



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

Wednesday, 1 December 2021

This is an **EDITED PROOF TRANSCRIPT** of question time proceedings that is subject to further checking. Members' suggested corrections for the official *Weekly Hansard* should be lodged with the Hansard office as soon as possible. Answers to questions on notice will appear in the *Weekly Hansard*.

Wednesday, 1 December 2021

Questions without notice:

ACT Policing—resourcing	1
Education—early childhood teachers	2
Business—voucher scheme	3
Light rail stage 2—London Circuit	4
Tuggeranong—green waste collection services	6
Planning—Gungahlin cinema.....	7
Canberra Hospital—master plan	9
Education—teachers	11
Schools—split classes.....	12
Gungahlin—swimming pool	14
Umbagog District Park—facilities	15
Government—zero emissions vehicles	16
Citizenship—ceremonies	17
Arts—Covid-19	18

Questions without notice
ACT Policing—resourcing

MS LEE: My question is to the minister for police. Minister, I refer to reports that “victims of burglary may not get a visit from police, with officers focusing their attention on more serious crimes”. The Chief Police Officer went on to say:

Resources are tight, as they are in every sector, so we find this is going to be more efficient.

He concluded:

We will be less responsive to some of the property crime we have been in the past.

Minister, when was this decision made and when was the AFPA notified?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Ms Lee for the question. It is important that we continue to resource ACT Policing to do the very best they can. The government has injected record funding into ACT Policing, including almost \$35 million to help modernise ACT Policing services and deploy additional staff. It is important that Canberrans have a range of ways of engaging with ACT Policing and reporting crimes.

ACT Policing are not changing the way they respond to crime. That is a very important point here. They are taking operational decisions on how they move their resources around, Madam Speaker. As you have heard from the Chief Police Officer today, they are changing the way that people can interact with ACT Policing to ensure that we can provide on-the-spot responses to those needing assistance.

Ms Lee: Madam Speaker, point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: Yes, Ms Lee.

Ms Lee: The second part of my question was: when was the AFPA informed? The minister has not got to that.

MADAM SPEAKER: Minister, do you have more? I think it is in order. He is talking about the decisions Policing is making in responding to reports.

MR GENTLEMAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Of course, we do have consultation with the AFPA. ACT Policing consults with them, and I have met with them a number of times recently as well.

Mr Parton: How did that go?

MR GENTLEMAN: It went quite well, Mr Parton, actually. It was a very pleasant conversation. Of course, I have been involved on and off with the AFPA for probably 20-odd years. The interactions between my office and their association are quite good. They give us good, strong advice and they advocate very well for their officers.

MS LEE: Minister, who decides which crimes will not receive a visit from police, and how will those decisions be made?

MR GENTLEMAN: These are operational decisions for ACT Policing. I do not interfere with those operational decisions. I am not the sort of person who would be calling VL1CP and telling a police car where to attend at any particular time. ACT Policing have the knowledge. Their criminal experts have the knowledge on where crime is occurring. They have done a very good job, Madam Speaker. You have seen that the recent results across ACT Policing and crime stats across the ACT dropped dramatically, particularly in areas of Gungahlin and the Molonglo region, some 40 per cent, and across the jurisdictions of the ACT at some 30 per cent. I congratulate them. They are doing a fantastic job.

MR HANSON: Minister, you said that this will not affect how police respond, but the Chief Police Officer said this morning, “We will be less responsive.” Minister, who is telling the truth?

MR GENTLEMAN: I was very clear. I said that this will not change the way they respond to crime that is happening at this time. They will use their resources to respond to crime that is happening in the territory in the priority decisions that they make daily.

Education—early childhood teachers

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, a central plank of quality early childhood education is qualified early childhood teachers. In your response dated 1 November 2021 to question taken on notice ECI7, you advised that in 2020-21, 48 temporary waivers were granted across 262 early childhood services, allowing those services to operate without the legislated number of early childhood teachers. This represents an understaffing level of nearly one in five teaching positions. Minister, how will the government deliver its promise of more education to 500 priority three-year-olds when there is already a one in five shortage of teachers now?

MS BERRY: I am impressed that the spokesperson for education is interested in early childhood education and the outcomes for young people in our community, particularly the ACT government’s strategy to improve early access to early childhood education through our preschool system by expanding preschool access to three-year-olds. The reason why we have been carefully phasing in the early childhood strategy to expand free preschool education to three-year-olds—making sure that it is targeted to young people who need that support most and to understand how the sector can manage with regard to the increase in the number of young people who are accessing free early childhood education funded by the ACT government—is to ensure that we have the appropriate staffing, the appropriate infrastructure and that we that we are targeting early childhood education to those young people and their families who need it most.

We have explained that a number of times in this place. It is very detailed in the ACT government’s early childhood strategy, *Set Up for Success*, that the ACT government’s priority is to make sure that every child, regardless of their background, gets the best possible start in early childhood education by expanding it to three-year-olds. What we have seen, however, is that the federal government, despite numerous requests to expand four-year-old preschool to three-year-olds, has come back with blank looks and

a misunderstanding of what early childhood development does for our young people. It is not simply wiping noses and wiping bottoms. It gives them the best possible equal start to their early years of education and development, starting them up and setting them up for success as they start their primary and secondary years.

