



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

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Wednesday, 23 September 2026

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Questions without notice

Palliative care—services

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, last week I asked you about the scope, delivery and timing of the new Acute Palliative Care Unit at Canberra Hospital. You took those questions on notice and, at that stage, were unable to provide the Assembly with basic details about the project, yet yesterday the former Minister for Health repeatedly stated on ABC Radio that the new Acute Palliative Care Unit is opening very soon. Minister, are you now in a position to provide the Assembly with the details you were unable to provide last week, including the scope, number of beds, budget and expected opening date of the new unit?

DR PATERSON: I will take it on notice, as I said last week.

MR PARTON: Minister, if the former minister is able to publicly state that the unit is opening very soon, why were you, as the current minister, unable to provide the Assembly with that information when asked last week and now?

DR PATERSON: Because I am the new minister in this portfolio area. The Deputy Chief Minister has extensive years of experience in this portfolio area and has overseen these projects, so she obviously has a very detailed knowledge base of these projects. I am weeks—I do not know how many—in the portfolio area, so I am required to get briefings on all these things and only have a basic understanding of some of these things.

MR CAIN: Minister, does the former minister know something about this project that you do not know, or can you now confirm to the Assembly that the new Acute Palliative Care Unit will be delivered in accordance with the government's original commitment?

DR PATERSON: Yes; we are delivering the new Acute Palliative Care Unit. That is a priority and I can absolutely confirm that. The questions that Mr Parton asked last week went to technical details about the budget, the time frames and the beds. That is what I took on notice.

Mr Parton: On a point of order: Mr Cain's question was very specific about whether the new Acute Palliative Care Unit will be delivered in accordance with the government's original commitment, not whether it will be delivered at all.

DR PATERSON: And I said yes.

MR SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Public schools—funding

MS LEE: My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, yesterday in question time when asked about cuts to school budgets, you said, "There have been no cuts." Minister, has your directorate made changes to the SRA funding formula that will mean schools across Canberra will receive less funding than they did in 2026—yes or no?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: There have been no cuts to the education budget for our public schools. Individual schools, as we have been very clearly saying for some weeks,

will see ups and downs in their school budget between the 2026 school year and the 2027 school year. We have been very clear about that from the start. What I have also been clear about is that the Education Directorate will be working with each school and with each principal to ensure that any transition to a lower budget—any budget reduction—can be managed to ensure that the school is safely staffed, that students, teachers and LSAs are appropriately supported and that our students are getting an excellent education in all of our public schools.

This was always going to be an iterative process. Again, I thank all of the principals and school leaders who have participated in this process. I also thank the small team in the Education Directorate, who have been working on the basis of the best information that they had available to them but were very clear with school principals and with the union that they did not have all of the information and that is why they needed to provide an early budget indication of what a student resource allocation budget would look like for each of those schools and was clear that there was an exceptions process, that this was going to have to be an ongoing conversation and that these are not final budgets.

I cannot be any clearer: these are not final budgets. They were never intended to be final budgets, and we will continue to work. I recognise that communication could have been clearer along the way.

MS LEE: Minister, were you aware that schools would have to cut support staff, increase class sizes, cut programs and have more split and collapsed classes as a result of these budget cuts?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I reject Ms Lee's characterisation of all of this. As I said in response to the last question, school budgets have not been finalised for 2027. I recognise that this has been a challenging process and that some schools have been surprised by what actually came out in their SRA budget. The vast majority of principals would have known that changes were coming, because they have been engaged in this budget conversation for some time and last year they would have seen the public school system resourcing review and the recommendations of that review, and these conversations about the principles on which the Education Directorate were going to establish budgets for the 2027 school year has been happening. But some schools are in a challenging situation.

Part of the reason that this needs to be an iterative conversation is that the Education Directorate does not have fully visibility of all of the decisions that have been made at a school level and of all the challenges that individual schools are facing. That is why school principals were given an indicative early student resource allocation-based budget and asked to come back, and there is an exceptions process with \$8 million on the table. It is why the directorate has listened to the feedback that we have received—this is the first time that we have done the budget process in this way—and is slowing down that process and continuing that engagement on a school-by-school basis. I reiterate: these are not final budgets for 2027 and that none of the things that Ms Lee has indicated is based on evidence.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, what assessment did you undertake on the impact on staffing, class sizes and core school services of these significant cuts to school budgets?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I reiterate that these are not final school budgets and that there an exceptions process, which was made clear from day one that has additional funding in it. I had detailed conversations with the Education Directorate about what the SRA indicated budgets would look like for schools and what the process was going to be to manage with each individual who was going to be in a challenging situation to work through that exceptions process.

