



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL
TERRITORY**

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2022-2023

(Reference: [Inquiry into Appropriation Bill 2022-2023 and Appropriation
\(Office of the Legislative Assembly\) Bill 2022-2023](#))

Members:

**MR J MILLIGAN (Chair)
MR A BRADDOCK (Deputy Chair)
DR M PATERSON**

PROOF TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

THURSDAY, 25 AUGUST 2022

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**Secretary to the committee:
Dr David Monk (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.

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 9 am.

Appearances:

Steel, Mr Chris, Minister for Skills, Minister for Transport and City Services and Special Minister of State

Transport Canberra and City Services

Corrigan, Mr Jim, Deputy Director-General, City Services

Marshall, Mr Ken, Executive Branch Manager, City Operations

Smith, Mr Jeremy, Executive Branch Manager, Infrastructure Delivery and Waste

McHugh, Mr Ben, Deputy Director-General, Transport Canberra and Business Services

Sturman, Ms Judith, Executive Branch Manager, Transport Canberra

Major Projects Canberra

Edghill, Mr, Duncan, Chief Projects Officer

THE CHAIR: I declare open today's hearing. Welcome to day 5 of the public hearings of the Select Committee on Estimates 2022-2023. In the proceedings today, we will examine the expenditure proposals and revenue estimates for the Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate, Major Projects Canberra, Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate, the Community Services Directorate, and the Education Directorate.

The committee wishes to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet, the Ngunnawal people. The committee wishes to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region. We would also like to acknowledge and welcome other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today's event.

Please be aware that the proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live.

When taking a question on notice, it would be useful if witnesses could use the words, "I will take that as a question taken on notice." This will help the committee and witnesses to confirm questions taken on notice from the transcript.

In the first session we will hear from the Minister for Transport and City Services, Mr Chris Steel. We welcome Mr Chris Steel and officials. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to that privilege statement. When you speak, can you confirm that you understand and agree to the privilege implications of that statement?

As we are not having opening statements, we will go straight to questions. I will kick that off. Minister, I would like to discuss mowing. It has been a hot topic for quite some time in the community, right across the ACT. In the budget there is an initiative titled "More mowing for Canberra", based upon an offset, which is \$399,000 which

has been allocated for 2022-23. Can you elaborate on why this money was not spent?

Mr Steel: We have provided new money for mowing in Canberra, recognising that it has been a wet couple of years. That has meant very strong and vigorous grass growth, particularly in the warmer months of the year. Of course, it is more difficult to mow when it is wet. It means more passes and more cuts. Sometimes, when it is so wet, it is impossible to mow. We want to be more responsive to the community, and that is why we are looking at trialling a new approach to mowing, with an additional team. I will hand over to Transport Canberra and City Services officials to talk a little bit about what that will mean and what the trial will be doing over the next 12 months.

Mr Corrigan: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. With our mowing program, there are 70-odd mowers that run across the whole territory, and we try and do four to five passes. Last year we did six, to keep the grass under control. The minister mentioned the wet weather and the growth when that occurred.

With this extra initiative, the mowers, obviously, are fairly large, and it is those harder-to-get-at places that we want to target. People might notice when we do go through and mow certain areas around the urban parts of Canberra, depending on what infrastructure is there—the location of trees, other assets and things—that the mowers cannot get to all of those areas. We want to get in and get that amenity addressed, so we get more of the stuff cut. We might use brush cutters and the like to do that.

We also want to trial something else. Sometimes you get certain growth occurring, for whatever reason, and it is a particular issue regarding the amenity for part of the community. If we need to, we can redirect some resources from time to time to address those hard-to-get-at places or where the growth keeps occurring, for whatever reason.

THE CHAIR: You mentioned that in wet weather you cannot send those big mowers out, but can't you still send personnel out on foot with whipper snippers, or anything else, to at least do some tidying up, particularly on verges, around trees and in other areas?

Mr Corrigan: That does occur as well, when we cannot get the mowers out. Even with the brush cutters, we have to be a bit careful, because we want to do it in a programmed manner, so that we can get the most efficiency out of the resources we have, and so that we can deploy. When the mowers cannot go out, there is plenty of activity; our workers can do a number of things. A lot of litter picking occurs, ongoing cleaning and things like that.

THE CHAIR: I note that there is only one-off funding allocated in the budget for the more mowing for Canberra initiative, and no ongoing funding. Why is this the case? Don't you think that there needs to be more certainty provided for these essential services going forward?

Mr Steel: We do have ongoing funding for mowing, but this pilot is running over a year, and it is a new way of working. We want to evaluate how that pilot has gone over the year—whether it has made a difference and whether we need to take a

different approach in terms of future funding.

THE CHAIR: Given that there is potential for the continuation of wet weather, what is your approach to ensure that you keep on top of this issue—not just continue to blame the wet weather but to get out there and do what you can to keep it under control?

Mr Steel: We get forecasts from the Bureau of Meteorology somewhat ahead of time. Certainly, I do not think they go much past a year, in terms of their forecasting. In terms of surge mowing capacity, on a year-by-year basis we will provide more funding, depending on how wet it is. We could be in drought in two years time; we do not know. Obviously, we will respond to the circumstances and conditions that we have at the time. If we need to provide more funding for that, we will look at that. Of course, we use forecasting from the BOM to inform the program.

MS LAWDER: Could I start by asking a clarifying question? Is the additional funding for more mowing for Canberra solely for personnel or is it also for machines? What is the break-up of that funding?

Mr Corrigan: It is primarily resourcing people, but we look at all of our equipment—brush cutters and the like. We will also look at our vehicles. It is a pilot, and I mentioned programming before. It is important that we get the programming right on this. We cannot have people at our depots going off all over the place; we have to program as much as possible to get the most efficiency out of it. We will look at the pilot—it is mainly resources, extra people—but we will look at any additional equipment we may need to make that work, such as an additional truck, vehicle or something like that.

MS LAWDER: If you look back over the last 20 or so years, every year, except drought years, there are complaints about mowing. Last year, with the La Nina effect, Minister, you seemed to imply time after time that it was simply because it was too wet to mow; yet this year we are going to trial having more resources, but we have another La Nina predicted. Last year, was it because it was too wet, was it because we did not have enough resources, or was it a combination? You cannot have it both ways.

Mr Steel: We provided surge funding for mowing in each of the last two financial years. In this budget we are investing even more, recognising that it is wet. I have never said that we could not mow on every single day because it was too wet to mow. There are certain days when it is particularly wet where it is difficult to mow from a safety point of view. But there is absolutely a need for further resources during those wet periods, and that is what we are recognising in the budget, so that we can get out on the days when it is possible to mow and get on top of that.

It requires more intensive use of the resources—more passes and more cuts per pass. That is why further resources are required. We will, of course, look at that on a yearly basis. We will see whether this pilot, the model that has been deployed in the pilot, is a good one to take forward before we invest further resources in it.

MS LAWDER: Minister, is it that each year we are adding a little bit more green

space that needs to be mowed near parks and playgrounds, or does it mean that what was previously roadside verge, for example, that may have been slashed, is reduced but made up in other more developed areas? How is the amount of area to be mown trending over time?

Mr Steel: There will be more areas in new suburbs that are handed back to the ACT government, and Transport Canberra City Services will have to manage those areas. We will look at further increases to Transport Canberra City Services whole budget to account for that. I will hand over to the team to talk a little bit about how that works.

Mr Corrigan: For the new areas we do receive some growth funding for all the services we need to provide—so not just mowing and looking at the urban open spaces, the parks and things; there are the roads and all our infrastructure that goes with it—lights and all those sorts of things—which all need maintenance. We do receive growth funding, and that is how we account for that.

We obviously keep a close eye on it. Going back to earlier questions around the mowing, we do get some complaints. It can be a bit of a sticky situation, but it has to be remembered that it is not just the mowing; it is also the amenity of the parks and things, there is the verge mowing for the main roads and also our sports ovals. So the complaints we get when they do come is normally amenity stuff. The sports grounds side is going well. With our roads, we focus on safety—and that is the other thing that the minister mentioned before. We always prioritise safety in these high rainfall areas to make sure line of sight and things like that.

Last year, in particular, we received a number of complaints, but that was helpful too, because would talk about, for example, a roundabout in a certain location, and we could get the crews out and get it under control as quickly as we could.

MS LAWDER: Are we saying that, while we have a pilot for this year, we have not been able to settle on an optimal amount to give certainty in this area and fund it on an ongoing basis?

Mr Steel: I think this recognises that we are in a wet period, and extra resources are required in a wet period to manage mowing—and this is in addition to the existing mowing program. We will have the programmed mowing that happens for safety, amenity and all of those things where a certain number of passes will occur across the territory.

What we are hoping to do with this additional team is to actually be a little bit more responsive and reactive to some of the issues that are raised with us by the community, whether it is through Fix My Street or through ministerial issues raised with us, where we can send out a team and deal with that issue. We will also look at where the hotspots are and patterns where we know an extra little bit of mowing may be required in order to ensure safety and amenity of the community and be able to send teams out to those particular hotspots on a more regular basis than the general passes that are already programmed.

So it is going to be a different approach. We are looking forward to seeing how it works and whether the community sees a difference in terms of the mowing program

this year compared to previous years. We will look at whether we want to extend that once the evaluation has occurred.

THE CHAIR: Mr Braddock on a substantive.

MR BRADDOCK: I refer to page 23 of the budget paper, the accountability indicators for output 2.1. I am concerned that we are ceasing the indicators G and H, which is the increase of community paths and cycle lanes and looking to combine those into one of community paths including cycle lanes. These are two very different things. For example, you would not really want your mother to be riding along a cycle lane next to heavy traffic. Why are we doing that? I would not want to see a situation where we add 100 per cent cycle lanes or 100 per cent offroad paths going forward.

Mr Steel: Ken Marshall might want to comment on this one and the methodology that we are looking at.

Mr Marshall: Thank you, Minister. I have read and understood the privilege statement. This change really seeks to address a couple of identified deficiencies and issues with the existing indicators. One of those is that there was some lack of clarity about classification of paths between the two existing indicators, because all paths in the ACT are considered to be community paths. So, in terms of our asset information systems, we do not have a clear distinction between community paths and cycle paths. They are all classified as community paths and use by cyclists is permitted on all of our path network. That lack of clarity was one issue with the existing indicators that has now been eliminated.

Another concern with those indicators in terms of their usefulness from TCCS's point of view is the degree to which we were able to influence ongoing performance against those indicators, in particular in relation on-road cycling. Typically, the mechanisms by which we have increased the length of on-road cycling on the network has been to look at the feasibility of incorporating on-road cycling as part of our resurfacing program. The resurfacing is obliterating the line marking anyway, which gives us a key opportunity to look at whether it is feasible to modify the line marking when it is replaced to facilitate on-road cycling.

That program of work has been in place now for a sufficiently long period of time that we have essentially cycled through almost the entire network. The new opportunities for revision of those line markings under the resealing program are diminishing over time and so it had become very difficult for us to really influence that outcome.

Similarly, there are mechanisms that increase the length of the overall path network that are essentially beyond TCCS's control in terms of gifted assets. That was considered not to be a direct measure of TCCS's performance in as realistic a way as the proposed new accountability indicator is.

MR BRADDOCK: I appreciate the definitional problems, but this has now created less clarity for the Assembly in terms of how much we are expanding our network of cycle paths and also community paths. One of the strongest actions a government can take to increase the take-up of cycling is actually segregated cycle paths that remove cyclists from the traffic. How are we to have assurance going forward that it is not all

being cycle lanes on a busy road but there are actually these offroad paths being developed?

Mr Steel: I think the whole point of the change is that the on-road cycle lanes which may literally just be paint on the side of the road is what was really tracking in the past there. There is an opportunity now to look at the off-road separated paths and look at the extension of those rather than just paint on the side of the road, which obviously is cheap to do but is not necessarily going to encourage the take-up of active travel that we want. Certainly the No. 1 priority in the updated Active Travel plan which the government has released is the safe, separated and protected path infrastructure for walking and riding. We want to try and track this better and provide more meaningful indicators going forward about the broader path network.

MR BRADDOCK: For the strategy, I just do not think the indicator is appropriate for measuring the performance of how we are achieving that, because it lumps both on-road cycle paths with the off-road and, hence, we have no visibility of how we are actually achieving that off-road effort.

Mr Steel: As Mr Marshall said, the reality is that most of the roads that should have had an on-road cycle lane, a painted one, added, have now actually been completed. So it is unlikely that, in the future, there is going to be a significant number of new painted on-road cycle lanes added to the indicator going forward, as you are suggesting.

MR BRADDOCK: I have one other point. I notice in (e) we have an annual resurfacing target for roads but there is no corresponding indicator at all for our paths. Why do we not treat paths the same way in terms of measuring our performance?

Mr Steel: They are different. I will hand over to Ken Marshall to explain the difference. The way that the off-road paths for Active Travel are built, they often do not have the same pavement structure and they do not require the same level of maintenance. They all have a different maintenance program will be needed. Transport Canberra City Services are currently considering what that should be going forward.

Of course, we are being informed by the audit that has been undertaken of our paths by the Jobs for Canberrans program, which is going to inform a more strategic approach going forward. Under the Active Travel plan, one of the key actions is to develop that strategic maintenance framework for Active Travel paths. That is in development at the moment. I will hand over to Ken.

Mr Marshall: Fundamentally, the targets for resurfacing on-roads are based on the expected life of the treatment of the surface of the road. The reason that is relevant in terms of roads is that our predominant expenditure on road maintenance is in the preventative reseal program. That program is intended to renew the resurfacings at the same rate at which they are deteriorating; hence, the relevance of a target that is based on the expected life of that treatment.

MR BRADDOCK: So there is no maintenance plan in existence for off-road paths?

Mr Marshall: Community paths are mostly concrete, and for concrete paths we do not have a preventative treatment. The regime is essentially a corrective maintenance regime. That is not true of the trunk paths, the arterial paths, which are predominantly asphalt. The asphalt paths are treated somewhere in between the two. They are like road pavements in that they are made out of asphalt, and the treatments that we apply are broadly similar to the treatments that we apply to roads. They are different in that the surfacing on a cycle path has really only one function, which is to provide a serviceable and safe-wearing surface. In the case of roads, the surfacing has an additional very important role in protecting the structural elements underneath the road—the more expensive pavement, the structural pavement, load-bearing pavement, that is underneath the surfacing.

The maintenance of road resurfacing is mainly aimed at ensuring it is waterproof and therefore protecting the very expensive road pavement underneath; whereas, again, in the case of cycle paths, the maintenance of that surfacing treatment is aimed eliminating issues and deficiencies that prevent that surfacing from being a useable, safe-wearing surface for traffic.

MR BRADDOCK: I think I have probably stretched my luck on that.

THE CHAIR: Any supplementaries? Ms Clay.

MS CLAY: Thank you, Chair. On the accountability indicators for our walking paths and our shared paths, our cycle network, I gather there has been a complete audit done of the current state of maintenance of that network. Has that been released yet?

Mr Steel: We are currently considering the outcomes of the audit that has been undertaken. The way I describe the presentation of that information, which includes large numbers of photographs of each path segment that has a crack in it or a lifted segment, is that it is operational—it is there to support the operations and maintenance of the paths. It is not in a report that I can hand over the desk to you. It is not presented in that way. But we are certainly looking at how we can use the data that has been collected and match that with our broader asset management data that we have in TCCS. I will hand over to Ken Marshall to talk a little bit about that and the presentation of that data. We are certainly looking, as part of our action which I have described, in the Active Travel plan to develop that strategic program going forward about how we can use that data. It is a snapshot of a point in time, in 2021, and of course there will need to be other datasets that we use to inform the strategic approach that we take.

Mr Marshall: Again, the nature of the data collected is somewhat different on the path network because the treatment regimes are different. So the usefulness of different is different, depending on whether you are devising a preventative program or a corrective program. In this case, the path audit is essentially, as the minister has described, a point-in-time collation of issues across the network, rather than the sort of ongoing condition assessment that is undertaken for road pavements in order to project into the future and devise preventative programs that optimise the outcome. I can elaborate on the differences between those two strategies if the committee has time and interest.

MS CLAY: No; that is okay. I might focus you on one last one. I understand that the audit is a point-in-time assessment. That is what all audits are. That is a great baseline for looking at where we are at the moment, and nobody expects a point-in-time audit to be accurate one or two years later. But it sounds like TCCS is trying to come up with some KPIs that are more meaningful than how people feel for the maintenance of our paths and footpaths. Will TCCS be using these audits to actually say, “Ninety per cent of our paths and footpaths are currently in good or better condition,”—or 40 per cent, in 2021, when the audit was done, are in good or better condition, or 15 per cent? Will there be some kind of baseline measure in that audit, and will you be releasing what that baseline measure is?

Mr Marshall: The intent of the audit was not to assess condition comprehensively across the network. When I say comprehensively, I mean all-inclusively across the network. The intent of the audit was to identify issues to inform corrective programs. I guess the difference between the two is—if I give an analogy that is maybe familiar to us from our own personal experience—the difference between the way you might think about using an insect repellent as distinct from an insecticide or a pain relief treatment. If you have imminent resources of a preventative treatment, you need to understand risk across the entire network. You need to be able to monitor the condition of every segment of the network over time progressively and continuously in order to establish trend lines that can be used to predict future deteriorations of the network and identify a complete map of the risk profile of the network in order to ensure that you are applying preventative treatments at the right time and the right place to offset future deterioration.

If you are advising a reactive maintenance program it is somewhat simpler. You do not really need to project into the future; you just need to know where the issues are—and it is useful to know—and a worst-first strategy is appropriate for a corrective maintenance program. What that means is that you really only need to know where the worst issues are at a point in time—at this point in time you need to know where the issues are. It is useful to know how those issues are distributed across the network because that allows you to devise a program that efficiently picks up as many issues as possible.

That is really the difference. The fact that we are able to report on condition of road pavements across the whole network is a by-product of the way that we go about establishing those programs of preventative treatments. So, to come back to the analogy, if you are using a repellent, you would not get best effect by just spraying that where you have already been stung, and nor would you apply it somewhere where you are well protected by your clothing. You would need to understand your risk profile across the whole network. You would need to be able to project that out into the future and predict where that preventative treatment will give you the best effect. As a by-product of that process, we are able to categorise the condition of the whole network, because we have analysed the condition of the whole network in order to be clear about where we will get benefit from preventative treatments.

This audit is really just about informing corrective programs. It is just a snapshot of time of where the issues are now and where we would get the best effect by putting a contractor on the ground to pick up as many of the worst defects as we can with the resourcing that is available right now.

THE CHAIR: We will turn next to Dr Paterson.

DR PATERSON: Minister, how has the ACT government ensured continued reliability across the public transport network through the pandemic?

Mr Steel: Reliability has been a focus of Transport Canberra during the pandemic. We have managed to deliver very high levels throughout, recognising that during the lockdowns we had essential workers needing to use public transport services, and they continued to operate.

Of course, there have been workforce impacts from COVID-19 and particularly in the last the year. That has been impacting a number of different sectors across the ACT but particularly transport. That is one of the reasons that we are currently running an interim bus network, to provide a level of flexibility for Transport Canberra so that they can deliver the services that are timetabled and that people know that they will show up.

I am really proud of all of the work that Transport Canberra staff, drivers, operational team members and of course the mechanics have done to make sure that we can deliver high levels—in some cases well over the 99 per cent benchmark that we look at in the performance indicators. That is going to be a focus going forward as well. And today we have released a refreshed Transport Canberra recovery plan which will guide what we do in the months ahead, and a big focus of that will be on the liability.

DR PATERSON: How is recovery progressing across the network?

Mr Steel: We have seen patronage recover on buses at about 69 per cent and about 71 per cent recovery compared to pre-COVID levels on light rail. So there is still a way to go to be able to get people back on to public transport. To some extent I think this probably reflects that there is still fairly large cohort of Canberrans that are working from home.

Through the transport recovery frame refresh, we are obviously trying to look at ways of improving that patronage, but we need to do so based on the latest health and safety advice going forward. We also need to harness the opportunities that are ahead over the coming 12-month period where there will be a level of disruption in the community as a result of major infrastructure projects, both public and private. We are looking at how we can make sure that Transport Canberra has a prominent role there to play in moving people around the city. But I might hand over to Transport Canberra to talk a little bit about the patronage, where it is at and what trends we are seeing.

Mr McHugh: I acknowledge that I have read and understood the privileges statement. As the minister touched on, we have seen the unpredictability of COVID impact the patronage in various ways. We have had a number of trends back after lockdown, where we have seen things start to increase and then plateau and hit another lockdown period. In fact, the second lockdown period at the back end of last year was when we hit our lowest patronage levels.

We have seen a steady increase in patronage from that decline back up to around that 70 per cent mark. We are seeing a return to public transport different for different transport users. We are seeing evenings and weekend patronage return at higher levels than, say, morning and afternoon commuters. It is not significantly different but there is definitely a slightly different trend. I think that reflects the changes that the community are making in their decisions about where and how they work. For example, Mondays and Fridays we are seeing lower overall trips. That would reflect what I witness in the workplace, and I am sure yourselves as well, with people choosing those days to do their work from home opportunities or whatever that might be.

As the minister said, we have just released the Transport Recovery Plan Refresh. We developed the first Transport Recovery Plan under a year ago. I think that was in the context of us predicting or forecasting that COVID may tail out over time and we would be able to implement certain improvements and encourage people back onto public transport over that period. The reality has been quite a different experience. So we thought it would be timely to provide a refresh to that document, reset the fundamentals and the focus areas for Transport Canberra in response to what we are seeing out in the community and make sure that we are ready to go and invite people back to public transport at the right time.

Mr Steel: I table that document.

DR PATERSON: Great; thank you. I guess just running off what you just said, Minister, about disruption, what are the lessons that have been learnt from the pandemic that can help the government prepare for the Stage 2 Light Rail disruption?

Mr Steel: I think we need to have a continued focus on passenger experience and really put the customer at the heart of what we do in terms of being responsive to their needs. What we are doing at the moment is developing a customer plan, and I will hand over to Ben and Ms Sturman to talk a little bit about that.

Mr McHugh: Actually I might pass on to Judith Sturman, the Executive Group Manager in Transport Canberra, who has been leading the work on the development of the customer plan.

Ms Sturman: I have read and understood the privilege statement. We have actually taken on a new member of staff to focus on the customer. We have a lot of experience within Transport Canberra already with respect to our customers and we have probably not used that to the greatest extent that we could. But now, when we have the opportunity with disruption and also the need to look at growth and bringing people back to transport, we have taken that opportunity to put in some work so that we can make sure that we do that well.

The key things that we are really focusing on are understanding the different profiles, the different users, different travellers. There are around 13 different profiles—more than you would probably think. For each of those profiles, we are looking at what their journey is from beginning of the journey and what their choices are and how they make their choices. This will help us to communicate the message better when we are trying to promote the best public transport as an alternative to cars.

We are looking at where disruption will impact people the most, so that we can focus on those regions and actually do regionally focused messaging. We have already done that to a certain degree with Active Travel. We did a local insert for Active Travel, which actually saw a really good response to people seeing something that was relevant to them, rather than just being a mass communication. They are really the main things that we are doing.

DR PATERSON: Great; thank you.

THE CHAIR: Any supplementaries? Mr Parton.

MR PARTON: In regard to reliability, page 8, the customer satisfaction numbers show the 2021-22 customer satisfaction with Transport Canberra bus services is 79 per cent, which is 9 per cent lower than the target. Why are more than one in five Canberrans not happy with our bus network, Minister?

Mr Steel: I will hand over to Transport Canberra to talk a little bit about the context of those numbers, but I think the reality is that we have seen fewer people using public transport, for a range of different reasons and because of COVID-19, and that is not different to other cities around the world. But that is one—

MR PARTON: But, Minister, surely these figures refer to people who are using the service, who are not satisfied with it. What percentage of those unsatisfied are so due to the continued operation of an interim bus timetable, can I ask?

Mr Steel: Yes, well, I will hand over to Transport Canberra to put some context around those, but certainly we have been operating an interim bus timetable during that period so there have been changes to the network during COVID-19, absolutely.

Ms Sturman: So if we go right back to 2019, which is when we actually saw a slump in our customer satisfaction, which was mainly based on the fact that we did a dramatic change to the bus timetable and people were getting used to that. So we had a lot of people that felt like they were disadvantaged but there were a lot of additional people that were using services and learning to use the services that were provided in that new network.

So over the last three years, we have seen an increase in that public satisfaction over transport and bus operations. So the new figures are actually a very progressive and satisfying result to show that there is that increased satisfaction emerging and that customers are seeing an improvement in the services.

MR PARTON: Can I ask how many years does an interim timetable have to be in place before it is just the timetable? I know we have had discussions about this along the way but, you know, is it possible for the minister or anyone else to give us an indication as to when we are ceasing with the so-called interim timetable?

Mr Steel: I think you have just contradicted yourself in one sentence there, so what we have—

MR PARTON: Right.

Mr Steel: What we have done and what we have said all along is that we will continue to monitor the workforce impacts that are being experienced under COVID-19 and look at when we can step up services, when possible. That is also the message that is being published in the refreshed Transport Canberra Recovery Plan today, and we will look at stepping up services, when we can, based on the workforce availability.

MR PARTON: Is that a publicly available document

Mr Steel: I will hand over to Transport Canberra to talk a little bit about those impacts that we are experiencing with the workforce.

Mr McHugh: So we have been constantly monitoring the situation both in the workplace with workforce numbers, but also community feedback and where we are gathering data across the network to see what is happening with patronage. On a weekly basis, we are analysing patronage numbers, vehicle capacities, the health situation and our driver workforce, and we are constantly thinking and planning about when is the right time to bring people back to public transport.

So I would not suggest that we sit back and go, “Six months or 12 months time might be right”. We are actually constantly looking at when is the next best available time to make improvements to the public transport network. It would be fair to say, we have had some plans in place to do that over the last 12 months at particular points in time which we have had to pull pretty late in the piece due to the ongoing impacts of COVID across the workforce. We have seen significant numbers of people out of the workplace, from a driver perspective but also we have had our work shops that have had to go to split shifts. So other things about making buses available have been restricted as well. All of those things, if we were to make a decision and deliver improvements to the public transport system, would put that reliability piece at risk. And what we are hearing from the community is that the reliability is the most important thing to them, at the moment. The frequency is also important and will become more important as time progresses and as COVID starts to dissipate across the community.

Mr Steel: We have seen in other cities where they have taken a different approach, where they have, as you suggested Mr Parton, provided free fares, but they have not been able to deliver the reliability. They have seen up to thousands of services drop in some circumstances. Obviously, that reliability problem does not vote well for people’s trust in the public transport system. So we have had a very strong level of reliability, and I think that is the right approach. The interim network gives us that flexibility while we do have workforce availability issues to deliver those reliable services. But of course, we will step up services when that is possible, based on the workforce availability which we continue to monitor very closely.

MR PARTON: Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

THE CHAIR: Mr Parton, you wanted to know if it was going to be publicly available?

MR PARTON: The refresh? Is that a publicly available document?

Mr Steel: Just tabled it—

Mr Corrigan: It will be available online as well for the community.

MS LAWDER: Minister, I want to ask a bit about the Southern Memorial Park. I can see there has been \$200,000 reallocated from last year to this current year for detailed design. Why was that not spent last year?

Mr Steel: Yes, the design is ongoing. It is the award-winning Southern Memorial Park; the design has just recently won an award and we are really excited about getting on with the design. I will hand over to the team and Jeremy Smith to talk a little bit about how that is progressing.

Mr Smith: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. Ms Lawder, you asked about the \$200,000 being moved from last year to this year; there have been some slight delays in the environmental investigations for the project. What we found was that there were some critters on the site which can only be monitored through particular months of the year. So we were not able to undertake those investigations at the back end of last financial year. We will be undertaking those studies this financial year through the months of September, October, November, December. So that has just meant we have had to delay a couple of those environmental studies.

MS LAWDER: So the minister has said the design has won an award, but if you are still waiting on some environmental impact, is it possible that the design might have to change to accommodate the animals, lizard, reptile, whatever, that you said you are monitoring?

Mr Smith: No, we are not expecting to have to change the design. We just need to understand what we are working with on the site. So we have engaged the designers and we are working through the design for stage 1 of Southern Memorial Park. That is the stage that we will see access roads, the first of the burial plots et cetera, both for natural burials and traditional burials. So the related environmental studies are an extension to what we currently have.

MS LAWDER: It says in the budget papers on page 38 that the detailed design, physical completion date would be June 2024. So are you saying it is actually complete, minister, given that it has won an award? Or what is the difference between the completion date in the budget paper versus the design that you have now?

Mr Steel: I think the design was based on the masterplan. That was obviously a document that we refreshed, based on community feedback and to particularly look at the staging options around Southern Memorial Park. So what we are focused on at the moment is stage 1 of that plan. Obviously, we do not need the full number of plots at the moment for the entire site, right now. We need to do that in a staged way as the community is growing and put in place the basic utilities and amenities that are required for the first stage. So Mr Smith might be able to talk about the timeframe and program for stage one.

Mr Smith: As the minister said, the award itself was actually won on some of the early designs of the project. We move through staged designs to ensure that we can engage with stakeholders, with the Cemeteries Board et cetera, to ensure that the structures and the infrastructure we are delivering is appropriate. As highlighted, yes, we are moving towards the target of completing the detailed design by that date in 2024.

MS LAWDER: I presume it is not in stage one. I think we have talked about this before. Will the Southern Memorial Park include a crematorium and if so, would it be gas fired or some other way of firing it? Or will it be the relocation of the so-called mobile crematorium from Mitchell?

Mr Steel: Look, a decision will be made closer to the time. That probably gets into stage 2. Certainly, the master plan has provision for those types of facilities and a memorial hall and so forth. A decision will be made closer to the time around the needs of the community when it comes to crematoria facilities. Of course, we have only just recently established the new crematorium out at Mitchell. I expect that that will continue service there. I do not think we are necessarily going to move it to Southern Memorial Park. We also know there are private facilities that are proposed as well, including one that is actually quite close to Southern Memorial Park, off Mugga Lane.