MR HANSON: Minister, what is the government doing to address this significant shortfall in qualified early childhood teachers?

MS BERRY: First of all, we are respecting and valuing the work of early childhood educators, and we are encouraging people to take up a career in early childhood education as well as within the teaching profession more broadly. The ACT government has been working with the Teacher Quality Institute around the registration of early childhood teachers to ensure that their professionalism is recognised and that they are registered the same as any other teaching professional is.

MR CAIN: I have a supplementary question. Minister, why is there a shortfall of nearly one in five teaching positions in early childhood education in the ACT?

MS BERRY: One of the reasons that Mr Cain and the Canberra Liberals might not have noticed is that the early childhood sector is a desperately underpaid and undervalued workforce. Despite the sector being predominantly women—97 per cent of the workforce being women—and having applied for an equal pay case in the Fair Work Commission, the case was knocked back by the Fair Work Commission. It was not supported by the federal Liberals to increase their pay to a rate that reflected the qualifications that they have and the professionalism of their work. That would predominantly be one of the reasons why the early childhood sector has difficulty recruiting people to work in that sector.

They are incredibly well qualified to care and provide an early start to a great education in our early childhood sector, but the fact is that a gendered workforce—97 per cent women—is underpaid and undervalued. They are paid much less—10 per cent less—than a man with the same kinds of qualifications in other, male dominated industries. So what the Canberra Liberals could do would be to support the early childhood sector’s union campaign—the United Workers Union’s campaign—to life the wages and respect the work of early childhood educators. Then we would see many more people choose that career, as their work is valued and that they are paid appropriately for the very important, vital work that they do for our community.

Business—voucher scheme

MR PARTON: My question is to the Chief Minister: the Canberra Liberals have been told that at a meeting of the Canberra Region Tourism Leaders Forum you declared there would be no more voucher schemes in the ACT. The meeting was apparently discussing introducing a voucher scheme to support the hotel sector, and the Canberra Liberals have been told that you said, “We tried it, it didn’t work. We’re not having another voucher scheme.” Chief Minister, were you referring to your government’s failed ChooseCBR scheme and, if not, which voucher scheme were you referring to?

MR BARR: I am not sure that is an exact quote of what I said, but I did indicate when it was suggested that the government endeavour to provide some form of voucher

scheme somewhat similar to New South Wales that we would not be pursuing that and that those states that had been offering those sorts of voucher schemes had largely been undertaking them on the basis of having their own internal domestic tourism market. So, for example, New South Wales can provide voucher schemes for Sydney residents, for example, to undertake tourism within the broader state of New South Wales.

I am not sure there is much value in the ACT pursuing that as it would mean people having to undertake all of their holidays inside the ACT. The staycation model just has not worked. We have done that with various programs and schemes and it is not really an effective way of stimulating the tourism and accommodation sector in the territory.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, do you disagree with Minister Cheyne, who hailed ChooseCBR a great success despite less than 20 per cent of businesses participating?

MR BARR: The scheme was a trial and a pilot, and it did achieve an economic multiplier effect. It was never intended that every single business in the ACT would participate in it, but it was open to a number of different business types to participate. As a measure to stimulate the tourism sector, which was the context in which I had this discussion with the tourism industry forum, I do not believe it was the most effective way to stimulate economic activity in tourism.

MS CASTLEY: Chief Minister, do you agree with business owners that specialty supermarkets are essential and should have been excluded from the scheme?

MR BARR: There will be variety of views on what sorts of business types should be in or out of particular government stimulus schemes. I find it somewhat amusing in the context of all of the questions and approaches the Canberra Liberals have adopted to business support over the last six months that they nit-pick on a subset of an industry type involved in a pilot trial stimulus scheme. That this is the biggest issue confronting the Canberra Liberals today speaks volumes.

Light rail stage 2—London Circuit

MS ORR: My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, can you please provide an update on the raising of London Circuit?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Orr for her question. Raising London Circuit is an ongoing project in the ongoing evolution of Canberra's CBD, particularly the southern end of the CBD. It will improve connectivity between the city and the lake, activate unloved parts of city west and unlock opportunities for new precincts and public spaces. It is also an important enabling project for the delivery of light rail to Woden.

This project involves raising London Circuit's roadway on the east and west sides of Commonwealth Avenue by around six metres to create an at-grade intersection with Commonwealth Avenue. Construction will begin in the first half of next year, it is expected, and that will take around two years to deliver.

Real progress is being made in delivering this project, despite the challenges presented by COVID-19. It is an important part of our government's \$5 billion infrastructure program that is underpinning economic recovery as we move through the pandemic. It

is supporting jobs in Canberra right now. Early works are underway moving essential utilities in preparation for main works construction to raise London Circuit in the new year.

The expressions of interest process for a construction delivery partner was completed in October and the National Capital Authority works approval was lodged in October. I encourage Canberrans to lodge questions and view the videos, maps and fact sheets on the NCA website about the project. Now is the time to have a say on this very important project for Canberra's future.

MS ORR: Minister, what consultation and engagement is the ACT government undertaking with businesses and residents in the London Circuit construction zone?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Orr for her question. The raising of London Circuit will deliver significant benefits to Canberra. It will also support the land release in the area in a very constrained part of our city, particularly in and around the existing cloverleaf exit ramps from Commonwealth Avenue. It is a major investment in the urban realm of our city, providing better access for active travel and improved connectivity between the CBD, city west and the Acton waterfront.