I recognise, as I said in my response to the first question, that, clearly, all of this has not been communicated either to principals or to the union as clearly as it should have been. I am happy to take some responsibility for that, but I also acknowledge that there is a small team in the Education Directorate who have been working very hard on the basis of the information that was available to them, recognising that part of the problem here is that they do not have transparency of all of that information because of the level of autonomy that our schools have had and the level of autonomy that principals have had to make those decisions over time.

That is why it needs to be an iterative conversation with principals. I again thank all of the principals and the school leaders who are engaging productively in this conversation. I thank the union for its advocacy for its members. It is the union's job to advocate for its members. I have showed up every time I have been invited. I went to a meeting with teachers, school leaders and LSAs to talk about how they are experiencing this process. As a result of my conversations and the directorate's conversations, this process is changing. This process is being slowed down so that we can get under the hood and understand all of these issues.

Public schools—funding

MS LEE: My questions to the Minister for Education. Minister, media reporting this morning details the ACT schools which will receive cuts to their 2027 budgets, including the schools that support some of our most vulnerable students such as Malkara School, with a cut of over \$2.8 million; the Woden School, with a cut of over \$1.6 million; Black Mountain School, with a cut of over \$3 million; and Cranleigh School, with a cut of over \$1.7 million.

Minister, before these cuts were imposed, what consultation did you undertake with the principals, staff and parent communities of Malkara, Woden, Black Mountain and Cranleigh Schools?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I really encourage Ms Lee to actually read the entire article, because it is very clear in the article that she is quoting from that there will be no cuts to specialist schools. The conversation, from the get-go, with specialist school principals was, "There's an additional \$7 million that has been allocated to ensure that no specialist school will have its funding reduced from 2026-2027." It says that in the article, Mr Speaker! It has been a conversation with every school principal at specialist schools. This scaremongering from those opposite, when it has been clarified, in writing, in the same article that she is talking about—

Mr Cocks: A point of order. I seek your wisdom, Mr Speaker, as to whether the word "scaremongering" is, in fact, parliamentary, given it implies that the facts we are presenting are not correct, and as to whether the minister is embarking on personal

reflections as well.

MR SPEAKER: Sure; I was actually considering this yesterday on the word “fearmongering”, because that was being thrown around a bit. I had a look, under standing order 54, at whether that was an unparliamentary word, and I could not find a precedent that it was. I then looked at standing order 55 and whether it is a reflection, and I think it is somewhat debatable. But the precedent at this place is that words like “fearmongering” and “scaremongering” are used. They are used in debate, and the precedent has not been to rule them out of order, so I will not be changing that precedent. There is no point of order.

MS LEE: Minister, did you personally sign off on these cuts to Malkara, Woden, Black Mountain and Cranleigh schools? And if not, why not? Who did?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Mr Speaker, what I signed off on was the proposed approach that would see no reduction in funding for our specialist schools, as indicated in the article. As I have said in response to my first question, it was one of the key bits of conversation that I had with the directorate: “We need to ensure our communication with specialist schools is clear that, while this is what the SRA budget—the student resource allocation budget—would indicate would be the funding for those specialist schools, that is not an appropriate funding model to apply to the specialist schools and they would be treated separately, outside of that model.”

So, modelling was done—“What if you applied this model to those specialist schools?” That modelling was done, and those numbers are available, but that is not what is happening, and it has been clear. My understanding is that the Education Directorate made that clear to specialist school leaders. From the get-go we have made it clear. My understanding is that it was made clear to the union. And I am now making it clear, yet again, in this place that specialist schools are not going to be funded on the basis of that formula. An additional \$7 million has been allocated to ensure that is the case, and specialist schools will not receive less funding in 2027 than they are in 2026.

MR COCKS: Minister, what do you say to the parents of vulnerable students at these schools who are now being faced with the distress of potential cuts to school resources and support services?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I would say: do not listen to the Canberra Liberals—

Mr Parton: Or the union!

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Read the actual article and the information that is in the article. Mr Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is verballing in the union. The union is not claiming that these cuts are going to be applied to specialist schools. They are not claiming that these cuts are going to be applied to specialist schools. They know that is not true. The opposition is—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Cocks: A point of order. By reflecting on anything from the opposition, the minister is now debating the question.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Cox, the Leader of the Opposition was interjecting and making comments, so he was inviting it. The minister was also asked, "What would you say?" She is telling us what she would say, so in that sense it is in order, but I would remind the minister not to debate the question, if she is leaning towards that approach.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: What I would say is this: do not listen to the opposition; read the line in the article that says:

That's why there's an additional \$7 million in the 2027 school year across specialist schools above their SRA—so no specialist school will have less funding than in 2026.

