractive entertainment was there, apart from Mr Hargreaves playing his ukulele.

**Mr Rattenbury:** That was not enough?

**THE CHAIR:** More than adequate, I would have thought, but others might disagree.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Others might help me with recalling what was available.

**Ms Whitten:** I recall some dancing, a demonstration of dancing at the centre. That was well received.

**Mr Manikis:** Rock and roll club.

**THE CHAIR:** No clogging?

**Mr Manikis:** No clogging. No, not this time.

**MS LAWDER:** A supplementary question?

**THE CHAIR:** I will just take another one, and then I will pass it on to you. Minister, you also mentioned that there were some questions raised about what could be included in the future, and you talked a bit about awards in regard to that. Were there other things that were suggested that could be done in the future?

**Mr Rattenbury:** I have not seen—

**THE CHAIR:** Was that the nature of the questions, or was it something else?

**Mr Rattenbury:** I have not seen the full debrief from the event yet; I think people are still reflecting on how it went. I think, if I am honest, that there was a bit of a sense of disappointment that not as many people came as the organisers might have hoped. That was perhaps a function of the fact that it was an incredibly busy weekend in the community. I know from my own diary—I am sure members have all been in the same boat—that the last four or five weekends have just been frenetic in the community in terms of the number of events on offer right across the community and across a whole range of interests. The organisers had put a lot of effort and thought into the day, and I think there was a bit of a sense of disappointment there. That might be something to reflect on—whether it is the right time of year or whether there is perhaps a better space in the calendar.



**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Supplementary, Ms Lawder.

**MS LAWDER:** You may have just answered this. I was going to ask how the numbers were this year. You said there were not as many as hoped. Does that mean less than last year?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Our count was about 500 people who came. My recollection of last year's event was that it seemed bigger than that to me at the time. Having been in both years, my sense was that this year did not have as many people. But there were about 500 people. Those that came had a good time, and there was a reasonable crowd there. But the aspirations of those organising it were greater. All of the seniors clubs were involved. They put a lot of effort in, and I think they would like to see more people for that effort.

**MS BERRY:** A supplementary?

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Berry.

**MS BERRY:** Is Grandparents Day always held in Tuggeranong?

**Mr Rattenbury:** We have only had it twice so far; and yes, it has been in Tuggeranong both times.

**MS BERRY:** Is there an opportunity for it to be alternated between Tuggeranong and Belconnen.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Or Molonglo?

**Mr Rattenbury:** I guess that is something we need to have a look at. Really there are three key areas we need to review out of this year's event. One is the timing. The second is the venue, the location. The third will be the program of events on offer. All of those factors will be reviewed. With an event that is now two years old, it is a good time to think about whether we have got it right, including whether a different approach, perhaps if it was more central, would be better. Would more people come? At the same time, so many things in the city end up being centralised that it is good to have them out in the suburbs. I would be reluctant to bring it into the city in a way, because it is great to have some things going on in Tuggeranong.

**MR DOSZPOT:** But also you touched upon the issue that the more elderly communities are basically in the older suburbs of Canberra, which are more in the inner south and inner north.

**Mr Rattenbury:** True, but there are plenty of grandparents in Tuggeranong.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Yes, of course there are.

**Mr Rattenbury:** It is a debatable point.

**THE CHAIR:** Any other supplementaries?

**Ms Whitten:** Just in terms of that, I might be wrong, but one of the suburbs with a large population of older people is Kambah.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Everything is big in Kambah.

**THE CHAIR:** Any other supplementaries on Grandparents Day?

**MR DOSZPOT:** I have a substantive.

**THE CHAIR:** We will get there. Ms Berry, a substantive question.

**MS BERRY:** We touched on this before but I want to ask about World Elder Abuse Awareness Day. There was quite a level of media strategy involved, but can you run us through how the day was publicised as part of that strategy.

**Ms Whitten:** We have a network, the elder abuse prevention network, for those organisations that have some kind of role in terms of hearing issues around people who may experience elder abuse, whether that is a physical issue or a financial issue. We have a range of organisations that are involved. Anglicare is the provider of the elder abuse prevention line; we work through non-government and government partners to publicise that. There was an advertisement, I think, on the television, as well as promotions at various centres on the day.

**MS BERRY:** What was the budget for that?

**Ms Whitten:** I do not think it was a very big budget. It would not have been very big.

**MS BERRY:** Do you think having World Elder Abuse Awareness Day raised awareness in the Canberra community, and do you have any data on that?

**Ms Whitten:** The ACT elder abuse arrangements are interesting. When people Google “elder abuse”, even if you are in New South Wales, or even internationally, our information comes up first. Over the years we have had calls from interstate and overseas to address issues in other jurisdictions or other parts of the world—not lots of calls. In terms of how effective it is, I think it is a conversation that we need to have in the community. It is how you have that conversation that is the tricky bit.

**MS BERRY:** That goes to my next question: what sorts of lessons do you think it provides for government on communication with the community for these sorts of priority areas?

**Ms Whitten:** Over the last few years, we have been taking a softly, softly approach. We have information on our website. We have produced bookmarks—they can be handed out, say, in libraries—with information about respect. That is the kind of approach that we have been taking, rather than making it a mass media conversation. Of course, there are particular organisations in the ACT, such as the Public Trustee, the Public Advocate, Legal Aid, the police, Anglicare and our own directorate, who have a role in terms of identifying when there is an issue and then making a referral to the right place.

**MS LAWDER:** It appears that the number of calls increased last year compared to the year before. Do you feel that is due solely to awareness or do you feel there are other underlying reasons for the increase?

**Ms Whitten:** It was 139 this year, up from 113. Over the last few years, it has been in the order of 100. It could be that people are more broadly aware of the services that are available and people are then coming forward with concerns. Of course, the police are always there in terms of any issues that might relate to any criminal conduct as well. I cannot give you any particular reason why there has been an increase in numbers except for some of the promotion that we have done.