The ACT government, as we move through this project, is actively engaging with businesses and the community within the construction area to ensure that they not only understand what is happening but also have the opportunity to help shape the delivery of the project. This includes the establishment of the light rail community reference group and the light rail business roundtable, both of which I have personally attended. Virtual doorknocking and calls to more than 90 stakeholders have been through the face-to-face community information sessions held in the Canberra city area. Presentations and project briefings have been provided to interested stakeholders, business peak bodies and individual businesses. Project notifications have been issued to nearby residents and businesses to inform them of the planned commencement of the early works.

Finally, we are undertaking work with the National Capital Authority at the moment on the public exhibition of the works approval until 24 December. After this, the ACT government will support the NCA in preparing a consultation report that will detail the issues that have been raised by the community and relevant responses to those as well. Local businesses, as well as other Canberrans, can have a say through this process.

DR PATERSON: A supplementary. Minister, what can Canberrans expect to see happening in relation to the extension of light rail to Woden in the new year?

MR STEEL: I thank Dr Paterson for her question. This is a big project and 2021 has been an incredibly busy year, despite the challenges of COVID-19 and one of the wettest years that we have seen in a very long time. We have seen environmental approvals, funding commitments from the commonwealth and, importantly, the start of early works ready for construction. The team will be hard at work to progress important utility relocations right through to Christmas. We will also see the release of requests for tenders for the raising of the London Circuit project, which is a major procurement milestone.

Next year will be an even bigger year for the project. I am looking forward to working with the NCA to progress the works approval for raising London Circuit early in the new year. Following that approvals process we will be awarding the contractor to deliver the project's main works and we expect that main works construction will start in the first half of the year, pending those approvals being given.

We are also progressing negotiations for depot modification works, the acquisition of additional light rail vehicles and the retrofitting of our existing fleet to allow wire-free running through the parliamentary triangle. We hope to enter into this stage of the project early next year. Of course, throughout all of this we will continue to progress consultation with the community on the design of light rail stage 2A. It is a big year for our city's biggest ever infrastructure project, and Canberrans should be really excited about what is coming up.

Tuggeranong—green waste collection services

MR DAVIS: My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services, and relates to FOGO. Minister, I was delighted to hear that the food organics and garden organics collection pilot, affectionately known as FOGO, is now underway in select Belconnen suburbs. As you would expect, I have been contacted by a number of my Tuggeranong constituents keen to know when the program is coming to the south side. Could you give us an update?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Davis for his question. It is exciting. We have seen huge numbers of people interested in this pilot project that has started in four Belconnen suburbs, with collections already beginning in single residential households and multi-unit developments as well. It is a really important part of our action on climate change, in reducing the amount of organic matter going into our landfill, which does contribute to climate change through methane gas emissions, and in providing better waste services and building a circular economy in Canberra.

We are starting with a pilot to test how the collections will occur, particularly in challenging environments like large multi-unit properties that have not traditionally had any green waste collection services, because they do not have gardens, but do have a lot of food waste. We will be learning a lot from this. Of course, we have learned a lot from other jurisdictions that have already made the move; around a third of local councils have done so. We will then use those findings to help to inform the future rollout to the rest of Canberra, including to Mr Davis's electorate of Brindabella.

Importantly, when we do move to a city-wide rollout, we need to have a large-scale, industrial-size composting facility available in Canberra to take this waste, and manage some of the risks and odour issues that might come from that. We do not have that facility in place at the moment. I am very pleased that in the budget we were able to get some funding to start the early planning and feasibility work that is required to get such a facility underway.

MR DAVIS: Minister, most of those constituents that have contacted me do live in medium and higher density developments. Can you explain some of the challenges regarding rolling out FOGO in that environment?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. Food waste can smell, so odour issues are certainly one of the things that we will be looking at how to manage in those environments. What size of bin is required for the population of a particular multi-unit property, and how we undertake education with the body corporate and members of those residential properties to inform them about the pilot will be part of the process, as well as what we can learn from that, to make sure that we reduce the amount of contamination going into the green bins. It is about making sure that people are aware of their obligation regarding what goes in the recycling bin, the garbage bin and the food waste bin.

We will be working closely with the multi-unit properties that have opted in, as part of the trial. We are looking forward to then rolling that out to the rest of Canberra households in the future, including multi-unit properties in places like Tuggeranong, Woden and Gungahlin, as well as other areas of Canberra.

MS CLAY: Minister, how many multi-unit developments have opted in to the Belconnen trial, and how many have opted out?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Clay for her supplementary. We are expecting that over the course of the pilot we may see a range of different multi-unit properties opt in. That number will change over time. We are hoping to see a greater take-up as time moves on. One of the reasons why we have chosen the four suburbs with the initial approximately 5,000 households being involved is that it does provide a great mix of single residential dwellings, smaller townhouses, and larger and medium-size complexes as well, including one of Australia's largest multi-unit developments, in the suburb of Belconnen. This gives us a really good indication of how we can successfully roll out this scheme across the whole of Canberra. It is a microcosm, if you like, of the situation across Canberra. We are looking forward to testing the collection process in particular and making sure that that works for people in those properties.