Public schools—funding

MS LEE: My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, media reports this morning include evidence from a staff member at an ACT primary school who says that parents were not informed about cuts to learning support assistants, and that schools were simply handed reduced budgets and told to make cuts. The staff member said, "Nobody is actually considering the level of support that the kids need" and described the process as "absolutely disgusting" and being "kept such a secret".

Minister, according to figures, Malkara, Woden, Black Mountain and Cranleigh schools have cumulatively received a cut of almost \$10 million, and you say that there is an additional \$7 million to support them. How will these schools cover the shortfall of almost \$3 million, despite your adamant assertion that they will not receive a cut?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I can absolutely assure the Assembly, as I have already done multiple times, that no specialist school will receive less funding in 2027 than in 2026.

Ms Lee: So, are they getting the 10 or not? You just said seven. You said it again today. Yep, magic pudding.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Mr Speaker, the interjections by those opposite are quite disorderly. I recognise that this commentary—

MR SPEAKER: Just, on a point of order, the Minister is right. So, if you could just tone it down or cease altogether would be great.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I recognise that this commentary is distressing for parents. I do understand that. I do not think that the way that some members of this place are managing that is helping to support those parents who do feel a level of distress. I would very much say to parents that school budgets for 2027 have not been finalised. There are some difficult conversations happening with principals about what those budgets will look like. We have heard the feedback about this process. We have slowed down this process to ensure those detailed conversations can take place. But overall, we are allocating additional funding across our public education system.

Ms Lee: Point of order, Mr Speaker. My question to the minister was very specific. She specifically stated a number of times now that those specialist schools will not receive

cuts, but she has also quoted the figures. And I have specifically and directly asked her: with the cuts of almost \$10 million, and with \$7 million to be injected, how is the shortfall of \$3 million going to be made up? She has not answered that question.

MR SPEAKER: On the point of order, do you have anything to add? No. Look, I accept that you have asked the question about the 10 versus 7, but she has also guaranteed that there will be no cuts, so I think she has been responsive and relevant.

Ms Lee: Oh, so it is another three, is it?

MR SPEAKER: It is more of a debating point, I think, Ms Lee, than a point of order.

MS LEE: Supplementary question? Minister, when will the school budgets be finalised? Given that you keep stating that they have not been, when will they be finalised? And do you personally accept responsibility for the incredible distress and confusion this budget process has had on principals and teachers and the school communities?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I think that was two questions, but I will answer both of them. School budgets will be finalised in April 2027, in line with what happens every single year. School budgets are never finalised until enrolments are known for that school year.

Ms Lee: So, they are meant to just go and have to start the school year?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: That is what happens every single year. But there is always an indicative budget that is provided, that is pretty close. But school budgets are never finalised until enrolments are known; never, in any year.

Ms Lee: So, pretty close? Okay, so this is what it is going to look like?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: In terms of the distress, I am happy to apologise to any teacher, learning support assistant, parent, carer, student or principal who has experienced distress as part of this process—but I do think that distress is exacerbated by the way that the opposition is managing this. They are not seeking to reduce that distress, they are seeking to escalate it for political reasons.

Ms Lee: No, we are advocating on their behalf. Who do you think come to us?

MR CAIN: Supplementary. Minister, will you guarantee that no student with high needs will lose vital support as a result of these budget adjustments?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: In terms of the support for students with disability, we are putting in an additional \$7 million there as well—and I will correct the record if that number is not accurate—and that includes those at specialist schools. But we are also changing the model of funding in line with the national changes to an adjustment phased resourcing model. So, funding will be allocated on the basis of student need rather than a diagnosis-and-deficit model.

Ms Lee: So, the need is \$3 million stripped?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: What we have seen in terms of funding for schools in relation to students with disability is that parents have been desperately trying to get a diagnosis for their child so that they can access additional support in their schools. That is not an appropriate model, for children to require a diagnosis when it is clear that additional support is required. That is why the adjustment phased resourcing model has been introduced. And schools have undertaken the nationally consistent data collection, and that was part of the reason that drove the timing of the conversation with schools about their budgets; because that NCCD data collection process needed to be completed before the Education Directorate could allocate funding under the adjustment-based resourcing model. So, Mr Cain's question really goes to that fundamental shift in how we think about supporting schools to support students who need additional support.

MR SPEAKER: Point of order, Mr Cocks?