**THE CHAIR:** Supplementaries? No? Substantive question, Ms Lawder?

**MS LAWDER:** I wish to ask about the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing, which is talked about on page 213 of the annual report. It says that there is a maximum of 12 representatives from various organisations and peak bodies representing older people. Can you tell me which peak bodies and organisations are represented?

**Ms Whitten:** In terms of the membership of the council, one of the peak bodies that has a representative on the council is COTA ACT. I am not sure if Mr Manikis has got some more information.

**Mr Manikis:** And then generally individuals that are selected or appointed by the minister. Their term is coming up shortly, and they go for a two-year term.

**MS LAWDER:** They are individuals who might be from an organisation?

**Ms Whitten:** That is right.

**Ms Howson:** But they are not there in an organisational capacity necessarily. Our usual approach is to call for expressions of interest through general advertising for advisory councils. People nominate and are then selected on the basis of a range of criteria, most importantly, their capacity to access elements of that community that can either benefit from the exchange of information or provide the minister with a source of insight into the issues for that particular group that they represent.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Can I have a supplementary on that?

**THE CHAIR:** Indeed.

**MR DOSZPOT:** It is just a clarification. The annual report states:

Membership—the Council has a maximum of 12 representatives from various organisations and peak bodies representing older people in the ACT, including one COTA ACT—

which you have mentioned—

and one Community Services Directorate ex-officio member.

I would like some clarification as to the other 10 members. Are they there representing other peak bodies? If so, who are those peak bodies?

**Mr Rattenbury:** I think the answer is that probably the annual report could be better expressed, Mr Doszpot. They are not there in a formal organisational capacity, even though many of them do belong to organisations.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Should they be?

**Mr Rattenbury:** I do not think so. We are just going through the selection process now. I have been thinking about some of these questions, about getting the right mix. Often members of the committee are involved in a number of different organisations. You would know Chin Wong, for example.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Yes.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Think about the number of things that she is involved in. While she is not there for a specific organisation, obviously in having her on the council she brings all of the different perspectives she has and the things she is involved in. They are the kinds of people that tend to be on the committee.

**MR DOSZPOT:** We are supportive of the concept.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes, sure.

**MR DOSZPOT:** All we are trying to ascertain is whether we are actually getting a broad enough community sampling. All we are asking for is—if they are representing those peak bodies, could they be mentioned along with their names?

**Mr Manikis:** Could I just add to the minister's comments there. It is a competitive on-merit process. The criteria that applications from members of the public will be looking to address in that process would be demonstrated commitment to the advancement of older people, demonstrated knowledge of the interests and concerns of older people in the ACT community, ability to consult and represent a wide range of views of older citizens in the ACT, commitment to participate fully in council activities, and ability to contribute to council processes and consultation activities. With those sorts of criteria, we tend to get applications from people that have had quite a significant involvement with community organisations looking after seniors and/or in service settings to do with looking after older people. At the end of the day, the council comprises people that have quite a wide range or breadth of experience on ageing issues.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Mr Manikis, I think we are in agreement with it. Please either change the wording or add those other bits in.

**Mr Manikis:** Sure.

**Mr Rattenbury:** We will change the wording. It is a fair point. I think it probably is not quite well enough described in the annual report.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Not a major issue.

**Mr Rattenbury:** No.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Mr Chair, that was my supplementary.

**THE CHAIR:** I was just going to check to see if there were any further supplementary questions.

**MS BERRY:** Yes.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I have a substantive one.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, I realise that, Mr Doszpot.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I thought it was my turn for a substantive one, Mr Chair.

**THE CHAIR:** But I have supplementaries. Mr Doszpot, I have supplementary questions on the substantive question. I shall deal with those first and then we will come to you for your substantive question, which is the way we do things in this committee.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I see.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Berry.

**MS BERRY:** Just regarding the ministerial advisory council, on page 213, there is mention of a number of major issues addressed during 2012 and 2013. The one that I am particularly interested in is the importance of pet support for older people receiving aged care. I wondered whether there had been any action on that particular issue.

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

**Mr Manikis:** We will take that on notice.

**THE CHAIR:** No further supplementaries?

**MR DOSZPOT:** I have a supplementary on Ms Berry's supplementary.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Lawder?

**MS LAWDER:** If yours is relating directly to that—

**MR DOSZPOT:** No.

**MS LAWDER:** I was going to ask a similar question but on a different topic. I am interested in what steps the government may have taken to address the concerns raised by the council about the abuse of disabled parking permits.

**Ms Whitten:** My recollection is that the council did raise that issue. Because it does not relate to this portfolio, the council would have written to—

**Mr Rattenbury:** Justice and Community Safety has responsibility for that.

**MS LAWDER:** So there is a process where those concerns are passed on?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes. Again with my TAMS hat on, I have seen some of those discussions. It is looking at issues of enforcement, but also one of the key areas of concern is the availability and who can actually get the permits in the first place—making sure the right people are getting the permits. I think in the region of 12,000 or 15,000 permits have been issued in the ACT. There is some discussion around whether we are giving them to the right people as well. That has all gone off to Justice and Community Safety to follow up with.

**MS LAWDER:** And then you provide information back to the council as well?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** A supplementary?

**MR DOSZPOT:** That was going to be my supplementary as well, so I think that has been answered.

**THE CHAIR:** Now you may have your substantive question, Mr Doszpot.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Thank you very much, Dr Bourke. This refers back to one of the first questions that was asked early on about the Older Persons Assembly. Can I get some clarification on the membership of the Older Persons Assembly for October 2014—how the membership was arrived at and whether membership applications have closed now.