Planning—Gungahlin cinema

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Chief Minister. Almost eight years ago on 26 November 2013 you announced the government would deliver on its 2012 election commitment to build a cinema in Gungahlin. You said work would start in mid-2014 on a seven-screen cinema complex for 2,000 patrons. You stated, "Delivering on this election promise is yet another example of the Labor government's commitment to the growth of the Gungahlin town centre." Chief Minister, nine years on from your election commitment, when do you plan to deliver on it?

MR BARR: The government released land for a cinema. The government, through the planning authority, has approved the development application for a cinema, but the government does not build and own cinemas. We have fulfilled our election commitment to make the land available, to release it for a commercial developer—the private sector, Mr Milligan; that part of the economy that you claim to represent.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Hanson!

MR BARR: The government has released the land and approved a development application for a cinema. The delivery of the cinema, the ownership of it and the commercial arrangements—

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members!

MR BARR: between the building owner and a cinema chain or operator are, indeed, commercial matters. The government is not building the building and the government is not running the cinema.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: You are warned, Mr Hanson.

MR BARR: The government released the land and has approved a development application.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, what other election promises have you made in the past 10 years that you have not delivered, and do you have a list of those broken promises?

MR BARR: What an obnoxious and absurd question from Mr Milligan.

MS CASTLEY: A supplementary. Chief Minister, is the fact that you do not have one minister in your government from Yerrabi yet four from your own electorate of Kurrajong another example of your commitment to Gungahlin?

MR BARR: I know this is one of Ms Castley's favourite topic. There are no senior shadow spokespeople in the electorate of Yerrabi. None at all. No-one senior. You have the most junior shadow ministers in the opposition sitting on the backbench having a go—

Mr Hanson: A point of order, the question was about government ministers; it was not about the opposition. Standing orders—

MADAM SPEAKER: Sit down, Mr Hanson.

Mr Hanson: Madam Speaker, it is not on relevance. It is about debating. I would ask if he is debating the question rather than answering it.

MADAM SPEAKER: Well, you are debating the matter, so sit down.

MR BARR: Thank you. The question is political and demands a political response. Let us be clear about that—this is not a question seeking information; is it a question seeking to score a cheap political point. And I am responding with an equally sharp political point that the opposition do not like, hence we have a *Muppet Show*-like performance with everyone jumping up getting a little bit excited. Animal will start playing the drum solo fairly shortly, Madam Speaker.

Canberra Hospital—master plan

DR PATERSON: My question is for the Minister for Health. Minister, can you please update the Assembly on how the Canberra Hospital master plan, released today, will transform the Canberra Hospital campus for the community?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Dr Paterson for the question. Today is an exciting day for the launch of the Canberra Hospital master plan. This is a significant piece of work that brings together this government's commitment to real investment in the ACT's health infrastructure and reflects the community's vision for a modern, person-centred Canberra Hospital.

The master plan takes a long-term view of health service delivery in the ACT and will strategically guide investment at the Canberra Hospital campus over the next 20 years. The master plan presents a practical vision for the campus for improved clinical functionality, amenity, accessibility and longevity of the hospital. It is a crucial pathway for meeting increased healthcare demand over the coming years, replacing assets, investing in the campus and achieving net zero emissions in line with commitments made by this government.

A key aspect of the master plan will be the opening up and greening of the campus. The upgrades and improvements set out in the plan make best use of the campus and the open space network that can be made available to patients, visitors and staff. This will complement new buildings, roads and paths to ensure that high quality facilities, cultural representation and wayfinding for the diverse users of the campus. These new spaces on the campus will include more areas to rest, exercise, learn, read, reflect, decompress and get together with family.

As the hospital campus is growing, and will continue to evolve, the master plan will be able to address important issues such as vehicle, public transport and pedestrian access to and through the campus as well as parking for campus users. In the 2021-22 ACT budget, we have already started that investment, with \$3 million to commence feasibility and design work for a new multistorey car park at the Canberra Hospital. This will complement work that is already underway as part of the Canberra Hospital expansion, which is already revitalising the campus.

DR PATERSON: Minister, what consultation occurred in bringing together the Canberra Hospital master plan?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Dr Paterson for the supplementary. Community consultation has been a real priority in forming the Canberra Hospital master plan and how we transform the campus over the next 20 years. We have ensured that the plan reflects what members of the community need for their health care and for the Canberra Hospital into the future.

The consultation process for the master plan was one of the biggest community engagement processes undertaken in the history of the ACT government. The team engaged extensively with all Canberra Hospital campus users, including the health workforce; surrounding residents; the wider Canberra community; key stakeholders in the campus, including our tertiary education research partners; and unions and

professional associations. There were two distinct consultation phases with the community. I want to particularly thank the Health Care Consumers Association and the Disability Reference Group for their detailed consideration of these matters.

The first phase of community consultation on the Canberra Hospital master plan closed on 10 March 2021, with over 800 pieces of feedback and a reach of more than 30,000 people through YourSay, social media and a road show to Canberra shopping centres. From phase 1, key themes included parking access, open space and wayfinding. This informed the development of master plan options which were presented through phase 2 of the consultation.