Mr Cocks: Under 118AA, Mr Cain's question was not actually about the policy behind the model which was chosen. It was indeed about the implementation impact on the individual students. He has asked whether the minister could guarantee that no student with high needs will lose support. I do not believe that the minister has directly responded to that question, and I would ask her to come back.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, I think, you have asked for a guarantee and she is not required to provide a yes/no answer. I think she was relevant and responsive. I accept that she has not given a categorical "yes" or "no" answer, but that does not mean she was neither responsive nor relevant.

Public schools—funding

MS LEE: My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, media reporting today shows that at least 58 ACT schools will receive less funding in 2027 than they received in 2026. Analysis of the figures published by the *Canberra Times* indicates these schools will lose more than \$43 million, while the schools receiving increases will get just over \$3.8 million, leaving a net reduction of almost \$40 million across the system. In addition to that, Angela Burroughs, the head of the ACT branch of the Australian Education Union, has actually quoted a figure of \$50 million. Minister, if these are not cuts, can you please explain why 58 schools will have less money available to them in 2027 than they had in 2026?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I think I have already explained multiple times, Mr Speaker, that school budgets for 2027 have not been finalised at this point.

MS LEE: Minister, isn't the reality that schools are being asked to do more with less and that it is students, teachers and parents who ultimately pay the price of your school funding cuts?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: No, Mr Speaker.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, given your repeated refusal to admit that these are cuts, why should staff, school leaders and parents have any confidence that you understand what is happening in the schools you are responsible for?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Well, we were clear from the get-go when we started talking about school budgets that some schools would see a reduction in their funding from 2026 to 2027, that for some schools this would be a challenge to manage, and that the Education Directorate would work with those principals and schools to manage through this process. We have been very clear about that. I have been clear from the start that this would be challenging, as the directorate has for some schools. I had an opinion piece in *Region Canberra* quite recently that absolutely acknowledged that this would be a challenging process for some schools. But what I also said was that no principal, no school leader and no school would be on their own in managing this process and that the Education Directorate would be there to walk with them, to support them and to understand the issues and make sure that they could manage their schools safely and efficiently to deliver an excellent education and a great place to work for teachers and other staff.

Public schools—funding

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Education.

Minister, as a result of the funding cuts for individual schools in 2027, schools have had to let go of a significant number of LSAs. Mount Rogers Primary is having to let go of 27 of their 30 LSAs, according to the *Canberra Times* article this morning. In the wake of these school budget cuts, what are you doing to ensure schools have enough funding to support students with complex needs, noting the tangible improvements from the new adjustments-based resourcing model will not reach students in time for next year's, and that the LSAs will have lost their jobs by then?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Mr Speaker, I am not sure why Miss Nuttall claims that the adjustment-based resourcing model will not have a tangible impact next year. That is part of what we have been implementing through this budget process. In relation to the impact of school budgets, I have sought some further information in relation to the claims made in the *Canberra Times* in relation to the learning support assistant numbers at particular schools.

As I have indicated, school budgets for 2027 have not been finalised. There is still a significant amount of work for some of those schools where the SRA model would indicate a significant reduction in their budgets to work through the exceptions process with the Education Directorate to ensure that they can staff their schools appropriately and deliver safe and effective education for all students, no matter what their disability or complexity might be.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, did the Education Directorate account for the loss of LSAs from next year's school classrooms when it decided to reduce individual school budgets for next year? Or did they think it was okay to let them know in April about their job in January?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am not quite sure where the latter part of that question comes from, Mr Speaker. It is standard process, as I have said earlier, that final budgets are received in April once enrolments are known, but also that indicative budgets are provided and that principals are able to staff their schools, obviously, for the beginning

of the school year. And I would just repeat again, Mr Speaker—because it seems to be not sinking in—that school budgets for 2027 have not been finalised. This is an iterative process and there is an exceptions process to support schools that need that support from the directorate. And once again, I thank principals and school leaders and everybody who has made contact with me to express their concern, and we are trying to clarify this process with all of those people who are contacting us.

MS CLAY: Minister, what data were schools asked to provide to the Education Directorate to determine their indicative school budget for next year?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Well, as I indicated, the NCCD, the data collection around the needs of students with additional learning support needs was one of those pieces of data that was provided by schools. That was part of the reason that the timing was the way it was. Obviously, there is enrolment data from school to school. There is a range of other data that the Education Directorate pulled together to provide these early indicative budgets based on the school student resourcing allocation model.