**Mr Rattenbury:** They have not even opened. In fact, it has not been started. The comment I made earlier which might have triggered this conversation was that, in inviting people to participate in the 2013 age-friendly cities conference, in the application process we said that we are looking for people who would be interested in participating in the assembly next year. When it comes to the assembly next year—we have not made a final decision on this—there will be an application process. It will be open. But clearly, one of the criteria will be that those people who have attended the conference will be looked on kindly, shall we say, in terms of having some continuity.

**MR DOSZPOT:** The numbers are locked in, are they not?

**Mr Rattenbury:** No. Last time we had around 70 people. It was constrained by the size of the Assembly chamber; that was the primary issue.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Sure.

**Mr Rattenbury:** We could think about changing venues, but I know that people

really valued coming to the Assembly last time, so in that sense I probably would not be inclined to change venues. We will see how the demand goes, I suppose. There is flexibility still.

**MR DOSZPOT:** My question is really along these lines. I thought it was a great initiative to have the assembly for older people. I would like to get some clarification on the selection process—how members are selected and the fact that there are pros and cons for sticking to essentially the same number as have been selected. It is good to have—

**Mr Rattenbury:** Do you mean the same numbers or the same individuals?

**MR DOSZPOT:** The same individuals.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I take your point that there is some preference given or whatever. But it also is quite healthy to have a bit of new blood coming to it as well. I guess there has got to be some rationale as to whether we select everyone that we want to be on there for the next five years or whether there are some people in the community who may have missed out in the first lot.

**Mr Rattenbury:** It is a fair point, Mr Doszpot, and one that I will take on board. We have not done a whole heap of work yet other than having that broad intent that it would be good to have a cohort of people come from one to the next. But your point around not excluding new people is a fair one.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I have had a number of inquiries from people who are very keen to nominate.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Already? Great.

**MR DOSZPOT:** That is why I was asking. I thought there were already some applications received by your department or that applications have been called for.

**Ms Whitten:** What we did last time in terms of the 2011 assembly was—because there was a motion of this Assembly about the composition of the Older Persons Assembly in terms of the distribution of people across different suburbs or regions of the territory, age groups, and the diversity of the group, we established a process where we advertised for applications or nominations and then we went through and, in a relatively scientific way, just worked through getting the right distribution of people reflecting the diversity of our community. That was how we selected people last time. In asking for applicants from the conference, as the minister has said, we did want to see who was interested in going to that conference and then taking that knowledge into the assembly. But it means that we can also go out again, as the minister has said.

**MR DOSZPOT:** There may be some misunderstanding amongst some of the people.

**Mr Rattenbury:** There might be. If you are talking to anybody, there will be an open process. We will be inviting people, but it will not be for a few months yet. It will be

well into the new year.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Thank you; that is good information.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Perhaps we can take on board that when we are starting out, we can let you know.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Thank you.

**Mr Rattenbury:** There might be some people you can specifically pass that on to.

**THE CHAIR:** We are going to take a break.

**Meeting suspended from 3.55 to 4.06 pm.**

**THE CHAIR:** We will restart. We will now go to Housing. Minister, do you want to make an opening statement or go straight to questions?

**Mr Rattenbury:** No, I am happy to go straight to questions.

**THE CHAIR:** I will kick off, minister. The report talks of the ongoing development of public housing more tailored to meet the needs of tenants, such as the Phillip intentional community for people with disabilities, as well as homes designed for older Canberrans. Can you talk us through that sort of stuff, please?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes, certainly. This came up earlier in the hearing today around meeting the housing needs of older people. As you have touched on, as the report identifies, there is a clear endeavour within Housing ACT to make the best use of our existing stock—so with people whose families have left, the empty nesters, essentially, to downsize them so that we can take advantage of those larger properties for families that need them now, and also for older people to be in the most suitable units for them. I refer to units that have adaptability for people with immobility issues and the like. That is a strong emphasis. We have seen in recent years, particularly with the federal stimulus money, a significant amount of that being put into the development of aged-persons units specifically. That is all part of putting people in the right type of accommodation within the housing spectrum.

**THE CHAIR:** You talked about moving tenants to more appropriate housing. How do you go about that process?

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** In terms of using the stimulus money that the minister was talking about, we advertised to existing tenants that we were building new, attractive two-bedroom units with good storage and parking spaces. We essentially advertised for those people who were interested to come and find out about the new units and then take up an offer if they wanted to downsize. So it was very much an encouragement. We talked about where the units were located, and we were working with them to, where we could, make sure that where they wanted to stay in the community that they were in, we were able to house them in their local community. Many of our tenants took it up because it was a new, attractive option and was very much around encouraging those who wanted to take it up to participate. Did you want



to say anything, Mr Collett?

**Mr Collett:** The designs built on our previous history and the feedback we got about the tenant reaction to our former aged-persons units, which tended to be small with insecure outdoor areas and without dedicated car parking. But we also used the requirements of the commonwealth for minimum six-star energy rating as a leverage point for going further with the orientation and the fenestration of the units—use of tiled floors to trap the sun and energy-efficient fittings, in terms of both water consumption and electricity consumption, with respect to the utility costs for older people, and making sure that the homes were not only suitable for them in immediate terms but also long-term viable accommodation as they aged in place.

**THE CHAIR:** What sort of design features would be included to enable that long-term viability around mobility?

**Mr Collett:** Bronwen has already spoken about the adaptability of the units. We ensured that all of the units could be made wheelchair accessible should the need arise, with reinforced fixing points in wet areas for hoists, more generous passageways, the use of tiled floors for ease of cleaning and also to act as heat sinks in the winter, the orientation of the units and the use of large glass areas facing north to trap the sun in the winter. Looking at security, secure rear yards and defined front yards, and undercover car parking with direct access from the garage into the units were characteristics of the accommodation that we provided.