The second phase took place between 23 July and 1 September, with a focus on gathering feedback on draft master plan options. The YourSay campaign for phase 2 included a total of more than 6,000 views, meetings with the ACT's community councils, six pop-up sessions and six drop-in sessions across the community, 2,800 flyers distributed to local residents, and doorknocking, with 1,000 pieces of feedback received from members of the public. This result is an enormous achievement given the COVID lockdown starting in the middle of phase 2 consultation. Both the community and the project team should be commended for bringing this work together at this difficult time.

Both the phase 1 and phase 2 listening reports are available on the Canberra Hospital master plan website.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, how will the Canberra Hospital master plan incorporate recent investments in health infrastructure on the campus?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Pettersson for the supplementary question. We know that the Canberra Hospital, which is almost 50 years old, has changed a lot in the last 20 years. The master plan has been designed to complement and enhance the ACT government's important recent and ongoing investments in the campus. The ACT government has invested almost \$1.3 billion in health infrastructure across the territory over the last decade; the Canberra Hospital master plan guides this continued investment in one of the most important health facilities in the ACT for the years to come.

The master plan will make it easier to navigate around the campus and improve day-to-day operations. It incorporates the changes we have already made at the Canberra Hospital to enhance our health infrastructure. This includes the \$624 million Canberra Hospital expansion that is currently underway, the largest investment in health infrastructure since self-government, which has already seen the construction of two new buildings and the refurbishment of a number of spaces.

The master plan will see improvements to access and amenity in the new critical services building that has commenced with the demolition of buildings 5 and 24 and construction now underway. It will also provide improved clinical, public and logistics connections across the campus.

Through the precinct approach that reflects community feedback about the campus, recent and new health infrastructure investments will align, with dedicated precincts to

ensure the right service in the right place at the right time in a way that is easy to navigate and understand. These precincts include the acute hospital precinct, which incorporates the new critical services building and the invaluable and expanded Canberra region cancer centre; the women and children's precinct, which includes the expanded Centenary Hospital for Women and Children; the mental health precinct, incorporating the adult mental health unit; the accommodation precinct, which includes the new south-side step-up, step-down facility; a gateway precinct to support flexibility; and a training, research and innovation precinct to support our health workforce through world-class facilities with our tertiary partners.

Education—teachers

MRS KIKKERT: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, during budget estimates on 19 October, you took questions on notice about the teacher shortages, including: what is the FTE teacher shortfall; a breakdown of how many of the 42.5 staff in the budget are actually registered frontline teachers as opposed to support staff or special needs teachers; and where is the money for 400 promised teachers? You provided a short response on 1 November 2021. Unfortunately, none of those questions was answered. Minister, please answer this question directly. What is the FTE teacher shortfall in the ACT right now?

MS BERRY: Can I seek some clarification from Mrs Kikkert? Was that short clarification in a question provided on notice or in a committee hearing?

MRS KIKKERT: It was a question taken on notice in a budget estimates hearing. It was taken on notice, but you did not provide the answer to that question taken on notice.

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Berry, she is seeking the shortfall in the full-time equivalent teachers in the ACT.

MS BERRY: I think Mrs Kikkert is questioning the question on notice response. I refer Mrs Kikkert to the question on notice and the response that the directorate has provided.

Mr Hanson: I have a point of order. The question outlined the fact that the question was taken was taken on notice and did not actually answer the question. Mrs Kikkert is asking what is the FTE teacher shortfall in the ACT right now, because the answer was not provided when Ms Berry provided the answer on notice.

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Berry, please go to that point of the question—the EFT shortfall in teachers in the ACT.

MS BERRY: I think the question was responded to during estimates. I recall that, at the time of the question, there were currently 12 teacher vacancies in the ACT.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, of the 42.5 FTE equivalent, how many will be qualified classroom teachers, given that the budget line is for special needs teachers only? Please answer directly.

MS BERRY: I will take that question on notice.

MR HANSON: I have a supplementary question. How much funding for the 400 promised teachers that you advised about at the last election has been rolled out thus far in the budget?

MS BERRY: I can inform, again, the spokesperson for education in the opposition, that there were 90 full-time equivalent positions funded in the ACT government's budget. I remind him that, yes, of course the ACT government has committed to fund 400 teachers in the ACT once the schools are built. We have employed and will engage the 90 positions for schools that are being built or are starting next year. As schools come on line—like Throsby, the new school in Kenny and the expansion of Margaret Hendry School—those teacher will be employed once the schools are built and they have places to work. I think that makes sense, doesn't it?

Schools—split classes

MS LAWDER: My question is to the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs. The Australian Education Union report highlights the issues of split classes in ACT schools and states:

... Often up to four classes per day were split, resulting in 'classes' over 40+ students, which contributed directly to ... occupational violence - particularly as students with special needs were forced to work with teachers (and students) they did not know well.'

Minister, how often are classes split in ACT schools?

MS BERRY: I understand Ms Lawder is referring to the teachers survey that was conducted by the Australian Education Union and released around August this year. In August this year the ACT government committed to work in partnership with the Australian Education Union setting up a task force to understand some of the issues identified in that survey, including the issues raised by Ms Lawder around split classes and teacher shortages, retention and workload more generally.