I will take on notice the detail of that to provide further information about the data. But as I have indicated before, part of the reason that the Education Directorate was going to principals to say, “This is what we know. And on the basis of what we know, this is the indicative SRA-based budget. But we need to hear back from you because we know that there are things we do not know.” We knew that there were things that the Education Directorate did not know because of the nature of our 93 pretty autonomous schools, which is part of the reason that we are undertaking the One Public Education reform process.

Australian-European Union Free trade agreement—ACT impact

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Minister for Trade, Investment and the Knowledge Economy. Chief Minister, one of the key opportunities often associated with trade agreements is attracting new investment. How can the Australia-European Union Free Trade Agreement help attract investment to the ACT and support local economic growth?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for that great question. As I am sure members are aware, Europe is of course home to many of the world’s leading companies, investors, research organisations and technology firms. As barriers to trade and investment are reduced and economic relationships deepen through this trade agreement, Canberra is well positioned to attract significantly greater interest from European businesses looking to establish partnerships, invest in innovation and expand their presence in Australia. We offer a unique value proposition in this context. We have Australia’s most highly skilled workforce, world-class universities, strong research capability, a sophisticated technology sector, a stable economy and a very well-educated community. These are exactly the attributes that international investors are increasingly seeking when making decisions about where to invest. We are particularly well placed to attract investments in areas like cybersecurity, defence technologies, digital services, clean energy, health innovation, space technologies, and advanced manufacturing.

Importantly, though, investment is not just about capital; it is also about expertise,

technology, transferred global networks, and access to new markets. When an international company invests in Canberra, local businesses gain new opportunities, researchers gain new partners and workers gain access to new high-quality jobs. The government seeks to position Canberra as one of the most innovative and globally connected cities in our region, and stronger economic ties with Europe will help us to attract investment that will be needed to grow our economy and create jobs in the future.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Chief Minister, what steps is the ACT government taking to ensure Canberra is ready to capture these investment opportunities as the agreement comes into effect?

MR BARR: We are actively building Canberra's reputation as a destination for investment, innovation and business growth. Through Invest Canberra, our innovation ecosystem and our partnerships with universities and industries, we are promoting Canberra internationally as a city where business can access talent, research, expertise and government decision-makers in one location. We are also investing in the foundations of future growth, including digital capability, innovation, precinct skills development, and support for emerging industries. These investments strengthen Canberra's attractiveness to international investors who are seeking longer term opportunities.

As I mentioned yesterday and in the first answer, Europe's strengths align closely with Canberra's. We see particular opportunities in clean tech, cybersecurity, space, defence, health and innovation, and across the plethora of advanced professional services. These are sectors where Canberra is already developing a strong international reputation. So, as this trade agreement is implemented, if the Australian parliament has the wisdom to vote for it, the government will work in market with businesses, universities and industry leaders to promote Canberra as a destination for EU investment and collaboration. Our objective is straightforward: to ensure that, when European firms look to Australia for their next investment, Canberra is not seen simply as the nation's capital but also as one of Australia's leading centres of innovation, talent and opportunity.

Land—prices

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Chief Minister. The SLA is currently offering 400 square metre blocks at Whitlam for more than \$600,000. In contrast, buyers could have a 900 square metre block at Googong for \$500,000. Does the government accept that the price of land and housing is a key reason many young Canberrans and their families are leaving the ACT?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Castley for the question. Certainly the price of land varies depending on its geographic location. Whitlam is considerably closer to employment and services in the ACT than Googong is. So it is not unaccepted that there would be differences in land values. We will see across the ACT land values will vary depending on the location of the land. The most valuable and expensive land in Canberra tends to be located in the inner south of the city. That is, again, not surprising given its proximity to employment and to services.

It is clear that we operate within a constrained land availability environment and that

there always has been and always will be land releases in regional New South Wales. Those that are proximate to the ACT will seek to leverage off the employment and services that are available in the territory.

MS CASTLEY: Chief Minister, does the government know which groups of Canberrans are driving domestic migration, the reasons they are going or the fiscal impacts of their departures?

MR BARR: We have considerable movement across the ACT border every year for a variety of reasons. That includes movement of students and the movement of defence families and those involved in politics and diplomacy. There will often be movement around Australia and between Canberra and international destinations based on employment. I would say that the strongest factor that drives movement is employment. There are also elements on the lifecycle too. We attract a very significant amount of people in their late teens and early 20s and we will often see a movement of people in their retirement phase of life out of the ACT as their working life concludes. Those trends have been reasonably consistent over the duration of this city's history.

MS CARRICK: Chief Minister, will you do analysis to determine what cohort of people moving across the border and to the surrounding region?