**THE CHAIR:** What about the kitchen fit-out? Are there any special features there?

**Mr Collett:** That was a key area for wheelchair accessibility, so we made the cupboards under the sinks removable and the bench height adjustable as a retrofit. The wet areas are the key areas for us to focus on in terms of designing in adaptability.

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** And single level, so from the car parking into the unit and also into shower recesses, everything is at one level and there are no steps.

**THE CHAIR:** What has been the latest take-up of these units, from offers to acceptance?

**Mr Collett:** The rate of take-up?

**THE CHAIR:** You asked a number of people to show their indication. What percentage of those people who were asked actually wanted one? In other words, how many people wanted to move on from where they are now?

**Mr Collett:** The answer, Dr Bourke, is that the program was oversubscribed and the most frequent complaint we got was that people were not offered a unit after they had expressed interest. Ms Overton-Clarke referred to the information sessions that we had. We took applications based on those information sessions, and then processed them on a first come, first served basis against their tenancy history and their needs and circumstances.

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** We were the only jurisdiction that took such a proactive

approach to homelessness. As you would recall, the nation building stimulus was about housing those who were primary homeless. But what we argued to the commonwealth was that we were far better off actually taking existing tenants and locating them in new houses and being able to use the opportunity to downsize and then, as a secondary process, housing people who were homeless. The commonwealth thought that was a really good way of addressing two issues—older people who were interested in going from larger homes to smaller homes, and also directly housing homeless people.

**THE CHAIR:** Many of these older people are single. Could you explain for us why two-bedroom accommodation is important for that demographic?

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** It can be for a range of reasons, either a carer or a grandchild. A lot of our research and study show that one-bedroom units are not necessarily ideal for older people. They like to have a study or, as I said, a room for a grandchild or a carer. So two-bedroom units tend to be an ideal demographic for us.

**THE CHAIR:** What sort of feedback have you had from tenants after they have been in these units for a while?

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** I will ask Mr Collett if we have got data on moving, but, essentially, people are very happy and comfortable in the units that they are in. There were some initial maintenance issues from builders and so forth around a few of the units, but we have had very good feedback from the tenants. As I said they are very pleased to be there. I do not think we have had much turnover—if, in fact, any at all.

**Mr Collett:** There has been a modest turnover, but certainly none that was based on dissatisfaction with the accommodation that was provided. The congregate living is attractive to older people so that they are able to reinforce friendship groups that existed in the geographic area. The spread over the seven sites that we have got across the metropolitan area means that we are able to focus on people's existing location and offer them accommodation which is linked to their friendship groups, their support facilities and retailing outlets that they know and are familiar with. So that has been successful.

I think an answer was given in the earlier session on ageing around the community facilities and the community space that was provided. That has been quite successful and there has been a reasonable take-up of the units that have been provided in community facilities in the larger complexes. The communal spaces that have been provided for community gardens and landscaping have formed another focal point for people who are interested in gardening. It is a way of the singles that you described making contact with couples and others in the complex. So there is a bit of a social scene established in most of the complexes.

**THE CHAIR:** Everybody learns something when they do something. What have you learned from this process that you might do differently in the future, given the opportunity?

**Mr Collett:** Our large glass areas meant that there was not an opportunity to open the windows when it was raining to get ventilation. I am going to quite a specific point,

but that was one of the key lessons. We retrofitted sun shades or weather breaks over the top of some of the larger glass areas in order to stop the weather blowing in in the event of summer rains. We have still got a bit of work to do with our colleagues in Territory and Municipal Services about garbage collection, around the hoppers. There are always things to learn, as you say, but we are getting down into the quite low level of detail. We got the basic designs pretty much right, and we are looking for other opportunities to build more of that accommodation.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Do you have a substantive question, Ms Berry?

**MS BERRY:** Yes, I have a question regarding the project independence. What is that and where is it up to?

**Ms Howson:** Project independence is one of our exemplars of innovative housing solutions. Our expectation is that there will be a growing demand for different styles of accommodation, particularly for people with a disability. This particular project is an exemplar in as much as it is shaping up to be a partnership with the private sector as well as government, in being able to formulate a governance model that would allow people with a disability, particularly younger adults, to come into a form of accommodation that would allow them to grow some equity in the purchase of their accommodation and also in its design accommodate their specific needs for support at that particular stage of life.

We are still working through with our private sector partners how all that would work, but while that is being bedded down we have worked quite consistently on the design of a model that would, as I say, allow young people with a disability to live together and be able to access the support needs that they have and maximise their independence as young adults.

**MS BERRY:** Are there other models like this? Why was this one selected?

**Ms Howson:** In terms of the physical design, you could say that there are certainly other models similar to this. We have been learning from other types, like the Ross Walker Lodge, for example—those types of congregate settings where people with a disability might come together. In terms of the physical design, we are taking learnings for those sorts of models and building them into our thinking around this one.

**MS LAWDER:** Page 99 of the report talks about evictions. There were 19 for breach of tenancy. Can you tell us about the nature of some of the breaches and what happens to those tenants after they are evicted? Are they able to move back to a public housing property in the future? How long might that period be and what would they have to do before they are allowed back?

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** The evictions have been primarily for debt. We make sure that, as we evict tenants, they are supported in the process. Certainly, in terms of being able to help them in the future to sustain a tenancy again, we work with them to ensure that our community partners work alongside them. We have a number of mechanisms in terms of re-engaging with former tenants to help them again in their tenancies and fixed-term tenancies is one of those mechanisms.

Particularly if there are children involved, we make sure that there are strong supports on their eviction. As I said, often that involves our community partners, not just supported accommodation in the homelessness sector but also financial counselling and so forth. So we are acutely aware that eviction is the last resort, and we do not evict lightly. We can certainly talk about what we do before we get to that final stage, because what we are doing is making sure that we intervene earlier in the process around debt so that our tenants do not get into the situation where they accumulate a lot of debt. I might ask Mr Duggan to talk about the debt project that we are currently working on.

**Mr Duggan:** One of the particular issues, as you have pointed out, is that where there has been a breach and eviction the majority would be around debt. We do carry a proportion of debt. We started to examine that and tried to bring forward a more assertive response in that area. Part of the project that we have been mapping out has been to examine the whole age cohort, the location and the length of tenancy of folks who were getting themselves into debt. Coupled with that, we did a fairly substantial literature review of what works. We have been looking at the evidence base quite broadly both nationally and internationally about what programs work in this space so we can work with people.

We have looked at three levels of intervention that we will build our principles around. One will be proactive early engagement, as Ms Overton-Clarke has said. We are now tracking when people start to get over four to six weeks of debt in arrears. We are going to be producing a more proactive response—not simply a letter advising the person that they are in debt, but really trying to engage the person very early and have a discussion about what exactly is happening, the family circumstances, why is this changing and what we can do in this space.

We are also being more proactive around how we manage our breaches, because there is a real dilemma between trying to support and deal with a breach simultaneously. We are doing a lot of work in that area to come up with a process that is equitable and manageable and that can be engaged very quickly. Unfortunately, when it goes into the remedial area, with some of the fixed-term tenancies, for example, they are people who have come back into the system. We have put them on fixed-term tenancies. There is a very strong mutual obligation with a fixed-term tenancy—for example, “You must have a direct debit. We will review you each month and we will work with you.” Presently we have eight people, eight families, on a fixed-term tenancy, all because of debt. One of them has already moved forward now that we are actually engaging them and entering into a new standard tenancy agreement with them.

The literature review is telling us that direct debit is the best process to engage at the commencement of tenancies, so we are doing a lot of work in that space. Financial literacy is a huge issue with our clients, so we are looking at some educational programs in that area and how we work with people. Also, we have to think about a real incentive scheme to keep them paying their rent. We have to try to engage people in the process far quicker, be more engaged and deal more with their issues—and, of course, there is acknowledgement.

**MS LAWDER:** A supplementary on that?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**MS LAWDER:** I guess my view would be that perhaps stepping two weeks into arrears would be better than four to six weeks. I know there is an administrative burden associated with that. I am also interested in whether you have what might be described as an administratively applied debt in some cases. For example, a woman might leave suddenly because of a threat of domestic violence and then accrue some sort of debt, pop up somewhere else and have this debt. What might you do in those instances? Do you waive those debts? Do you come to some arrangement?

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** That is exactly what we do, particularly around domestic violence. We review every case. There are different components. There is tenant-responsible maintenance. There is a whole suite of, as you say, administrative areas where people can be charged. We ensure that where there are mitigating circumstances, such as domestic violence, we review every case to make sure that we waive those elements.

**THE CHAIR:** Just a supplementary there. With regard to the answer before about the timing of intervention, whether it be two or six weeks, do you have any data in front of you that would tell us what proportion of debt goes from two to six weeks? Is it 100 per cent or two per cent?

**Mr Duggan:** Obviously I do not have it with me, Dr Bourke, but we have looked at when debt was being accrued, how quickly and in which age cohorts. Quite a number of people will not have had a debt process for a number of years and then something happens. We are very aware of life's circumstances in those spaces. We look very much at debt accrual with our younger tenancies and how we work in that area with those folks. So we do have a good feel of it.

The only thing we have decided to do is change some of our allocation processes. We will engage people from application to allocation and the 90-day period that follows. We are changing a number of our processes so we can work with people when they receive a tenancy and support them during that initial period.

We also have to bring our financial service supports up-front. Some of the assessments we are doing now through our multi-disciplinary panel are to identify the issues and then build a support package immediately through allocation. We are also very heavily engaged with the child and family centres around this process. A lot of our families are quite vulnerable, and we are linking in with them pre the person getting their allocation. We are talking to them about: we have an application, the people are vulnerable, they have made an application for public housing property, can we talk to the people and talk to the child and family centres or the community sector and build some support packages which we think will moderate people getting into difficulties as the tenancy continues?

**MS LAWDER:** A supplementary, chair?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**MS LAWDER:** Earlier I think you mentioned looking at incentives. I am interested in what kind of analysis you might have done on that. On the face of it at least it would appear that giving a little bit of a rebate or something would be a lot more efficient than having to go through all of the arrears, debt collection and all of those types of things.

**Mr Duggan:** We have not developed a response to that but, from the incentives perspective and our literature review, we have seen a number of national and international examples where there was an incentive for people who were maintaining their tenancy. We thought we could not have a process of dealing with one just issue. We need to encourage people to maintain that. I do not have that advice to date, but we are actually in that space. The most recent one, which we received just today, was from a service in Bolton which talked about incentivisation, getting repairs done to property and the levels of support. That is another piece of this work that we will be concentrating on. Our main concentration at the moment is really on direct debit, financial literacy and a more elongated process that more encapsulates that.

**MS BERRY:** When you say “direct debit”, is it centrepay?

**Mr Duggan:** Yes. What the evidence tells us is that if people direct debit at the commencement—if that starts from the immediacy of the tenancy—from either Centrelink or their bank, they tend to be able to manage their tenancy easier. But we also have a cohort of people who have never really been able to manage their finances. There is a lot of evidence telling us that we have to talk to people about financial literacy: how do you manage a budget; how do you take into account the 12-month period bills coming in et cetera? We also have a piece of work to do in that space.

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** I guess I would like to keep it in perspective. We do have 80 per cent of people who are in debt on a repayment plan. We are talking about a very small proportion of tenants. We have recognised, as Frank is alluding to, that we need to change the way that we deliver our services to make sure that we have much earlier intervention one on one with those who are in greatest need. We are changing the way that we deliver our housing manager service to make sure we have a differentiated model so we can focus on those who are most in need.

**THE CHAIR:** As there are no supplementaries, I will ask a substantive question. Minister, can you update us on where we are at with Common Ground, please?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes, I can. We are making very good progress on Common Ground. I am thinking about which bits of the work to let you know about. From a community point of view, we have obviously had excellent support from the Common Ground board, the community organisation who have very much driven this project in the ACT. They have provided a lot of support and input from a community point of view. We have identified sites in Gungahlin. There have been a number of sessions now with the Gungahlin Community Council to talk about the project and to talk about the possible sites.

I think it would be fair to say that the community has been very supportive. It goes to our earlier conversation about perceptions of crime, being a facility for those coming out of homelessness. We wanted to make sure the community was very aware of what

the project was and the intent behind it so that we did not get into a space of people perhaps fearing the facility. To be absolutely fair and quite clear about it, the community has been very supportive.

I have managed, in the course of other duties that I have been doing, to visit two of the other common grounds in Australia. Most recently I went to the one in Sydney. Those opportunities have been very good because they are common grounds that have been open for a while. Again, alluding to our earlier conversation, they have learnt some things they would have done differently and we have been able to incorporate that into our design thinking. One of the key lessons was to make sure that prospective service providers are involved in the design of the facility. One of the things that we have done is to go to tender for the service providers so that as we are designing the Common Ground they can be involved in that so we get that right.

That is all the process stuff that has been going on. In terms of the physical works, we are working to a completion date of December 2014. I am expecting the first work to begin within the next month or so on the site.

**THE CHAIR:** Good.

**Mr Rattenbury:** So all of that adds up to it is going extremely well. The Community Services Directorate, or Housing, has been very focused on this and has really made sure it has stuck to a good time line. I am very pleased about that.

**THE CHAIR:** How many units in the complex?

**Mr Rattenbury:** There will be 20 units for the formerly homeless and 20 affordable housing units. I am not sure if you are aware of the model, but it is that half-and-half model, so that those who are coming out of homelessness have as their peers, their neighbours, people who are working and have their lives more regular in that sense. There is also, I guess, a sharing of that experience and some role models in that environment. The ACT government is in partnership with Argyle Housing for those 20 affordable housing units, and they will be funded through the national rental affordability scheme. That partly goes to the time line because, having received those commonwealth NRAS credits, it puts a particular time line on the project, which has very much focused our minds as well.

**THE CHAIR:** Forty units for Canberra—how does that compare per capita with other capital cities?

**Ms Howson:** We do not have that data.

**Mr Collett:** Given the ACT's very small size in comparison to other jurisdictions, with 1.6 per cent of the Australian population, we will likely have one of the highest concentrations of common ground beds per head of population of any of the jurisdictions. We have come to this after a number of the other jurisdictions. The minister referred to the benefit of being able to look at common ground facilities in those other jurisdictions. After we make a start on ours, the Northern Territory will be the only jurisdiction that does not have a common ground.

Some of the common grounds are larger, and that will be more typical of the model—up to 120 units in Melbourne—and a number of the jurisdictions have two common ground developments. Some are even going for a third. But the total would barely be five times as much as our 40. And, of course, their populations are much more than five times our size.

**THE CHAIR:** Is there room at the current site for future expansion?

**Mr Collett:** Yes, we have made sure that we can expand the model. Common Ground were quite enthusiastic about maximising the size of Common Ground. There are a number of advantages in terms of amortising some of the fixed costs over a large population. The start-up of Common Ground and moving people from primary homelessness into stable accommodation is a significant challenge and will take some considerable time. We took the approach that we should start modestly and leave the potential to grow. We have made sure that we can fit another 20 units, or possibly more, on the site and share the community facilities, the entrance and the security provisions that we put in place for the first stage.

**THE CHAIR:** Could you tell us a little bit more about those security provisions?

**Mr Collett:** I guess one of the maxims of common ground is safe, secure accommodation for people who have not been safe. People who are coming out of primary homelessness suffer a significant number of privations as well as often being exposed to trauma early in their lives, mental or drug and alcohol problems. One of the characteristics they have is not having any security at all. So they cannot have possessions; they cannot keep things safe. A safe environment is very important.

The common ground model is based on a 24/7 concierge service. The model comes out of New York and that is pretty much the norm in that state. Most of the common grounds that have been built in Australia have that characteristic of 24/7 security. But, of course, giving people choices around who they contact in their living environment is another important change from primary homelessness. We will be using security cards to effect entrance to individual floors, as well individual units, to try to make sure that some of the vulnerabilities, the victimisation or the encouragement to return to former ways and the pressure that can be brought on people who are vulnerable can be managed within a secure complex.

**THE CHAIR:** Apart from the security, what other design features would be different to, say, another 40-unit development around town?

**Mr Collett:** I am sorry, I just missed the question.

**THE CHAIR:** Apart from the security features that you have already talked about, what design features within this building would be different, as a result of what you are trying to achieve there, from what you might expect in another 40-unit complex in Canberra?

**Mr Collett:** What is characteristic of common ground accommodation as opposed to normal residential accommodation?



**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr Collett:** I think one of the key things is providing a sense of non-institutional appearance. We have been able to do that by providing natural light at the point at which the lifts exit onto each of the floors. We have been able to develop corridors that have a change in alignment so you do not stare down a gun barrel of a corridor. We have been able to provide common areas at the end of those corridors. We have been able to provide a recess and a portico to the front doors to the units to individualise them. And we have been able to make provision for cross-ventilation in the units by opening up the access ways to natural air movement and having security screens as well as solid doors for the openings of the units themselves.

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** As well, the other main feature about common ground accommodation as opposed to just a block of units is that the common facilities on the ground floor are very much geared towards assisting outside partners to come in and offer services—to all clients, but particularly those who are more vulnerable. We have made sure that, from the start, we have got Medicare Local as one of our committee members; we are working closely with them to identify health needs, and it will also be adult education needs, so that the spaces on the ground floor are able to accommodate those outside partners who can work closely with the service provider into the future to help those clients and tenants get more involved in external activities that might then be able to lead them into other sorts of activities later on.

**THE CHAIR:** So those partner NGOs will actually be tenancing rooms or spaces?

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** Yes, that is right. I am not sure if they will be tenancing them, because we have not actually worked out the arrangements. David is going into quite a lot of the detail, but at the moment, of course, we are starting down the architectural route, so we have purposely made the plans not yet concrete in terms of those communal areas. That is the work that we are doing in the next few months.

**Ms Howson:** A number of the common grounds in other jurisdictions are aspiring to have, for example, bulk-bill medical facilities or businesses take up some of their commercial space so that they have that facility available on site for not only the tenants in the building but also the local community. The common ground in Sydney had a gymnasium; it opened the gymnasium to tenants that lived around the common ground. Again, there are benefits around building relationship capital within the community and demystifying any of the fears the community might have around the tenants in that particular building, but also giving them some benefits in terms of access to facilities that are right on their doorstep. That is notwithstanding the fact that I am not sure they will be built into ours, but that is the theme, essentially.

**Mr Collett:** Another example is the common ground in Adelaide, which runs a five-day-a-week dental service for common ground residents and for others in the vicinity. That is an arrangement they have been able to make with the Adelaide university school of dentistry. It is those links with not only NGOs but education institutions and local practices that will be important.

**THE CHAIR:** How much commercial space will you have on the ground floor?

**Mr Collett:** It will not be purely commercial space. And, as Natalie indicated, with the smaller facility, much of it will be multipurpose. There will be a range of rooms that could be used as typically medical or dental consulting rooms and could be fitted out. There will be other spaces that will be more universal. Most of the common grounds have a high demand for an art space and for an IT room, so we have earmarked an area that could be used for that particularly.

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** Cooking classes.

**Mr Collett:** Yes. This is an area where Common Ground ACT are expected to have, and have indicated, a strong desire to be involved in making those links with the community. They have been involved with us in the presentations that we have made to the Gungahlin Community Council. We have touched not only on the design and the appearance of the building, but also on the nature of the programs and what it might mean to the community in terms of getting involved in an important initiative.

**THE CHAIR:** Are you going to have a wi-fi network?

**Ms Howson:** We will take that into account.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Certainly the Sydney common ground, for example, has an IT lab with six or eight computers. It is that same thing: people who have been in a homelessness situation do not have that capability, have not had access to regular internet. There has been a high demand for that. They probably do not have their own iPads, so it might be that a computer lab is a better outcome.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay.

**MS BERRY:** I have a supplementary question.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**MS BERRY:** It might not be able to be answered yet, given that it is not even built yet. It is regarding the concierge-type service and whether that would be a person employed by a co-op kind of arrangement or whether that would be contracted out.

**Mr Collett:** We will need to do more work on that. We have identified that as one of the key areas that we will need to look at in terms of the ongoing support costs. We have been quite up-front with Common Ground ACT and with both the tenancy and building manager and the support provider that the minister talked about engaging earlier. Like the other issues that Bronwen mentioned, that will be work for the next six months while we are getting started on the building.

**Mr Rattenbury:** The point to be clear about there, though, is that it is a concierge service, not a security service.

**MS BERRY:** Yes; that is the reason I asked the question. If you do not want it to be like an institutionalised setting, you do not want a security officer.

**Mr Rattenbury:** No. And again, that has been very clearly pointed out to us by other

common grounds around the country. They do not have security staff. Their staff are trained to deal with difficult circumstances, but there is not that formal security. They have found that very important for creating the right environment and culture.

**THE CHAIR:** Supplementaries? No? Substantive question, Ms Berry?

**MS BERRY:** My question is about how many houses were acquired from existing properties and how many were built in the reporting period.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes.

**MS BERRY:** How many houses were acquired? How many were acquired from existing properties?

**Mr Rattenbury:** You mean spot market purchases?

**MS BERRY:** Yes. And how many were newly built?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Bear with us for a moment; we will just find you an answer on that.

**Mr Collett:** I will have to take the question on notice. I apologise.

**MS BERRY:** That is okay.

**Mr Collett:** I believe that we purchased only a very small number and would have done so only in response to particular needs of individual clients on our priority waiting list who we were having difficulty accommodating. I am getting some advice here. We budgeted on purchasing 12 units in the reporting period 2012-13 and in fact purchased 10 units in 2012-14.

**MS BERRY:** Were they existing properties or were they built—new homes?

**Mr Collett:** They would be purchases of an existing property. Building units would be listed under the construction numbers. In the period, we constructed 117 units. So 117 were built and 10 were purchased.

**MS BERRY:** Do you have a figure for how that compares with previous years?

**Mr Collett:** I do not have that to hand. We will have to take that on notice and track that. I could speak generally, though.

**MS BERRY:** Yes.

**Mr Collett:** We have seen a decline in the number of spot purchases and an increase in the number of constructed properties that we are building. We talked previously about the success of our older persons initiatives under the stimulus package. The non-older persons units that we constructed under the stimulus package were similarly successful.

One of the challenges for spot purchasing properties is that we are not always sure of

the adequacy of the construction. There have been a number of properties that we have purchased where, notwithstanding that the property inspection had been carried out, we have later found out that there have been construction problems or difficulties that we have had to address. Also, amongst the older or middle-aged properties that are available on the market, the orientation, the insulation and the overall solar performance of those properties are poor, and often the facilities, in terms of the fixtures and fittings, and the heating, are non-standard.

We also have an active program which we call designing out maintenance where we monitor and record the areas in which we spend the most on maintenance, and we instruct our designers and architects to avoid those aspects of new properties. We have pretty much cut out the use of timber in the external fabric of our buildings. We have also made a number of changes to the internal construction detailing, again to address that need. So we use impact-resistant plasterboard throughout; we use solid-core doors with three hinges. And there are a number of other design features that look at the areas where we have the most maintenance problems.

We feel that we get much better value from our construction program than we do from spot purchasing, so we have reinforced the number of constructions and scaled back the number of purchases that we make.

**MS BERRY:** Page 108 of the report talks about the number of houses that were purchased. I am particularly interested in the number of houses that are purchased with four or more bedrooms, either already-built or constructed homes. Are you finding that there is a greater need for homes with more bedrooms rather than a single tenant situation?

**Mr Collett:** Yes. We have in our portfolio a smaller number of four-bedroom houses. Our portfolio is skewed towards three-bedroom stand-alone housing. Our applicants show the same general demographic trends as the rest of the community, so many of our households are smaller. But at the other end of the scale we have a number of larger properties. Finding a block that is suitable for the construction of a larger property is often a challenge for us. Some of those larger families also need access to services, whether it is medical services or support, or have particular accommodation needs. Many of those four-bedroom houses will have been purchased with specific tenants in mind from our priority waiting list who have waited for a long period of time because of the lack of four-bedroom houses in our construction program.

**MS BERRY:** On your priority list, when you have people who have reached that point on the scale where they are urgently in need of housing and you need to go out and purchase one, how do you do that? How do you find the house?

**Mr Collett:** We have a panel of real estate agents that we use—in the main, for our disposal program, so they would be taking properties to market through an auction process to dispose of stock which falls outside our public housing asset management strategy. But we would also use them for giving us intelligence about the market and finding properties, as well as our own staff looking on allhomes. The changes that have been made through having allhomes make it relatively simple to do searches and access the properties. So our staff can do that, and they do that when necessary.

**Mr Rattenbury:** It sounds like a fun part of the job—searching allhomes!

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** Ms Berry, as we pointed out earlier with that big construction of 83 two-bedroom properties, it is both the large number of bedrooms and also the two bedrooms which is really where the demand is. As Mr Collett said, the quantity of stock we have is in the middle. So when we construct or buy, it is at either end of that.

**Mr Collett:** I can answer the previous question about the trend lines, albeit over a fairly small range. In 2010-11 we purchased 39 units; in 2011-12, 19; in 2012-13, 10; and in 2013-14 we have budgeted for 17. So it is kicking up a bit as we address some of those needs. You can see the overall trend that I described, albeit over a short period of time.

**MS LAWDER:** I have a question relating to page 108 and the response to climate change. In this reporting period Housing ACT spent about \$3.9 million on energy efficiency improvements. Can you tell me what is the estimated energy cost saving as a result of these improvements and how long will it take to offset the cost of the improvements?

**Mr Collett:** We have been modelling that work and we have been doing some post-modification evaluations to get a better handle on that. It is a fairly comprehensive set of data, so I will take that on notice and make that paper available to you, through the minister.

**MS LAWDER:** Thank you.

**MS BERRY:** I ask a supplementary to that question about energy standards. Are the same energy standards—I think you touched on this earlier—applied to houses bought as we apply to ones built by Housing ACT or purchased by Housing ACT—new ones?

**Mr Collett:** No, we are not able to do that, given the other requirements of finding accommodation, in terms of location, configuration and the number of bedrooms suitable for a particular tenant. There simply are not that many houses, particularly in the 10 to 20 years old range, that have got the energy standards that we would require of our new construction. We have a standard of three star for energy rating for properties we purchase, and we would make a decision on a property-by-property basis to bring the insulation, in particular, up to as high a standard as we reasonably could.

**MS LAWDER:** I have a financial question from volume 2, page 156. It looks like your actual expenditure and your own-source revenue were both above budget last year, but your budget for the coming year is similar to the budget for last year. I wondered why the budget has not increased or whether there are specific reasons this year why you went above budget.

**Mr Hubbard:** That is a good question. As you alluded to, it is related to a couple of one-offs. It might be worth turning to the operating statement, which will give you a better idea as to how the numbers move around. One thing you do notice when you look at—

**Mr Rattenbury:** What is the page number?

**Mr Hubbard:** The page number is 173 of the same volume. One of the things that characterises Housing ACT's operating statement is that there is a big consistency that goes from one year to the next, and it is really related to the fact that the rent revenues, which are the user charges on that operating statement, are pretty consistent from one year to the next. It is influenced by CPI, and that is the user charges showing at about \$88 million. Where there is a bit of a difference is in the other revenue, and what you see there is an increase of about \$4 million. The main things that have changed there are insurance recoveries, some remedial work that was done in Narrabundah caravan park and some recoveries from tenants. So that moved that up by about \$4 million.

When you go down into the expenses side, again you see that there are pretty consistent numbers going from one year to the next for employee expenses and super. Supplies and services are largely the same. The big difference, and probably the most unique event that happened in housing during that period, is in the grants and purchased services area. That shows about a \$15 million increase from the previous year's, from the original budget. The difference there was the granting of 53 properties to a community housing organisation. That really describes most of the movements that are in the financials which make it stand out.

**THE CHAIR:** Which community housing organisation was that?

**Ms Overton-Clarke:** That was Argyle, so it was under the nation building project.

**THE CHAIR:** There being no further questions and it being almost 5 o'clock, we will draw to a close. Before we adjourn I would like to remind committee 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 ministers to respond within 10 working days of the receipt of those questions. Answers to questions taken on notice are to be provided five 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 for today is adjourned.

**The committee adjourned at 4.59 pm.**