We have been doing that work since August, since the report was released, because the ACT government—

Mr Hanson: On a point of order on relevance, Madam Speaker, the question is a simple one: how often are classes split in ACT schools? I ask that the minister be directly relevant.

MADAM SPEAKER: The minister is talking about a process addressing the issues the review raised. I think she is relevant, but she has a minute left and she may provide more detail.

MS BERRY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In partnership with the Australian Education Union we have set up this task force to understand the issues that have been identified in the survey with the support of the union and the members they represent—our teacher professionals in ACT public schools.

It is really important to understand and hear from teachers directly through their union

about the issues and dig a little deeper into the survey responses to understand completely the kinds of things our teaching workforce are experiencing. We have been doing that work since August, and it seems like the Canberra Liberals have just discovered that that survey exists.

MS LAWDER: What resources are available for those students with special needs when split classes occur?

MS BERRY: I refer the member to my previous answer—that this is work the ACT government is doing in partnership with the Australian Education Union. We are not making up anything here; we have been paying very close attention to this work from the moment the survey was released in August. We have set the task force up. Those meetings have been occurring. The Education Union is representing the interests of their members through the task force, which has been agreed to by them.

It is a genuine attempt by the ACT government and the Australian Education Union to understand the issues that have been raised by teacher professionals in our public schools in that survey rather than waiting for months down the track to start trying to score political points or ask questions about a survey that has been around for a while. It is not a new thing; it has been around for a few months now.

The ACT government has been getting on with the work, valuing and listening to our teaching professionals and the issues they have raised and starting the work on making a difference for the work loads of teachers in our schools, understanding what we need to do around attraction, retention and workload. This is not an issue that is confined to the ACT, but the ACT government is absolutely committed to doing that work. That is proven through the work we are already doing now through the task force.

MR HANSON: Minister, why do you not know or why does your directorate not know how many classes are split and how often, and can you complain what impact this is having on ACT students?

MS BERRY: Again, I refer the member to my previous two answers on this matter. The Australian Education Union released survey results in August. The ACT government agreed to set up a task force and is working in partnership with the Australian Education Union to understand the issues that have been presented in the survey results. The ACT Education Union has supported that. They have asked for it. We are doing it. We take these issues very seriously and we have shown how seriously we take them by setting up this task force immediately.

Mr Hanson: On a point of order, Madam Speaker, the question is not whether the Australian Education Union is happy with what the government is doing; the question is how often are classes being split in schools? It is a simple answer. If the minister does not know, that is fine.

MADAM SPEAKER: Can you go to the detail, minister.

MS BERRY: Yes, Madam Speaker, I can, and I will say again that the purpose of the task force is to understand those issues.

Opposition members interjecting—

MS BERRY: It is very funny. I am answering the question by saying that is what the task force is doing. That is what the Australian Education Union has done, representing their teachers—

Opposition members interjecting—

MS BERRY: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, I am being badgered by at least three members of the Canberra Liberals when I have provided an absolutely honest response to the question they have asked—that is are unpacking that information through the task force. I get that everybody is a little bit tired towards the end of the year, but seriously.

MADAM SPEAKER: I remind members about being orderly.

Mrs Kikkert interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mrs Kikkert, that is enough.

Gungahlin—swimming pool

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Today, 1 December, is the day you promised that Gungahlin's 50-metre pool would open. I had said on radio that I would throw a party to celebrate. Minister, the pool is still closed. Will Gungahlin's 50-metre pool open in January for the summer holidays? Yes or no?

MS BERRY: No, Madam Speaker, it will not open. Ms Castley is well aware—

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members!

Mr Cain interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Cain!

MS BERRY: Madam Speaker, that is completely unacceptable behaviour from a member of the opposition.

MADAM SPEAKER: I have called him to order, Ms Berry.

MS BERRY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Ms Castley is well aware of the issues that have faced Gungahlin pool, particularly around the ability to get a workforce to come and do that work at Gungahlin pool, because of COVID. She is well aware of that. The sports directorate has been providing updates regularly to the YMCA and the Gungahlin pool, and directly to the Gungahlin Community Council. Ms Castley knows exactly what is going on at the Gungahlin pool and she knows exactly the reasons why there has been a delay.

I am as frustrated as everybody else in Gungahlin that uses that pool facility that it has been out of use for some period. It is incredibly frustrating and distressing for the Gungahlin pool community. That is why we have been getting on with the work to make sure that it can be upgraded and repaired as soon as we possibly can. Unfortunately, the international health pandemic impacted the ability to recruit the workers to do the actual work.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary.

MS CASTLEY: Will the government provide financial compensation—in light of no date for the pool to open on the website—to members, including squad swimmers, forced elsewhere because of the pool's closure?

MS BERRY: We are working with the pool community about what that might look like in future. A couple of the other things that the government has invested in as far as the pool repairs are concerned include discussing with some of the pool users some of the upgrades that could occur at that pool in the meantime as we are doing the repairs on the tiles and the membrane work. When we talked with the lap swimmers, as well as the water polo association, some of those upgrades were about ensuring that we could make the pool's lighting better; so we are installing better lighting in the pool so that it is better for those pool user communities. In addition to that, we are doing noise-muffling works to make sure that the pool is a bit less noisy when water polo activities are occurring in the pool. Those are two additional measures that the ACT government had taken on in discussions with the pool communities as far as making those upgrades better and bringing the pool back in better condition than it was.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary, Mr Milligan.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, how much financial compensation is the government paying YMCA New South Wales due to the pool's closure?