MR BARR: We do have data from the ABS. I have not seen this year's, but in most years there is a net inflow into the ACT from surrounding New South Wales rather going the other way. There has been a topical conversation or perhaps an urban myth over many years that somehow there are thousands of people who leave the ACT just to go across the border each year. The population data does not support that. Of course, there is movement—there always will be—but the ACT's population has been growing faster than the surrounding region.

Ms Carrick: Mr Speaker, on a point of order: I asked the Chief Minister if he will do analysis to determine the cohorts that are moving across the border.

MR BARR: That analysis is undertaken by the ABS. We just had a census and we will get data from that next year. So I will not replicate the ABS work. We will wait for that data. The point I was making to Ms Carrick is that it is an urban myth—perpetuated by some with an interesting agenda of wanting to talk Canberra down. But the evidence has been that the ACT has been growing faster than the region surrounding us—and that has been the case for more than a decade.

Land—Affordable Home Purchase Scheme

MS CARRICK: Chief Minister, participants in the Affordable Home Purchase Scheme in Whitlam have endured years of delay. Now, as these homes approach completion, buyers report being pressured to sign certificates of occupancy before they have had sufficient opportunity to obtain independent legal or building advice about changes to the plans and incomplete works. At the same time, buyers remain uncertain about whether landscaping and paths will be delivered without additional costs to purchasers.

Chief Minister, why were Affordable Home Purchase Scheme buyers in Whitlam subject to repeated pressure from builders in the SLA to sign certificates of occupancy

before they had adequate opportunity to undertake independent due diligence as required on the form?

MR BARR: I am not certain that that is a fair assessment of the situation as it relates, certainly, to the SLA. I cannot comment definitively on what builders might have sought to do outside of any influence of government or the SLA, but I will seek further information from the SLA in relation to the accusation in that question that they have not behaved appropriately. I would be surprised if that were the case, but I cannot be certain, obviously, what individual builders may or may not do.

MS CARRICK: Chief Minister, what steps did the SLA take to ensure buyers had access to all relevant information, including inspection and compliance reports, before being asked to sign the certificate of occupancy?

MR BARR: I will take that on notice.

MR EMERSON: Chief Minister, can you guarantee that all homes under the scheme will be handed over complete, including landscaping, fencing and paths, and that buyers will not be required to bear any additional costs for works that were in their contracts?

MR BARR: I am not sure I can give a guarantee in this place right now. I will need to seek some further advice on that matter. But I think the final part of Mr Emerson's question related to contracts, and I would expect contracts to be honoured.

Mr Emerson: Just to clarify. He said he would need to seek further advice. Was that taken on notice?

MR SPEAKER: I think he said he will take further advice. You asked for a guarantee, and he said he cannot provide that guarantee. He has been relevant. He has answered the question, but I think he is going to provide further information if he can. Is that right?

MR BARR: Yes. I said I would seek further information from the SLA in relation to that matter, but where it relates to honouring contracts, I would expect that they would be honoured.

MyWay+—real-time passenger information

MR BRADDOCK: My question is for the Minister for Transport. Minister, a Transport Canberra service update dated 15 September lists an issue which prevents real-time passenger information being shown in the Android version of the MyWay+ app. This means Android phone users may lack critical information in planning their public transport trip. Minister, what is the issue? When will the functionality of real-time passenger information be restored?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Braddock for the question. I have been briefed that there have been two issues. One is being resolved as we speak, and another requires further investigation. The latter is about real-time passenger information which is affecting some Android users but not all. I, certainly, was being affected but I am not now. But I do not have the full brief on that yet.

I do have some answers about the other issue, which is surrounding the MyWay+ Android application and its interaction with Google Play. The advice I have got is that there was an issue with compliance with Google's target API requirements for Android applications. As I understand it, Google requires existing apps to meet specified target API levels, to remain available to users on the newer Android operating systems. This is a yearly requirement. Google describes this as its regular annual update process.

There was an announcement to developers about this year's timeframe on 15 July. The relevant enforcement date was 31 August, and developers were able to request an extension to 1 November if more time was required. I have been advised that SkedGo, which develops and maintains the application under NEC's arrangements, identified the requirement in mid-August and commenced work on an updated application.

It advised the territory on 31 August that an updated was required but, as I understand it, did not give advance warning that there would be an impact on the application's availability from that date. The updated Android application has now subsequently been submitted through Google Play, and it is being updated progressively through a staged rollout.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister how is the government managing the contract with NEC to ensure they actually deliver on their contractual obligations?

MS CHEYNE: Regarding the application—and I will get directly to Mr Braddock's question—what we know is the application did not meet the relevant requirement when Google's 31 August enforcement arrangements took effect. What I am still establishing is whether the available extension to 1 November was sought or obtained, and the precise chronology of the advice we received by NEC and its subcontractor, and how that was communicated.

I do expect a major technology contractor to anticipate routine platform requirements; to tell the territory early when there is a risk to customers; and to provide clear and technically accurate explanations when something goes wrong.

I have been the transport minister for a relatively short period, and while I am a new transport minister, I am not a patient one. I am seeking a meeting with the new CEO of NEC. There are live, ongoing contractual negotiations underway and I do wish to prejudice them, but I will certainly keep the Assembly updated to the extent that I can. But I would say that I have already had to spend, in the last two months, a considerable amount of time seeking clarity on MyWay+ matters, and my tolerance for avoidable surprises and unclear explanations is extremely limited.

MS CLAY: Minister, two years after launch, when is will Canberra get the worldclass transport system we were promised?

MS CHEYNE: That is a tricky question for me to answer, Mr Speaker, and I am not seeking to be facetious here. NEC remains the territory's principal contractor for MyWay+ but there are contractual and commercial matters being worked through between the parties, and negotiating those matters publicly or saying anything that might prejudice the territory's position is not something that I am in a position to do.

I think that does go to the heart of what Ms Clay is asking—because that is fulfilling the contractual arrangements of what we have asked. While I cannot pre-judge the territory's contractual position, it certainly does not prevent me from demanding an explanation and expecting better performance. I think NEC should be aware that I will be forensic in my understanding of the issues, and how they are engaging with the territory—as Transport Canberra is already aware that I am forensic in how it is managing its contract with NEC. I look forward to having a very frank and robust conversation with the CEO of NEC soon.

ACT Public Service—employment of staff subject to family or domestic violence investigations

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for the Public Service. Minister, what is the government's policy in relation to the ongoing employment of staff subject to family or domestic violence orders, charges or investigations?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: This is one of those matters in relation to the public service that would be the responsibility of the Head of Service and Directors-General, but I will take the question on notice.

MR EMERSON: I am happy if this is better directed to the Chief Minister for response. Minister/Chief Minister are any ACTPS senior executives currently on leave while subject to family or domestic violence orders, charges or investigations?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take the question on notice.

MS CARRICK: Minister, how many senior executive positions across the ACTPS, including Directors-General and Deputy Directors-General, are currently being filled by someone in an acting capacity while the person who holds a substantive role is on extended leave?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take the question on notice.

Firearms—legislation

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Minister, last week I asked what evidence the government had that limiting the number of firearms a licensed owner can possess would make Canberra safer. You told the Assembly that:

Part of the National Firearms Agreement ... is to establish caps on firearms.

Minister, I have reviewed the National Firearms Agreement and cannot find a provision establishing a general cap or limit on firearms ownership. Can you identify the provision of the agreement you were referring to?

DR PATERSON: I believe the new agreement that has been—I am not sure if the new agreement that has been negotiated is public yet, but the previous agreement did not

have caps. So the states and territories are negotiating with the commonwealth around a new national firearms agreement and as part of that is a discussion around caps.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, given the WA Law Reform Commission recommended there should be no upper limits, did you consider that when introducing the change in this legislation?

DR PATERSON: We considered that. We considered all the evidence from the inquiries in WA and also considered what New South Wales passed in their parliament towards the end of last year. We took all that into consideration, as well as discussions with the commonwealth and with other states and territories, which have been progressing over the best part of nearly a year now, and that is where we arrived at the legislation that I introduced into the Assembly, which has been under committee inquiry and I do not believe the committee inquiry recommended that there was no caps, but we will continue to work through the bill, and I will bring that back to the Assembly at some point in time.

MR PARTON: Minister, can you reveal to the Assembly the exact source which has led you to go with the cap currently in the bill, as per the answer to your question in question time last week.

DR PATERSON: As I said, we took evidence from a variety of sources to arrive at the decision to progress and introduce legislation with the cap of five firearms with exemptions for up to 10 and a range of other exemptions that are available as well. So we have introduced that legislation. I will still continue to work through—

Mr Parton: Point of order on relevance, the question was to very specifically reveal to the Assembly the source that led to the cap that is in the current bill and I am not sure that the minister is revealing that.

DR PATERSON: So we do not take a single source of information or single point of information. We assess the broad range of evidence available to us, a range of stakeholders and their advocacy, and then we compile all that—

MR SPEAKER: I will just rule on the point of order. You have asked if there is an exact source. She said there is a variety of sources, so she is responding to the question, Mr Parton. Minister, continue.