MS LAWDER: Just finally, it may not be TCCS, but I know there has been significant community concern about a proposal for a crematorium at Callum Brae, which is not all that far from the proposed Southern Memorial Park site.

Mr Steel: Yes.

MS LAWDER: What impact have community concerns had on considerations so far and has there been an environmental assessment?

Mr Steel: Well, that was the facility that I was just referring to, the private facility that is proposed. But those are questions that can be directed to the planning authority.

MS LAWDER: Sure, thank you.

MR PARTON: Minister, both in previous estimates hearings and annual reports hearings as well as in a press release in February this year, you have told Canberrans that a contract for a new ticketing system would be signed within the budget—the deadline for that being June 30 this year. Has a contract been signed, minister?

Mr Steel: Well, I am really pleased to say that things are on track for the new ticketing system and we are in the very final stages of procurement, but I am not sure that we can say too much about that from a probity point of view, but I will hand over to—

MR PARTON: So the answer is no, it has not been signed?

Mr Steel: I will hand over to Ben McHugh to talk a little bit about where we are up to.

We are certainly looking forward to having a provider in place soon to be able to develop the ticketing system ready for next year.

MR PARTON: But the contract has not been signed, has it?

Mr Steel: It is in the very final stages, so I will hand over to Ben. He has obviously been doing that procurement. You would appreciate that I do not get involved. It is an arm's length process.

MR PARTON: Probably just as well!

Mr McHugh: To answer the question, Mr Parton, we have not signed a contract on that procurement at this stage, but as the minister has indicated, we are in the very final stages of contract negotiations with a preferred provider and we are really looking forward to sharing that outcome of that process with the community in the very near future.

MR PARTON: The final stages of this process seem to be going on as long as the interim timetable. Why has this project been constantly delayed since its inception?

Mr Steel: No, the most recent process, I think, has been fairly straightforward. There have basically been three tranches of work. We went out to market; we did not get an outcome that we thought was value for money. Then we were looking at a different procurement with a particular provider, based on opportunities that had presented themselves. Ultimately, we decided not to progress with that procurement because we did not feel like we could get the best outcome for the territory. So we went back out to the market and I will hand over to Ben to talk about that.

Mr McHugh: Correct. We are in the third phase of procuring a new or a next gen ticketing system. This third phase we have had a really strong response from industry, a really successful procurement process thus far, and we are really hopeful, as I have just mentioned, to be able to share the outcomes of that process with the community in the very near future. Within the realms of probity, that is about all I can say to that.

MR PARTON: All right. Page 34 of budget statements H shows nearly \$17 million from the 2022-23 financial year being reallocated to the 2023-24 and 2024-25 financial years specifically for this project, with nearly \$13 million of that shifted to the 2024-25 financial year. I guess I just need to ask, after looking at those numbers, can Canberrans expect this project to be complete in this term of government?

Mr Steel: The exact program is the subject of the procurement discussions that are underway, so we will be able to announce—

MR PARTON: So it is possible that it will not be done in this term of government?

Mr Steel: We will be able to actually announce that once that process is concluded, but we are optimistic about it being delivered next year.

MR PARTON: So are you leaving open the door that this will not be completed in this term of government?

Mr Steel: No, I just said that we are optimistic about it being delivered next year.

MR PARTON: As optimistic as you were about the contract being signed by 30 June or more optimistic than that?

Mr Steel: Well, we are actually still around the middle of the year, so I think we are going pretty well. We are looking at the actual implementation of the ticketing system still taking place next year, based on the information that we are aware of at the moment.

MR PARTON: Thank you.

DR PATERSON: Just on the cashless ticketing system, how will this impact drivers and also consumers of public transport in the ACT?

Mr Steel: Yes, we know that ticketing is one of the barriers to using public transport and that if we can make it as easy and as flexible as possible, it will encourage even more people to use public transport. We do of course get feedback from people who have gone to use ticketing systems in other cities, including Sydney, which obviously added the option of the credit card system.

We are looking at providing the full range of options to people, including a ticketless system that will enable people to purchase a ticket on their mobile phone without needing to necessarily tap on. Hopefully it will open up more opportunities for people to use public transport and those that are using it for the first time as well and may not know how to navigate the current MyWay system. I will hand over to the team to talk a little bit about what we are trying to achieve.

Mr McHugh: So again, without divulging too much associated with the current procurement process, the scope of works that we went to tender with includes multiple payment methods and opportunities, without ignoring the sector of the community that will still rely on a more traditional payment method, particularly those who may be associated with concessions or other things.

We do know that from our experience of working with our colleagues in other jurisdictions that the ticketless payment technology does attract another type of user who may have been discouraged by having to register and top up and manage a particular account.

So the account-based system can be paid by credit card, by your phone, it can be potentially topped up through a range of different methods and methodologies that would not include you having to go to a particular outlet. We think that is going to be a really positive experience for the customer, particularly given what we have learnt through COVID around taking cash out of the transport system and out of the management system. It has provided a positive outcome from a health perspective but also from a customer experience perspective, and our drivers have benefitted from being able to manage those conversations with our customers in a different way.

There will be an education process as we transition our customers from the current

system into the new system—what benefits are provided, but also the responsibilities that they will have in terms of making sure that they have got their accounts topped up.

DR PATERSON: Just in terms of consultation with sort of vulnerable users, like older people or children, people with disabilities, have you consulted with them in this process?

Mr McHugh: I can confirm that absolutely we have been consulting with a whole range of different user groups and we have established within Transport Canberra an accessibility reference group which does bring in a range of representatives from those community sectors. We have also done some consultation with ACTCOSS through the current period and the design and the scope and performance requirements of the system. I might hand over to Judith Sturman to give you a bit of an update on the accessibility reference group and what that has been progressing.

Ms Sturman: We have run an accessibility reference group for just over a year now and that includes a number of groups, including the ones that you have mentioned. The purpose of that group is to make sure that those individuals are both consulted with and they are informed of upcoming projects that they might want to have some influence and some consultation on.

So next generation ticketing is one of the key projects that we are looking at, not just to work with that feasibility reference group but actually to have smaller breakaway groups to make sure that we have covered all of the needs of every group.

It is the heads of those groups that meet at the reference group, but we know we need to get into the actual group members. We will be going into more detail once we have a solution that we can talk to in detail to those groups. We will be going out to them, doing some extensive consultation on the system and the way that we approach it.

Mr McHugh: I might round that out, confirming that one of our commitments has been to not leave any customer behind through this process. The ticketing system is a real opportunity to ensure that every member of the community gets access to public transport, including those who particularly need it, and how we can make that experience a positive one for them. The ticketing system will play a role in helping us support those people in that space within our community. We are looking forward to designing that system with them so that they can have a positive experience every time they need to go on a bus.

DR PATERSON: Thank you.

MS LAWDER: Minister, will the ticket upgrade project be complete before the construction of Light Rail Stage 2A? If not, how much will it cost to install one ticketing system for light rail and continue with the bus ticketing system?

Mr Steel: As I said, the program will be determined through the final stages of procurement that are underway, but we are very optimistic about it being implemented next year. Light Rail Stage 2A will not be operational next year. It will be some years.

MS LAWDER: When the upgrade period commences—presuming you sign contracts

and do the upgrade—how will the government collect fares during that transition period?

Mr Steel: A lot of preparation has already been occurring for that transition period. We know that there will be a period where we need to refund customers for the MyWay accounts that they currently have. We will be clearly communicating with the community about that at the right time to give them the opportunity to make the transition to the new ticketing system and to prepare themselves. I will hand over to the team to talk a little bit about that.

Mr McHugh: There are a number of ways: you can transition hardware on a bus or on a light rail vehicle to a new set of hardware; you can try and duplicate that technology for a period; you can accept a period where there will not be a card reader on a bus because it will be going through that transition. We are investigating the details of each of those options right now, as part of our consideration of the rollout of the new system, to ensure that we protect the interests of government, in terms of the revenue associated with ticketing, but, more importantly, the customer has a seamless transition from one system to the new system. There is a range of options and we have not landed on exactly which one we will implement at this stage, but that will become clearer as we appoint a provider and work with them on their program and delivery.

As you can imagine, we have 450 buses that have a range of technology that needs to be removed; we know that there are buses on the road every day; you cannot just take big batches of them out for a week and replace all the technology. So it is about how you stage and roll out that implementation is in the final stages of design.

MR PARTON: Is it possible there will be a period of time with no fares?

Mr Steel: We have not made that decision at this point in time. We are just doing that preparation and planning for the transition at the moment—how that will work. But obviously having a final preferred provider that we have a contract signed with will be the point where we can then work with them directly on the details of the implementation of their system. Once we have got them on board we will be able to take that detailed planning to the next stage.

MR PARTON: Thank you.

MS CLAY: Minister, I am interested in delays to light rail and how we are progressing. I understand that we have pre-feasibility work on stages 3 and 4 which was meant to be completed in 2021 but was not, and we have rolled it into the future light rail network plan refresh, and that body of work is not due for completion until 2023. I am wondering why the network plan refresh was needed and how it is different from the planning work we already had underway?

Mr Steel: The reality is that, with a multidecade vision for light rail, stage 3 is some time away, so there is a lot of time to be able to do the planning for that piece of work. Our focus is on delivering light rail to Woden, starting with stage 2A to Commonwealth Park. I am certainly happy to hand over to the team to provide some detail about that future planning work for stage 3.

Mr McHugh: As you would be aware, there has been a network master plan for light rail in place for a number of years. We have started the process of reviewing, refreshing and updating that. Some work has been progressed to a point, but, given the government's focus on getting the current stages of light rail delivered, we will wait until those decisions and designs have been finalised before we progress that further. We are absolutely conscious of the longer-term rollout of light rail and what those priorities might be.

MS CLAY: Will the contract for 2A be signed this year?

Mr Steel: I will hand over to the team at Major Projects Canberra, who are obviously in that procurement. That is subject to the procurement outcomes underway. We have signed one contract that is a significant part of 2A, which is: the depot modification contract, the purchase of five additional light rail vehicles and the retrofitting of the existing 14 light rails with the on-board energy systems. There is procurement underway for the actual stage 2A works component, which will come after raising London Circuit. I will hand over to the team. We are expecting, around the end of the year, there to be a works approval application made to the National Capital Authority for stage 2A.

MS CLAY: The end of the year being December or the end of the year being June?

Mr Steel: Around the December period. I will hand over to Duncan Edghill to talk a little bit about that.

Mr Edghill: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. I apologise if I missed any part of the question, some of the audio was a little bit difficult. In terms of the timing of signing the stage 2A contract, we are continuing both the design and procurement activities to lead into signing the stage 2A contract.

There are two important things that need to happen in advance of us beginning construction on stage 2A. The first one is, as the minister has mentioned, obtaining the NCA works approval for stage 2A. We are working towards submitting our NCA works approval application this calendar year, and then it is up to the NCA as to how quickly all of that may progress. The other important element is actually undertaking the physical raising of the southern portion of London Circuit, which is a project where we have signed contracts and physical work will shortly be underway, but there is obviously quite a time involved in undertaking those physical works.

The reason I say those two things is that in terms of when we physically sign the contract for stage 2A, it will be at some point after works approval has been obtained and once the raising of London Circuit is further progressed. The reason for that is twofold. The overarching point is that we want to be signing the contract as close as possible in time to when the works actually commence. That is a risk mitigation measure for the ACT government in that, if we sign the contract too early, there is always the risk that something may change which has implications for the program or budget and so forth. From a prudent, project expansion perspective, we want to sign the contract as close in time to the point where we will actually be beginning the physical works, and, as I mentioned, the works involved in raising London Circuit play into that.

If there are any conditions or anything that is new that comes out of the NCA works approval process, then it is much better for the territory to be aware of that before it has signed the contract, so it can be priced, negotiated and worked through. That is probably a long-winded way of saying we will not be signing the contract this calendar year, but that is a very deliberate decision of the ACT government, given all the precursors that need to happen in the project.

Mr Steel: It is also not in the critical path. The contract that was on the critical path was getting the new LRVs. There are a couple of reasons for that. We need the new, extra LRVs to be able to deliver stage 2A operations from when it begins, and there is obviously a lead-in time for the construction of those new vehicles. Also, we need those additional vehicles to take out the existing ones for the retrofitting of the batteries—the on-board energy systems. That is why getting that contract in place was so critical early on, but this later contract is one that we have obviously got a little bit more time on in terms of construction going to be getting underway over the next couple of years for RLC, and it will follow RLC—the construction on stage 2A.

MS CLAY: So we have sorted out 2A—it is not going to be signed this calendar year, but it might be this financial year. With 2B, when are you doing work on the EPBC environmental approvals and the NCA and ACT planning approvals? When is that going to start and when will that complete?

Mr Steel: I will hand over to the team at Major Projects Canberra to talk about the work that has been happening. We have been working closely with the National Capital Authority in order to finalise the design for 2A in terms of landscaping.

There has been, necessarily, a need to look at the future design for 2B as well, and some work has already been undertaken in conjunction with the NCA on heritage matters, particularly relating to Commonwealth Avenue bridge, which is also the subject of another project run by the NCA to strengthen the bridge and widen the wings. We have already been progressing work, and we have our technical advisor onboard, AECOM, who are providing some of that advice to us.

Mr Edghill: The primary focus has been on raising London Circuit—the LRV contract and stage 2A we have just discussed—because we need to do that before we can build stage 2B.

The primary focus of the activities to date on stage 2B has been, firstly, works undertaken previously around resolving the route that stage 2B would take, and we have a proposed group which we have discussed it with at length here with the NCA. The work on stage 2B that we have been undertaking at present has primarily focussed upon Commonwealth Avenue, and, in particular, the Commonwealth Avenue landscaping and master plan, which is a piece of work that we have undertaken in conjunction, and very close consultation, with the NCA. Part of the reason for focussing on that part of stage 2B in some detail is that it is also relevant to stage 2A. Part of the stage 2A route, when it comes off the raised London Circuit, will turn southwards—but I guess it depends on which way you are coming from onto Commonwealth Avenue, so it has been very important to us and the NCA to ensure

that whatever we are doing in stage 2A will be consistent with what we do with stage 2B. There has been a lot of effort that has gone into quite a detailed landscaping master plan in that part of the stage 2B route.

Then at the other end of the stage 2B route, we are building the futureproofed Woden light rail stops. That is also the other key area of focus at the moment we are looking at—that has been undertaken for the CIT Woden project. When that project comes on board, and when the new public transport interchange comes on line there initially, that future light rail stop will be utilised as a bus stop. The design of that project is making the spatial allowance for light rail to come down through Callum Street to that location. The design of the broader interchange, but also that light rail stop, will be consistent with everything else we are doing on that stage 2B route. Also there are some more considerations from Callum Street, where the new bus layover is being built next to Philip Oval. We are also designing that with the view that the light rail transport will ultimately come through.

The third element of stage 2B is the work that we are doing as part of the LRV and depot modification works—the contract that we have just signed. There will be elements of stage 2B that we know will be wire free, so the work that we are doing in retrofitting the existing fleet and buying new LRVs is not only relevant to stage 2A but to stage 2B as well. Also, the works that we are undertaking to modify the existing Mitchell depot for the expanded fleet for stage 2A is being done to make sure it is futureproofed for the stage 2B expansions too. So we are not doing anything now for stage 2A that will hamper that stage 2B expansion at the depot.

In short, the 2B work which is progressing at the moment is really focussed around those three key areas. Of course, as stage 2A progresses, it involves in the final points of detail the design for stage 2B, when that time comes.

MS CLAY: There is a lot of detail there. I am trying to confirm: have you started work on stage 2B on any of the ACT or Commonwealth environmental or planning approvals

Mr Steel: The answer is yes. The EPBC application was submitted, and Duncan Edghill can talk about that.

Mr Edghill: Thank you, and I apologise: we could not hear the audio of that question.

MS CLAY: The planning and EPBC environmental applications—have you started them on 2B?

Mr Edghill: Yes. There initial works have been undertaken. In fact, there was a commonwealth joint scheme committee hearing which was held a little while ago, and, leading into that, and leading into the initial planning of stage 2B, there were various heritage works and environmental works which were undertaken that will ultimately feed into the broader EPBC approvals process.

That will be a lengthy process which will be ongoing for some time, particularly given some of the heritage considerations on where the stage 2B route will go. It is probably the proper heritage perspective that it is, arguably, the most complicated part of the

ACT. Certainly, without wanting to put words in the NCA's mouth, the closer you get to Parliament House, the closer and closer they are interested in such matters, so that will be an ongoing piece of work that will take some time for us to work through.

Mr Steel: The reason why we split the project into 2A and 2B was largely around the EPBC requirements and some of the other planning requirements for 2B. They are much less complex for 2A, and that is why that piece of work is progressing as a priority. But as we continue to move through the works approval process planning requirements for that stage of the project, and the contract signing for 2A, we can then start focussing in a little bit more detail on the requirements for 2B.

You are correct in identifying that an environment impact statement will be required to be developed as part of the EPBC process for 2B, which will consider those environment and heritage issues. It is a significant piece of work that will involve consultation with the community, and that will certainly be a focus as we move through the 2A program.

DR PATERSON: When is it intended that 2B will start? Is it going to be that 2A finishes and then 2B starts in construction, or will it be all constructed at a similar time?

Mr Steel: While the procurement underway for 2A will determine the exact program, we will certainly be looking at what opportunities there are of trying to align, as much as possible, the workforce. I will hand over to Duncan Edghill.

Mr Edghill: Part of our planning for stage 2B, as well as straight procurement, will also involve looking at what early activities might need to be undertaken, both from the perspective of utilities and in the project more broadly, and what elements may take longest. We do not have a resolved answer for it at the moment, but given the way we have approached stage 2A, for example, and stage 1, it may well be the case that there is potential for some form of early works to be undertaken, at some point, to help prepare for the physical construction of the rail systems.

The other component that immediately comes to mind is the new Commonwealth Avenue bridge that will be a feature of stage 2B. I do not have a proposed construction approach for it at the moment, but we know that that will be an important part of the infrastructure which is built. The current proposition is that Commonwealth Avenue bridge, and this is already in the public domain, will be built between the existing two Commonwealth Avenue bridges. So, without having negotiated for the construction approach, it is conceivable that utility works and, potentially, works associated with the Commonwealth Avenue bridge might, in the fullness of time, be some of the earlier components of the stage 2B project which need to be undertaken.

DR PATERSON: Thank you.

Mr Steel: It is fair to say that there would never be a straight transition of the workforce, simply because different skills and different people with different expertise are required at different stages of a project. So, when you are finishing one project and starting another, it is not necessarily the same people that would be

transitioning.

The other risk factors that are involved with 2B timing which are out of the ACT government's hands are those approvals that are required. It is probably the most complex project in Australia in terms of the approval requirements through the stage B corridor, including: EPBC Act requirements; the NCA works approval framework; getting agreement of both houses of parliament to the project, because it goes into the direct area around Parliament House; and any other planning requirements the ACT government may have. Some of those are out of our hands, and that will ultimately determine what the time frames of the project are, as well and how quickly we can move through those planning approvals.

THE CHAIR: Mr Parton, a supplementary question.

MR PARTON: Minister, the completion date for light rail to Woden is listed as "TBD"—to be determined. I think it is ludicrous for anyone to believe that, as the minister in charge of this project, you are not working behind closed doors with an estimated completion date for stage 2B. Are you prepared to reveal to Canberrans what that estimated completion date is, and, if not, why not?

Mr Steel: We will when we have moved through the procurement process and worked with Canberra Metro on the delivery program for that project. At this stage, our focus is on 2A—

MR PARTON: So you cannot tell me when that project is going to be completed.

Mr Steel: We are going through that process for 2A, in procurement, with Canberra Metro.

MR PARTON: On the day that the first light vehicle rolls into Woden, do you think it will be legal, at that stage, to buy a petrol-powered car on Melrose Drive, or will that be illegal?

Mr Steel: That is ridiculous! I reject the premise of the question.

MR PARTON: I am wondering, in general, when this project is going to be completed, because, in reference to Ms Clay's questions, there are a bunch of things here that seem to be being kicked down the road. We have a lot of signs up saying that we are working towards light rail getting to Woden. Surely you can give us some indication when that is going to be completed.

Mr Steel: We are certainly committed to bringing light rail to Woden. I do not believe you are, Mr Parton, or your side of politics—

MR PARTON: The question is to you, the minister, Mr Steel—

Mr Steel: It certainly would not happen under your leadership, if you were in government. We are getting on with the work and 2A is our focus. We have to get through that procurement process in order to establish the construction time frame—the exact construction time frame.

We want to provide clear information to the community as we go through that process so that we are not providing rubbery time frames that may change. We want to provide clear information about the construction time line for the project, and we can do that once we have got through the procurement process. That is why we go through it and establish contracts for the delivery of these major infrastructure projects which do have risks to them.

We have seen significant risks in the infrastructure sector relating to supply chains for the materials that are required to build these types of infrastructure projects. We have seen significant delays in relation to wet weather for some of our infrastructure projects, so we want to be as clear as possible and not provide rubbery figures. We want to make sure that when we are providing figures, they are ones that we can be held accountable to.

MR PARTON: Just to close in on that, on page 17 of the budget statement—I am not quite sure which one because I do not have it in front of me—it only has appropriation for building light rail to Woden for the 2022-2023 financial year. I want to ask: what is the projected spend in future years on this project? Because at this stage, we have appropriation for light rail to Woden for 2022-2023 but nothing further. Are we able to get an indication of the projected spend in future years?

Mr Steel: That is the process that we are going through in the procurement, where we will determine the cost of delivering the stage 2A. We have just signed a contract for the additional LRVs, retrofitting and the depot modification. It is an augmentation of the existing public-private partnership for stage 1, and that will come out of the current budget provision.

MR PARTON: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mr Braddock, a supplementary question.

MR BRADDOCK: Do we have an anticipated completion date for 2A?

Mr Steel: That will be determined through the procurement process—the exact time frames for that. We expect raising London Circuit to be about two years in construction, so quite a significant period of time. Duncan Edghill, did you want to provide any further detail?

Mr Edghill: Yes, thank you, Minister. The intention is, as best we can, to roll from construction associated with the raising of London Circuit into the construction of stage 2A. If that is the case and, as the minister just noted, raising London Circuit is expected to tail off in the back half of 2024, if we then roll straight into 2A, realistically, the stage 2A process will take at least a couple of years.

I do not want to pre-empt what the procurement outcome might be. Of course we want the best and quickest outcome that we can for the ACT government, but, realistically, if we are starting the 2A rail systems after the raising of London Circuit has been completed, then that will give you an idea as to what our anticipated time frames would be.

MS LAWDER: Thank you. Minister, I appreciate you saying you want to focus on providing clear information to the public and not rubbery information, and that you are working through the procurement process, which will inform the due date, or delivery date, for stage 2A. However, I feel you must have some idea of when you want it completed. What if the procurement process told you it would take 10 years? Would that still be acceptable? Minister, will stage 2A be operational before the 2024 ACT election? Is that your goal? What figure do you have in mind?

Mr Steel: No, I have never said that. In fact, previously, I have never said that—

MR PARTON: I think you have!

MS LAWDER: I am asking you though.

Mr Steel: You can feel as you like, but the reality is, in order to establish a construction program, as Mr Edghill has talked about, we need to understand in detail, working with Canberra Metro, about how it will be delivered and whether they can get the supplies in the time frames that we need. All of that will be worked out through the procurement process and the contract negotiation—

MR PARTON: Maybe 2030?

Mr Steel: We will have a better idea, and we will make that available to the public when we can, once that process has progressed to the point where it can be signed and published on the contracts register.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much, members and witnesses. This brings us to the end of this session. The committee would like to thank Minister Steel and officials for your attendance today. No doubt we will probably see you sometime soon again. There are plenty of questions a lot of people want to add. For any questions taken on notice by witnesses, could you please provide answers to the committee's secretary within five working days.

Hearing suspended from 10.30 to 10.45 am.

Appearances:

Cheyne, Ms Tara, Assistant Minister for Economic Development, Minister for the Arts, Minister for Business and Better Regulation, Minister for Human Rights and Minister for Multicultural Affairs

Community Services Directorate

Rule, Ms Catherine, Director-General

Summerrell, Mrs Jessica, Acting Executive Branch Manager, Children and Families

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

Fulton, Ms Caroline, Executive Branch Manager, artsACT

Cultural Facilities Corporation

Ramsay, Mr Gordon, Chief Executive Officer

Major Projects Canberra

Edghill, Mr Duncan, Chief Projects Officer

THE CHAIR: In this session, we will hear from the Minister for the Arts and Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Ms Tara Cheyne, and officials. Welcome. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. When witnesses speak can you acknowledge the privilege statement.

As we are not having opening statements, we will go straight to questions. Minister, I would like to ask some questions about the recruitment process for the position of CEO of the Cultural Facilities Corporation. Can you please talk us through the time line of the recruitment, from when the former CEO announced her retirement back in May 2021 through to Mr Ramsay taking the role on 13 December 2021.

Ms Cheyne: Thank you, Mr Milligan. I confirm that I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. This is a question that is best directed to the ACT executive, as it is a public service appointment. It is not a ministerial appointment. Kathy Leigh led that process, under the Cultural Facilities Corporation Act. The chair of the panel, which was Kathy, is required to consult with me on the outcome of those deliberations and I can confirm that she did so.

In terms of the time line, I believe it would be publicly available information as to how that progressed. I believe Ms Elvin advised her intention to retire. I can check those dates for you, Mr Milligan. It would be in the first quarter, if not the first half, of 2021. Then there was a public service recruitment process. Ms Elvin also advised that she did not have an end date in mind, given that it could take some time for the process to be finalised, and that she would stay until the completion of that process and perhaps a little bit longer to help onboard the incoming CEO, which she did. We do have the CEO here, so he will be able to tell you his start date. But from my recollection it was early December 2021.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister.

MS LAWDER: Minister, are you able to tell us who was on the selection panel for the position and how those panel members were selected or appointed? Did you have any input into who was on the panel?

Ms Cheyne: Thank you, Ms Lawder. Again, we are really straying outside of my responsibilities here. My recollection is that the panel comprised the then chair of the board of the CFC, Kathy Leigh and a senior member from one of the national cultural institutions whose name escapes me. Again, I believe Ms Leigh advised me of the composition of the panel when it was being put together, but that was the sum total of my input.

MS LAWDER: Were you informed at any point about how many applicants there were or how many were short-listed?

Ms Cheyne: I believe so, yes.

MS LAWDER: So are you able to tell us how many applicants there were and how many were short-listed?

Ms Cheyne: No, Ms Lawder. There would have been a conversation with Ms Leigh and me, but these are questions best directed to Ms Leigh, who ran that process.

MS LEE: Minister, what was ACT cabinet's role in the recruitment of the new CEO?

Ms Cheyne: None, as far as I am aware. It was a public service appointment.

MS LEE: So it was not approved by ACT cabinet?

Ms Cheyne: I believe that cabinet was advised, but I do not think that there was an approval role for cabinet. I will double-check this. Again, it was not a ministerial appointment. I am not sure how many more times I can say that.

MS LEE: And did you have any engagement with Ms Leigh or anyone else on the selection panel, or indeed the current chair, before the appointment, about this appointment?

Ms Cheyne: Engagement in what way, Ms Lee?

MS LEE: Did you have an engagement with the current CEO before he was appointed, about this role?

Ms Cheyne: The current CEO, Mr Ramsay?

MS LEE: Yes.

Ms Cheyne: Mr Ramsay informed me that he was intending to put in an application, and I believe I responded with: "Thank you for letting me know."

DR PATERSON: Minister, I am just wondering: what has been the focus for the new CEO of the Cultural Facilities Corporation since he started?

Ms Cheyne: Thank you, Dr Paterson. Given that the new CEO is here, I might go directly to him. But I can confirm that it has been a very busy time for the Cultural Facilities Corporation, particularly in light of our major budget announcement relating to the theatre. Beyond that, there is a lot of work. There was another major budget announcement for Lanyon. There were major budget announcements in our last process which have been realised now, including how they relate to CMAG, across the road. There is plenty going on, and I will ask Mr Ramsay to provide some more information about what his priorities have been.

Mr Ramsay: I have read and understood the privilege statement. Thank you, Dr Paterson, for the question. As the minister has indicated, it has certainly been a very busy time in the Cultural Facilities Corporation over the last eight months, building on the excellent work of the former CEO, Ms Elvin, who has left the organisation in an amazingly sound position. I do want to pay my respects to Ms Elvin's work over more than two decades in the role.

What we have found with the Cultural Facilities Corporation now is that, because of the movement beyond the initial period of the pandemic into more of a recovery mode for the arts and for culture more broadly, it has been important for the Cultural Facilities Corporation to be thinking through how it positions itself for the future. Part of the work that I have been concentrating on is a very strong focus on increased collaboration. We have been working across the leadership team of the Cultural Facilities Corporation—the theatre, CMAG and historic places—to see how we may be able to work more closely together across those various business arms, in addition to the strength of each individual business arm. That has been an important twofold piece of work.

Another piece of work that I have been bringing particular attention to, which is reflected in the Arts and Culture Strategy and Action Plan, is increased collaboration with external organisations as well. We have had the first gathering, with the CFC hosting the leaders of national cultural institutions, and we anticipate another one within the next few weeks. That is with the leaders of the National Museum, the National Gallery, the National Portrait Gallery, the War Memorial and others, to see how we may be able to draw a stronger joint tourism focus to arts and cultural institutions across Canberra.

I note that the Cultural Facilities Corporation, especially through the current and future work of the Canberra Theatre, is placed in a unique position in the ACT to be able to relate both to local organisations and national organisations. So we are working now on what we may be able to do more strongly, with increased work around cross-promotional work. We have had the initial conversations as to what that might mean in years to come around cross-programming as well. That, I think, would be excellent for arts and culture in Canberra and as an economic driver of tourism here as well.

I have also brought a strong focus to collaboration with our local arts organisations and have been doing my best to meet them and to see how we can work with our

regional key arts organisations and others. We believe that the Cultural Facilities Corporation is well placed, again, to help make those connections and to see how we can continue to foster the growth of arts and culture, in line with the minister's statement of ambition for the arts here in the ACT. We have that role, and I believe that is an important thing that we are able to do. They have been a couple of the key areas that I have had a particular focus on.