MS BERRY: I will take that question on notice.

Umbagog District Park—facilities

MS CLAY: My question is to the minister for city services. Minister, can you provide an update on planning and works for new and improved footbridges in Umbagog park in Latham?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Clay for her question. As she would be aware, the ACT government understands the real importance of Umbagog District Park, both culturally and as a place of recreation for the community. That is why it has been disappointing that three bridges in the park have been closed. That came about as a result of the ACT government undertaking checks on the bridges. Those inspections revealed safety issues. As a result those bridges have been closed for the time being.

We are now undertaking detailed investigations of the ecological values of the area. That is part of the necessary due diligence that is required before we look at the replacement bridges to be provided in this area. This work will continue. I look forward to updating the community, as this work progresses, on how that might affect the timing

of the provision of replacement bridges.

MS CLAY: Minister, can you tell me when you expect works to commence and when they might be completed?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her supplementary. This is subject to the work that is required. We know that Umbagog park reserve contains ecological values that may be matters of national environmental significance, and that may be protected under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. As a result of those cultural and heritage values, we need to undertake an ecological survey and heritage assessment to address those issues, ahead of undertaking design work that is required.

We look forward to consulting with the community going forward. If we do need to replace those bridges with new bridges, we will be consulting with the community on those designs. I look forward to updating the community as things progress, but we certainly understand the inconvenience that this poses to people using the park. We ask that they do not use the bridges, which are signposted.

I also acknowledge that this matter has been raised with me by both the Deputy Chief Minister, Ms Berry, and Minister Cheyne. I know constituents have been raising it with them. On the basis of those representations, we have been making sure that any vandalism to the fencing blocking off these bridges has been addressed, and we will continue to keep an eye on that going forward, whilst we work on the ultimate rectification works and possible new bridges over the creek.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, are there any long-term plans to improve recreational access or the facilities at Umbagog park?

MR STEEL: Certainly, we know this is an important place for recreation. As we undertake this important due diligence work, we will look at ways that we can enhance the recreational amenity of the area. It is important that people have access to each side of the creek for recreation. When we are doing so, we need to make sure that we are protecting the cultural and heritage values of this important park, which has played an important part in the life of Canberra for thousands of years, not just in the life of Canberra since the city has been established.

This is something on which we will be consulting with the community, regarding what they would like to see delivered in terms of making sure that we provide access over the creek. We will be interested in getting the community's views as we progress with this project. But it will take a period of time for us to do these initial assessments to inform that work before we go out for community consultation.

Government—zero emissions vehicles

MR CAIN: My question is to the minister for emissions reduction, which according to the Chief Minister is not a significant portfolio. In a report tabled earlier this year the Auditor-General criticised your government for insufficient public reporting about its actions relating to zero emissions vehicles. In fact, the Auditor-General found the only detailed commentary on the implementation of actions is contained in a secret report the government has not released. The Auditor-General concluded that “local public

interest is likely to be high but dedicated detailed reporting is not public.” Minister, what is this secret government report, and why have you not released it?

MR RATTENBURY: I am trying to recall that reference. I will take the question on notice and get back to Mr Cain quickly. I can say that we have been very upfront with the community about our zero emissions vehicle program. In fact, as one of the owners of probably the single largest zero emissions vehicle fleet in Australia we have made enormous progress. We have talked to the community about it frequently. We are working with other governments to share the lessons we have learned. We have set up the Fleet Advisory Service to share the knowledge the government has learned with companies in town and not for profits who also own fleets. We have certainly not been shy in sharing information. I will check that and get back to Mr Cain as quickly as I can.

MR CAIN: Minister, I guess this may also be taken on notice, but will you release this report about the implementation of government actions to reduce vehicle emissions, given the high level of public interest in the issue?

MR RATTENBURY: I will take that on notice in light of my answer to the first question.

MS CASTLEY: A supplementary. Minister, how can Canberrans hold your government to account when there is so little public reporting of your activities to reduce vehicle emissions?

MR RATTENBURY: We have a range of accountability mechanisms and reporting that takes place every year. For example, the minister’s annual report on climate change details a lot of this information. Members are free to come in here and ask, as they are doing today, about these matters. There are a lot of measures there. I will check on that other matter and, as I said, I will come back to Assembly with more information.

Citizenship—ceremonies

MR BRADDOCK: My question is for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Minister, I have constituents concerned about the backlog of citizenship conferral ceremonies due to the COVID lockdown preventing citizenship ceremonies. What is the government’s plan to address this backlog?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Braddock for the question and his interest in this. Yes, lockdown did affect our ability to hold citizenship ceremonies due to their very nature, being held in person. Citizenship is something that is a matter for the Australian government, but we work in partnership with the Department of Home Affairs in conducting citizenship ceremonies. The Department of Home Affairs conducts its own, but it works with the ACT government and also with city councils across Australia in determining when those citizenship ceremonies are held.