DR PATERSON: I have nothing further to add.

Budget—Treasurer's advances

MS CLAY: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, the June quarterly financial report was tabled in mid-August, after estimates hearings had concluded, meaning the Assembly had no opportunity to scrutinise it before the budget cycle closed. It discloses three big cost blowouts: a \$3.2 million capital injection for defect rectification at the new Canberra Hospital pharmacy, a \$700,000 Treasurer's advance to cover shortfalls in Canberra Theatre ticket sales, and an \$18.3 million Treasurer's advance for additional child protection costs. When did the government first become aware of the defects with the pharmacy, requiring a \$3.2 million capital injection, and why didn't

the government identify this during construction handover or the defects liability inspection so the territory would not have to pay for it?

MR STEEL: I will take that question on notice.

MS CLAY: Why did theatre ticket sales fall so short that they needed a \$700,000 Treasurer's advance, and will the territory be liable for underwriting ticket sales for the new lyric theatre too?

MR STEEL: I will take that question on notice and come back to the Assembly with some more information.

MS VASSAROTTI: Why does the government continue to under-budget for child protection given the frequent budget blowouts, and what specific changes have you made to avoid this in future?

MR PETTERSSON: The ACT government responds to demand for child protection services as they emerge. The ACT government is committed to addressing the cost pressures that we are experiencing in care and protection. The provision of care for children is expensive. Commonly, children in care have complex trauma and require specialist services. This is expensive, but I believe there is commitment across the community to ensure that every child who enters care gets the services they need. We have seen a broad decline in the number of children in care in ACT. Simultaneously, we have also seen an increase in costs. This is a key priority of mine, as minister, to address.

Planning—Braddon Bowls Club site

MS VASSAROTTI: My question is to the Minister for Planning. My question is about the Braddon Bowls Club site. The environment and planning committee has recommended that you withdraw DPA-07—a proposal to amend the Territory Plan for the Braddon Bowls Club site. The committee was not convinced to support the DPA for a variety of reasons. It is quite clear that the proposal lacks an understanding of its neighbours and that more work needed to be done. The community who opposed this development would benefit from knowing what the next steps are. Can you advise whether you will approve, withdraw or return DPA-07 to the Territory Planning Authority? If not yet decided, what will you be taking into account in this decision?

MR STEEL: I have not yet made a decision on that and I have not yet received a briefing in relation to that. I understand the information that has been provided by the committee, and that will be considered, of course, in future decision-making. I look forward to updating the Assembly and the community about that.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Vassarotti, a supplementary?

Ms Vassarotti: I do have a have a supplementary, but is that question being taken on notice?

MR STEEL: No.

Ms Vassarotti: So you are not taking that question on notice?

MR STEEL: No; I answered that question.

MR SPEAKER: Is there a point of order, Ms Vassarotti or—

Ms Vassarotti: I asked the minister what he would be taking into account when making a decision.

MR SPEAKER: I think the minister said that he has not received a brief yet and so is unable to answer that element of it. That is my understanding. So I think we can probably move to a supplementary.

MS VASSAROTTI: Sure. Can you elaborate on what issues the Territory Planning Authority took into account before accepting the application by the proponent and releasing DPA-07 for public comment?

MR STEEL: I am happy to ask the independent Territory Planning Authority for some further information and come back to the Assembly. But there was, of course, the supporting report for DPA-07 which was published subject to consultation with the community. It has obviously been subject to some discussion in the community as well.

MR BRADDOCK: Why isn't advice from the agencies referred to in section 62 of the Planning Act 2023 made available in the draft planning documentation released for public comment?

MR STEEL: I am happy to come back with some further information about that. But the information that has been provided is available on the Planning website under DPA-07.

Access Canberra—customer accounts

MR CAIN: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. Minister, does Access Canberra currently hold money belonging to customers as positive balances in its clients' accounts, and if so, what is the total amount of customer money currently being held?

MS CHEYNE: Without more specificity, I do not think that I can answer the question on this floor, so I will take it on notice.

MR CAIN: Minister, are 100 per cent of those customer balances backed by funds immediately available to be returned to customers and does the territory earn any interest or other financial benefit from holding that money?

MS CHEYNE: I will take it on notice.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, why does Access Canberra not automatically refund positive client account balances to customers or automatically apply those funds to their next transactions?

MS CHEYNE: I note that the previous question was whether we do and now I am being asked why we do not. Accordingly, I will take it on notice.

Mr Barr: That is all the questions, Mr Speaker. The balance can be placed on the notice paper!