Obviously, with the announcements in this year's budget, there will be very significant work on the development of the Canberra Theatre Centre, the ongoing evolution of the Canberra Theatre Centre.

There is increased work around Lanyon, both in terms of the conservation and protection of trees and the work around drawing the staff together into a single space, from what was the Nolan gallery down there some years back. Being able to do that builds a stronger staffing team, a stronger staffing experience at Lanyon. It also increases the experience of people who are visiting Lanyon because it frees up more spaces for people to have educational, cultural and historical experiences. It opens up a number of possibilities there.

The one other key focus that we are looking at, at the moment, is how we can position the work of the Cultural Facilities Corporation even more closely to audience experience, rather than event activation. So it is a shift. We talk about it within the organisation at the moment, about the shift from a concentration on facilities to concentrating on cultural experience. It is a flavour shift across the organisation—how is it that, if we put audience participation at the centre, we may be able to help grow that?

We think that there are some excellent possibilities with CMAG at the moment. If members of the committee have not been over to CMAG to see the exhibition *Search for Paradise*, I really encourage you to go there. It is probably the most significant—at least one of the most significant—exhibitions in CMAG's history. It has been wonderfully drawn together. Again, we might be able to help bring about things like that. As part of that, we are linking also with the new members of parliament from up on the hill to see how we can help people from the Australian parliament fall in love even more with Canberra and therefore be key advocates for the arts and culture here in Canberra.

DR PATERSON: It was great, Mr Ramsay, to hear about how you are engaging with the national institutions. Have you collaborated, or do you have any intention to collaborate, with the local tertiary institutions?

Mr Ramsay: Indeed, we already have some very positive work with CIT and training. We have recently done a review of the educational experience, particularly across the Canberra Theatre Centre. Part of the thinking there is about how we can create pathways for people's experience in terms of the development of careers in the performing arts or at least the technical area of performing arts. That has been something that has been present in the Canberra Theatre for a few years now, under previous government allocations. We are looking to see how we can grow that partnership with CIT.

We have had a number of conversations already with the ANU School of Art & Design and the ANU School of Music. We are going to be hosting a gathering of leaders from across different parts of the ACT arts and educational bodies in the future for part of the work that is going on for CMAG. It has been excellent to have Beck Davis and Kim Cunio being so positive and collaborative in the work there. We are really looking forward to being able to grow that partnership even further.

As part of the work that is happening just across the square, in what was the Elections ACT space, which now falls within the CFC, what we are doing there is partnering with the City Renewal Authority and the ANU, as well as Craft ACT, to activate that in the next couple of weeks. We believe that the first part of the bump-in of what is known as the Second Space activation program, featuring and concentrating on the work of the ANU, has some really outstanding possibilities for people in Canberra to engage with that and to see some of the truly cutting-edge technology that is being developed at the ANU in the area of arts and culture.

DR PATERSON: Thank you very much.

Ms Cheyne: Chair, I have further detail that goes to the specifics of what Ms Lawder and Ms Lee asked. I have just asked my staff to determine the date when Ms Elvin and I think it was Justice Refshauge met with me to advise that Ms Elvin was planning to retire, so I will get that date for you.

The vacancy for the appointment was advertised on 4 June 2021. Applications closed on 20 June. More than 20 applications were received. I do not have the detail of the numbers that were short-listed or who was short-listed. The selection advisory panel was Kathy Leigh, as Head of Service; Justice Refshauge, as the chair of the board; and the person whose name I forgot before was Anne-Marie Schwirtlich AM, who is the former Director-General of the National Library. Candidates were short-listed and interviews were held in July 2021. Again, the appointment was made by the Head of Service and it was conducted in line with the usual public sector recruitment processes.

I misspoke before, regarding the requirement to consult with me. It is not the CFC Act. It is the Financial Management Act 1996, section 80(3). Before making an appointment to the CEO role the Head of Service is required to consult with me, but I was not involved in the decision. Kathy Leigh will be appearing on Monday, when you can ask for further detail.

MS LAWDER: Minister, I presume Mr Ramsay, as the current CEO, is on the executive contract which is outlined in the annual report. What is the current CEO's salary, compared to the salary of the previous CEO at the time when she left? Is it more, less or the same?

Ms Cheyne: That is not a question for me, Ms Lawder. That is a question for Kathy Leigh.

MS LAWDER: Are you aware of how much travel allowance the current CEO gets?

Ms Cheyne: No.

MS LEE: Minister, in your earlier answer you said that you received a text message from Mr Ramsay notifying you that he had applied or was going to apply for the role. Did you discuss that text exchange with any of your colleagues, either cabinet or public service?

Ms Cheyne: I would not know, Ms Lee. It was over a year ago. I expect I would have told my chief of staff, but I do not think that there was anything unusual about Mr Ramsay informing me. I think he was doing it as a courtesy.

MS LEE: You mentioned that there were over 20 applicants for the role. Did any other applicant either text you or get in touch with you in any other way to notify you that they were intending to apply or had applied for the role?

Ms Cheyne: I do not believe so.

MS LEE: Thank you.

MR BRADDOCK: Jumping over to multicultural affairs, I am interested in what strategies the ACT government has to address racism in the ACT community, noting that 2.15 of the Welcoming Cities Standard talks about supporting initiatives to address exactly that.

Ms Cheyne: Thank you, Mr Braddock. Of course, the ACT government does not condone racism in any form. It is awful and incredibly regrettable that racist incidents nevertheless do occur. It is something that I have been championing as Minister for Multicultural Affairs but also as Minister for Human Rights.

I believe you may have been a participant in the bystander awareness training recently, which I think did go to some lengths to highlight that it can be the small things that can be insidious and ultimately breed worse behaviours among people. Fortunately, in the ACT racist incidents are rare; nevertheless, they do occur.

The Human Rights Commission—and I am happy to talk about this next Thursday—investigates complaints of racism and works to conciliate where those occur. But I think that across government we all have a responsibility to ensure that not only are we addressing racism when it occurs but we are preventing it in the first place.

You may be aware that we are currently undertaking significant reforms to our Discrimination Act, one of which is that we are proposing to insert a positive duty into that act. This would be a first for us in the ACT. I think the way to frame it is that in the Discrimination Act, in the way it is currently set out—and this is not unusual—it is always about after something occurs, after negative discrimination occurs. What a positive duty does is positive rather than negative, so it is what you are doing in the first place to prevent something from occurring.

We are proposing that there would be obligations on government authorities, in the first instance, to adopt positive duties in their workplace to prevent this from happening. That would extend to racism, but it is beyond that as well. There is a proposal on the table at the moment that this could be extended to the private sector in later years. Of course, this is an educative journey and that is why we have been

consulting on that provision. I might see if we have got anything further.

Ms Rule: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. I think all of the activity we undertake in the multicultural space is about creating an environment that is positive for people from all types of multicultural backgrounds. We can give you some specific details, but things like Welcoming Cities accreditation, the Multicultural Festival and the grant activity that happens for multicultural activities are all about building an inclusive community for everybody in Canberra. Mrs Summerrell might want to add some detail to that.

Mrs Summerrell: Thank you. I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. Thank you very much for the question. As the minister and Ms Rule have outlined, there is a lot of work that goes on in this space particularly. I will start with Welcoming Cities, which you mentioned. The ACT is a member of the Welcoming Cities network and the government has committed to moving to the level of advanced accreditation standard through that.

That is something that we are working towards now. We were recognised in the established category previously, which was an excellent achievement. Part of that work is about moving from Canberra being a welcoming city where people feel welcome to actually where people feel that they have a sense of belonging. That is the process that we are in at the moment.

We are working at the moment to provide evidence on how we meet the additional requirements in those categories. That includes progression in social and cultural inclusion and economic development in those areas. That will then be assessed and reviewed by an external reviewer and the evidence that is collected as part of that process will be reviewed.

In addition to that and what sits nicely alongside that is the work that we have been doing in relation to the Multicultural Recognition Act, which is an enormous piece of work that has been undertaken through the Office for Multicultural Affairs but with really significant input from the multicultural community as well. The Multicultural Recognition Act recognises the importance of multiculturalism in the ACT and the significant value that Canberrans place on growing cultural and linguistically diverse communities. As the minister said, it really is the positive duty and prevention side of things. It underpins what we want to articulate as the type of Canberra that we want to live in, and that work complements the work of the Human Rights Act and the Discrimination Act. That has undergone significant public consultation, as mentioned, and I look forward to being able to progress that work further.

In addition to that, and again alongside that—it is a multi-pronged approach—there is the bystander awareness training that the minister mentioned, which I know you are aware of as well. That is a piece of work that has a whole-of-government approach, and that is to support those that are vulnerable to extremism and violent extremism. It seeks to build and strengthen the protective factors that enhance community resilience around community safety. That model is a training model delivered through Griffith University. There are a series of workshops that occur as part of that training, and there are train-the-trainer models so that we can see the infiltration of that throughout our community.

As the minister and Ms Rule said, a lot of the work that we do is to address those issues and there is enormous reform happening in this space, in very close consultation and connection with the multicultural community.

MR BRADDOCK: Mrs Summerrell, just to clarify the statement of claims, let's say, of how we meet the requirements of the Welcoming Cities framework to the advanced level: that has not been finalised or developed yet? I am interested in that, Minister.

Ms Cheyne: Mr Braddock, I can talk to that quite briefly. We need to put together, essentially, a portfolio of evidence that we submit and that is then independently assessed. We did that in, I think, July or August last year to reach the established level—which we did, very pleasingly. We are undergoing a process right now with a steering committee right across government which is collecting that evidence for us to submit as our portfolio of evidence for that advanced level. We will be able to speak to that, potentially, at the annual reports hearings.

MR BRADDOCK: Okay. Thank you.

DR PATERSON: Minister, could you further outline the consultation that has occurred around the new discrimination amendment bill?

Ms Cheyne: Dr Paterson, it would probably be best left until the human rights hearing next week.

DR PATERSON: Okay. Minister, are you able to outline the investment in this year's budget in Canberra's arts and cultural sector, in particular the Canberra Theatre and Civic Square development?

Ms Cheyne: That is a good question. It is substantial. There are a number of different elements where we have been able to, very pleasingly, support our arts sector with funding this year. That includes about a 10 per cent increase to our arts organisations and the funding pool there. There is some additional funding for Ainslie and Belconnen, regarding how they operate, as well as a very significant commitment to upgrades for Gorman House.

A good chunk of the budget announcements related to the Canberra Theatre redevelopment, as well as additional upgrades to the Canberra Theatre. I will talk about the smaller investment and then the larger investment for the Canberra Theatre. You might recall that in our last budget we committed over a million dollars for urgent and essential works for the Canberra Theatre. It was about work health and safety issues and visitor experience. If you have been there recently, you might have noticed that the foyer carpets have been replaced. Some remaining expenditure will go out the door this year regarding portable staging platforms, security upgrades, some end-of-life stage-view cameras, and a range of lighting and AV system replacements and upgrades.

We also invested over \$2 million in this budget in some other essential upgrades to the Canberra Theatre as it currently stands. Again, they largely relate to workplace health and safety issues and to visitor safety and comfort, particularly with the

Courtyard Studio. If you have been there, you would have noticed that it has a very small foyer. I believe there have been some air-conditioning issues as well. It is about making sure that that is pleasant. It is a small space, but it is always very popular both with organisations that use it—it is a main hub in particular for organisations like the Canberra Youth Theatre—and patrons who go there. It is a very big part of our Comedy Festival offering as well.

Going to the headline announcement in the budget, there is over \$28 million over the next two years to progress the Canberra Theatre Centre development. This is to develop the preliminary design for the new Theatre Centre, to get it shovel-ready, in addition to extensive stakeholder and community consultation. This is the heavy lifting. We need to get the design right. The design is so important because everything in this entire precinct will flow from the theatre's design. As you know, there will be a lot of work going on here. That is why the investment is happening now.

The new facility will see the existing theatre repurposed, with a flexible flat floor, as well as a new theatre constructed to accommodate approximately 2,000 people, in addition to retaining the Playhouse theatre. The current theatre houses only about 1,200 people. It will include some additional spaces that are a bit more flexible in their use for things like live performance, live music, some local performance and some experimental performance as well.

Duncan is here, from Major Projects Canberra, and is leading a lot of that work in terms of the development, supported by the CFC, who will be having direct input into that, as well as undertaking a lot of that community consultation. Duncan, is there anything further that you want to add?

Mr Edghill: I am happy to provide some further detail around the actual work that will be undertaken over the coming two years, which the \$28 million relates to.

THE CHAIR: Can I ask you to acknowledge the privilege statement?

Mr Edghill: I acknowledge the privilege statement. The facility is a unique facility, in terms of buildings of this type around Australia. There are, of course, other theatres, but, compared to hospitals, schools and the like, it is a relatively unique facility. It is also in a very prominent location, so it falls within the National Capital Authority's planning approval area. It is a project and a facility that does not just stand alone; it also needs to integrate very closely into the surrounding city district, and other plans that the government may have for the broader area.

The work that we will be doing over the next two years relates not just to the theatre itself—although, of course, that is very important—but also to the broader context in which it sits. We will begin a procurement process shortly to bring on board our partner for design and technical advisory services. There is a lot that we need to do. There are the obvious design and architectural works and urban realm works that need to happen. There is also a necessity to consult very closely with the local performing arts community and our stakeholders within the ACT government and the community more broadly.

There is work that needs to be done around the acoustics and the audio. There is work

that needs to be done around the systems design. If you have been to the existing Canberra Theatre, there are a lot of ropes and manual labour in the way they do things at the moment. Part of the design process will be working through exactly how the theatre will operate. There are different options which may be available to us.

There is, of course, the less glamorous stuff that needs to happen around engineering services, and particularly structural engineering, mechanical, electrical, fire and so forth. We need to pay very close attention to disability access. We need to think very closely around car parking arrangements with the theatre and how that may integrate with the broader surrounds.

We also need to work through constructability. The design and constructability are important and go hand in hand because the intention would be not simply to close the theatre, refurbish it and then reopen it several years later. An important component of the project will be to ensure that the theatre remains operational through the build process. That will be an important factor that needs to be taken into consideration as we are working through the design process. Of course, we need to undertake a level of design that will enable us to undertake costing, quantity surveyor type activities, so that we can produce a construction phase business case for the consideration of government.

Taken together, there is quite a lot of work that we need to get done. That process will begin with the procurement process for our design and technical advisory partner, which will begin shortly.

MS LAWDER: You mentioned parking. Will there be significantly more parking? Will that be underground parking, for example? What is the connectivity between the parking and the new theatre?

Mr Edghill: That is one of the design questions that we need to work through. It is a question that cannot be resolved by the theatre in isolation. We need to be looking more broadly at what is happening in the city. It is for that reason that we are working very closely with the Canberra Theatre Centre and the CFC. The CRA is another important stakeholder as we work through that design process.

The parking arrangements in the city, quite apart from the theatre project, will continue to evolve. Part of our process, in undertaking the theatre design process, is looking forward and working very closely with other arms of government to make sure that we end up with an integrated design solution, rather than designing the theatre in complete isolation.

MS LAWDER: Generally, as a guiding principle, would you expect underground parking, and get rid of the surface parking?

Mr Edghill: They are design options and questions that we will work through with our partner, because different parking solutions and different options will have different cost implications and different timing implications for the project. That is part of the options analysis that we will now be undertaking so that we can present the most sensible option or options to government to consider.

MS CLAY: It is great to see the increase in the arts budget and to see Canberra Theatre moving on. I am always concerned about the balance of our arts spend. In the statement of ambition you had some great transparent reporting which showed that almost 60 per cent of our arts budget goes on buildings, so we have only around 40 per cent to go on jobs for artists, arts administration and the programs to go in those buildings. I am wondering what our balance is now in this budget. Do you know how much of that is going on buildings and maintenance?

Ms Cheyne: Ms Clay, you and I have spoken about this before. ArtsACT is going through a process now. We did give that undertaking, with the release of the statement of ambition, that we would provide, in a transparent way, all of the funding and where it is going. But it has been delayed a little bit, so I do not have that answer for you. I do not think we will be able to find it quickly, but we do plan to update that publicly in the coming months. I am very happy to share that with the committee, or otherwise, then.

I make the broader point that it is very easy to get into a place of this or that—infrastructure or funding for artists. But it is all about growing the ecosystem, so to speak. Our artists have made it very clear to me that they do want better facilities to be exhibiting and performing in. Capital costs are costly, and I think that is reflected in this budget. But it is not about one thing or the other. You would have seen that the arts organisation funding, a 10 per cent boost, is significant, particularly in the context of our broader budget. That reflects the confidence that we have in the sector as a whole, and where we want to take the sector as well.

We also want to have facilities that reflect who we want to be as a city, and that those facilities attract touring productions. That increases the number of visitors. With that increase in visitors, my intention—and I have been very clear about this—is that we want to make sure they are going not only to a theatre show or to the National Gallery, but also to our other organisations across the city, whether that is the Glassworks, the Canberra Contemporary Art Space and so on.

You heard Mr Ramsay talking before about the work that he is doing with the cultural leaders to make sure that we have those better connections there, because ultimately everyone benefits. I appreciate that this is a significant part of the budget, and capital costs generally are, but we are growing the budget for our arts sector as a whole. That is what I would be pointing to here. We have done an enormous amount of one-off emergency injection funding over the last few years, and that has achieved its goals. But now we are providing a very significant boost in our organisational funding to provide better opportunities for artists. That funding is not one-off; it is ongoing and it is indexed. I think it has been received extraordinarily well.

MS LAWDER: I have a question for Mr Ramsay as CEO of the Cultural Facilities Corporation. It is about the CFC chief of staff role. My understanding is that the position was not there prior to the appointment of Mr Ramsay as the current CEO. Can you confirm whether that is the case?

In addition, I note that the role was gazetted about four weeks after Mr Ramsay started at the CFC, with Mr Ramsay as the contact person for the role. But it was only open for one week, from 12 to 19 January—arguably, during the quietest time of the

year in Canberra. Was that an appropriate length of time to attract a suitable range of applicants? How does that fit with the minister's earlier comment about the selection process for the CEO? I think the minister specifically mentioned the usual public service selection process. I am not sure that one week in January would be viewed as the usual public service selection process.

Mr Ramsay: The appointment process for that new role arose from conversations that I had had with the outgoing CEO at the time of my commencement. As the minister indicated earlier today, Ms Elvin worked with me in some significant periods of handover. She indicated to me that it was her view that the organisation was one position in the leadership team, the executive or the leadership team, short, and that was creating significant pressures around a range of matters, particularly in what was then called the corporate team, or the finance team, which is now the central team of the Cultural Facilities Corporation.

Arising out of those conversations with the former CEO, and also arising out of conversations with the CFC board, it was my determination, as the chief executive officer, that the most appropriate position, having considered a few different ones along the way, was that of an organisational chief of staff position. That position was created in accordance with the processes under the Cultural Facilities Corporation and the ACT public service for the creation of a position.

It was, as you say, advertised. We were extremely pleased with the quality of the applications that came in. The selection process was overseen by a panel that was duly put together. The panel comprised me, another member of the senior leadership team from the CFC and a member of the board. On the basis of the applications that came in, which were high quality, the process was an interview process and then appointment.

The reason that it moved quickly was that, as Ms Elvin had indicated to me, as the board had indicated and as I reflected on it as well, in my decision as CEO, the gap in the leadership team was creating flow-on effects right through the organisation. One of the key areas of this particular position was leadership and oversight in the HR area of the organisation, which had previously fallen to the responsibility of the chief financial officer. We believed that it was appropriate for the HR area to be separated from the chief financial officer, to allow the chief financial officer to provide more detailed oversight of the finances, including the financial development of the organisation. Also, part of the core work of the organisational chief of staff is organisational strategic collaboration. We have been working with the board on a number of particular projects that that person has been leading since then as well.

MS LAWDER: What about the timing and the one-week period?

Mr Ramsay: There is a range of time that is available within the ACT public service. I took advice in relation to that from within the organisation. It was publicly advertised for that period of time. As I say, I thought that the quality of the applications that came in was excellent, and we were able to proceed with the appointment on that process.

MS LAWDER: How many applications were there, how many people were short

listed and who was involved in the short listing process?

Mr Ramsay: Starting at the back and moving forward, the short listing was by the selection panel—as I say, it was me, a member of the leadership team and a member of the board. That is a standard ACT public service selection panel process. I will have to take on notice the number of applications that came in. It is my recollection that two people were short listed, but I will confirm that and get back to the committee.

MS LAWDER: Thank you. As the CEO, did you write the position description or was someone else responsible for that?

Mr Ramsay: Ultimately, it was my responsibility to finalise the position description. That is the case with appointments within the CFC. The delegations for all employment within the CFC sit with the chief executive officer. As delegate, it is my responsibility to finalise or to approve all position descriptions across the CFC.

In terms of this particular one, it was done in consultation with members of the existing leadership team; with the chief financial officer, given that it was impacting on his particular working responsibilities; and with members of the executive of the board.

MS LAWDER: Who wrote it? Did you write something and send it to the CFO or did the CFO write something and send it to you?

Mr Ramsay: I did more of the drafting than others, yes, but it was done in consultation with others as well.

MS LAWDER: Are you able to table a copy of the position description for the committee?

Mr Ramsay: Yes, I can take that on notice and get the position description.

MS LAWDER: I understand that the position was advertised as temporary. Is it still temporary or is it now permanent?

Mr Ramsay: The position is a permanent position.

MS LAWDER: When was that decision made?

Mr Ramsay: I will take details of the particular dates on notice.

MS LAWDER: Who made that decision?

Mr Ramsay: The CEO has the delegate responsibility for all matters of employment within the Cultural Facilities Corporation.

MS LEE: Mr Ramsay, I understand that the candidate who was ultimately successful in this role was your former chief of staff when you were a minister in this place. Did you have any contact with the chief of staff during the application process, either initiated by you or by her, about the role?

Mr Ramsay: It is my recollection that I did not, but I will be happy to confirm and to advise the committee if that is not the case.

MS LEE: Can you also confirm, whilst you are doing that—or you might recall—whether, if you did have contact, you discussed the nature of that contact with anyone else in the CFC, including the selection panel?

Mr Ramsay: I can advise the committee that, in accordance with ACT public service employment matters, each member of the panel was asked to declare any previous engagement with any person who was an applicant to the position and, because of that, any potential risks around conflict. That is a standard matter with every employment process. That was done by me and by the other two members of the panel in relation to more than one person who had applied for the position.

MS LEE: How did you manage that conflict? Did you recuse yourself from the interviewing of your former COS or were you sitting in on that interview?

Mr Ramsay: I was part of that, but we had worked through with the panel and with the chair of the board the process of the declaration of any former engagement that members of the panel had with this applicant and other applicants. That was, again, standard process for ACT public service employment to be able to manage that. The person that we were consulting primarily on that was the chair of the board of the CFC.

MS LEE: From recollection, you mentioned there were two candidates short listed?

Mr Ramsay: That is my recollection.

MS LEE: Were both short listed candidates interviewed?

Mr Ramsay: Yes. My use of the term “short listed” is short listed for interview.

MS LAWDER: Can I clarify that the person who was successful in the role, who was, from my understanding, working somewhere else at that time, just happened to see the ad for the position in the one-week window and applied for it without any contact from anyone to suggest that they might apply—someone from CFC, for example, to say, “Hey, have you seen this?”

Mr Ramsay: It is my recollection that the advertisement was placed and there was not drawing that to anyone’s attention. We were confident that, with the importance of this particular piece of work, it would draw a good round of applications, and we were pleased with the quality of the applications that came in.

THE CHAIR: We might move on to the next substantive question.

Ms Cheyne: Chair, if I may, I will confirm those dates that I said before that I would get. Ms Elvin emailed me in advance of a meeting that she had scheduled with me to let me know what the meeting was about on 10 May, and we met on 11 May. It was on those two dates when I was informed of her plans to retire; and 11 May is clear in

my ministerial diary disclosure as well. I met with Ms Elvin and Justice Refshauge.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

MS CLAY: Minister, I was pleased to see your remuneration principles and practices for artists and artworks, which says that artists should receive fair pay for their work. It is really great to see that. It echoes calls that the Greens have been making for a long time for fair pay. Can you tell me what tangible policy outcomes you are expecting, what changes you are expecting that this will make to artists and how you are tracking that that is actually what is happening on the ground?

Ms Cheyne: Thank you, Ms Clay. For some of the detail there I will go to Ms Fulton. I think as I said at the time of the announcement, the policies and the principles are not a reflection that we think that there is an issue or a problem but more that there is an absence of clarity about how artists should be engaged across government and indeed across the entire community.

As a government it was important for us to make clear what our principles and practices should be, given the conversations and the representations we have had, including with some peak bodies, regarding fair remuneration, appropriate remuneration, in addition to the conversation that has been going on for a long time now about things like exposure not necessarily being appropriate—this is work and it should be paid work. Equally, it should not just be up to artsACT; this should be a document that is owned right across government and that could serve as a basis for artists and arts workers, and ideally those who are procuring them, if they do not have a policy already to start from.

In terms of tracking, I would not say that we have anything in place as yet. But data collection overall is certainly a priority for us, as a government, and is very much, I think, going to be a priority in the national cultural policy. In our own representations to the federal government, data collection, including on remuneration, is something that we are hoping to see. I might see if Ms Fulton has anything further to add.

Ms Fulton: I confirm that I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. Further to what the minister said, the remuneration principles document is a principles document outlining best practice. As we were developing the policy, it came up in consultation that something like this would be valued by the sector, by people who employ artists but also by artists and art workers themselves. It highlights that artists and art workers are workers. It also elevates best practice principles around contracts. So even if an artist or an arts worker makes a decision that they might take in-kind support, it makes it very clear that there needs to be a benefit to the artist and arts worker.

We will be, of course, referring to the document, going forward, as part of artsACT funding when we look at applications either for our arts activity funding round or for our arts organisation round, in terms of ensuring that there is fair remuneration for artists and arts workers, also promoting it across the ACT government for any events that employ artists and arts workers. We are certainly engaging with the Australian government, as part of the national cultural policy, in promoting this document as well.

MS CLAY: Thank you. If this is a best practice guide, rather than a requirement, will you be tracking when it is applied and when it is not applied?

Ms Fulton: Certainly, if we are able to, through our own arts funding and through other mechanisms supporting artists and arts workers to utilise peak bodies like us, and the law, in terms of a fair contract. It is probably a hard thing to track in terms of outcomes. What I mean by that is that we are not privy to every contract or every payment. But certainly within our cohort of arts funded organisations, yes, we will be able to track that.

MS CLAY: And that will be reported on?

Ms Fulton: Yes.

MS CLAY: Great.

Ms Fulton: As part of the arts policy and action plan.

Ms Cheyne: Ms Clay, I might just mention something that we have done recently. As we have made clear in our own communications and also in guidelines that we, as a government, have put together for funding programs, performance artists and technicians should be paid a minimum of \$250. That was very clearly stated under the guidelines for Amp It Up! recently, where we said that artists and technicians should be paid a minimum of \$250 each, regardless of any box office or ticket sales arrangements, which are a matter between the artist and the venue. I think that goes to what Ms Fulton was drawing on there: that we have control, to a point, on what we can be setting the standard for across the industry.

MR CAIN: Minister, regarding your multicultural affairs responsibilities, I refer to budget statements G, at page 25. I note that there is a \$1 million allocation for multicultural affairs for this financial year. Then on page 26, at the bottom there, there is \$948,000 allocated for the festival, left over from 2021-22. Could you explain what has happened to that \$948,000?

Ms Cheyne: Yes, Mr Cain. The \$1 million that you are seeing on page 25 relates to the additional funding that we announced to be able to deliver the 25th National Multicultural Festival. You will see under the heading on page 25 that it is a budget policy decision. Because it is new provisioned funding, that is why it is appearing there. So we have an additional \$1 million to help us to deliver a festival that is appropriate for the 25th anniversary.

What you are seeing at the bottom of page 26—and, again, I will draw your attention to the heading—is a budget technical adjustment. There was minus \$948,000 last financial year, which has now been provisioned for this financial year, because the festival did not go ahead. Because the festival did not go ahead, the funding was there and it has now been adjusted to this financial year. So the overall funding for the festival is around about \$2.6 million.

MR CAIN: Minister, I refer now to the budget outlook, page 94, where it says there is

an allocation for the Multicultural Festival of \$2.7 million. Can you explain where that number arises, given the explanation you have just given on the other numbers?

Ms Cheyne: Yes, Mr Cain. I think I just said that \$2.6 million is the total funding—

MR CAIN: It is 2.7.

Ms Cheyne: Yes, I know you said 2.7. I am just getting the details for you, Mr Cain. I can tell you what the funding is. There is the \$948,000 that has been adjusted into this financial year. There is the additional \$1 million. Then on top of that we have user charges for participating in the festival. There is a fee for stalls, depending on the nature of the stall. We do have some commercial providers—they attract a larger fee than our community provider—as well as sponsorship revenue. So that is what takes the total cost of the festival to \$2.7 million.

MR CAIN: That discrepancy in user charges—could you explain what that amount is and what it actually means?

Ms Cheyne: Mr Cain, I believe I just did. They are the fees for stalls.

MR CAIN: They are fees—

Ms Cheyne: Fees for participating in the festival in terms of commercial operation, or for stall holders.

MR CAIN: So that is a fee you are charging?

Ms Cheyne: Yes.

MR CAIN: How is that an allocation of funds, if it is a fee you are charging?

Ms Rule: The funding that goes to the festival is made up of two sources of money: one is money provided by the government and the other is money paid by stall holders.

MR CAIN: So how does that line up with the budget outlook statement saying that \$2.7 million has been allocated in a budget measure?

Ms Rule: Because the user charges are treated as revenue on one side and expenditure on the other. So the money comes in and it goes out again.

MR CAIN: So stall holders who pay a fee are being deemed as contributing, but how does that line up with the government paying that amount of money for the festival, that extra amount?

Ms Rule: I think—

MR CAIN: It is not very clear to me; sorry.

Ms Rule: The funding that the government gives to the festival as a whole is made up of two sources of revenue. One is revenue from the government and the other is

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revenue paid by the stall holders. So what is on page 94 is the total money that is allocated to the festival. The source of that money is partly from government funding and is partly from user chargers.

MR CAIN: So when you say, “allocated to the festival”, you really mean not just by the government but by stall holders?

Ms Cheyne: Yes, but it is the smallest proportion of that, Mr Cain. So \$700,000 comes from sponsorship and stall holder user charges. The total cost is \$2.7 million, so the amount that the government is contributing far exceeds the cost for the different participation in the festival.

MR CAIN: With respect, that is terribly unclear and that \$2.7 million needs to be better explained.

Ms Cheyne: With respect, Mr Cain, I think it is very clear.

MR CAIN: I doubt that.

THE CHAIR: What is the rate of charge for stall holders? Has it gone up at all or has it remained the same?

Ms Cheyne: My understanding is that it has remained the same, year on year, or since the 2020 festival, the last time we were able to hold it. There may be someone behind me who has that detail. The applications for stall holders have just closed, Mr Milligan, so I can get that detail for you and provide it.

THE CHAIR: Yes, if you can, and the difference between commercial and community stalls. I take it they are different rates as well?

Ms Cheyne: Yes. I do now have that. It all does depend a little bit on whether community stalls are there for one day, two days or three days. For community stalls, if they sell food or cultural items, for one day it is \$300. If they are a licensed stall, selling liquor, then it is \$600 and then it is another \$300 or another \$600, depending on the category of community stall.

For diplomatic information stalls it is \$300 for one day or \$500 for two days. A multicultural community information stall is on Sundays only. That is the smallest day of the festival, so that fee is \$150. For community clubs the fee is for three days, and it is \$2,400. For commercial stalls it ranges, but it is between \$3,500 to \$11,200. That really depends, again, on the size of the stall or the van and the type of business. If it pleases the committee, I can send that link to the secretary. I will get my office to do that.

THE CHAIR: Yes; that would be useful. Thank you.

MS LAWDER: Minister, I wonder if you could give a bit of an update on any progress with the Kingston Arts Precinct. I am especially interested in community consultation and perhaps repairing that relationship with the community panel and other artists interested in the Kingston Arts Precinct.

Ms Cheyne: Absolutely, Ms Lawder. I will speak as far as I can on this, and whatever I cannot answer in the SLA space the Chief Minister will be able to answer next week. As you are aware, I think it was November last year that we announced that the relationship with Geocon would not be proceeding and that the government would be, essentially, delivering that in-house, including its own procurement process.

That had a bit of a reset with our founding organisations and with the broader community in early December, when we had a smoking ceremony at the site, which, in effect, cleansed the site. All of our founding organisations are continuing to be founding organisations, which I think really does point to the strength of the relationship, irrespective of the provider, and how much everyone is looking forward to and sees the benefit of being together in the one space.

artsACT has been undertaking some significant work this year, as has the SLA. The work that artsACT has been doing has been about the vision, with the founding organisations, the founding strategy, which is being released imminently, if it has not already been. That provides the high-level direction and vision for the site.

Importantly, what has taken up the lion's share of the consultation this year has been something called a place brief. It really is about the design aspirations for the site—the look and the feel. That has been an iterative process. Earlier this year, several in-person consultations were held to discuss that. There have been some surveys. Right now there is a survey that is live that asks some questions of the community, with some visuals, about what most accords with the direction we should be taking at that site. I think that has been a really important process and one that has helped to reset that relationship and really build ownership for not just the founding organisations in the arts sector but the broader community as well.

The SLA is also in a process at the moment of procuring a number of consultants to support some of the major delivery aspects of the project. Again, they will have more detail than I have to hand. There are three major consultancies and it is a two-stage tender process. Again, it is not unusual. They are: project management, principal design and quantity surveyor. I understand that the EOI process has concluded. They will be short-listed, if they have not already been, and then those short-listed are asked to submit a request for tender. I understand that the preferred suppliers will be engaged by mid-October.

There have been a number of other things underway as well. I might just quickly run through them. A heritage consultant has come on board to help finalise the conservation management plan. Obviously, as a very historical site that is critical. A community engagement consultant has been working on that stakeholder engagement plan and leading that community engagement. We have also got Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consultants who have been helping to deepen our understanding of place and progressing plans for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts space. That is important because it is unique for the site and unique for our arts offering in the ACT as well. The founding arts organisations otherwise currently exist in a space, whereas there is no dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts space. Getting that right from the beginning, in consultation with the community, is vital.

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MS LAWDER: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank Minister Cheyne and officials for your attendance today. If witnesses have taken any questions on notice could you please provide answers to the committee secretary within five working days. We now draw this session to a close. The committee will suspend for one hour and reconvene at one o'clock. Thank you.

Hearing suspended from 12 to 1 pm.

Appearances:

Berry, Ms Yvette, Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Early Childhood Development, Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Women

Community Services Directorate

Murray, Ms Christine, Executive Group Manager, Inclusion and Participation

Education Directorate

Haire, Ms Katy, Director-General

Simmons, Ms Jane, Deputy Director-General

Efthymiades, Ms Deb, Deputy Director-General, System Policy and Reform

McMahon, Ms Kate, Executive Group Manager, Safe at Schools

Matthews, Mr David, Executive Group Manager, Business Services Division

Huxley, Mr Mark, Executive Group Manager, School Improvement Division

THE CHAIR: Welcome back to the Select Committee on Estimates hearings for 2022-23. Please be aware that the proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice, it would be useful if you could use these words: “I will take that as a question taken on notice.” This will help the committee and witnesses to confirm questions taken on notice.

In this session we will hear from the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Ms Berry, and officials. Welcome. Thank you for coming along.

I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. Each time someone speaks for the first time, can you please acknowledge that you understand the privilege implications of that statement.

As we are not having opening statements, we will go straight to questioning. I will start with the first substantive, and it is in relation to the Youth Assembly’s request for dedicated school buses to be reinstated. Minister, one of the recommendations in last year’s Youth Assembly report included reinstating dedicated school buses in the ACT, servicing all ACT primary and high schools and colleges. Some of the young people involved in that discussion had experienced firsthand having their school bus service cut.

What did they share about it and what would they like? The recommendation came from the environment and sustainability forum, and the young people in that forum formed the opinion that cutting dedicated school buses had reduced the number of students willing and/or able to get to school via public transport, including themselves. What was their environmental concern in relation to the specific recommendation?

Ms Berry: Sorry; what was the question?

THE CHAIR: The last part was: what is their environmental concern in relation to the specific recommendation to bring more buses back to every school?

Ms Berry: Whose concern?

THE CHAIR: This is from the Youth Assembly report.

Ms Berry: The Youth Assembly.

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Berry: What was their concern?

THE CHAIR: They called for all buses to be reinstated to take students to primary schools, secondary schools and colleges.

Ms Berry: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Where are you at, in terms of that?

Ms Berry: Okay, so it is not their concern; it is about what the government is doing with that recommendation.

THE CHAIR: Yes, thanks.

Ms Berry: Yes. I can ask Ms Murray to provide some background to the Youth Assembly and the recommendation. Thanks.

Ms Murray: Thanks very much, Minister Berry. Thank you very much for the question. As you are aware the ACT Youth Assembly had about 109 young people attend it—so it was certainly well attended—between 12 and 25 years old. They not only set the agenda for the topics of discussion but actually led those conversations.

The response in terms of the buses is something that is probably for TCCS to answer. Post the Youth Assembly, we write up the discussions and then we prepare a report, which is authored by the advisory council and provided to government. We certainly take on board the advice that is provided by young Canberrans and we really value and support them, in a variety of ways, to have that voice.

The conversation that primarily was had in the room on the day was focused not only on the access and equity issue in terms of attending schools but also on the multiple cars doing drop-offs, rather than a bus. It was around the environmental features, which is why it sits under the sustainability area.

The ACT has indicated that it is committed to supporting environmentally sustainable transport solutions. The future of transport in Canberra, as described by TCCS, will include more attractive and flexible options that increase choice, reduce carbon emissions and facilitate vibrant urban reform. Public transport is part of that, but so are cycling and walking. Certainly, there is a high level of encouragement towards those methods of transport as well. We know that Canberra's transport network will

support a shift towards those modes, which is certainly something that the Youth Advisory Council have been engaged on and are keen to progress.

So, in answering the question, I reinforce that we hold the Youth Advisory Council meetings and we hold the Youth Assembly to really give an opportunity to percolate the voices on things that matter for young people in the ACT. This has been a really positive way of hearing those voices and then responding as a whole of government.

MR BRADDOCK: I am interested in the projections of student enrolment in government schools, particularly in light of the census data that was released recently that found that many additional Canberrans are here. Can I please have an update on what the government is doing to ensure that we can accurately predict how many students are enrolled in our schools?

Ms Berry: Thank you for that question. I can ask Ms Efthymiades to provide some more information there.

Ms Efthymiades: Thanks, Minister. I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. Mr Braddock, in the session that we had earlier in the week, I explained the overall process of us using the census in February and August—our school census takes, not the national census, obviously—to inform part of our modelling and the work we also do in partnership with the ANU. That is our foundational projection work.

We have that in train, the revision of that, and then the national census coming through, and the work that has been done with CMTEDD is to contextualise that. We are working in close partnership with them at the moment. We are anticipating the revised projections that incorporate that census to be with us by about mid next month. So it is all being re-mushed with those revised numbers and then they will be made available.

MR BRADDOCK: The education and community inclusion committee provided some recommendations as well in this space. I do not believe the government has yet responded to those. I am just wondering whether consideration has been given to those recommendations.

Ms Berry: It might be helpful if you could refer to the specific recommendations you are talking about so that we can quickly grab hold of that report. Then if we can provide information, we will do that.

MR BRADDOCK: Sure. It was the ECI's inquiry into managing ACT school infrastructure. It was about school infrastructure to meet the projections. I do apologise. It was talking about the STEP model and how that is utilised to predict the enrolments.

Ms Haire: Mr Braddock, the government response to that inquiry will be tabled in the Assembly on 5 September, but certainly Ms Efthymiades can speak more about the STEP model. I think she mentioned it on Monday as well. So the specific response to the recommendations will come on 5 September; but if you would like further information on the STEP model, Ms Efthymiades can provide that now.

MR BRADDOCK: No; that is fine. I am comfortable with that. Thank you.

DR PATERSON: Minister, I was just wondering how Youth Week was celebrated in the ACT.

Ms Berry: Thank you, Dr Paterson. That is a really good question. Our youth in the ACT are an important part of shaping the future for Canberrans, so we make sure that we provide opportunities for their contributions to be celebrated each year. The Youth Advisory Council gave us some really good advice on what they thought young people might like to be experiencing as part of Youth Week, after the past couple of years, when people were not able to get out and celebrate with each other and with their peers, and particularly young people who do not ordinarily get the chance to access or visit different ACT facilities or landmarks. I can ask Ms Murray to go through some of the events and activities that young people got to participate in as part of this year's Youth Week festival.

Ms Murray: Thanks so much, Minister, and thank you very much for the question. We hold Youth Week in April every year. Again, as the minister has indicated, we have been working with not only the Youth Advisory Council but also doing more work with our Education colleagues in this space, and listening to the Student Congress and getting some advice in relation to that.

There are a few things that we do in Youth Week. The Youth Week grants program provides about \$20,000 for projects to enable young people in Canberra to participate in community development activities. They really are targeted on Canberra and the community. We had 20 applications and we funded 11 of those in the past year. There was some really fun stuff, if you had an opportunity to get out and have a look at it.

The Multicultural Hub in Canberra ran the Kooky Youth Olympics, and we had some amazing events with sumo suits and the like. What it did was create a really strong connection between people who never would have crossed paths beforehand. Certainly, the advice that we have received is that they have created ongoing connections not only with the Multicultural Hub but also with their peers. Table Tennis ACT ran some great programs. There was a lovely Sunset Festival run by the Woden Community Service.

I really loved Showing Off, which was held by Capital Regional Community Services, which was an artistic collaboration showcasing the good things that young people in Canberra do, and the amazing things. I think we hear sometimes negative things, so the group and the young people have told us, "Let's celebrate our diversity but also the things that we contribute."

The Ethnic Broadcasters Council hosted a youth takeover of the station, which meant that some great mentoring relationships have been created and some people who have expressed an interest in broadcasting have been able to get some work experience there. One very close to my heart is that Carers ACT hosted a young carers' retreat. I think that is self-explanatory but actually really critical. It was incredibly well received, particularly after the last couple of years that we have had.

Something I have spoken about previously is that, while we know that our Youth Advisory Council is very diverse, and while we have worked very hard to make sure that we have diverse voices on that council and we know that they are highly engaged individuals and that is fabulous, we also have spent some time really working with those people who would not necessarily have engaged with government or services. The feedback that we have had is: “We would love to be involved, but actually we can’t prioritise it because we simply can’t afford to be engaged.” I am really pleased to say that 677 young people participated in free events. They were particularly targeted at people who might be from vulnerable backgrounds or children in the out of home care system et cetera.

So 171 young people went to see *Sonic the Hedgehog* at Limelight and they had a great time. Again, it created a connection in the community, which I think is really valuable. We had 60 in Belconnen and 60 in Tuggeranong bowling at Zone Bowling; 80 played miniature golf at the Yarralumla Play Station; 131—so slightly less than *Sonic the Hedgehog*—watched *Ghostbusters* at Dendy; and 175 people visited the National Zoo and Aquarium and had a barbecue lunch. That was, yet again, another fabulous experience for people who have lived in Canberra for close to 20 years of their life and have never experienced our National Zoo and Aquarium.

Really positive feedback was received across those free events. It is quite humbling that the feedback has included that these have been life-changing events for people—to be thought of, to be considered, to be valued and to create some connections. You know me; I could go on. But thank you very much for the opportunity to share Youth Week.

DR PATERSON: Minister, I think young people have had a really tough time over the past couple of years, so how important is it for the ACT government to invest in events like Youth Week in our COVID recovery?

Ms Berry: Thank you for that question. Yes, it is really important. What I have been hearing from the Youth Advisory Council members is how important it is for them to feel like their voices are valued and their experiences are valued and respected. With these kinds of activities, when we celebrate Youth Week, there has been a process around that and what that might look like.

This time, having these free events was through direct feedback from not just the Youth Advisory Council but other people in the community saying, “Look, we just want to go out and have some fun and meet other kids like us. We haven’t been able to do that for a couple of years.” Making sure that they were targeted meant that it got to the people who really needed that support.

So, yes, I take very seriously those opportunities to engage with young people and hear their views and perspectives, which are different from ours. There is no “back in my day” that you can compare with what students and young people are going through now. And that is just one way that we hear them and that young people can get their voices into the decision-making processes of government. It is really important.

DR PATERSON: How did the ACT government ensure that these celebrations were

inclusive?

Ms Berry: Ms Murray was talking about how we have made sure that young people in all their diversity got the chance to be part of these experiences. There were a number of stakeholders that we engaged to make sure that we were targeting those kinds of young people who needed that opportunity, who would not normally have it, including MARSS, the Youth Coalition, our community service youth centres and the Youth Advisory Council themselves. Ms Murray, have I missed any?

Ms Murray: We provided direct tickets through Gugan Gulwan as well, and Menslink, CREATE, St Vincent de Paul and Anglicare. Carers work very closely with Carers ACT, the Multicultural Hub and also Diversity ACT. Obviously, being fortunate to work across portfolios with our Office for Disability ensured that the activities were accessible for people with disability as well.

DR PATERSON: Thank you.

MR HANSON: I go to budget statements F, table 1, on page 4, which is FTE staffing in the Education Directorate. It looks like there were 6,553 FTE in 2021, and then that decreases to 6,473 in 2022-23. That is a reduction of 80. I note that there are the new cleaners coming in. Even though we have new cleaners coming in, there is still a reduction in staff. I was just wondering if someone could explain what that reduction is.

Ms Berry: I can ask Mr Matthews to go through this in a bit more detail with you, but the reduction is the cleaners who were employed under the COVID-19 response fund. That is pretty much what the reduction is. Mr Matthews, can you provide some more detail on that?

Mr Matthews: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Mr Hanson. I have read and understood the privilege statement. Mr Hanson, the FTE numbers in the budget papers describe, essentially, the variation between the budget and the actual outcome. If you look at the last couple of years, we have had a budgeted FTE, which is what gets appropriated, and we have generally spent more money and employed more people as part of the COVID-19 response. So in the past couple of years you will see that the actual outcome was higher than the budgeted amount.

What we pay most attention to is the difference between the budgets year on year. We look at what was funded last year and what is in this year's budget. There were, in total, 108 additional FTEs between the 2021-22 budget and the 2022-23 budget, and that comprises new funding initiatives in this budget. It comprises staff funded under the budget initiatives, as well as 55 staff under new initiatives, and another 27 full-time equivalents for enrolment growth, which is the growth of our system and the new funding that comes in for new students. Then there are approximately an additional 26 staff that we have built into our budget as an expected minimum response to COVID-19 during this financial year.

We would expect two things: firstly, the estimated outcome for 2021-22 will be reported in the financial report; and, secondly, that we have a budget for 2022-23, which, as I said, is 108 up on the past year. Our outcome for 2022-23 will of course

depend on a range of different factors, most notably COVID-19.

MR HANSON: Of that 108, how many are anticipated to be registered teachers?

Mr Matthews: I cannot confirm that number for you now, Mr Hanson. Some roles in our budget initiatives have been identified as particular personnel, like social workers or the like. The way that we fund our schools—and I think we have described this in previous hearings—is that we give an overall funding allocation to schools, based on our student resource allocation model. Then, essentially, principals determine the staffing structure that they need within their school—that is, whether they need additional teachers, school leaders, learning support assistance staff or administrative staff. We do not tie that funding when we allocate to them for particular teaching roles, unless it is part of a specific budget initiative where that is funded on that basis.

MR HANSON: The government, leading into the last election, promised 400 new teachers. In net terms—I am not talking about people who have been recruited, and obviously there are staff coming in and staff going out—how many additional registered teachers are there currently compared to October 2020 when we had the election?

Mr Matthews: I will make three quick points about that, Mr Hanson. The first thing is that the election commitment—and I am very familiar with it—talked about teachers and other support staff. The election commitment was for 400 teachers and other support staff. Secondly, obviously that is over the life of the government, and we are only halfway through this term of government. Thirdly, the FTE numbers are reported as part of our annual report every year. Shortly, we will be reporting on our FTE number, so you will get a halfway picture as part of that annual reporting process.

MR HANSON: Does that picture paint what classification those FTE are—whether they are teachers, registered teachers, support staff or whatever?

Mr Matthews: Mr Hanson, our annual report breaks it down by teachers and other staff, so that is visible and transparent in the annual report—the different FTE numbers for teachers and for other staff.

MR HANSON: Okay. Thanks very much.

MS CLAY: Minister, we spoke on Monday about where children in Belconnen town centre will be going. We had a bit of a conversation. There are no plans at the moment to expand Macquarie primary, there are no plans at the moment to expand Florey primary and there are no plans to build a new school in Belconnen. We have been corresponding about this. You recently wrote to us and told us:

The ACT population has grown strongly over the past decade and the ACT infrastructure plan released in 2019 foreshadowed new public education primary and high school capacity in central Belconnen region in this decade. Early planning work is underway at the directorate for a new primary school capacity, which could be delivered through several small expansions of existing schools or delivery of a new primary school.

We were pleased that we got that letter. We were not quite sure what it meant, but

I am now confused because we seem to have heard the opposite. Where are kids in the Belconnen CBD going to school now, and where will they be going in 2030?

Ms Berry: In 2030?

MS CLAY: Yes, by the end of this decade. Where are those children attending school now and are we planning for school capacity? Where do we expect those children will be going in another five years?

Ms Berry: Ms Efthymiades talked about the population change in a hearing earlier this week. When I wrote that letter to you, it was before we had the more recent update on population and growth within that area. As population growth changes, we adjust our planning accordingly. I will ask Ms Efthymiades to provide more information.

Ms Efthymiades: Ms Clay, the technicality is about what is in the public domain around planning and what is in the early stages of planning. As you would appreciate, the government needs to make informed decisions about investments around school announcements, and those have to be timed in a way that is commensurate with actual population needs, budget et cetera. We are always planning. We do continuous reviews regionally and locally, for all regions in Canberra. We monitor some more closely than others because they are fluctuating more than others.

There is a lot of pre-planning, and that will be the planning that was referenced in Minister Berry's letter. All of those things are live, but they are not at the stage where the population is established enough and the future of the population growth is sure enough to make a permanent build commitment.

MS CLAY: The census figures show we have 741 children under 14 living in Belconnen town centre at the moment, which sounds like a school to me. What is the trigger? If you are telling me that the population is not yet high enough to make allowance for those children, what is the trigger to make allowance for those children?

Ms Efthymiades: There are a few factors that come into play. One is sector affiliation of the students—which schooling sector they will go to. We pick up a bit under two-thirds of the student population. That would be our first consideration. The second one would be the age distribution. If it is up to 14, that is primary school and high school, so how many are there in each area? At the moment those students all have priority area guarantee for particular schools. So they are not without a school; they have priority area guarantee for different schools. We will keep monitoring that and, as it gets to key junctures, we look at the expansion of a local school. Expansions of local schools are absolutely in the early planning, but they are not at the point where we would seek to activate them.

MS CLAY: We heard on Monday some figures about population growth. I think you said that it was initially thought that the population growth was around three per cent and that had stepped down to one per cent. I will put some questions on notice to get detailed figures. We have had a look and, in 2011, we had 367 children; in 2021 we had 741 children; and it is looking to us, based on those numbers, that by 2030 we will have 1,000 children. Can you tell me what the population growth is of children

and what the trigger is where you start to say, “Okay, now we need to proactively look at more capacity”?

Ms Efthymiades: The age breakdown will matter—whether they are in primary school, high school or college. There is not a hard-and-fast trigger point. It is managed locally. No doubt you will appreciate that the regions in Canberra all behave quite differently in their growth, but it is constantly monitored.

As I mentioned in response to an earlier question, we are just embedding the revised national census figures at the same time as we are finalising embedding our own school August census figures into our projections. At that point we will again look at all of the key things. Belconnen town centre is absolutely one of our priority ones that we monitor really closely, just like Gungahlin.

MS CLAY: I will probably lodge the detail on notice. I will be wanting the detail of those age brackets. We are concerned because we are seeing really rapid growth, and it is difficult to know what the forward plans are.

Ms Berry: The government is not as concerned as you are, Ms Clay. We do this work. As Ms Efthymiades said, we are constantly planning, and constantly looking at enrolments each year to make assessments around schools. We are constantly looking at where the siblings are coming from and who is being born now—the birthing data and census—and combining all of that. We work with demographers in the Australian National University to understand it as well as we possibly can. We are in a good place in the ACT to be able to understand that, with those close relationships.

At the moment, as we said, that planning is continuing, and it continues every year. There is capacity within schools in that region. If there was not, that would be a different story. But there is capacity across those age groups. The requirement for a new school will be planned, as we see growth in that area, and there is no doubt that there will be increased growth in that area. At the moment a school is not required for the next couple of years, at least. There is no commitment today for a new school in 2024, for example.

MR HANSON: When it comes to the demographic planning that you are talking about, and looking at enrolments and population growth, obviously, a lot of students are at non-government schools. How do you do that planning and say, “Okay, this area is growing and we’re going to need 60 per cent for a public school, 40 per cent for a non-government school,” or whatever it might be? You identify land, I assume, to be put aside. How does that process work?

Ms Berry: That is all part of it, but that really sits with planning—that initial planning of a new estate. If that is what you are talking about, Mr Hanson, it might be best asked of the planning—

MR HANSON: With the decision about whether there will be a block of land set aside for a non-government school, is that simply a planning decision? Is it informed by Education? You would inform planning and planning will make the decision as to where and what?

Ms Berry: We can probably give you a little bit of information. At the start of a new estate, for example, you would not know how many schools or places you would be putting into that estate until you knew the number of dwellings. You can then do some guessing around the population, and go from there regarding how many schools will be needed and whether they are government or non-government schools. Ms Efthymiades can provide more information.

Ms Efthymiades: There are a couple of elements to that. If, for example, it is like in the Belconnen town centre—brownfields—there is limited land availability. As part of those early planning conversations, before we can say, “Okay, now it’s time,” we are definitely in conversations about what land options might be possible, should something need to be stood up in Belconnen town centre. That is a brownfields response.

With a greenfields response, as the minister said, with the amount of dwellings et cetera, often things are foreshadowed well before that is known. But the conversations essentially are around when a population yield is identified; then land for X number of schools is agreed at a high interim level, until things solidify a bit more. In greenfields conversations, we always have a factor in there for identifying land for non-government schools.

MR HANSON: Do you have an indicative list of sites that are currently envisaged for non-government schools—if not a specific site, which greenfield sites are likely to get a non-government school? Do you have that list?

Ms Efthymiades: I do not have it with me, but there is—

MR HANSON: Can you provide that on notice?

Ms Efthymiades: If we take that on notice, we would be able to give some form of—

Ms Berry: For example, as part of the Ginninderry master plan, there is a private school space planned out there. The site is not confirmed, but there is one out there. There is a site in Wright, which is continuing through that process. I cannot think of any others off the top of my head.

MR HANSON: If you could take it on notice, that would be fantastic.

Ms Efthymiades: Yes.

MR HANSON: When you then say, for example, at Ginninderry, there will be a site for a non-government school, how does that process play out in terms of whether it is Catholic or whether it is an independent school? How does that work?

Ms Berry: That sits with planning. That is with Minister Gentleman—the actual process for allocation. There is a process—

MR HANSON: The allocation.

Ms Berry: It is not allocated to any particular non-government or religious school.

There is a process that they need to go through to put in a tender.

MR HANSON: There will be a site allocated: “This is going to be a non-government school”—

Ms Berry: A site is allocated for a non-government school; then there is another process.

MR HANSON: Then the non-government schools will apply, through planning.

Ms Berry: It is best if you ask Minister Gentleman for the detail on that.

MR HANSON: With respect to the issue of mobile phones, there has been quite a bit of discussion in the media. There is a school in Sydney that has taken action here. I note that there seems to be a variety of different responses across the school sectors in the ACT. Could you give me a sense of whether there is a directorate policy or whether it is managed at a school level, and what the expectations are within the directorate?

Ms Berry: Yes, we can go through a bit of that information for you. Of course, phones and all kinds of internet-attached devices have been incredibly vital for people to be able to communicate with each other over the past couple of years. We cannot ignore the fact that they exist and that they are a part of our lives. I will ask Ms Simmons to talk you through the policy and what happens in individual schools.

Ms Simmons: I confirm that I have read the privilege statement. The directorate has a central policy in relation to electronic devices. The ACT has a position that the use of devices is an important part of the teaching and learning process. The position is that mobile phones are devices that can be used. In a classroom they can be used in terms of learning; in some cases they have accessible apps for students with disability. The position we have is that it is about educating students on how to use mobile phones effectively and successfully. It is generally very successful in the way that they are utilised in classrooms.

We have a policy that supports that centrally, and schools are responsible for working with their community. There are a whole lot of guidelines that we have available that they can utilise to support that.

The other thing I would say is that various research across the country, and not just in Australia but internationally, supports the fact that educating young people on how to use their mobile phones in a way that is conducive to learning is the most effective way of being able to teach people the right way to interact with other people, social media and so on.

MR HANSON: Certainly, some of the evidence that has been presented in the non-government school sector—and there were a couple of academics that wrote in the *Canberra Times* a couple of days ago—suggests that, although it is well intentioned, young teenagers will find it difficult not to get distracted by apps on the phones that are designed to be addictive. Where phone use has been limited, that has assisted in terms not only of academic engagement but also of social engagement in

the playground and so on. Are you continuing to look at this, based on some of that evidence coming forward?

Ms Berry: At this point in time there is no decision to make any changes to the current policy. Whilst I read some of those articles that those individuals posted over the weekend, there is still advice and research that suggest that banning mobile phones in schools disadvantages young people and will not resolve the issues that parents and others, and academics, are suggesting would be the case if phones were banned.

It is more about how they are managed in schools. There is the advice and information we can give to young people about being good digital citizens; also, how we can support parents to put in place tips and tools for their toolkit on how they can help to support the young person to be a good digital citizen.

At this stage we are not considering any changes to the current policy. Of course, things change. Certainly, things have changed in the past couple of years. But the advice to me remains the same—that it would not necessarily lead to the kind of positive impact that people would expect from that prohibition. Even the eSafety Commissioner suggests that phone bans are not the way to go.

MR HANSON: Given that students in ACT public schools have access to a Chromebook that is provided to them, how is a child disadvantaged by not having access to a mobile phone? They have access to the internet. They are using a Chromebook to support their learning. How does it disadvantage a child to not have access to a mobile phone in the classroom?

Ms Berry: Mobile phones have the ability to have many more different applications on them that are much more useful to a child's education across a range of different areas than can be loaded onto a Chromebook. Chromebooks have restrictions to the sorts of applications that can be applied on them; they are, first and foremost, a textbook of today, if you like—an electronic textbook of today—but a mobile device has, as I said, the ability to load a range of different applications that are supportive of a young person's learning.

Ms Simmons: I can add some more to that, Minister. In terms of our policy, young people have that opportunity to bring a personal device. In some instances they are set up in a way that allows them, as I mentioned earlier, to access the curriculum in different ways.

As the minister has just said, there are some applications that young people would potentially use. For example, there are applications that can be used in a presentation, for an assignment or an assessment, where they need to be able to utilise a particular application. Sometimes a dictation type of application will allow them to be able to translate into certain software systems.

There are a lot of different reasons why people would use that. In some cases, the only personal device that young people have is their phone. These days, young people use their phone for a multitude of reasons—not just to use it as a phone, as many of us might do. They might use it as part of storing files and information that might assist

them to be able to use it in other systems. It might be photographs or whatever they need to use to insert into some learning that they are undertaking, or, as I said earlier, a presentation. There is a multitude of ways that the devices could be used in a classroom.

MR HANSON: I understand that there are advantages. Equally, there can be disadvantages, in terms of kids being on apps that perhaps do not support their learning—TikTok, Snapchat or whatever. Is there a process whereby those apps can be prevented from being used and other ones can be used? I do not know whether the technology can do that. Maybe you have to link in to the school's IT system through their wi-fi, and that limits the use of some of those apps—or is that not feasible?

Ms Simmons: We give really clear guidance to our schools and provide a lot of support. We take eSafety really seriously. In our schools we provide a range of systems, in terms of security and safety for our schools. There are some instances where there has been a gap and we have been able to address those gaps. In terms of specifics around what a mobile phone can access in a school, I would need to take that on notice in terms of any specific questions.

MR HANSON: This goes beyond a security and safety aspect. It is more about the kids being distracted than unsafe. I would be interested to hear if there is anything more.

MR BRADDOCK: I have a bill before the Assembly to extend voting rights for 16- and 17-year-olds. Have you consulted with the Youth Advisory Council about that proposal, and what were their views on that bill?

Ms Murray: We have had a number of conversations with the Youth Advisory Council on the voting age and whether lowering the voting age is appropriate. Certainly, I have been part of those conversations. The general tenor on the question—and the minister was in one of the conversations that we have had—has been that we would like some more education on what voting should look like, and to understand the systems more.

There was a sporadic understanding of how it all works, to be perfectly honest, and a real desire to demonstrate that if people were going to participate in this process, they wanted to be fully informed. There was a long conversation around some people's families being particularly engaged in this space and other people's families never having spoken about it. In fact, there was a nervousness.

It is hard to say that there was a consistent view on whether there was support for lowering the age or not. There was some conversation about an opt-in model. Certainly, I do not think there is a consensus from the Youth Advisory Council on the approach that should be taken, but they are very engaged in having the conversation and are pleased to be at the table and to be able to provide advice directly to the minister.

Ms Berry: It would be safe to say that, just like everybody else, the current group on the Youth Advisory Council have not made their minds up. In the education space we are working with the Electoral Commission about gathering some information that we

can provide to our school communities to ensure that they have information around what it looks like in the ACT, as far as elections go—how that works and what the process is. I am not sure where that work is up to.

Ms Haire: Civics and citizenship is an important part of the Australian curriculum. It is one of the things that has been strengthened in the new curriculum that will be implemented from 2024 in the ACT. It is a very strong part of what is in the current Australian curriculum as well. We are very fortunate to have in the ACT access to so many of the institutions, so that young people can see our system of government at work. Certainly, we know that our schools take advantage of the opportunities that being in Canberra brings, as they come here, and as they go to the national parliament to observe democracy at work. It is a crucial element of the school curriculum, and we are very fortunate to have the partnership with the Australian Electoral Commission.

MR HANSON: On that piece of legislation, the Youth Advisory Council might have a view on the fact that the bill would make voting compulsory for 16-year-olds and that, if that 16-year-old failed to vote, they would be committing an offence. Did they have a view on whether they thought that 16-year-olds were committing an offence if they were not voting? Did they think that was a good idea?

Ms Berry: Mr Hanson, I could not answer specifically about what individuals thought about that legislation but, as I said, with the rest of the community there is obviously a willingness or a readiness to be engaged in decision-making processes. That is why they have all volunteered to be part of the Youth Advisory Council. That is an important role that they play in advising me but also in facilitating the Youth Week activities, as well as the Youth Parliament days.

They also do some of their own work. In the past year or two, they developed their own consent brochures and worked to make sure that the brochure worked for young people and was in a language that young people would understand more. So they do their own set of work as well.

What I am hearing from the Youth Advisory Council is that they are not decided either way. They do want to be engaged in decision-making processes, but whether or not they all agree or do not agree, for or against, that is not what I have been hearing from them.

DR PATERSON: Minister, there was an article recently in the *Canberra Times* around Daramalan College installing sensors to alert school staff around vaping that is occurring in the school. I was just wondering whether there is any move or thought in ACT public schools to install these sensory detectors.

Ms Berry: Not at this stage. There is no decision by the ACT government or ACT government schools to put in sensors in that respect. I know that there have been a number of schools across the country, and obviously we will look at it. Mr Huxley, do you want to provide some more information on that?

Mr Huxley: Happy to, Minister. I have read and understand the privilege statement. The approach to vaping in schools falls within the curriculum. We take an education approach in terms of vaping in schools. We have had resources available for schools,

which is handled under the health curriculum. We believe in educating and working with students and making them informed as consumers, so they understand the risks associated with these things, similar to the approach in drug education over many years in schools, whether it be tobacco, alcohol, drugs or vaping.

Part of that is also understanding some of the marketing techniques that can come with these things, and really informing students around the health risks. We have a resource site available to all schools. That has health fact sheets, links to podcasts and a whole lot of curriculum resources and information available to all of our schools to work with their students as part of the curriculum so that they understand the risks, they understand some of the tactics and strategies that people who want young people to use these products may be using and are informed to make the right decisions.

Obviously, vaping does occur in schools. The policy response comes under our Safe and Supportive Schools framework, which is available across all ACT public schools. The first instance might be a phone call back to mum and dad: “It is not acceptable.” At the end of the day, vaping is not legal. That is the response that we take with parents; we work and partner with parents. If it happens multiple times, we might then treat it as noncompliance in terms of the approach to the school, and there will be escalating consequences for the young person. In cases of addiction, in any situation like that, we then refer to external agencies, such as Ted Noffs, for example, in the most extreme cases. That is the broad approach that we use in regard to vaping, in line with the way we treat those things from an education basis in all of our schools.

DR PATERSON: Recently the law in relation to affirmative consent was changed. I am just wondering if there are changes in the education to kids in schools around the legislative reform.

Ms Berry: I think there are a couple of parts to that. It had already formed a part of the curriculum, but it is now definitely very clearly part of their curriculum and described nationally. In the ACT we have committed to the gender equality process across our schools, which is around that education process with young people and about respectful relationships and what that would look like. We do what we can within our schools. Of course, this problem also occurs outside of our school gates. But, as a school, we can contribute to the community’s response to stopping sexual assaults and violence outside and understanding what consent looks like.

Ms McMahon, can you provide some information about that sort of curriculum delivery in our schools around consent?

Ms McMahon: Certainly. I have read the privilege statement and understand that. We have—I think ongoing with the Australian curriculum—always taught about gender equity, sexuality and relationships education. Recently, with the new Australian curriculum, it is now obviously a compulsory part of that. Respectful relationships and sexuality education is taught right through the curriculum—from little people up to our big people—and consent forms part of that all the way through. Understanding what is right and wrong around our bodies, who has access to those bodies and how we behave with each other is taught developmentally throughout the curriculum.

We have recently employed three new people, through the Gender Equity Program, to

provide coaching support to our staff across our schools. As we have increased the amount of teaching that we do, we also need to increase the capability of our teachers, especially in some of those areas where the level of responsibility for teaching that content area has increased—for example, our PE faculties within our high school settings. So we have a new program of coaching to support the capability development of our teachers across our system.

We have also worked with our community. The year before last we had a roundtable which had many partners. All education sectors in the ACT, the universities, our parents and our Youth Coalition came together in a roundtable to discuss what it means to be teaching relationships and sexuality education across the territory. The outcomes from that have helped to build that program and understand what children want in their education, the honesty that they need, the guidance that they need and the really rich teaching and learning opportunities that need to exist within our schools. It is a growing program, and it is certainly being guided by our young people, by our parents and by experts.

MR HANSON: With Calwell there was an FOI done and it showed that in the lead-up to WorkSafe closing the school, the school was put in lockdown at least 10 times. Some of the quotes include, on 2 March: “This is a situation that is getting to the totally hysterical and impossible to manage.” And correspondence from a senior official saying, “I agree this is a very disturbing incident. We both needed to know about it a lot sooner.”

It seemed, from reading the FOI, that there were a lot of warnings that something was going wrong at that school until WorkSafe closed it down. Has the review of that school and the body of work given any learnings for the directorate to look out for in other schools to make sure that, if those sorts of situations are happening, the schools know what action they have to take, and the directorate will get engaged earlier to make sure that that response is provided sooner to prevent it getting out of control, as it did at Calwell?

Ms Berry: Those reviews, Mr Hanson, are for that very purpose. The ACT Education Directorate is an ongoing learning organisation, just as our schools are. So every opportunity to learn and improve on previous experiences or outcomes across any of our schools where a review is conducted are used as learning opportunities so that we can improve and be better as a directorate and as a school. Mr Huxley, did you have some more information?

Mr Huxley: Yes, certainly. Thanks for the question, Mr Hanson. We provide a range of different supports across our schools. That is from data that we monitor, as well as a direct requests from schools. We have been providing a range of supports—which I think has been identified with Calwell now—in the past couple of years. The impact of the pandemic going to and from remote has meant that some of those supports, and getting traction for them on the ground, has been difficult, as implementing change in any of our schools has been.

We have been monitoring and working with Calwell now, though, in terms of the outcomes of the SPR, moving forward. We are continually reviewing our processes in terms of incident managements and follow-ups with schools and also the range of

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supports that we can put in place. The Special Purpose Review, SPR, that was conducted at Calwell was evidence of our approach to learning. It is fully publicly available for everyone to see and view, and we are working with the school on implementing the recommendations from that as we speak.

CHAIR: Given that it is now 2 o'clock, on behalf of the committee we would like to thank Minister Berry and officials for their attendance today. If witnesses have any questions that they have taken on notice, could you please provide the answers to the committee secretary within five working days. Thank you.

Short suspension.

Appearances:

Cheyne, Ms Tara, Assistant Minister for Economic Development, Minister for the Arts, Minister for Business and Better Regulation, Minister for Human Rights and Minister for Multicultural Affairs

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

Arthy, Ms Kareena, Deputy Director General, Economic Development

Pryce, Mr David, Deputy Director-General, Access Canberra

Lhuede, Mr Nick, Executive Branch Manager, Construction Occupations Registrar and Architects Registrar; Construction, Utilities and Environment Protection; Access Canberra

Engle, Mr Sam, Coordinator-General, Office for Climate Action

Clapham, Dr David, Executive Branch Manager; Regional, Infrastructure, Planning and Transport

Cubin, Ms Derise, Executive Branch Manager, ACT Commissioner for Fair Trading and Controlled Sports Registrar; Licensing and Registrations; Access Canberra

Neiberding, Mr Craig, Acting Executive Branch Manager, Customer Coordination, Access Canberra

Wild-River, Dr Su, Senior Director, Environment Protection Authority Delegate for Lakes and Clinical Waste Controller; Construction, Utilities and Environment Protection; Access Canberra

Balaretnaraja, Mr Ash, Acting Executive Branch Manager; Business and Innovation, Economic Development

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon and welcome back to this session, Ms Cheyne, in your capacity as Minister for Business and Better Regulation, and officials. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. When you speak for the first time, can you please acknowledge that you understand the privilege implications of that statement. As we are not going through opening statements, we will go straight to questions. I will start off with the first question.

According to the latest ABS business entry and exit data, the ACT has the worst survival rate for businesses that are employing between one and 19 employees and employing between 20 and 199 employees. So why is there not any more funding for business in the budget, given that the ACT has the worst survival rate for business in the country?

Ms Cheyne: Thank you, Chair. I acknowledge the privilege statement. Firstly, I need to reject that there is not funding, or not enough funding, in our budget for businesses, and I am happy to go in detail—

THE CHAIR: That would be great.

Ms Cheyne: about the support that we are providing to businesses. Of course, we are aware of the 11.30 release from the Bureau of Statistics this morning, and we are alive to some of those points that you have made about business survival. But I would also note that we have a very strong figure of a 7.7 per cent increase in the number of

additional new businesses in the ACT in the past financial year. A 7.7 per cent increase is the second highest in the country of any state or territory.

We have an economy that supports businesses trying new things. I think that it is easy to look at survival and/or business exits as a negative, but we are very aware in the ACT, and we encourage an environment of innovation, of trying new things and of giving things a go. That does not necessarily mean that every business will survive, and it may well be that a business ends and that same proprietor begins another business soon after. So the figure that we are very pleased about and that, I think, goes to the strength of our economy at large is that 7.7 per cent increase.

I also am very conscious that the strength of our economy has been reflected in other recent statistics as well, showing that our state final demand has grown by 3.2 per cent; that residents and businesses are also spending significantly more than they were in the past financial year; that our job vacancies are at record highs; and that unemployment and under employment are at record lows. I appreciate that that is a positive but also presents some challenges to business as well as they look to recruit and have staffing that is appropriate for what they are trying to achieve.

To go to your question about what is in the budget for businesses, we are continuing to fund the Canberra Business Advice and Support Service. We have a digital toolkit on the ACT Business Hub, providing resources for businesses to use for their workforce attraction efforts. There is also the realisation of our previous budget initiative, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Business Support Program. That contract was awarded just recently and is really a concierge service to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses begin and grow.

There is funding in this year's budget for the continued development of the Business Hub. Since we have established that, we have seen very good engagement from businesses, and we want to develop that into even more of a one-stop shop for businesses that are looking to enter, as well as to grow.

We do have funding for delivery of a new Access Canberra website which, for many businesses, is the front face for the ACT government and engaging, especially with the regulatory and registration aspects of the business. As you would be aware, the Better Regulation Taskforce has been funded to deliver a three-year program of work. We released our report, as well our agenda for that, in May this year, and we are continuing to deliver on that agenda, going forward.

That is just what is in the budget in the short-term but, of course, we provided an extraordinary amount of support to businesses during the lockdown last year to assist with their survival.

THE CHAIR: Out of the 7.7 per cent increase, do you know what sectors that mainly covers?

Ms Cheyne: I received the media release at the same time as everybody else, Mr Milligan, so I do not have that level of detail yet. I was in the same hearings as you.

THE CHAIR: Okay. In terms of the support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses, do you have some numbers there in terms of who has put forward interest and who has set up business and in what areas they might be?

Ms Cheyne: We are seeing that as a really important growth area for us in the ACT. That is exactly why we had that election commitment and why we have now funded that commitment and engaged the Coolamon advisory—I forget their proper name—to provide that concierge service. We think this is an area that can really grow, and that concierge service is going to provide that support to them. It has only just begun, so in terms of the numbers of businesses that it has assisted so far, I doubt we would have those figures. I will just see if Ms Arthy has anything further to add on that.

Ms Arthy: Thank you, Minister. I have read and understood the privilege statement. The minister is correct: it is at a very early stage. I will check with my colleagues as to whether we do have any numbers of businesses that are being assisted. But, after only a short period of time, I think we are really only in the very early engagement side of things. I can do a quick turnaround and just check.

Mr Balaretnaraja: I have read the privilege statement. The first reporting period includes to 31 August. So we expect to have the full numbers for that period then.

THE CHAIR: How long has the advisory been open for?

Ms Cheyne: The services agreement was executed on 1 June this year. It will run for one year, with an option to extend services for an additional year. The range of services that they are going to provide, as I mentioned, is the concierge service to connect businesses with a range of service providers; mentoring and coaching services; and access to accelerator programs for businesses that are looking to grow. They are seeking expressions of interest from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses that are looking to use the Coolamon service at the moment. Just recently, they delivered a workshop with external providers, including the federal government, the ACT government, universities and industry to provide information about its program and to understand the range of services available from support providers to help inform their own program delivery.

DR PATERSON: Minister, just following on, is there any cross-portfolio work within the ACT government that you can detail in terms of the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business development in the ACT?

Ms Cheyne: This is our primary area for this portfolio. But, of course, we are very focused as a government in elevating First Nations voice, truth-telling and the engagement of First Nations artists and elevating artistic practice. We discussed briefly the work that has been funded through the budget and released at the same time as the budget, through our creative policy. The key focus area that informs all of our actions is about how we can elevate our First Nations practice. I think that is important, because it can be easily forgotten that artists are businesspeople as well. This is a key way that we can support them in another portfolio.

We also very much appreciate that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses engage well with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander concierge services. Hearing

people and engaging with them in a way that is culturally appropriate also helps further those businesses, including with lived experience. That is exactly why we have made this investment. We look forward to being able to provide some more detail after that first quarter. So perhaps in the annual report hearings we can go to that level of detail.

DR PATERSON: Great; thank you.

MS CASTLEY: I want to ask a bit more about the survival rate of business. I know, from talking to the business community, that they do not really care that we have a 7.7 per cent increase in businesses being created—I mean, they do care—but in the BRT report it says that 55 per cent of non-employing businesses do not survive, and 70.5 per cent of businesses with one to 19 employees are not surviving.

Going back to Mr Milligan’s question, other than a concierge, with respect to the businesses that are struggling, the 70 per cent that will not survive, out of the 7.7 per cent of new businesses that are created today—this year; whenever it is—how are you helping them? How will this budget help the 70 per cent that we are expecting will not survive?

Ms Cheyne: Ms Castley, you have it in your hands; the better regulation report details an awful amount of work that we are doing to support businesses and make it easier to conduct business in the ACT. I am happy to go into that level of detail for you. There are two streams in it. It is a lengthy report, and detailed. I am happy to talk to you about what has been achieved to date.

MS CASTLEY: Could you talk about the amount of money for those streams? I have read the streams; there are a lot more reviews and a survey. I have more questions on the BRT, but when you speak, it is almost like we do not expect businesses to survive. It is almost a positive: “Don’t worry; we’ve got more being created.” What do you say to businesses when you speak to them about our survival rate?

Ms Cheyne: Ms Castley, you might be conflating some figures here. What is happening overall is that the number of businesses in the ACT is growing. Businesses are entering and exiting, but our overall number of businesses in the ACT is not going backwards; it is improving.

MS CASTLEY: Did you talk to any businesses that have not survived, to inform the Better Regulation Taskforce report?

Ms Cheyne: Yes, and we are continuing to do so. We have been engaging with a number of community and business leaders, regarding talking to businesses that have exited. We do want to hear from them about what they found difficult. It has also been difficult for us to find businesses who might be willing to talk because some of them might be doing a new business, engaging with something else or they have taken a different direction. I will see whether Mr Engele has anything further to add.

Mr Engele: I acknowledge the privilege statement. As part of the work, we talked to a number of businesses, previous business owners and the key peak organisations that are working with those businesses. In terms of the landscape, the BRT report was

written at the time of COVID, so it highlighted the key challenges for businesses in the 2021 year, where the survival rates were challenging for businesses.

MS CASTLEY: With the costing for the concierge that you discussed, it is for 12 months, from 1 June this year to 1 June next year. Will the report be tabled in the Assembly?

Ms Cheyne: What report?

MS CASTLEY: Figures for how many businesses have utilised the concierge.

Ms Arthy: This is the normal contract reporting that we have. They are just required to provide the information, every quarter, about the number of businesses that they assist. At this stage, unless the minister says otherwise, there is no requirement to table them in the Assembly, but we can provide—

MS CASTLEY: I am wondering how I can get—

THE CHAIR: You could always write to the minister once that period is up.

Ms Cheyne: We will be back in two months, and we can talk about it then.

MS CASTLEY: Perfect.

MR BRADDOCK: I am interested in the initiative “strengthening environmental protections” and what that means for the EPA and Access Canberra. Can you provide more detail for me?

Ms Cheyne: Yes, I certainly can, Mr Braddock. Thank you for your ongoing interest in this. There are two things, as part of this budget initiative. I will ask Mr Pryce to talk to the detail. In the short term, we have recognised that the number of environmental protection officers in the ACT since the EPA was established under Access Canberra has not grown. That is since about 2015 or 2016. We are seeing that there has been an increase in not only the number of complaints but also engagement with the EPA. There has been a 33 per cent increase in complaints to the EPA in the past six years. That includes a 49 per cent increase in noise complaints alone. Of course, we have greater urban density and mixed use development. We want the EPA to be not just responsive but proactive.

Part of the budget initiative is for two new FTEs over the next two years to support the EPA’s functions and the posture that we have right now. On top of that, there is funding in the budget for a resource in EPSDD—in Minister Vassarotti’s space—which will be a senior policy officer for a 12-month period who will develop a three-year action plan—delivering the reforms that are necessary to deliver an enhanced and modernised environmental protection framework for the ACT.

What I am getting at here is that we recognise that, if we keep going the way we are going, as we currently are, we need more resources now. We are assisting with that with this budget initiative. Also, it has now been some time. The circumstances of the city are changing. Complaints are increasing. We have talked several times in these

hearings and in annual report hearings about where the EPA should be directing its resources, and harm versus risk. This review will help to guide that. It will also help to guide us in responding to some of the feedback that we received in the *State of the lakes and waterways* report that the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment released this month.

MR BRADDOCK: With the rising number of complaints—as you said, the city is getting bigger—why do those two FTEs for the EPA stop after two years? What is the reasoning there?

Ms Cheyne: That is a great question. It is because the work that the EPSDD officer will do with that three-year action plan will be informing us about the resourcing requirements, going forward. I do not want to pre-empt what that work could be, but it could be that they say, “Actually, the resources that we have will be effective but they need to be directed in this way,” or they could say, “Actually, we are going to need more resources.” We are dealing with the situation that we have now, while that EPSDD officer does the policy work, and then that will inform, potentially, a future budget bid.

DR PATERSON: Minister, while we are talking about the environment protection agency, I hear constituent concerns sometimes around Denman Prospect and the greenfields areas about construction and what goes on at some of the sites. What level of enforcement action is taken in these areas where you have huge construction going on?

Ms Cheyne: There are two aspects where the EPA has had a strong role in Denman Prospect. One has been in relation to construction noise complaints; the other has been about construction more generally. Mr Lhuede will be able to talk a little more about the actions that have been taken recently.

Something that I was very pleased to learn about, throughout the Molonglo Valley area recently, was that the EPA had been proactive. As we were talking about a moment ago with Mr Braddock, following the significant rain events, they have been especially proactive in working to ensure that sedimentation from sites has been prevented from entering our waterways in the first place. The EPA—Mr Lhuede will be able to give more detail—went out and engaged with building sites to work on that prevention. A week after the significant rain event they went around and, very pleasingly, there was no evidence of sedimentation.

We are currently working with EPSDD and across ministerial offices, with Minister Vassarotti, on updated construction and land development guidelines. Again, that will better reflect the overall situation of construction in the ACT. Nick will have plenty more detail and some good-news stories.

Mr Lhuede: The minister covered off very well the proactive work that was carried out, with the heavy rainfall we have been having recently. That reflects the past two years. That has been quite significant, and it is one of the reasons that we are focusing significantly on those areas.

In addition to the issues around water quality associated with construction, the other

significant area of focus has been in relation to noise and construction noise. Another area of proactive engagement has been more broadly in education with builders and residents in some of these greenfield areas. As you can imagine, in many circumstances, an individual has moved into a greenfield area and is surrounded by building, and it can be challenging.

Earlier this year, the team, with our engagement team in Access Canberra, undertook to write both to builders and residents in those areas, and help to explain, I suppose, some of the issues and gain an understanding from residents about approaching builders; likewise for builders to be respectful of people in those areas.

In construction, and looking at the associated water quality issues, along with the noise issues, there has been some solid, proactive work undertaken by the EPA in those new areas at Denman and in other new areas.

Ms Cheyne: Dr Paterson, I did not realise that Su Wild-River is online. She may be able to give a further level of detail.

Dr Wild-River: I confirm that I have read and understand the privilege statement. The material that has been presented so far gives a really well-rounded picture. I can confirm that the EPA has been undertaking an enhanced program, particularly around those sites in Denman Prospect and other areas that have been identified after recent visits by the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment as high risk.

The EPA focuses on a proactive and preventive approach to this kind of thing in the first instance. For instance, according to the guidelines, when there is work on a site larger than 0.3 hectares, they are required to obtain agreement. The conditions of the agreement include a sediment control plan before works commence, and that needs to be updated if any changes are made to the planning. That has to cover things like disturbance of earth, placing filler, soil surface, and changing the rates and volumes of stormwater. There is a range of strategies that have to be included in those plans to minimise sedimentation.

I would love to share an example of how we have been delivering this enhanced regulatory program over the past couple of months. Everybody will no doubt remember that, on 4 August, we had a significant rain event in the ACT. The EPA was looking at the weather forecasts in that week, and we tasked a few officers to go out and do some preventive work before the rain event, to make sure that all of the sites in Denman Prospect were as tight as they could possibly be, and in other areas, such as Whitlam.

Officers went out and talked to site managers to make sure that all of the sediment fences were as good as they possibly could be and that everything was in place. You will remember that we did have the large rain event, and the follow-up that we did a couple of days later in all of those areas showed that those sediment control works had been successful, and there was no evidence from those inspections that we did straight afterwards.

All of that work is ongoing. The wet weather continues. It is a real challenge with a lot of development going on, but that proactive approach is a really good focus.

DR PATERSON: How has the building industry responded to your engagement?

Dr Wild-River: Generally, very well. The guidelines are very clear. They are targeted to what is needed on the site, so they are very practical guidelines. The assistance that staff in the EPA give is targeted towards practical solutions. We work together with people on site to identify what is needed. It can be quite site-specific.

As with any regulatory space, there are instances when people are not as keen to comply, and we do have enforcement options in that case. We do undertake compliance and enforcement actions when those are needed. We follow the Access Canberra and ACT government compliance framework in doing that. If we fail with our engagement and education activities, we will move on to enforcement activities. We can issue a range of infringement notices and invoke protection orders when it has been needed over the past year, and it is ongoing.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, I have a question about the ChooseCBR review. With respect to David Butler Consulting, I have done an online search, and I am wondering how you chose David Butler Consulting. I have struggled to find a website. I did find information about a David Butler Consulting, and the company was deregistered on 25 May 2018. I have not been able to find anybody else. Could you talk me through who David Butler Consulting is, and how we chose him?

Ms Cheyne: I will have to check. My recollection—and I will come back to this and confirm it shortly—is that I asked the Head of Service for a review to be conducted. The Head of Service identified David Butler and consulted with me on his appointment to lead that review. Having looked at his work history and his particular engagement in terms of technical aspects, he appeared to be appropriate. But it was not a consultancy that was commissioned by me.

MS CASTLEY: Would it have been a panel? Would he have been sole-sourced by the government?

Ms Cheyne: I do not know whether I can answer that, Ms Castley, as I did not do the procurement. It might be one for Ms Leigh. Can I come back to you in this hearing, after I have worked out what the process was?

MS CASTLEY: Yes. He would have needed to have an ABN, and all of that stuff, to be able to be paid, I assume. I am keen to understand. I could not seem to find the cost for the review.

Ms Cheyne: Yes, I am happy to take that on notice.

MS CASTLEY: And what involvement you had; why did you not have involvement in this? Could you explain that again?

Ms Cheyne: Because it was an internal review.

MR COCKS: I am interested in going back to the questions around business, and business regulation in particular. I have been through the report that you referred to

earlier, but I am looking for some quantification around the burden of regulation on businesses in the ACT. Do you have any figures that you can provide, and can you share those with us?

Ms Cheyne: What sort of figures are you after, Mr Cocks?

MR COCKS: I am interested in what the burden of regulation is on businesses, in terms of the financial impacts, the time impacts, any analysis that you have around how that translates to a business's choice as to whether they start, and any impacts as to whether a business continues to operate in the ACT.

Ms Cheyne: I will check the level of quantifiable detail that we have to hand that we can give you. It does depend on the nature of the business and, in some cases, exactly which part of government they are dealing with. We are very alive to the cumulative impact on businesses. Across Access Canberra, the Better Regulation Taskforce and economic development, we want businesses to be supported.

We do have a principle, and it is detailed in the report, of only telling us once. While it is not quantifiable, there is a qualitative empirical example that I can give. Businesses have reported that they might engage with one area of the government and provide X amount of information; then they engage with another area of government and are asked to provide the same level of information, or slightly tweaked, and have to do it in another area.

That is something we are actively looking at, at the moment—where that information is provided once, making it easier within government to share that information so that the burden is not on businesses to continue to provide that information. I will check whether Sam has anything that goes directly to your question.

Mr Engele: It is a good question, and a question that the task force did explore as part of the work. There are some jurisdictions that use some basic measures. They look at the number of permits or lines of legislation, but they really do not get to the heart of what the impact is on business.

As outlined in the work program, we have an end-to-end user mapping piece of work that we are commissioning at the moment, to work with businesses to understand the touchpoints with government and the time it takes for that. Unfortunately, when you look at legislation, it can be very lengthy legislation, but the impact on business can be quite minimal, because of the way it is implemented. Conversely, some legislation in the legislation book may only be short, but actually it is quite complex in terms of how businesses experience it. We want to understand that in more detail. That is outlined as one of the pieces of work, and we are underway on that at the moment.

In addition, we are looking at the regulatory costs and benefits. We know that regulation, for businesses and the broader community, does provide some benefit. It is about how we balance those costs and benefits. We are commissioning work on that as well. They are both difficult to answer at the moment because it has not really been done at a sophisticated level in Australia—or, actually, across the world.

The third piece is a business sentiment survey. It is a longitudinal survey, and we are

basing that on what is undertaken in New Zealand. They regularly check in with businesses on a range of parameters to understand what things are changing, and to identify future areas of reform.

They are the three areas that are touched on in your question. We do not have that data at the moment, but we are definitely interested in getting to a level of knowledge where we can share that with you.

Ms Cheyne: Mr Cocks, another element that we are exploring is a concierge model within government. It is not just about telling us once; it is also about making it easy to find information. That is why we have funding in the budget to improve our offering, which is already quite good, on the Business Hub website. All of the information that businesses need should be in the one place, making it easier to find.

In addition to that, it is about exploring something—whether it is a phone call, a crack team or something like that—so that businesses can call and say, “I need to do this,” and get directed to the correct area. We already have a little bit of that in the events and business engagement team within Access Canberra. I think we can explore that offering so that there is that support for people who say, “I’m interested in starting a business,” “I want to grow,” and “Perhaps it’s time for me to exit.”

MR COCKS: The idea of a concierge seems great, but in some ways it is not necessarily getting to the heart of the problem, if a business is contending with a high volume of complex legislation and regulations. A number of businesses tell me that they have given up engaging and trying to get the government to listen to them on this. In some of this work—Sam, you mentioned these studies that are coming up—how will you contact and reach out to businesses in that group that have bought out of this review process?

Mr Engele: As part of that, we are working largely with the Canberra Business Chamber and the Australian Hotels Association to work with their members to identify the right people for us to work with. That will largely capture people who are currently in business, and current members; but, as we have said previously, we are interested in understanding those businesses that are closing, and the motivating factors around that.

MS CASTLEY: As you said, part of the BRT report highlighted what businesses were asking for, and the concierge is excellent. One of the things that they asked for was people working in government that have previously run businesses. How have you actioned that so far? Do you guys know how to run a business? Have you had businesses in your past? Have you employed business owners, so that they can be the ones talking to business owners when they call?

Ms Cheyne: I cannot speak for the public service’s entire experience, but there are a few aspects to that. First of all, my parents were, and still are, small business owners—my mother, at least. Certainly, I grew up with that in mind. Across the public service, of course, we have a merit-based approach for the different roles, and people enter the public service with all sorts of different backgrounds and experience. In addition to that background and experience, our compliance team with Access Canberra have done an extraordinary job on the ground, particularly over the past two

years, in going door to door, engaging with businesses and having those conversations with them about what they need. In many cases, businesses say, “I need this,” or “I need that,” and we are able to point them to different areas of information.

Background is a part of that. I am not sure that we can mandate that someone has a business background for particular roles in the public service. But we do have a dedicated public service that is engaging with business in good faith. Especially when we consider the amount of engagement that occurred last year, not just with Access Canberra but with the business support grants team, I am not sure businesses have ever had that many contact points with government before. We have seen that as a real opportunity to continue to build that engagement with them.

The number of people who have signed up to our newsletter, for example, has grown a lot. We try to keep that simple, and share information that is relevant to businesses. As was referred to before, we will be doing that business sentiment survey and checking in with businesses about their entire business and regulatory experience with government.

MS CASTLEY: I note that people that would have applied for the ChooseCBR scheme are getting that newsletter now. Isn't that part of the—

Ms Cheyne: Not ChooseCBR; business support grants.

MS CASTLEY: The ChooseCBR people are getting the business support grant email; I know a few people. That is good; that would explain some of the increase. I appreciate that you have gone door to door to business, and not just the Business Chamber and AHA, which is excellent, because there is a big difference between running a chamber and being Joe Plumber, who is on his own, works all day long and does not know how to apply for something at 10 o'clock at night, which is the time when he is probably writing—

DR PATERSON: Chair, what is the question?

THE CHAIR: She is getting there.

MS CASTLEY: Your CMTEDD report says that it should recruit people with a business past, so I am interested to hear how you will go about that, as your report states.

Mr Engle: On page 29 of the report, we have identified the benefits that could come from a secondment program with business, so that we can share those ideas. We heard similar comments in relation to business wanting government to understand the pressures that they face. That was one of the possible options that we thought might be a useful way of achieving that cross-fertilisation of understanding.

THE CHAIR: Minister, in May 2021, you made a ministerial statement on the Better Regulation Taskforce. Within that statement you said:

One of the task force's first and most critical initiatives has been talking to business about how to talk to business; what methods, with what frequency, suit

business owners best to have their views and concerns heard by government.
This ... will benefit everyone who runs or works in a business in the ACT ...

Given that it was one of the task force's first and most critical initiatives, what have you discovered about how to talk to business, what methods are best, what about the frequency, and how will your discoveries benefit everyone?

Ms Cheyne: We covered quite a lot of that with Ms Castley's questioning before. The key lesson learned for all of us is that there is no one right way for businesses to be engaged with, or for them to engage with us. That is one of the reasons that we have this multipronged approach, so to speak. It is about the incidental engagement that might be occurring through our compliance teams. It is about being available to answer questions, and to ask questions. Again, that was a very key feature of the business support grants team, who were actively engaging with business and working with them on the right information to provide.

It is something on which we can continue to engage with businesses, and that is part of what that business sentiment survey is about. The concierge approach that we are talking about will assist greatly, so that businesses are getting what they want, when they need it, in the way that suits them.

Equally, that work on our website, as unsexy as it is, is really important. As Ms Castley noted, there can be times when an owner might have time to think, be doing their books or whatever. It can be late at night, and being able to find things easily online is so important. That is why I will keep going on about it. We want to get that right for businesses.

MS CASTLEY: If I can go a bit further with the BRT, the report did mention developing a survey and briefly discussed that. What more will that survey get us than your on-the-ground engagement with business?

Ms Cheyne: Because it is a longitudinal survey, Ms Castley—and by that we mean done over several years—we can continue to get data from those responses that we are getting from businesses. So it is not as if I write to you today and that is it, and then the business survey is done. We would be engaging with businesses over a period of time and learning whether there are changes simply in how they feel about their engagement with government. If the first survey is the benchmark, we will be able to track where we can go from there.

MS CASTLEY: Okay. The human-centred design—I understand that is a model for working with businesses. So is it concierge people who will be learning how to use this human-centred design? Can we talk about that? It is a methodology, so is that just something they all know? Isn't human-centred design the goal of dealing with anybody?

Ms Cheyne: Yes. I appreciate the term. You can put all the information up online or have it there and say it is publicly available, but if it is not easy to find or presented in a way that is intuitive to people, that is not human-centred, essentially. It is about making sure that, when you are looking for the information, you can find it and it is not buried. Ms Castley, it is a really well understood term.

MS CASTLEY: I know it is a well understood term. I totally understand. As I said, it is a methodology. I just find it insulting a little bit—human-centred design. “We will deal with you in a human-centred way.” That it is it.

MR BRADDOCK: I would like to ask questions about drone delivery services, which have expanded in Kaleen and Giralang. At last budget estimates you provided an update as to what the ACT government was doing regarding the recommendations from the committee from the previous Assembly. Can you please provide us with a further update of what has been happening in that space over the past year?

Ms Cheyne: Thank you, Mr Braddock. The short answer is that we have been continuing to engage with Wing and with the Conservator of Flora and Fauna in the ACT, as well as with the commonwealth. The change in government means that those conversations are probably not as progressed as they could be, but we certainly have been engaging in a way that has still been very positive among all parties.

Essentially, probably more for the benefit of the record, our legal and legislative environment around drones in Australia continues to be complex and evolving. We do know that jurisdictions are taking different approaches, but certainly the Canberra Nature Park Reserve Management Plan prohibits the flight and operation of drones in our Nature Conservation Act designated reserves in the ACT.

There is a framework where Wing receives approvals to operate in the ACT from the commonwealth’s infrastructure department and from the Civil Aviation Safety Authority. Wing, as you know, did conduct quite a bit of community consultation earlier this year about its expansion. The commonwealth government do liaise with us about that, but ultimately they are the decision-maker. We fed into the start of a national policy approach, and that is what we strongly think needs to occur here. We are continuing to engage with the commonwealth as they are gearing up now, with the change of government.

There is probably not as much detail to report on as I could otherwise have shared. However, there is now a portal on our Access Canberra website where people can make complaints. Access Canberra is already receiving complaints, but now there is a place where people can put them and we can feed them to the commonwealth departments. They also have their own webpage that relates to complains. That is a development.

MR BRADDOCK: Thank you. Can I have some details, please, on the number of complaints that have come through the Access Canberra portal?

Ms Cheyne: Yes. I do have that. Access Canberra has received 15 complaints about drones in the past 12 months. Regarding the different ways that people are complaining: TCCS has zero and EPSDD has received three.

MR BRADDOCK: Thank you.

DR PATERSON: Minister, I have a constituent who I would consider very vulnerable. He is in his seventies and has autism. He recently needed to attend Access

Canberra down in Woden but it was all too much. I am wondering if you can speak to how Access Canberra works to ensure that the shopfronts and the services are accessible and inclusive.

Ms Cheyne: Thank you, Dr Paterson. We have Craig on the line, who I will defer to because he has done an enormous amount of work in that area, with our contact centres, the call centre, and with our service centres. Can I start by saying that I am sorry to hear that your constituent found it all a little bit too much. We do have staff at Access Canberra. If he does attend again, if he makes himself known to staff, they will be able to support him and guide him through that.

We also have funding in the budget to increase that concierge role again. Essentially, once you enter the door, there is the assistant service that you are provided with—do you have the right information to make your transaction go as smoothly as possible; do you need any help filling that out—those sorts of things. Certainly, if your constituent arrived and made themselves known, that would be afforded to them, absolutely.

Mr Pryce: I have read the privilege statement. Thanks, Dr Paterson. Our focus for Access Canberra in our strategic guiding principles is access for all. We ensure that, regardless of the circumstances of the individual, whatever service channel they choose, we provide options to them. We are particularly focused on those Canberrans who need extra assistance or have vulnerabilities that need additional supports.

Through COVID in particular, because we have had a lot of disruptions to our service as a result, one of the strategies we put in place was a bookable service. We are working with the Council on the Ageing at the moment around that, through our Dickson service centre. We are still evolving in our service delivery, but what we are trying to do is come up with better ways to support more vulnerable Canberrans. We can arrange, for when they come in, the right people to support them, and even quieter times. A family with an autistic child might need to come in at a quieter time. In the earlier stages of COVID there were quieter periods, particularly for vulnerable people.

We are trying to bring all that together and come up with a longer-term strategy, especially around bookable appointments. We think that is a way in which we can determine the needs before the client actually needs to come to us. We can then even determine whether we deliver some form of outreach service. Again, if a vulnerable person needs to be with carers and cannot really travel, can we somehow project our services to them in their safe environment? That is an area of focus.

Again, I am sorry to hear that the person had difficulty accessing the service. I would always be pleased to follow up, to see whether we can do more to support. One of the things that our concierge staff are trained in, especially at our service centres, is trying to identify when additional support or service is needed so that they can tailor that through the service centre or get the right people and make that person's experience easier. I have executive branch manager Craig Neiberding online and he can add to this, because he leads that particular work.

Mr Neiberding: Good afternoon. I acknowledge the privilege statement. As David Pryce and the minister have covered, this is a real priority: access for all and what

measures we can put in place to further support people of all disabilities and backgrounds. As you have heard, we are trialling the pilots through COTA, but we have reached out to Carers ACT to get their feedback on what more we could do in this space so that we are not just supporting a particular demographic, but to see how we can support everyone who accesses our services.

We are currently looking at our service model and how we can shape that to provide the additional services, such as quiet hours. The appointments are the ones that we are hearing, specifically from Carers ACT, would really benefit that demographic and clientele. We are looking at it. I am sorry to hear that it was not quite right. We do try to design all our centres with neutral colours. We try to make it a calming space, with neutral colours. We have had all our centres assessed by Dementia Australia, which has a lot of domains that cover other disabilities as well, and they have rated quite well.

DR PATERSON: I guess that was where I was heading with my questioning: whether there is planning or thought being given to an outreach service. I think we spoke to Minister Stephen-Smith yesterday or the day before about acute, vulnerable populations—that getting the service out to them is really critical. I am hoping that there is consideration of this.

Ms Cheyne: Yes. I think, Dr Paterson, it is something that we would be open to with our entire Access Canberra service model offering, but where we are at just at the moment in terms of staffing—and I mean absences—has meant that we are probably just not at that point where things are stable enough to be exploring something like that. But I think it is a good idea, certainly, that would be worthy of consideration.

Chair, I have some detail about the ChooseCBR direct consultancy. It might not be all the information, but I think that it will help. David Butler was appointed to the review by the Head of Service as a single quote because the value was less than \$25,000. The review cost \$23,750, inclusive of GST. He does have an active ABN. He has significant experience as a chief executive and senior executive, including with the OECD and the Australian Taxation Office. To go directly to your question: it was through direct procurement by the Head of Service, in consultation with me, including the terms of reference for that report. The report and its terms of reference are available online, but if it assists the committee I can email it to you.

THE CHAIR: Yes; that would be great.

MS CASTLEY: I just have a couple on the budget for the task force. The 2021-22 budget allocated \$917,000 for the task force. The 2022-23 budget has \$329,000. Is that the total budget for streams 1 and 2—I think that is what we are calling them? Can I get a breakdown of all expenditure, showing the consultants and additional work that you have done in the task force across all of the years?

Ms Cheyne: Ms Castley, are you talking about budget statements B or the budget outlook?

MS CASTLEY: The budget outlook, I believe. Yes.

Ms Cheyne: For both of those figures?

MS CASTLEY: Both, yes. I do not have the page in front of me. I just know that there was \$917,000 for the 2021-22 budget and then for 2022-23 there is \$329,000. That is quite a drop. I am just trying to understand about the money.

Mr Engele: Yes. I can answer that.

MS CASTLEY: Thank you.

Mr Engele: The \$917,000 was, I think, the establishment, and that then flows through. There was money that was allocated across years for that. In this budget, what you are seeing in the appropriation tables would be the rollover. There was a rollover as a result of some project work that was not completed as we anticipated. We moved it into this year and it has been programmed for this year. That was largely because of the COVID disruption that I think we have spoken about before.

Also, funding was provided for a mediation service that BRT was administering last financial year as part of the COVID support. That funding was not fully utilised and there was approval to roll that over to use it for end-to-end user mapping and for the sentiment survey. So that is the funding that you will see. It is a movement from last financial year into this financial year. That is why it is only a small amount: because the rest of the money is already in the base.

MS CASTLEY: Okay; thank you. Have salaries needed to increase? Have you brought on more people in your team?

Mr Engele: No, the staffing profile remains the same.

MS CASTLEY: Great. Was there any additional work? Have you had to spend any money on any of the digital stuff yet, or extra consultants coming in?

Mr Engele: There has been use of some consultants. Last year we used some consultants for the legislative review. We engaged some facilitators to assist with some, not all, of the workshops as well. I do not have the full list of consultants, but I will take that on notice and provide it to you.

Dr Clapham: I think I have that. I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. As Sam has outlined, there are a number of consultancies that are currently either being procured or have started, where we have not expended those funds. That relates to end-to-end user mapping and the review of the local industry participation policy. In terms of procurements already undertaken, \$61,105 was spent in the previous financial year on the engagement, planning and facilitation of workshops that Mr Engele referred to.

We also contributed some money to small business community communications research. That research was undertaken by the economic development directorate, but the task force contributed \$14,896. That was a series of focus groups with a large number of businesses. It went to many topics, but a lot was around how business prefers government to engage and communicate with it, as well as issues and

challenges faced by business.

We also undertook, as outlined in the report, a detailed legislative review, which had a number of different questions that it answered for us. I think I am correct in saying that part of the rollovers that are in this year's budget reflects making the final payment on that consultancy project, which, over the course of the program, came to \$92,400.

MS CASTLEY: You said \$61,000 for workshops. How many workshops was that for?

Dr Clapham: It was not just for workshops, Ms Castley; it also produced a detailed engagement strategy for the task force to help us identify the best engagement tools and multiple engagement tools for us to undertake the discovery phase. I will just check my notes. I think it was two detailed workshops that made up part of that. I will double-check that number. But it was by no means just facilitation; it was also the production of an engagement strategy for the task force.

MS CASTLEY: I note that there is the list of who you spoke with in the report there. I am wondering: can we get a list of the businesses that attended or at least a breakdown of the sectors?

Ms Cheyne: I think we did that in a response to a question on notice last time.

MS CASTLEY: So nothing has been updated since then? There have been no further workshops with those people? No? Okay. Thank you.

MR COCKS: Can I just check: would this be the right place to ask a question about the *Our CBR* newsletter?

Ms Cheyne: No. I think that is Monday. It is not me.

MR COCKS: No? Okay. Someone will tell me, I am sure. In that case, I would like to ask about e-invoicing. I note that when e-invoicing was debated in the Assembly on 3 August 2021, Minister Steel cited ongoing work by the commonwealth as a reason for being unable to make a firm commitment on e-invoicing. Now that this initiative is in the budget, on page 115 of the budget outlook, can you please confirm that the ACT government is satisfied with the implementation of e-invoicing?

Ms Cheyne: Mr Cocks, I think this is Minister Steel's responsibility.

MR COCKS: Okay, so the digital—

Ms Cheyne: E-invoicing I think relates to Bettina Konti's areas, the Shared Services IT area, which is not me.

MR COCKS: Okay.

MR BRADDOCK: I am interested in the budget for the EPA and trying to figure out what exactly that is, because it is not exactly clear to me from all the budget papers. Is

it possible to get a picture of that?

Ms Cheyne: Yes. We have done that in a previous hearing, Mr Braddock. I think it was when you were not on the committee, at annual reports hearings or estimates hearings this time last year. I see that Su is on the screen as well, but, Mr Pryce, let's see what we have got to hand.

Mr Pryce: I will just start if I may, Minister. Yes, we did have a question about it in a previous hearing. EPA is a business area within Access Canberra. The appropriation to Access Canberra is at the organisational level, so we do not break all the components down into those parts. The reason for that is so that we can move resources across the whole agency, such as our corporate area, finance, back-of-house support, ministerial support—all those other functions. We provide that across the whole agency. If the EPA were separately funded then that would require those elements, so it is really an efficiency for the whole organisation. Su, do you want to talk more specifically about any elements of your authority?

Dr Wild-River: I am happy to do that if you are interested.

MR BRADDOCK: Yes, I am. I appreciate the efficiency and flexibility that the framework provides you. I am just trying to seek a greater understanding of what is the budget. Has it changed? Has it dramatically shifted out of EPA or into EPA?

Mr Pryce: It definitely has not reduced or lessened. Certainly, with the budget outlook for this year, it is increasing.

Dr Wild-River: Yes; that is right. To provide more of an overview of the specifics of EPA, it is positioned within Access Canberra, as David has explained. The EPA carries out crucial functions as part of the forefront of defence in protecting the environment. This work is critical to the health and wellbeing of the community. The EPA is the principal environmental regulatory agency in the ACT. We are responsible for administering the Environment Protection Act, the Water Resources Act, the Lands Act, the National Environmental Protection Council Act and the Clinical Waste Act. We aim to be proactive as well as reactive in preventing environmental harm and responding to pollution events, and we take a risk-based approach in allocating resources.

As Minister Cheyne mentioned earlier, the EPA has maintained a staffing level of just 17 full-time equivalent positions since the establishment of Access Canberra in 2015; but in that time the population and urban development of the ACT have increased significantly, because the ACT has been one of the fastest growing areas of Australia. The EPA is a mandatory referral agency for statutory planning functions and the regulator of all the activities which have the potential to pollute. With that increase in development and business activity there has been an increased likelihood of environmental issues being missed during development, so assessments and the regulation of activities have increased, while up to this point the capability of the EPA has not been increasing.

The EPA is also responsible for regulating water take in the ACT. There is a significant workload associated with managing the water licences, plus an increase in

the federal obligations for reporting, data management and compliance activities in relation to the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

That new funding that you are asking about has been allocated to the EPA in recognition of those increased demands, where the EPA needs to keep abreast of new and emerging environmental risks and trends. We have an increased role because of the changing nature of the city. Yes, the budget allocation includes \$722,000 in new funding over two years, as Minister Cheyne explained earlier. I will tell you a little bit about what that is going to do for us.

It will help us to address increased demands for new environmental risk trends, with that increased population. There are also new and emerging matters, such as those that are highlighted in national policies around additional obligations and things like PFAS chemicals. We have to do new assessments on matters like large-scale renewable energy installations. All of that happens while we are maintaining our existing regulatory function around areas like all of the contaminated sites that we manage in the ACT and the existing more than 300 environmental authorisations that we carry on. They are in perpetuity.

MR BRADDOCK: Thank you. That is plenty.

Mr Pryce: There was a question on notice previously on this, on 16 March this year, to Ms Castley. It was a question on notice No 12 on that date, if you want to reference that too.

MR BRADDOCK: Thank you for the reference. I was not aware of that.

DR PATERSON: Minister, this might be an EPA one. I will ask the question and see how it goes. One of my local constituents has raised with me that many automotive businesses closed their commercial operations during COVID and have since become home-based businesses, mainly to avoid higher commercial rates of operation.

Basically, some of these businesses are not registered for GST, so they are not on the ACT government's radar. The problem with these businesses operating in suburban areas is that they often use high-risk chemicals and toxic waste. Commercial premises are under regulations to maintain environmental standards and practices. I guess the question is: what is being done to recognise this as an issue and are there things that the EPA can do to address this?

Ms Cheyne: I will just check in with Mr Pryce and others.

Mr Pryce: Can I just clarify: are you just talking generally about business or particularly about motor vehicle repairers?

DR PATERSON: Motor vehicles. They use a lot of oils and things like that. This constituent runs a home business and knows there are others who run home businesses as well, but there are no environmental protections on these.

Mr Pryce: I might throw this to Dr Wild-River, just on the environmental controls, and then my executive branch manager, Derise Cubin, can talk more about it. She

deals with that, particularly around licensing and registrations.

DR PATERSON: Great.

Mr Pryce: If your focus is environmental: EPA first?

DR PATERSON: Yes, we will go environment first.

Dr Wild-River: Thanks for that. The requirement to hold an environmental authorisation only applies to relatively large operations that have significant potential to cause environmental harm. Similarly, although it is not in this portfolio, if a business has a significant waste element then it might need a waste licence. For things like you are describing that operate from a home base, they would usually be below the threshold of requiring a specific regulatory intervention like a licence.

But environmental protections all still apply, as do waste regulations. How that works is that the Environment Protection Act has a general environmental duty, and that puts an obligation on everybody in the ACT to take reasonable and practical steps to prevent and minimise environmental harm. We have a range of guidelines online, on the Access Canberra website, which provide a whole lot of guidance about that. Again, they are pitched largely at the bigger end of town, but all of the principles and concepts apply just as well to the small scale.

There do end up being a few complexities around which agency might respond to particular issues. For instance, the Environmental Protection Act is the place to regulate quite a number of noise complaints but not all. Vehicle noise is covered under vehicle legislation, whereas building noise is covered under the Environmental Protection Act. We really try in the noise portal, for instance, to make it a really easy pathway for somebody to get to the right place, just with a single phone call. So there are things in place regardless of scale, but the particular nature of the intervention will be tailored to the scale.

DR PATERSON: Thank you.

Mr Pryce: As a linkage there, I will see whether Ms Cubin wants to add anything, Dr Paterson. There may be planning elements required too. If it is a change in the use of the land, that may require development authority, so it can be quite complex, depending on what the particular issue is. Derise engages with that business licensing.

Ms Cubin: Yes. Thanks very much. I have read and understood the privilege statement. As highlighted, we license motor vehicle repairers in the ACT. We obviously have bricks and mortar motor vehicle repairers, but we also have home-based businesses. I do not have the breakdown between them at the moment, but they should have a licence to operate in a home-based space and there are planning considerations as to whether or not the lease purpose allows for that type of activity to happen in that space.

We are also very mindful that there are environmental protection obligations when a business is licensed or registered to operate in any space, as well as work, health and safety obligations because they are operating machinery or other types of equipment.

That information we do provide. In saying that, if there is information that suggests that there are businesses operating that do not have a licence then we are always very happy to receive that and engage with those businesses, because they may be unaware that the licence requirement applies to them. At the moment, I can say that we have 253 licensed repairers, but I do not have the breakdown.

DR PATERSON: No worries. Thank you very much.

MS CASTLEY: I would like to ask about workforce planning. The budget has \$22.4 million over four years. I know Graham Catt from the Business Chamber expressed some concern with regard to workforce. Adina Cirson from the Property Council also said that a targeted strategy to attract skills is what is required in the ACT. Minister, can you talk to me about how much in the budget has been allocated for a workforce plan, if anything?

Ms Cheyne: Thank you, Ms Castley. This really is Minister Steel's area, in terms of workforce attraction and skills. I can talk to it at a higher level. We do have officials here, but they are probably limited in what they can say without their appropriate minister. We will just see how we go. I will try and be as helpful as possible.

MS CASTLEY: Thank you. I appreciate it.

Ms Cheyne: \$160 million of budget funding has been set aside to address the workforce and skills shortage. Within that figure—and this does not add up to \$160 million—there is \$35 million to support jobs over four years and over \$22 million for the development of our knowledge-intensive sectors, which are growing at an extraordinary rate and creating a number of new jobs and businesses. That is in addition to \$4 million to extend and refresh Study Canberra, which is about attracting and retaining more domestic and international students. There is a record amount of funding for apprenticeships, traineeships and other vocational education activities, including through the User Choice and Skilled Capital programs.

You have heard about the elements within economic development that I am responsible for, where we are providing that additional support, but there are some other considerations here. One falls outside of my portfolio responsibilities, but I know that Minister Davidson will be well placed to talk about it, and that is the Age-Friendly City Plan, which talks about the underemployment of seniors and whether that is a workforce that we can be capitalising on.

In that Age-Friendly City Plan there are two actions. The first is on promoting the purpose and operation of the whole-of-government flexible work policy, including employment opportunities across the whole of government for older Canberrans, as well as piloting a targeted campaign to local businesses to provide employment opportunities for older Canberrans. I do believe the latter action is on hold due to COVID, but, again, Minister Davidson will be able to speak to that when she appears, if she has not already appeared in that capacity.

In addition, there is a focus across all jurisdictions, including the new federal Labor government, regarding migration and skilled migration. We have certainly made representations regarding intakes and how that can be made easier, including in a way

that will assist our workforce—that is, extending post-study visa duration for all graduates, easing industry and regional restrictions for working holiday makers, guaranteeing relaxed temporary visa work restrictions for non-student visa holders, and so on. I think you get the sense of where we are heading with that.

It is complex at the moment. I think it is very clear, as the report on the front page of the *Canberra Times* stressed today, that we are in this quite—I know we all hate this word—unprecedented situation where we have more job vacancies than we have people available to fill them. It is incumbent on all of us to make sure that our city is as attractive as it possibly can be, and that our workplaces are as flexible and attractive as they possibly can be, in both government and the private sector as well. There are no easy solutions here, but we are well positioned, as a government and as a city. I will see if Ms Arthy has anything further to add.

Ms Arthy: Thank you, Minister. As the minister said, this is Minister Steel's portfolio, but I can talk in fairly general terms. Workforce attraction and retention is a critical problem not just across the ACT but nationwide. We have a few things underway, particularly a working group of industry peak stakeholders, including the Property Council and the Business Chamber, who we are meeting every three to four weeks to talk about what we can do to address the issues relating to workforce attraction—what some options are that we can work to. At our most recent meeting we presented an initial concept for a marketing campaign, and we are working that up with business before we present it to the minister for approval.

The more substantive piece of work we have got happening is some research by the University of Canberra. They currently have a survey in the field open to every Canberra business. We have been trying to advertise as much as we can, to find out what are the barriers that ACT employers are finding in attracting the workforce they need. What we have found with Canberra is that we have got a very different economy from anyone else. We are a very knowledge-based economy. The research that is done tends not to focus on similar economies to ours, so we wanted to go right to the source and find out: what are the barriers here for us to get a workforce?

I think the survey closes this week. Once we get that, we will have a better idea about what some of the interventions are that we can do that will make a difference. Other states and territories have done very expensive marketing campaigns, with little outcome, from what I understand. What we want to do is look at: what is the source of this? We are hoping that we will have initial results from that towards the end of September, and we can then start shaping up what our response is. That is the main one.

In the meantime, what we have done is prepare what we call a digital toolkit, which we have made available to every business to give them tips and tricks about how to advertise—particularly for those people who need to attract workers from interstate. It is to help them sell Canberra, because, as you know, Canberra often has a very bad reputation outside of Canberra. What we have done is provide them with a lot of material about how to promote Canberra. We have also done some cooperative grants, to have businesses come together on how they can try something different in attracting a workforce. But, really, what we are focusing on is that research, which will then determine what the next phase is, so that we have it very targeted. And we

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are working closely with the industry peaks to make sure that what we do will make a difference.

THE CHAIR: We have reached the end of this session. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank Minister Cheyne and officials for their attendance today. If any questions have been taken on notice, can you please provide answers to the committee secretary within five working days. We now draw this session to a close. The committee will reconvene after a short 15-minute break.

Hearing suspended from 3.30 to 3.45 pm.

Appearances:

Davidson, Ms Emma, Assistant Minister for Families and Community Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Justice Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Veterans and Seniors

Community Services Directorate

Rule, Ms Catherine, Director-General

Sabellico, Ms Anne-Maree, Deputy Director-General, Reform

Murray, Ms Christine, Executive Group Manager, Inclusion and Participation

Summerrell, Mrs Jessica, Executive Branch Manager, Children, Youth and Families

Bassett, Dr Louise, Executive Branch Manager, Strategic Policy

Brendas, Ms Tina, Executive Branch Manager, Youth Justice, Children, Youth and Families

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

West, Dr Damian, Deputy Director-General and Secure Local Jobs Registrar, Workforce Capability and Governance

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon and welcome back to the estimates hearings, 2022-23. As it is a new session, we need to go through a little bit of housekeeping, so I draw your attention to the following. Please respect the stated room limits and physical distancing requirements that are in place in this building as part of the Legislative Assembly's COVID-safe measures. Please allow the cleaner to clean the desk and the seats between witnesses. Please practise good hand and respiratory hygiene.

Witnesses are to speak one at a time and directly into the microphone for Hansard to be able to hear and transcribe them accurately. The first time witnesses speak, they will need to state their name and the capacity in which they appear. If we have any witnesses appearing by Webex they should do the same, but also state their name each time they speak after that. That will help Hansard.

Please be aware that the proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice, please use the words, "I will take that as a question taken on notice," or words to that effect. That will help the committee and witnesses to confirm questions taken on notice from the transcript.

In this session, we will hear from Assistant Minister for Families and Community Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Justice Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Veterans and Seniors, Ms Emma Davidson, and officials. Welcome. I also remind witnesses of the protection and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege, and draw their attention to that privilege statement. As I said, each time you speak, mention your name, the capacity in which you appear and that you understand the privilege implications of that statement.

Now, as we are not starting with opening statements, we will go straight to questions, and I will pass my substantive across to Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: Thank you, chair. Minister, I wanted to ask about initiatives for seniors. According to the recent census, there has been an increase in all of our senior age groups in terms of the proportion of the population, and those from 60 to 75 years have gone from eight per cent to 12.6 per cent of the ACT population. Yet, in the budget, we saw the same initiatives for seniors funded as we have seen for a number of years: the seniors card and the age-friendly cities, which of course is for everyone; it is not just seniors. Why have we not seen new initiatives for seniors taking into account, but irrespective of the fact, that we have more and more of our population in those senior age groups?

Ms Davidson: Thank you for the question. I have read the privilege statement. The interesting thing about making sure that we are a truly age-friendly city and that we are providing all of the supports needed for seniors is that it is a piece of work that happens across every directorate. Our Office for Seniors and Veterans spends a lot of time working with other directorates and talking with them about how they are implementing things. Before I pass to Catherine Rule to talk more about how we do that, I want to let you know about some of things that we are doing that might have been missed or are a bit hard to spot in the budget. You mentioned the age-friendly city plan. There are \$2 million worth of suburb upgrades that are happening in Chifley, O'Connor, Reid and Scullin.

The work to prevent abuse of older people, and to support older people who have experienced abuse, continues through the Attorney-General's Department around harmonising our enduring power of attorney laws and the national register for powers of attorney. There has also been the work continuing with Access Canberra in providing dementia-friendly services at their service centres. We have talked before about the Belconnen service centre. I think we have also talked before about the Dickson service centre taking appointments and the ways in which they are supporting people, but there is more to come, which we can talk about if that is what you are interested in.

There has also been some work we have talked about with the Canberra Museum and Gallery to make it more accessible and to provide hands-on, dementia-friendly workshops for people. As well, we are providing things through our grants program, such as intergenerational programs like pen pals, and children and seniors gymnastics classes. There have been \$80,000 worth of grants in 2020 and 2022, and we will be opening for grants again soon for the next year.

There is also a lot of work that is happening across other directorates that you might find in the older persons mental health and wellbeing strategy. We have got two big strategies here: we have the age-friendly city plan, and we have the recently released older persons mental health and wellbeing strategy. That includes 25 actions across a whole range of areas that include things like older women's experience of housing and homelessness and of violence, and what is happening for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and in our LGBTIQ community and our multicultural communities as well. The first two years of that work includes lots of research and scoping to make sure that what we are implementing is addressing those specific areas.

I do not know if there is more that you would like to ask about on that. I could take

those questions, but if you would like to talk more about some of the work being done for seniors and veterans, Catherine Rule could tell you how they work with the other directorates.

MS LAWDER: I am well aware of the work on the age-friendly cities et cetera, abuse, Access Canberra, dementia and CMAG. We have been talking about some of those things for an amount of time. What I am specifically asking for is: what is new or different in this budget for seniors?

Ms Davidson: I think what you are going to see that is new and different includes continuation of things like more Access Canberra centres that are providing services that are dementia-friendly and increasing the amount of work that is being done across our suburbs to make them age-friendly. But there is also all of that work that I was talking about in the older persons mental health and wellbeing strategy that recognises the social determinants of people's mental health and wellbeing around things like: do you have affordable housing; is it the right kind of housing for where you are at this stage in your life; have you had experiences of violence, and are you able to access the support that you need to deal with that? That is quite a lot of work that you will see rolling out over the next year or two.

MS LAWDER: Thank you. With that older persons mental health and wellbeing strategy, is that a survey? How does that work? What if someone said, "No, I don't have adequate housing." We do not really have anywhere to put anyone at the moment.

Ms Davidson: You can find the older persons mental health and wellbeing strategy on the website for the Office for Mental Health and Wellbeing, under 'Publications'. There are 25 actions listed there that will be rolled out over the next four years, but certainly some of the ones that I just mentioned are things that we are going to be focusing on within the next year or two. So you will be able to see those actions rolling out and people will be able to engage in that work with us.

MS LAWDER: Using the example you gave about housing, when you say you are rolling out 25 actions, will there be money specifically for more housing for older people?

Ms Davidson: Within the first two years, there will be research and scoping work done to understand exactly what we need to be doing and how we should be implementing that. That work is coming under the Office for Mental Health and Wellbeing, as part of that strategy, and they will be working with other ACT government directorates.

MS LAWDER: So, that is older persons' mental health and wellbeing, which, while it is applicable in the seniors and veterans space, in theory I guess it comes under your mental health portfolio. Is that correct?

Ms Davidson: This is an older persons mental health and wellbeing strategy and it recognises the social determinants of people's mental health and wellbeing, which includes housing, violence—

MS LAWDER: What area of the directorate does it sit under?

Ms Davidson: There are 25 actions that cross pretty much all areas of ACT government work, and the Office for Mental Health and Wellbeing, having the role of being able to work across all of ACT government, will be able to make sure that those things are happening, working with the right directorates. It depends on which exact action you are interested in. The strategy was launched last week, and you can download it and read it online, and we would be very happy to provide you with a briefing on how that is going to work in practice.

DR PATERSON: I was just wondering if you can expand more on the dementia-friendly plan in Access Canberra, and how that has been implemented.

Ms Davidson: Yes; absolutely. I will pass to Catherine Rule, who can talk in more detail about our dementia-friendly Access Canberra service centres. The Belconnen one has recently opened, but we have also done some work in Dickson.

Ms Rule: I will throw to Jessica, noting that Access Canberra is in a different portfolio, but Mrs Summerrell can probably talk a little bit about the work that we have done with our colleagues in Access Canberra.

Mrs Summerrell: Thank you very much for the question. The dementia-friendly work that has been done, as Ms Rule mentioned, does sit within a different directorate, but it is something that the Office for Seniors has worked really closely with that directorate and with Dementia Australia on. I can let you know that all Access Canberra service centres have now received an assessment as dementia-friendly spaces. There is a series of dementia-friendly principles that they need to demonstrate in order to receive that. Those include environmental factors like having unobstructed areas; how movement is supported; and having spaces that have a general familiarity.

One of the pieces of work is around flooring, and understanding how you mark and demonstrate flooring, and what that looks like for someone who may have dementia. The marking of different floor areas to identify barriers is one of those pieces of work. There is a barrier—a visible difference in the colour of the flooring—so that people can see the end point of that space. Then there is a range of different seating considerations that happen as part of that, including different seating heights, different back supports, and ensuring that, through that process, people can always be seen. That is a really important part of that as well.

Obviously, COVID is a consideration, but it is really important, as well, that people can have a good communication channel and process through that experience. That is something that we have had to work through as well, obviously, to maintain COVID safety, but also to ensure that there is that good communication ability.

One of the other areas that we have looked at is stimulation within the space, making sure that there is not unnecessary noise, that there is limited artwork, and that lighting is considered. They are all part of what makes that assessment. Through that process of working with Access Canberra and with Dementia Australia, those assessments have occurred. Stakeholders are involved in that process, as well, which has been a really good collaborative piece of work. As the minister mentioned, there are a

number of things that been outcomes of the age-friendly city plan. This is definitely something that the age-friendly city plan has been a huge contributor to.

Through that process, as well, we have been able to link Dementia Australia with other parts of Canberra, and there are other things that are happening in that space as well, with lifts and with some of the large events that happen across Canberra. Whilst not in this portfolio, the National Multicultural Festival is another area where we are looking to have dementia-friendly aspects and general accessibility aspects incorporated.

We have also done some work around films and how people can access films—films as in movies—that are familiar to them. And we are looking at the familiarity of those and the themes that remain familiar to people. So there is a lot of work happening in that space that started with Access Canberra but then branched off into a range of other areas to support those Canberrans with dementia.

MR BRADDOCK: Thank you. Canberra has a lot of veterans residing within its borders. We have spoken in the past in terms of a veterans' wellbeing centre. Are you able to provide us an update on where that is at?

Ms Davidson: Yes; I can, actually. One of the really important things to think about when we are talking about veterans is the Veterans' and Families' Hub for the Canberra-Queanbeyan region. What the current federal minister is referring to when he speaks about veterans' wellbeing centres is Veterans' and Families' Hubs. That recognises the importance of veterans and families in providing support and recognises that sometimes it is the families that have difficulty accessing the right services, particularly when they are posting into an area that they are not familiar with. It is important to understanding how diverse our group of veterans is in the Canberra area.

The census data that was recently released showed us that we really do have a high concentration of veterans and their families in Canberra, and that it is a very diverse group. About 5.98 per cent of Canberra residents who are 15 years and older are either current or former serving ADF members, and that is quite a bit more than the 2.8 per cent national average. Also, 11.2 per cent of households in the ACT have a veteran in that household, compared to 5.3 per cent nationally. What I am saying is that Canberra has quite a concentration of veterans and their families, but it is also important to know that they are a really diverse group. So while we have a higher proportion of our veterans as DVA clients than the national average—52.6 per cent in the ACT, whereas it is about 40 per cent nationally—we have probably the closest-to-even ratio of serving to previously-serving veterans compared to the other states and territories.

It is also important to think about how we work as a region. Just as our education and health services are used by people living on both sides of the border, so, too, are services for veterans. There are around 4,270 veterans living in Queanbeyan, and that is pretty similar to the number of veterans living in, say, Gungahlin. That means that if we are going to have a Veterans' and Families' Hub in either Canberra or Queanbeyan, it needs to be able to serve both sides of that border, and it needs to provide services to a diverse group of people who are represented by a large number

of ex-serving organisations and a really wide diversity of life stages and interests and supports that they might be looking for.

So that process of how we get from here to having a centre open is going require some really deep engagement with our veteran community. That is something that the ACT could be really helpful with if the federal government decides that they want to build a Veterans' and Families' Hub in either Canberra or Queanbeyan. The ACT government is actually quite well-positioned to be able to support them in understanding the needs of our local veterans and their families, given all the work that we have been doing with them.

Ms Rule: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. I would note that it was an election commitment of the federal government in the recent election campaign to establish a veterans' wellbeing centre in Queanbeyan as part of the national network. We work really closely with our colleagues in the Department of Veterans Affairs and so would expect that, as further work gets done on that centre and opportunities arise for us in this region, we will be working really closely to make sure that that centre is established and works with the existing services to meet the needs of veterans in the region.

MR BRADDOCK: What are those opportunities that will arise for the ACT out of its being located in Queanbeyan?

Ms Rule: It is part of the national network; it is not a state-based network. The intention is that it is based in an area, so I would anticipate that veterans residing in the ACT would have to access to the centre in Queanbeyan.

MR BRADDOCK: Thank you.

MS LAWDER: What is the rate of homelessness amongst veterans in the ACT, and how does that compare to the national average?

Ms Davidson: I am really looking forward to that data dropping in the ABS TableBuilder product, hopefully before October when their next major release happens, because that will really enable us to get accurate, granular data on homelessness and veterans. There is already some information there, at a national level, that lets us know that this is something that we need to be looking at. Certainly in the veterans' wellbeing taskforce, all of the state veterans ministers and our federal veterans minister have been talking about the importance of addressing homelessness services for veterans in our conversations so far.

MS LAWDER: But you do not have any figures now that you are working off?

Ms Davidson: I am just waiting for the ABS data drop to happen in the TableBuilder so we can see the more granular data about homelessness in veterans. The ABS, the last I heard, was saying that it is expected to be provided before October.

MS LAWDER: Yes, you have said that twice. I am asking: last month or a year ago, what figures were you working on?

Ms Davidson: The ABS is our best source of data about the population in the ACT and the inclusion of a question about veterans is incredibly helpful and something that is new in the most recent census. That is going to provide us with information that we have not been able to access before, which is really going to help us to understand where in the ACT are people experiencing these things.

Ms Rule: The homelessness team in Housing ACT might have some more granular data on this: they may not. I cannot answer that because they are not here, but homelessness is on at some stage next week, I think.

DR PATERSON: I am wondering how this new hub—and also, I guess, ACT government investment in veterans, going forward—grapples with the, as you said, diverse population of veterans? You have an older group of veterans who are very defined. They define themselves and identify as veterans, whereas you have a younger group of veterans who perhaps do not identify as strongly as veterans. They have a different kind of structure and social engagement and engagement with services.

Ms Davidson: Yes. We have such a diverse group of ESO organisations and VSOs in the ACT and region because different people have different support needs or are looking for different services. They are going to identify in different ways, and they are going to want to make contact and maintain social connection with people who understand their experience. People of different ages or with different kinds of service backgrounds, or who are looking to engage with employment services versus education, housing, family support, or mental health and wellbeing, are going to go to different organisations. That is why we have such a diversity there.

It means that it is important for us to spend the time to understand what each of those organisations is doing, and to listen to them when they come to us to talk about what people's needs are. It is also why we have the Ministerial Advisory Council for Veterans and their Families. There is a really diverse representation within the council. It is an incredibly highly-functioning advisory council, which does great work in terms of getting out there with their networks and understanding what is happening, and providing us with feedback on where we can improve services.

DR PATERSON: Further to that, what is that advisory council's views on how to go about engaging a cohort of potentially disengaged veterans that need support in our community?

Ms Davidson: Our Ministerial Advisory Council for Veterans and their Families has an annual work plan, where they set out clear and specific areas that they want to work on. I will pass to Catherine Rule, who can talk a bit more about what is in the work plan this year and what subcommittees or working groups they have for the issues that they are working on.

Ms Rule: I will ask one of my colleagues to jump in on some of the detail, but I think the minister is right in saying that the diversity of the ministerial council is really important. It reflects, as well, in the grant funding that we provide to veterans' organisations. We know that veterans and their families naturally connect with their communities in different ways. So, making sure that there is a diversity of activities funded that target the diversity of the veteran community is really important.

Everything, from sporting groups to social activities, men's sheds and those sorts of activities, are funded under the veterans grant program on the advice of the advisory council. One of its members will sit on the grant assessment panel.

Those natural connections through other community activities are more effective, in our experience, than the government being the face of connection for veterans. But Ms Summerrell might want to talk about the detail of some of the action planned.

Mrs Summerrell: This is a really good question. The diversity of veterans is definitely something that is very much front and centre. As the minister mentioned, one of the really important components around this is recognising the role of families in our veteran space, and that families are often the connection point for us in this. So, making sure we have support services and wrap-around supports available for families as much as veterans is really critical. The ministerial advisory council does have a broad representation of veterans from all different stages of their careers, and represents many aspects of the journey of a veteran.

I think it is really important to recognise that veterans, just like the general population, seek and need support in a range of ways. That can be through social catchups. It can be through formal gatherings. As Ms Rule mentioned, there is a funding mechanism to allow organisations that have very specific and targeted ways, to engage veterans—like through sport and exercise and the men's sheds. Then there is the process of formal counselling and a more formal process, as well. We definitely support the diversity of those activities through the grant funding, but also make sure that we continue to hear what the Ministerial Advisory Council for Veterans and their Families is telling us in terms of what is needed for the veterans more broadly.

The ministerial advisory council, as the minister said, has a very dynamic work plan. It is a very engaged advisory council. It is very much focused on improving the lives of veterans and families in Canberra. It has three very specific areas of work that it is focusing on—those being, employment and education, health and wellbeing, and then veteran-specific wellbeing support. That veteran-specific wellbeing support definitely goes to the questions that you are asking.

We do know that the diversity of the population in Canberra is different. The veterans' diversity is different in the ACT. That is why it is important that, through those grant rounds, we continue to fund a range of organisations and activities to provide that support. But I will say again that veterans are a part of our community and they do need that support in the same way that lots of us do through a range of different mechanisms.

MR BRADDOCK: A critical part of wellbeing is employment. How do we assist veterans in that endeavour?

Mrs Summerrell: Yes. We have an ACT Public Service program to support veterans who might be wanting to transition from service into working with our ACT Public Service. We actually won an award as the 2020 Veterans Employer of the Year for public service organisations a couple of years ago, but we have continued on with that work. We took the Soldier On gold pledge earlier this year—in May. That is part of our ongoing commitment to support veterans to make that employment transition. We

also have some new champions within our ACT Public Service for veterans, to let them know about the opportunities there are working across the ACT government.

Part of that has come out of the way that veterans engaged with our community during the COVID lockdown last year. There are families in Canberra who would not have been able to put food on the table, were it not for veterans who were volunteering in our food relief program to literally get food delivered to Canberra households who were in quarantine and unable to get access. Without their knowledge of logistics, their commitment to the community and their ability to get in there and get that job done, we would not have been able to do that so successfully. So, I really thank them for that. But that has sparked a whole lot of thinking around where else in our ACT Public Service might we benefit from the skills, the knowledge and the experience that veterans bring to our community.

We know that we have some great veterans who are working across areas like corrections, transport, community services and emergency services, but we also know that we need veterans working in places like health and community services. I might pass to Catherine to talk a little bit more about our ACT Public Service veteran champions.

Ms Rule: I will give you some broad numbers. Damien West is on the video, as well, I think. He will be able to talk to this in detail. In the last year, we have seen a 25 per cent growth in veteran employment in the ACT Public Service from the previous year.

MR BRADDOCK: Sorry, 25 per cent?

Ms Rule: Yes; 236 people in the ACT Public Service identify as veterans, and I think that is evidence of the work that has been going into that. But Mr West might want to make some contribution.

Dr West: Thank you, Catherine. I acknowledge the privilege statement. As outlined by the minister, we have had a veteran employment strategy for coming up to five years now, and we continue to see growth in the number of veterans that are choosing to work in the ACT Public Service, and also in those who are interested in joining the ACT Public Service.

As mentioned, we have extended the executive champions network to part of the ACT Health Directorate, Chief Minister's ACT Emergency Service Agency, the Community Services Directorate, and the Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate, so we are going to have champions in each of those areas who are generating interest and raising awareness about the contributions that veterans can make to the ACT Public Service.

We continue to participate in the ADF transition seminars. They continue to be a great source of information and provide a vehicle and a platform for us to identify and share with veterans transitioning out of the service the opportunities that are present in the ACT Public Service. At the most recent seminar series we had really deep and extended contact with over 60 ADF personnel and veterans as they were coming out. As part of that strategy, we work heavily on communicating transition guides and recruitment processes and we help people come to terms with the processes for

winning employment through application in the service. And we received good positive feedback from that.

Moving forward, and in talking to our veterans, we are going to focus heavily in the next year on peer-to-peer networking—building a connection between veterans that are working within the service, giving them an immediate network and strengthening their existing networks. And following conversations with the ministerial council, we will consider further what work we can do, or what initiatives we might be able to progress, with regard to the partners of veterans. One of the last strategies that we were attempting to implement—that COVID has prevented us doing twice—is moving into out-of-office-hours school-based apprenticeships to family members or the children of veterans serving in Canberra.

So, there is a raft of opportunities that we have. Also, communicating the opportunities within the service continues to serve us well in terms of raising the awareness, but also having people successfully apply for and be employed in the territory. Thank you.

DR PATERSON: Minister, my question is around the bill that Ms Orr passed through the Assembly earlier this year—the Carers Recognition Act. I was just wondering, have we seen changes in the field in response to this new legislation?

Ms Davidson: Before I pass to Catherine Rule to talk a bit more about the implementation of the Carers Recognition Act and the feedback that we are hearing from the community, I really appreciate that we now have something in legislation that allows us to recognise the commitment of the 50,000 carers that we have in the ACT and what they do for people and how we can, as a society, better understand and support them in that. I will pass to Catherine Rule, who can talk more about feedback that we are hearing about the implementation.

Ms Rule: Thanks, Minister. A lot that is happening in the carers' space at the moment is really exciting. We have the legislative changes that you have just referred to, Dr Paterson, as well as funding for a carers' strategy and work that is going into the next stage of that strategy. The carers community is super engaged with us at the moment and very enthusiastic about seeing the legislation implemented and the strategy implemented. Dr Bassett will be able to reflect on some of the specifics about the implementation of the legislation.

Dr Bassett: Thank you. I acknowledge the privilege statement. Thank you for your question. It is really important to remember that the act only commenced on 10 June, so it has only been in for a very short period of time, but what we have been doing is really making sure of the awareness of what the obligations might be on organisations and awareness across the public service as well, because, of course, all public service agencies also have obligations in terms of reporting, making sure that people who are employed by the ACT Public Service are aware of their obligations, and raising that recognition to an acceptable level.

We have commenced that work. We have been working with our sector colleagues as well. We have had several presentations where we have described the intention of the act, what it is for, and how it would work and we have looked at ways we can help

other agencies to take the act and make it fully implemented, but also to enact it in a way that is visible—showing that the work is actually happening, not just having it on the shelf but actually enacting it and giving it life in its intent, which of course is about that right or recognition of the significance that carers play in the community and the role that they can play inside our organisations. There is more to do.

Ms Davidson: I should add as well that there is funding in this budget for the carers strategy. That is \$820,000 over the next four years. Carers ACT and the government's group for that carers strategy are critically important to be able to support them in the ongoing work that they are doing so that we have not just the legislative recognition but also the practical support for carers in the really difficult work that they do every day.

MRS KIKKERT: The carers strategy. With the funding that you have set aside for that, is that outsourcing? Is there work to be done by someone to create the carers strategy or will that funding be towards services provided to the carers?

Ms Davidson: I will pass to Catherine Rule.

Ms Rule: It is not outsourcing. It is really important that we work in partnership with Carers ACT on the implementation of the strategy. It is funding for a number of initiatives that I would not describe as “outsourced”. It is working with Carers ACT to implement the strategy.

Ms Davidson: Any time we are looking to build resilience and strengthen our community, the important underpinning for that is that it should always be community-led and government-supported. The community of people with lived experience know what it is that they need, and it is our responsibility to support them in being able to get access to that.

MRS KIKKERT: Have the new initiatives been discussed, and have they been out in the public discussion with the carers?

Ms Rule: Yes. There is a carers strategy that is being developed in conjunction with Carers ACT and action plans sitting underneath those that have been entirely co-designed by the carers sector. The directorate has just facilitated a process but the content of those strategies and action plans is 100 per cent designed in conjunction with the carers sector.

MRS KIKKERT: When will that be available?

Ms Rule: It is already available.

MRS KIKKERT: Okay, I thought they were still doing—

Ms Rule: The carers strategy has been launched some time ago, and the budget commits funding to actions under that carers strategy.

MRS KIKKERT: Okay, great. Thank you.

MS LAWDER: Minister, you provided a second progress report back in May on the age-friendly cities program, and part of that included support for intergenerational initiatives. I am just wondering about reporting. How do you track that? Do you say how many intergenerational playgroups there were, and is there a cost associated with each one? What is the reporting and evidence about that progress, or is it just a tick, “Yes, we have supported some.”

Ms Davidson: I will pass to Catherine Rule in a minute, who can talk in more detail about how we measure our progress in the age-friendly city plan. It is the intergenerational programs that you are interested in particularly, isn't it? Some of those have been funded through the seniors grants program, which, as with all grants programs, includes an acquittal process as well. But I can pass to Catherine Rule, who can talk more about the processes we use.

Ms Rule: Thank you, Minister. There is a robust reporting framework underneath the age-friendly cities work and you have already referred to annual reports being tabled by the Minister. We are measuring a whole range of things, but there are four key focus areas in the age-friendly city plan, and under each focus area we have articulated key drivers, actions and measures of progress. It is those measures that we will continue to report against. It has been a successful kind of framework in terms of committing across the government to action and then being able to monitor progress against those actions. So it is a robust framework: it is detailed; it is clear; and we will keep reporting against it.

MS LAWDER: Thank you. In the May update, 11 of the 33 actions were completed. Does the reporting include the outcomes against those actions? What difference have they made to the lives of older Canberrans—not just that they took place but what has been the outcome in terms of mental health or wellbeing for older Canberrans?

Ms Rule: You are right that of the 33 actions in the plan 11 are complete, 19 are in progress and two are on hold. One has not yet commenced. Some of them are things where, once they are done, they are done—upgrades to infrastructure, for example, which the community has told us is required. We have done those things, and you can see and touch and feel them. But there is more work with stakeholders and other organisations about the impact of some of the other things. Mrs Summerrell can talk in a bit more detail about that.

Mrs Summerrell: Thank you for the question. I might combine the two with intergenerational playgroups as well, because that is a good example in terms of outcome reporting. The intergenerational playgroups is something that we partner with Playgroups ACT to deliver. We get really robust feedback around the importance of that and the impact that that has on both aspects of who participated in that.

As Ms Rule mentioned, through across-government colleagues, we have a process to understand where the actions are up to, how those actions are progressing, and what some of the benefits are. If there was an action, for example, that had been really successful and had exceeded expectations, then that would be part of a discussion through the inter-directorate group that manages those reporting processes. Then we would see the ability to perhaps use that in something else as well. Through the grants fundings, as well, we can see some of these things like intergenerational playgroups

are really successful. Sometimes we see that there are other organisations that want to participate in that process or that activity because of the success of that program.

Ms Davidson: Some of the feedback that I hear from the community as well indicates that even when a program might seem relatively small in terms of the amount of funding required or that sort of thing, it can have a really big impact. For example, just this morning I was out with a group of women who had received some grant funding through the seniors grants. I was out talking to the Supporting Asian Women's Friendship Association, and they had a quilt that they had made together. The ability to connect with each other, to have that shared experience of what they have been through in COVID, and to find a creative way to tell that story and create some meaning out of this really stressful experience we have all been through as a community meant a lot to them. And they talked quite specifically about the amount of help that they got from the Office for Seniors and Veterans in making sure that they were, as a small group with lots of volunteers, able to participate in that program and get the support that they needed to help women get out and maintain social connection during COVID.

MS LAWDER: Also in the May statement, Minister, you said that data was collected on the attitudes and perceptions of older Canberrans, particularly in relation to COVID-19, to inform work across the ACT government. How was that data collected and over what period?

Ms Davidson: Yes. There was some really helpful data that we collected through a YourSay survey. I will pass to Catherine Rule, who will be able to talk a bit more about that data. I actually went through it in quite a bit of detail in a webinar a couple of days ago for people with disability and seniors, to help understand how the impact of COVID has changed the lives of people who are older Canberrans, people with chronic health conditions or people with caring responsibilities. Now that we are getting back out into the community there are still around 180,000 in our community in that situation, who are not necessarily able to just go back out in public and not wear masks and not have to worry. They are finding that really stressful. So the more that the rest of us can understand about how we can support them to stay safe and healthy, the easier it is for them both to stay physically safe and healthy and to know that they are still part of a community that sees them and values them and supports them. I will pass to Catherine Rule.

Ms Rule: I am going to throw to Mrs Summerrell, rather than filling in the gap here.

Mrs Summerrell: And in fact, sorry—

Ms Rule: It is like a bouncing ball!

Ms Murray: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. Thank you very much for the question. As you would expect, in relation to the YourSay survey, it was really valuable information to have; in particular, to reveal the perceptions of those people who are living with disability, or older Canberrans, and how COVID has impacted on them. It was really helpful and insightful to be able to support the minister to have that conversation directly with people and to explore that even further. We have both the qualitative and the quantitative data, which will allow us to progress.

Just to underline what the minister has indicated, there is a strong feeling and perception that there is a great desire for Canberrans to band together, as we did during the peak periods of COVID, and think about how our actions impact on other people's ability to fully participate within the Canberra society.

In relation to broader questions earlier around evaluation, I reiterate the role of the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing. The ministerial advisory council are critical to us in terms of creating a connection and engagement that government would not necessarily have directly with older Canberrans. They have been able to feed that up directly to the minister, in relation to their findings on this particular topic, and on the implementation of the age-friendly city plan. They have a number of public conversations planned in the not-too-distant future, to make sure that they are connecting, being open and feeding that information back to us.

MS LAWDER: With the YourSay survey, how many respondents were there and what was the break-up of the age groups? Was the survey open to everyone—people with disability, carers and older people, or general members of the population? I am interested in what proportion of seniors were respondents.

Ms Davidson: I would welcome an opportunity to provide a briefing and to provide the detail from that survey a little more publicly. We talked about it in the webinar a couple of days ago with a whole lot of organisations in the sector working with people with disability and older people. It would be valuable for the broader community, and for you in particular, given your strong interest in making sure that we are supporting our older Canberrans, to have access to that data. I would be keen to provide you with some more detail and a breakdown—

MS LAWDER: Sure, I would like that, but I am sure the committee would be interested, in terms of recommendations as well, to understand the break-up.

Ms Davidson: Yes. We saw some important things in those survey results. One of the takeaways for me is that there is a real difference between how people feel about their safety around the ongoing pandemic between people who are over 65 and identify as having a disability, and people who are not in that category. There is a stark difference between how significant an issue they feel COVID is for them personally. You see some correlations between that and how they feel about public health and safety regulations that help to reduce the transmission of COVID.

It is incredibly important for those of us who are not at the same personal risk from COVID to understand how it feels if you are one of the people who are at greater risk—what I can do, for example, as an individual, to help to protect the people around me and to make sure that they know that they are supported and that I am looking out for their health and wellbeing, not just my own. It is important for the whole community to know that.

MS LAWDER: Will you take that on notice and provide the breakdown?

Ms Davidson: I will take that on notice and provide you with a more detailed breakdown of that information.

MS LAWDER: I will contact your office about a briefing.

Ms Davidson: Yes.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, I understand that earlier this year CSD asked OzChild to prepare a business case to transition functional family therapy from a pilot program to a full program. However, in May it was decided that the program would not be continued, and CSD advised OzChild that it would not be continued. There is no mention of the program in this budget. Minister, what happened between the beginning of the year and May that changed your mind and your directorate's mind? Who determined that OzChild should be informed not to prepare a transition plan before the pilot had ended? On what basis was that decision made?

Ms Davidson: Thank you for the question. Before I pass to Anne-Maree Sabellico, who can talk to you in more detail about the management of the functional family therapy youth justice program, I understand that we are going through a process at the moment to independently evaluate that program. It is important, whenever we run a pilot or a trial or we implement a new program, that we have some independent evaluation done, so that we can better understand the evidence base for whether that program should be a permanent ongoing program and, if so, the best way to implement it. Should it continue completely as is, or are there things that we could change about it, if we are making it permanent, that will make it even more effective? I will pass to Anne-Maree Sabellico, who can talk about the program.

Ms Sabellico: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. The functional family therapy youth justice program was funded as a pilot, and it was funded through one-off funding. The first time that it was funded was in January 2021, and it was for an initial 12-month period. We then extended it for an extra six months. All the way through, knowing that it was a pilot with one-off funding, there was agreement that we would look at the pilot and what information it gave us, to give us a greater understanding of the needs of the service within the service system going forward.

Through that process there was some data collected in terms of the work that had occurred—the numbers of young people that had gone through the program, and those that were still going through the program at the time. Given all of the work that is happening around youth justice more broadly, in terms of the thinking about what needs to occur going forward, a decision was taken to look at establishing an independent evaluation of the program, to look at the benefit of that program to the ACT in the context of ACT services.

That is currently underway, and it will give us the information we need to understand how we want to take this forward, and whether it is the right program to run for the cohort of young people that we have, for the numbers that we have. As a pilot, it was a much smaller program than what is run in other jurisdictions. Was that then capable of continuing at size? There were those sorts of questions.

There was only one referral pathway in. We need to understand, if we were to open that referral pathway, what it does and how it changes the way in which the service operates. The evaluation will give us that information, and that will lead us to having

a look at what we do going forward.

I had a conversation with OzChild at the point that we were looking at ending the pilot program. As such, we also agreed to a period of time for their continuance, to ensure that no young person missed out on completion of the program, because that was really important. That work is still underway in terms of finalising the program for all young people.

MRS KIKKERT: Knowing that there was one-off funding for the program, why was OzChild told at the beginning of the year to prepare a business case for the rollout of the full program instead of a pilot?

Ms Sabellico: I am unaware of them being asked for a business case. A business case would be developed by us to put forward for consideration by the minister. They may have been asked for information to feed into a business case, should that be warranted at the time.

MRS KIKKERT: You mentioned that some families are currently involved in the functional family therapy youth justice program. How many families are currently in the program, and are they finishing it off with OzChild?

Ms Sabellico: Yes, they are. The agreement was that, for those young people that were still in the program at the point that the pilot was to end, we would continue with the program for those young people. I recall there were about eight that still needed to go through. The last one will complete the program, I believe, at the end of October.

MRS KIKKERT: I understand that there are some families who were on the waiting list to be in the program. What will happen to them?

Ms Sabellico: We will undertake a review of all of the referrals that were sitting in the pipeline, and have a look at what other services we can access and tap into, to be able to support those, as well as our own, in terms of our youth justice support services.

MRS KIKKERT: In the meantime, while you are reviewing the program, is there an alternative program for families who are currently on the waiting list?

Ms Sabellico: Because the referral pathway is with CSD, they would be known to us, so we would be working with them. Their caseworkers would be looking at the options and arrangements for each of those families.

MRS KIKKERT: How much are you expecting to spend on functional family therapy, if you were to go on with it being a full program instead of a pilot?

Ms Davidson: One of the benefits of having an independent evaluation done when you run a pilot or a trial program is not only does it tell you what is most effective, but it gives you a better understanding, if you are going to make it an ongoing program, of what quantum of resources are required, and what the real demand level is that you need to meet. That is one of the reasons why we are getting an independent evaluation done.

MRS KIKKERT: Who is doing the evaluation?

Ms Sabellico: We are just in the process of finalising the contract at the moment. We will be able to provide that at a date in the future.

MRS KIKKERT: They have not started doing the evaluation yet, because you are doing the contract—

Ms Sabellico: We have agreed a full scope of work. We will also be providing that more broadly to OzChild once that is all signed off. It is expected in days.

MRS KIKKERT: How long do these kinds of evaluations usually take?

Ms Sabellico: We have negotiated for it to be done within a clear period of time of about three months, to get some initial findings, and about six weeks later to get some final recommendations.

MRS KIKKERT: You will be consulting with OzChild about the final report?

Ms Sabellico: Yes, we had a conversation with OzChild during the week. They will be participating in the evaluation itself.

THE CHAIR: Referring to the Community Services Directorate, on page 26 it appears that funding has been removed from Roundabout Canberra. Can you explain why?

Ms Davidson: Thank you for that question. I will pass to Catherine Rule, who can talk a bit more about the funding contract for Roundabout Canberra, where exactly that sits and what is happening with it.

Ms Rule: Mr Milligan, can you tell me what you are referring to? My understanding is that it has been funded.

THE CHAIR: For 2022-23, it is minus \$49,000—

Ms Rule: Are you referring to budget statements G?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Rule: Which page?

THE CHAIR: Page 26, at the top.

Ms Sabellico: That relates to the fact that CSD is funding Roundabout out of our appropriation for that amount of money. Roundabout is a service that we use quite often, in a child protection and family support sense. We will be looking at providing a share of the funding required to fund that as a service. It will be shared between us and, I believe, Health as well.

MR BRADDOCK: I moved a motion in the Assembly last year about social recovery from COVID. What are you doing to be able to support that social recovery, and how does this budget help in that regard?

Ms Davidson: Since that motion last year, we have had the Omnicom wave and a second round of restrictions that had a really big impact on our Canberra community, as we saw in the results of that YourSay survey that I was talking about earlier. I will pass to Jessica Summerrell, who can talk a bit more about the social recovery framework that we have funded in the budget, and the work that we are doing to better understand community needs and how we can meet them.

Mrs Summerrell: Thank you very much for the question. Social recovery is obviously something that is very important to us as we prepare for and manage disasters throughout our community. As I am sure you are aware, social recovery is one of four recovery pillars. The other pillars are economic, environmental and built; and social recovery is one critical part of those pillars.

The 2022-23 budget has provided funding of \$400,000 over two years to support the development of a social recovery framework. The purpose of that framework is to better understand the priorities for individuals, the community sector and the broader community for what social recovery could and should look like following a disaster.

That will be a co-design process. It is important, through that process, that we understand the role of our community organisations, partners and the community more broadly in how we look at that framework.

We also need to look at how communities are working together in the development of communities. We know that communities that are strong at the beginning of any type of disaster will respond better. Part of the framework looks at what we are doing in terms of community development.

There are a number of things that we do, in terms of community development. A lot of our community organisations are funded to provide that support. For example, some of our NGO providers have done some work recently out in Ginninderry to look at bringing a number of residents together to meet their neighbours, start developing those new communities and extend those social networks. If, for some reason, there was something that would impact that community, they have that foundation from the outset to be able to work together to rebuild. That is how we know that communities rebuild best.

There has also been some work done through another of our NGO providers called “a window into wellness”. It is an initiative to support the increased numbers of community members that we know are struggling with mental health and isolation due to the pandemic. That initiative has had a real focus on self-care, mindfulness and wellbeing, and uses the benefits of nature, local therapists and artists to facilitate workshops and activities to support the community. We would expect that the framework will bring together what would look like short-term responses, medium-term and long-term responses.

We do have to recognise that, at this point in time, the ACT is not necessarily a

territory that has the same level of natural disasters that other states and territories experience. We also have to be ready, and aware of the fact that the environment is changing. We need to have that piece of work ready in the event that we experience more disasters with extreme weather events.

Alongside that, we continue to work; the framework will happen. It does not negate our responsibilities that we have at the moment. We continue to provide support where needed, as one of the pillars of recovery. We continue to work across government with other directorates through planning, response, preparation and recovery, as needed.

MR BRADDOCK: Are there any specific initiatives for social recovery, or are you more drawn to the tangentials, where there is overlap? Are they contributing to the framework? Apart from the framework, will there be any specific initiatives contributing to social recovery in this space? Some of the suggestions you were outlining there sounded more like initiatives that are great, and I am not denigrating them, but the social recovery element is almost the afterthought.

Ms Davidson: There is funding in this budget for development of that social recovery framework. Part of that is understanding the landscape of what assets and services we have in the ACT that can step up and help in the event of a disaster or an emergency, and understand where the gaps are. It is about understanding how we can support our community sector to be able to deliver what they need to deliver to the community in the event of an emergency.

Quite often, when things go terribly wrong in the community, the first people that we turn to are our NGOs—the organisations that we already know, trust and have relationships with. It is about understanding that there are specific needs related to our age, what part of town we are living in, what other circumstances we are dealing with and what other complexities we have in our lives.

For government, it is important for us to understand who is out there and what they are able to do, so that we can best understand how to support them in the event of, say, bushfires, pandemics, major storm events and things like that happening. In addition, there is work that is ongoing in terms of building social connection, rebuilding social connection, and community resilience, as we come out of the pandemic. That is happening across a number of different directorates.

Ms Rule: We cannot pre-empt what the framework work will come up with. We have learnt from emergency responses that every emergency is different, and you must have a toolkit, if you like, of things that you can draw on. A framework will help us to identify what those things are, how to activate them—because they will not all be delivered by government—and in what circumstances. How we respond to something long term like COVID versus the storms in west Belconnen will be different. The framework will help to guide decision-making and allocation of resources in those different circumstances.

Ms Davidson: It builds on that underlying principle of recovery from disasters being community-led and government supported. That is what we are looking to do.

MR BRADDOCK: Forgive me if I am misunderstanding this. Once the framework is complete, will there be some follow-on funding and initiatives or will it be more of a just-in-case, for the next emergency, and we would then be able to utilise that to help guide our response?

Ms Rule: The purpose of the framework is to provide advice about what is required. I would expect we would have a conversation with government about how to prioritise some of those things and what funding might be available, versus what services already exist that we can tap into.

THE CHAIR: What financial provisions could be made in terms of responding to a recovery in this sense? Are there any financial provisions in place now, or will you guarantee financial support?

Ms Davidson: These are the kinds of questions that we need to answer through developing a social recovery framework. It is about understanding where the gaps are and what it would take to meet those gaps, and what services already exist, so that we are not trying to duplicate things that already exist in the community; instead it is about making sure that they are well connected and well supported. That is why we need to develop things like a framework.

THE CHAIR: How will that framework sit within the emergency services act? Will it sit within that?

Ms Davidson: I will pass to Catherine Rule, who can talk some more about what the social recovery framework is, and where it fits in.

Ms Rule: The most important thing is that we are doing this work now. Part of the exercise will be to define the framework, including what legislative parameters might need to exist. There are clear administrative arrangements, orders in place, that give the minister and the directorate responsibility for social recovery. There are networks across government around social recovery. We have learned through experience what some of those functions are that we can bring to the table in an emergency response.

Your question is a bit like asking: how long is a piece of string? Until the work on the framework is done, I do not think I can answer the question about what it looks like and how it will be applied.

DR PATERSON: Do the volunteering statement and strategy come under your portfolio, Minister?

Ms Davidson: Yes, indeed. I am the minister responsible for volunteers. I will pass to Catherine, who can talk more about the development of the volunteering strategy.

DR PATERSON: A new strategy is being developed?

Ms Davidson: There is a new strategy coming. Catherine will be able to talk you through the process.

Ms Rule: I will pass to Christine. She has the detail on this one.

Ms Murray: We have been doing some really good work with Volunteering ACT, such as on our methodology. We are co-designing a shorter-term plan in preparation for a longer-term plan. We are currently drafting that together at the moment. It is one of those plans where we will look to leverage into other areas of ACT government, and across government, to ensure that we are touching on all areas that are relevant to volunteers. I do not need to tell the committee about the value of volunteers. I have appreciated the opportunity to work very closely with staff members of Volunteering ACT to get to the point that we are at now, where we will be able to have a conversation with the minister around the direction of the plan.

Ms Davidson: One of the benefits of having an interim plan, while we are developing the new longer-term plan, is that recognition of how much things were disrupted by what we have been through with the pandemic. A lot of organisations rely on the work of volunteers who are part of that demographic group of people who would be most at risk during COVID, and needed to physically isolate to stay safe—older people, carers and people with pre-existing health conditions.

They are still going through the process of having those volunteers return to what they were doing previously and working out the best way to do that safely. We are in a bit of a transition period with volunteers at the moment. Being able to have an interim plan before we develop the new long-term plan recognises that we are still going through quite a lot with this pandemic, and that is having a big impact on volunteers.

DR PATERSON: Has COVID changed the way in which people volunteer, in terms of more people engaging locally and not necessarily formally volunteering?

Ms Davidson: We certainly saw a huge increase in the number of people engaging in informal volunteering through things like mutual aid groups and food relief groups during the pandemic. It shows what a kind and connected community Canberra is, when so many people took it upon themselves to see a gap and find a way to support the people around them—even things as simple as filling out “know your neighbour” cards and popping them in neighbours’ letterboxes to let them know, “I’m here, and I’m able to help if you need something.” All of those things make a big difference. There are certainly a lot of people in Canberra who are looking to continue engaging in volunteering activities. That is why it is important that we continue that work on a volunteering strategy.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, the 2020 healthy centre review of Bimberi made 27 recommendations. How much of the funding for Bimberi appropriated in this year’s budget will be used to address those recommendations, and which ones are they?

Ms Davidson: I will pass to Tina Brendas, who can talk in more detail about where the funding is going and what is being done.

Ms Brendas: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. Thank you very much for your question, Mrs Kikkert. In relation to this financial budget, the funding is for capital infrastructure upgrades. That is in regard to the enforceable undertaking. There is no money committed to the Inspector of Correctional Services’

recommendations specifically within the 2022-23 budget. Out of the 27 recommendations, we have agreed to 26 and completed nine, and we have progressed through 12. There is no funding specifically allocated to those questions within the 2022-23 budget.

MRS KIKKERT: Is the indoor underground swimming pool still operational?

Ms Brendas: Yes, the swimming pool is still operational, and was during COVID. All public pools within the community had been closed, but within Bimberi the young people were still able to utilise the pool.

MRS KIKKERT: How often is it used by the young people?

Ms Brendas: It is on the programs regularly—weekly, daily. It depends on whether the young people want to participate in the swimming program.

MRS KIKKERT: Who trains them? From my understanding, the reason why the pool was built was to teach the young people how to swim.

Ms Brendas: Yes.

MRS KIKKERT: Do you get a licensed person to come in and teach them how to swim or is it one of the youth workers in Bimberi?

Ms Brendas: Our youth workers who participate in and supervise the swimming program are lifeguard trained through Life Saving Australia. We have, on occasions, had a bronze medallion program for the young people, where young people learn specifically to swim, and improve and enhance their swimming capabilities. We also run the program recreationally. Young people who can swim, and are confident swimmers, also engage in the program.

MRS KIKKERT: Is it heated?

Ms Brendas: Yes, it is.

MRS KIKKERT: How much does it cost to maintain it?

Ms Brendas: I would have to take that on notice and get back to you.

MRS KIKKERT: Okay; thank you. Do you have a time line for when the rest of the recommendations will be completed?

Ms Brendas: In regard to the Inspector of Correctional Services?

MRS KIKKERT: That is correct.

Ms Brendas: The second update will be in November, and we envisage that we will have several other recommendations completed. I am not exactly sure; I cannot provide a time frame on exact dates as to when we will finish.

MRS KIKKERT: Maybe you could take as a question on notice which ones have been completed and which ones are awaiting completion.

Ms Brendas: Yes, I will take that on notice.

THE CHAIR: In terms of the ACT disability strategy, there is money for an ACT carers strategy. I want to confirm what money has been put aside for disability justice, and the overall disability strategy.

Ms Davidson: The ACT disability strategy has been going through extensive consultation with the community about what should be in the ACT disability strategy. Given that this is a piece of work that will set the agenda for the next 10 years for the ACT government, it is quite a significant strategy to be working on. We have been consulting quite widely with the community.

I will pass to Catherine Rule, who can talk in more detail about how that consultation has been going. It is important that, when we go forward with seeking funding to implement the actions out of an ACT disability strategy, we go in there knowing what it is that the community has asked us to do. I do not want to set any preconceptions around what is possible by asking for funding for something that we are not yet able to define because the strategy has not yet been completed and published.

Ms Rule: Engagement in the consultation on the ACT disability strategy has been truly impressive. I have worked in disability at a national level and I have not seen a level of engagement greater than what we are getting here in the ACT, which is fantastic.

We have done survey activity on the YourSay webpage. 354 people have completed that online survey. Over 5,800 people have visited the YourSay web page. We will have conducted 30 consultation events by the time the consultation is finished. We have had 323 people attend 24 events, with six to come.

We have had a range of forums to cover the true diversity of the disability community. You will appreciate that there are groups that represent different population cohorts, different disability types, and that are structured in different ways. We are going far and wide, and people are very interested.

During this month we will have focused conversations around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability; public servants across the broader spectrum, not just in the ACT public service; carers; and the business community. What we are expecting will come out of that will be a strategy that truly reflects what the community have said to us that they want, and that allows the ACT to lead the field in delivering on the National Disability Strategy, to which the ACT government is a party.

I expect that once we have finished consultation and developed the strategy, the conversation with government will be about funding those things that the community have told us they want and need under that strategy.

THE CHAIR: When will this consultation be completed?

Ms Davidson: I am expecting to release a listening report, an interim report, based on this consultation in December, around I-Day, and the final report early in 2023. It should be kept in mind that, because this is setting the agenda for the next 10 years, planning for funding also needs to take into account what the priorities are in terms of what happens in what year.

THE CHAIR: Obviously this report will influence funding, going forward, potentially, for service providers in this space, particularly for the service providers that provide support for people who do not qualify for the NDIS?

Ms Davidson: There is a broad range of topics that people have been talking about within this ACT disability strategy. It is not necessarily just about NDIS or access to disability services; actually, people are looking to engage with us in talking about things like housing, housing affordability, what is happening in the LGBTIQ community if you also have disability, what is happening in education and making sure that we have good, inclusive education options for people.

Employment is a big topic as well. I know that there will be recommendations that they are looking for in relation to employment. That is an important conversation for us to be having right now as a community, with the unemployment rate at the level that it is at right now, and the huge need for employers across every industry to have people with the right skills and availability to work. With respect to all of the things that we have learned over the past couple of years about workplace flexibility and accessibility, there are good opportunities right now for us to have real and lasting change.

One of the other big things that people want to talk about is how we think about disability itself, and how that is part of someone's identity. There are people out there for whom their disability provides them with strengths and skills that they would not have if they did not have a mind and a body that worked in a particular way.

THE CHAIR: Obviously this will influence funding. Will it also potentially influence policy and legislation, going forward?

Ms Davidson: Absolutely. I expect that it will. I am looking forward to it.

THE CHAIR: In areas of health, education and other areas; what other areas could it potentially influence?

Ms Davidson: Honestly, every aspect of someone's life. When you are someone who has disability, it has impacts across every area of your life—housing, education, health services and employment. It is also about the way in which we relate to each other in our community. It is about discrimination and human rights, and understanding the value of people's skills and strengths.

MRS KIKKERT: In regard to Franklin House, Minister, I refer to table 1 on page 7 of budget statements G, regarding employment levels. How many of the increase of 12 FTE were staff for Franklin House?

Ms Davidson: Thank you for the question. I will pass to Tina, who can talk about how Franklin House operates and staffing levels there.

Ms Brendas: Thank you for your question, Mrs Kikkert. Franklin House is part of Bimberi residential services. It is staffed with youth workers. You mentioned 12; eight youth workers are staffed for Franklin House.

MRS KIKKERT: Is it currently operational?

Ms Brendas: No, it is not operational as yet. We have had a delay due to COVID, having regard to the construction industry and access to materials. We were hoping that it would have been operational by the first week of July, but we envisage that it should be in the next couple of weeks. They have committed to having that work completed.

MRS KIKKERT: How many young people can live in that home?

Ms Brendas: In the house, three young people.

MRS KIKKERT: Is there an age gap?

Ms Brendas: There is not, but at the moment we are looking at the need based on some of the research around 14- to-18-year-olds.

MRS KIKKERT: Can you have boys and girls living at Franklin House?

Ms Brendas: Yes, we can.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, have there been any discussions within government about moving from a detention centre to a fully residential model for young people in the youth justice area? If so, what has been the discussion?

Ms Davidson: There are situations in which young people might have community orders that require them to live at a specific location. That already exists. There are situations in which someone might be sentenced to a period of detention and, in that case, they would go to Bimberi. I am not sure what you are looking for there.

MRS KIKKERT: You mentioned before that we are going to move away from detention centres to a community focus for—

Ms Davidson: I know what you are referring to here.

MRS KIKKERT: Great.

Ms Davidson: I look forward to a day when we no longer need a youth detention centre because what we have been able to do is recognise the criminogenic pathways and the social determinants that lead young people to engage in risky or harmful behaviour and we can put in place things that change the pathways so that they are able to fulfil all of the things that they want to be able to do with their life and not be engaging in that kind of behaviour that ends up in contact with the justice system.

That is going to require some significant change in being able to integrate social services and health services in this city, and being able to intervene earlier. We are doing that across a whole range of health and social services. You will see that reflected in the work that is being done in things like Next Steps for Our Kids, and in some of the work that is being done in the development of services like, for example, the youth at risk mental health trauma service that was funded under the bilateral agreement with the commonwealth. There are a whole range of services that we are looking to do that with. Over a period of time, I am looking forward to seeing the outcomes in terms of better supported young people and their families.

MRS KIKKERT: Okay. Is Franklin House appropriately able to meet demand? Are there more than three young people that need to live in a residential home like Franklin House?

Ms Davidson: I might pass to Anne-Maree Sabellico, who can talk about our other options for young people on community orders who need to reside at a specific residential location.

Ms Sabellico: Thank you, and thank you for the question. Franklin House is a service that is attached to Bimberi residential services. As well, they have Narrabundah House, so there are the two. Between them, young people are appropriately mixed and matched to go into those services. For those where we need something else, because either they are full or it is not an appropriate match, we will access other services that are available to us that are provided by the NGO sector.

MRS KIKKERT: Who is it provided by?

Ms Sabellico: By the NGO sector; by the non-government sector.

MRS KIKKERT: Okay. Great. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I just want to confirm: is there any funding provided for the Disability Health Strategy? Is that part of the Disability Strategy overall or is there separate funding provided for the health strategy?

Ms Davidson: The Disability Health Strategy is probably a question better answered by the Minister for Health.

THE CHAIR: Okay. And the disability advocacy funding as well?

Ms Davidson: On disability advocacy funding, I can pass to Catherine Rule, who can talk more about our funding for ADACAS and for Advocacy for Inclusion, who provide individual advocacy services. One of the reasons that I have sought funding in previous budgets for those individual advocacy services is a recognition of how complex the NDIS has been for a lot of people to work through and the need for additional support there.

I am very hopeful that, with the NDIS review that is soon to start at the federal level and that renewed commitment from all of the disability ministers around the country

and our federal minister, we will see some recommendations implemented that reduce the level of bureaucracy involved and simplify the process so that people can access the supports that they need in a more timely manner.

We have seen some great work done by our Office for Disability and Canberra Health Services, working with the NDIA, to get people home from hospital faster and on to their NDIS plans at home. That tells me that it is possible for us to reduce bureaucracy through good communication and good case management support. I will pass to Catherine Rule, who can talk in more detail about the funding we provide to ADACAS and Advocacy for Inclusion.

Ms Murray: Thanks very much, Minister. I will take this one again. The individual advocacy funding that we provide in the disability space is ongoing: \$400,000 a year. That is \$200,000 to Advocacy for Inclusion and \$200,000 for ADACAS.

THE CHAIR: Okay.

Ms Murray: There is also the ongoing systemic advocacy for AFI. It incorporates People with Disabilities ACT, Women with Disabilities ACT, Carers ACT and the NDIA. So we work very closely with these organisations. As the minister said a couple of times, I think, we take the view that the government supports and actually the community leads. So we have an excellent relationship with these organisations. Again, they are represented on the large-scale regular webinars that the minister runs and she has that ongoing direct dialogue with those organisations.

THE CHAIR: So is it identified in the budget papers? I could not find it. Is it a separate line item where this funding is available for these different strategies and advocacy groups?

Ms Davidson: That funding was an initiative that was announced with funding through the forward estimates in the previous budget.

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Davidson: So I am not sure what page—

THE CHAIR: Was it spent or not?

Ms Davidson: The funding that was announced in the previous budget included funding through the forward estimates for the four years. I could not tell you what page it was on.

THE CHAIR: It is in there. Okay.

Ms Davidson: Yes.

THE CHAIR: That is fine. You do not need to take that question on notice.

MRS KIKKERT: One priority listed in budget statements G is the establishment of a 24/7 therapeutic respite accommodation service. What is this service, and how is it

intended to strengthen service responses for young people engaged with the youth justice system?

Ms Davidson: Sorry; could you please just repeat what page number that was?

MRS KIKKERT: Page 5.

Ms Davidson: Thank you. I will pass to Catherine Rule, who will be able to talk more about that particular program.

Ms Rule: Sorry, Minister; I am just trying to find the reference. I just cannot see it right in front of me. Is it under the children, young people and family services—

MRS KIKKERT: I am just trying to find it online myself. I have got it down in my notes.

Ms Rule: It is the second last dot point: “Strengthen service responses for young people who are at risk of homelessness or engaged with the child protection or youth justice system”. So it is the Safe and Connected Youth Program. That sits under Minister Stephen-Smith’s responsibilities.

MRS KIKKERT: Okay.

Ms Rule: So we may not have the right officials here to answer that question.

MRS KIKKERT: Okay. I will ask her. Thanks. Minister, the Raise the Age coalition, which includes the ACT Children and Young People Commissioner, stated in their budget submission that there are three core elements that must be funded in the ACT 2022-23 budget to enable the ACT to successfully raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to at least 14 years of age. These include a legislated multidisciplinary therapeutic panel; a team of therapeutic coordinators providing a wraparound service; and an age appropriate and trauma-informed crisis response. How much funding does this budget provide for each of these core elements?

Ms Davidson: You are absolutely right that in order to successfully raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility we do have to have the right services available to support young people and their families who are going through crisis and difficult situations. It will be incredibly important that those services are in place before the legislative change takes effect.

Given that we have not actually had a bill introduced yet to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility, we do still have some time to work out exactly what are the services that are needed, and what quantum of funding, and what time frame are we looking at to have those things in place before the minimum age of criminal responsibility is raised.

I am absolutely committed to making sure that we do raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 14 years, in conjunction with having good, strong services in place for young people and their families. That includes recognising that we need good integration between services. That goes to some of those things you were talking

about with multidisciplinary responses.

We see that reflected in other areas of work throughout the ACT government. For example, looking at people with complex mental health and drug and alcohol situations and the work that is done in an ongoing way by our ISR program within the Office for Disability, supporting people with complex disability and other needs. There are a range of places across government where we need to do that integrated kind of response, and this is another example of that. We will continue to work with the sector to better understand how we can put those changes in place and make sure that that is all ready to go before the minimum age is raised.

THE CHAIR: By raising the age of criminal responsibility, how does that actually prevent children below the age of 14 still committing crime?

Ms Davidson: Sometimes what you see when you have legislative change is an opportunity to provide services that perhaps are filling a gap or to provide services in a different way or a more integrated way than we have before. Other examples might be, say, with the Carers Recognition Act, recognising that carers are out there and doing a lot of incredibly important work, day after day. That then gives us the opportunity to say, “Well, what do we as a community need to do to support people in doing that?”

Raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility is an opportunity for us to identify where the areas are that we can improve supports for young people and their families and to put those services in place or to modify existing services to be able to meet needs more flexibly than they have been able to before. We are really wanting to work with the sector to make sure that those responses meet the needs of those families who are having those difficulties at the moment.

MRS KIKKERT: Thank you. From my understanding, in Bimberi, in the past, there have been young kids, as young as 11 or 12. Since the government has known that there have been young people in Bimberi because they have committed an offence, why could you not just implement those services yesteryear, rather than right now? Or why can't you implement them right now if there are young people in Bimberi who are actually under 14?

Ms Davidson: This is why we went through a process with a discussion paper, and with Morag McArthur's report and review of what is happening in ACT services at the moment and where the gaps are. We know that there are a very small number of young people and their families who have some very complex needs. That is why we have undertaken that work, to understand where the gaps are and what we can be doing better so that we can better respond to their needs and make that kind of transformational intergenerational change, so that we do not have those young people ending up not just in our youth justice system but in the justice system as adults, in our mental health services, experiencing homelessness, experiencing violence, and then going on to have all of the trauma associated with that as young adults as well. So this will see benefits across a number of different areas for the ACT government.

MRS KIKKERT: How many young people are currently in Bimberi?

PROOF

Ms Davidson: I will pass to Tina Brendas, who can tell you how many young people are in there today.

Ms Brendas: Thank you for your question, Mrs Kikkert. This afternoon there are 20 young people currently in custody.

MRS KIKKERT: And how old is the youngest?

Ms Brendas: 13.

MRS KIKKERT: Okay. Do you know when Franklin House will be available for operation?

Ms Murray: I think we already answered that question, Mrs Kikkert.

MRS KIKKERT: No, she did say it is not operational. But I do not think you said when it was going to be operational, did you?

Ms Brendas: I did. I said hopefully in two weeks. Sorry if you did not hear me.

MRS KIKKERT: Sorry. I did not hear that part. Okay. Great. Thanks. And how many young people are currently in Narrabundah House?

Ms Brendas: I can answer that. There are no young people currently in Narrabundah House. Narrabundah House, as of yesterday, has closed due to some significant work that needs to be undertaken on the roof and internal walls. That will be, I think, three weeks worth of work—and that is depending on the weather.

MRS KIKKERT: Were there young people in there before it closed down yesterday?

Ms Brendas: No, there were not.

MRS KIKKERT: When was the last time it housed young people?

Ms Brendas: I will have to take that on notice to get the exact date. It was in August. But I will take that on notice.

MRS KIKKERT: Okay. I understand that Narrabundah House is only for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people; is that true?

Ms Brendas: It takes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, yes. But it also takes non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young men as well, depending on the need. So it takes both.

MRS KIKKERT: Okay. Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young men only?

Ms Brendas: No—not only. Both. Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young men and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young men also.

PROOF

MRS KIKKERT: It is only for young men?

Ms Brendas: Yes. It is for young men.

MRS KIKKERT: Okay. Because I was going to ask: what is the difference between Franklin House and Narrabundah House?

Ms Brendas: That is the main difference.

MRS KIKKERT: Okay. Great. Thank you very much.

THE CHAIR: The committee's hearing for today is now adjourned. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank Minister Davidson, as well as the officials, for attending today. If any witnesses have taken any questions on notice, please get the answers to those questions to the committee secretary within five working days. If any members wish to put any questions on notice, please get them to the committee support office or committee secretary within five working days of the hearing. Thank you.

The committee adjourned at 5.29 pm.