We know that there is a backlog that is consistent right across the country. The backlog, as I understand it, is less in the ACT than in the majority of the states. What we are doing to assist with this is have as many people as we possibly can in the citizenship ceremonies. That has meant fewer guests or no guests due to the density restrictions.

We did restart our citizenship ceremonies in November, and we have been holding three a day instead of the usual two a day. We will be continuing to do this throughout the coming months until at least March. That should help us clear up the backlog.

It is important to note that we do not get a list of everyone who is waiting from the Department of Home Affairs. We usually get advised two or three weeks before the next scheduled citizenship ceremony. So I cannot provide specific advice on when someone's citizenship ceremony may be held, but people are very welcome to contact the Department of Home Affairs.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, have you made representations to the federal government to increase their level of citizenship ceremonies to address the backlog?

MS CHEYNE: No, I have not at this stage, but we do have a meeting of multicultural affairs ministers in the coming days. I will be happy to raise the issue then.

MR DAVIS: Minister, based on your conversations with your federal government counterpart, when do you expect to get on top of the ACT's backlog?

MS CHEYNE: It might depend on whether the federal minister will agree to the Department of Home Affairs processing a few more. I expect that the additional ceremonies that we will have—we also have ceremonies coming up next week and then we will have ceremonies in January, February and March—should help clear the majority of the backlog. We have been looking at some different ways that we might be able to host citizenship ceremonies on a bigger scale, but this is all subject to the health advice.

Arts—Covid-19

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, how is the ACT Government supporting artists through the COVID-19 recovery?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Pettersson for the question. It is well recognised, including by everyone in this place, that artists have had among the most difficult time since COVID hit in March 2020 in Australia. I am pleased to share with the Assembly that the ACT government is standing up for, and supporting, our arts communities with a range of ongoing and new initiatives. I just announced today that 68 Canberra artists, musicians, film makers, performers and other creative practitioners will receive grants through the latest HOMEFRONT and the Arts Activities \$5,000 to \$50,000 funding rounds.

I am also delighted to announce that Canberra artists and creatives can apply for the next round of \$5,000 to \$50,000 Arts Activities funding, which opened today. Applications for that will close on 28 February 2022. To support successful Amp It Up! recipients, who represent some of our most beloved ACT live entertainment venues we have extended the performance period for proposed shows under this COVID response program until the end of March 2022. Members will recall that it was initially supposed to be until the end of the November this year. This is obviously in recognition of the disruptive impacts of the recent lockdown on our live music sector and night-time economy.

Another initiative I would like to mention is the Creative Recovery and Resilience program, which has been designed to focus on the employment and economic stimulus for the ACT creative sector. That is supported by an investment of over \$700,000. Six new projects are currently being delivered in partnership with local organisations not only to build their capability and capacity but to provide opportunities to artists and art workers. We have seen extraordinary resilience and perseverance through the arts sector over the past two years, but it is critical that we provide these supports to ensure that the sector not only bounces back but continues to prove why Canberra can be positioned as Australia's arts capital.

MR PETTERSSON: I have a supplementary question. Minister, can you please provide some more detail about the types of projects funded through HOMEFRONT.

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Pettersson for the question. HOMEFRONT was announced, as members will recall, in 2020 in response to the immediate and devastating impacts of COVID-19 on artists in Canberra. ACT artists were eligible to apply for up to \$10,000 per application, with the express purpose of supporting their ongoing artistic practice during the pandemic. In this third round of HOMEFRONT, 54 applicants, representing a range of artistic disciplines will share in over \$350,000 worth of funding. In total, the HOMEFRONT program has now supported 179 artists across the three funding rounds over the last two years. This represents a direct financial investment of over \$1.3 million to ACT artists and creatives.

Some successful applicants who were receiving HOMEFRONT grants in this round include musician Angus McAndrew, who will receive \$8,000 to record, mix, master and produce a video for new songs by local act Neko Pink; performer Shawnah Cady, who will receive \$7,865 for video equipment and mentorship for their *A Daddy and a Diva* show; and Paul Bissett who will receive \$9,693 to work with a script consultant and produce to write a new draft of a screenplay for a horror feature film.

MS ORR: Minister, what support is the Government providing artists through the \$5,000 to \$50,000 Arts Activities funding round?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Ms Orr for the question. Arts Activities funding is available to ACT based artists at all stages of their careers, and to organisations providing the Canberra community with opportunities to engage in the arts. The initiative supports artists, groups and arts organisations to undertake a broad range of activities, including art-form based projects, mentorships, residencies, professional or skills development and opportunities for the community to actively engage in the arts. Arts activities for the \$5,000 to \$50,000 funding round is open twice a year and provides funding to Canberra based artists and arts groups for one-off projects. A total of 14 artists will receive funding through this latest round, and that totals over \$360,000.

Some examples of arts activities recipients include Sputnik Sweetheart, who will receive over \$13,000 to produce their new EP, *Something More*; Crossroads Movement, who will receive over \$22,000 to develop their artistic practice and a new dance work titled *Sashay Café*, and ArtSound FM, who will receive over \$11,000 to pilot a media training course to support visual arts organisations in the ACT. I congratulate recipients of the most recent funding round, and look forward to seeing and hearing the work our

wonderful Canberra artists will produce.

Mr Barr: Madam Speaker, I ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper.