QUESTION TIME

OF THE

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FOR THE

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

Thursday, 29 October 2026

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Questions without notice

Government procurement—conduct in procurement

MR PARTON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, following findings of serious corrupt conduct by Operation Kingfisher, which led to the resignation of the then Deputy Chief Minister, Master Builders ACT has rightfully called for action to restore confidence in the territory's procurement system. The estimates committee has also recommended an independent review of previous capital procurements.

Will the Chief Minister commit here and now to an independent review of previous ACT government capital projects over the last decade to establish whether other tenders were subject to inappropriate influence and whether taxpayers received value for money?

MR BARR: Well, of course, all previous tenders are going through a process of assessment. The Auditor-General is also an independent entity, so I am giving some consideration to whether a referral to the Auditor-General would be the appropriate way to address the issues that the Leader of the Opposition has raised. It would then be up to the auditor to determine which, if any, projects his team wish to look at.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, what evidence can you provide to demonstrate that the Campbell Primary School procurement was an isolated incident and not business as usual?

MR BARR: The absence of any other public allegations or referrals that I am aware of—and to the extent that there has been ample opportunity over the last decade for anyone to bring forward any concerns, and, where there were concerns, they were brought forward to the appropriate entities.

MRS MORRIS: Will the Chief Minister specifically commit to reviewing all major capital procurements involving similar tendering and evaluation arrangements and publish the findings?

MR BARR: I would refer the member to my answer to the first question. In relation to how one would define major, the threshold for the initial round was anything over $500,000. That has not identified any areas in the Education Directorate where a tender outcome differed from that recommended through the assessment process.

It is of course open to anyone to refer anything to the Auditor-General or, indeed, to the Integrity Commission. So that is available. What I am not interested in doing is spending tens of millions of dollars of taxpayer money going over projects that do not have any questions raised about them. The Auditor-General is certainly the independent entity. I would hope everyone would agree that it would be appropriate, were any matters to arise, to refer to the Auditor-General.

Drugs—Directions Health Services—syringes

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, local media reporting shows that ACT government-funded Directions Health Services has been

forced to restrict access to injecting equipment because of an enormous surge in demand from people using peptides taking advantage of free syringes. Minister, when did ACT Health first become aware of these supply pressures? And what additional resources have been provided to Directions Health Services or have been requested?

DR PATERSON: I thank the member for the question. We have had this discussion with Directions ACT, and they have raised that there has been a surge in access to the needle and syringe program. We have also heard concerns from the Australian regulator, AHPRA, around this surge in peptide use in Australia. It is really concerning. I think what we saw in the media today that is concerning Directions is that their core business of supporting people in our community who inject psychoactive drugs and peptide use potentially takes away from their ability to serve that community. We have not had any specific requests for additional resources at this point, but we are absolutely aware of this as an increasing issue and will continue to work closely with Directions to monitor it.

MR PARTON: Minister, how much ACT government funding has been wasted on free syringes for peptide users?

DR PATERSON: I do not think it has been wasted. I think it is just a change of use and access to this service. Obviously, if people are injecting substances in the community, we want them to do that safely. This is a trend that is happening nationally and internationally. We have seen—

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Just ignore them.

DR PATERSON: We will continue to work very closely with Directions to monitor the situation, but this is a really concerning situation. In terms of the use of peptides in Australia, people are accessing them online from overseas. It is completely unregulated, and there are really concerning potential health outcomes for individuals who may use those peptides.

Members interjecting—

MRS MORRIS: Minister, what is your advice to social media influencers who are suggesting people access free syringes at Directions Health Services?

DR PATERSON: My words would be to social media influencers who are encouraging individuals to use these peptides and access these peptides or if they are selling these peptides—because what we are hearing from the federal government is just how dangerous these peptides can be. They most often do not contain the substance that an individual thinks they contain, and we are seeing more and more evidence of that. We are also seeing reports about, for example, one peptide that is designed to give you a tan really quicky. Apparently that is causing melanoma or increasing skin cancer risk in very young people. This is a really concerning trend. My message to the social media influencers is to stop doing this, to stop perpetuating substances that are unregulated in Australia.

Illegal tobacco—legislation

MRS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Health. Following commentary from the minister relating to the human rights implications of closing illegal tobacco shops, federal Labor minister Julian Hill said there was no:

> …unqualified human right to flog illegal stuff trying to get kids hooked on nicotine and vapes [and] funding organised criminals.

Mr Hill also said, "This is getting ridiculous. I met with these ministers eight months ago and they've gone around in circles, frankly," and he also warned that the territory was "at risk of becoming a national joke."

Minister, why were you citing human rights considerations as a reason for not committing to closure laws when even your own federal Labor colleagues think that argument is ridiculous and a national joke?

DR PATERSON: It took the Canberra Liberals a fair while to get to this one. This is really old news now. I went on ABC radio a couple of weeks ago and was asked what we are taking into consideration around closure laws. One of the things that we are taking into consideration is human rights, which is exactly what we take into consideration with every single piece of legislation we develop. It is a real shame that a member of federal parliament—

Opposition members interjecting—

DR PATERSON: The member obviously does not want to hear my response.

MR SPEAKER: Members.

DR PATERSON: Yes, it is a real shame that he did not contact me first to directly ask me about us progressing this legislation. I have been very forward leaning in the Police Ministers Council around our support of the tobacco work that has been going on nationally. Minister Stephen-Smith had announced to the chamber when the previous tranche of legislation was passed that we are progressing a second tranche of legislation. Since becoming health minister I have been briefed on this. Closure laws are absolutely part of the development of that legislation. We will be looking at serious criminal penalties for people who sell illicit tobacco and vapes in our community. We have always been transparent that that bill will be coming at the end of the year. It will be coming in the next sitting of this Assembly.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, what measures were discussed with Minister Hill eight months ago, and what progress has your government actually made in the time since those conversations were had?

DR PATERSON: I was not in the meeting that Mrs Morris refers to, so I cannot speak to that.

MR PARTON: Minister, do you accept the assessment of your federal Labor colleague that the territory is at risk of becoming a national joke under your watch?

DR PATERSON: No, and I spoke to Mr Hill about this and he apologised to me for his comments in the media and committed to us working together closely to achieve the best outcomes for the Canberra community. As I said, I have been participating in the Police Ministers Council for the last couple of years. There has been a very strong agenda around tobacco and illicit vapes as well as on firearms reform in Australia, and I have been very explicit of the ACT's support and participation in addressing these very serious policing concerns in our community.

Community facilities—management

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for the Public Service. The recent report by the Auditor-General titled *Management of community facilities*, paints a damning picture of the management of community facilities by ACT Property Gorup, Major Projects Canberra and Infrastructure Canberra. The audit showed that planning for the management of community facilities is ineffective. There is no asset management planning, which creates organisational and service delivery risks. There is no overarching framework for the management of community facilities. There are no criteria for peppercorn leases, and government has no record of some of those leases. The organisations looking after these key community assets have not been doing their job. What action is the government taking to address the concerns in this damning report?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Clay for the question. This was an audit report that in fact Infrastructure Canberra welcomed and sought, and on which it worked very closely with the Auditor-General and the audit office because they understood there were some significant challenges in relation to the management of community facilities. And they acknowledged the significant shortcomings that the report identifies.

The report makes 10 recommendations and 52 key findings, and the government takes those seriously and acknowledges the need for improvement. So, we will obviously be responding formally to the 10 recommendations in due course.

Infrastructure Canberra has engaged proactively with the audit office to undertake this performance audit, but it also itself identified many of those issues identified in the report, and has engaged with the work that has continued throughout the audit report. That includes updating the allocation policy, with community consultation already complete—and the updated allocation policy will be released shortly; standardising and modernising licence agreement templates; updating central agreement registers; providing dedicated procurement and contract management training; and undertaking meaningful structural reform in service delivery.

So, this will not be a response that starts subsequent to the release of the Auditor-General's report; this is a response that is already underway. And we certainly welcome the audit process as a further opportunity to strengthen how community facilities are managed, and the broader property function.

MS CLAY: Has the Labor government got a current asset management policy for community facilities, and if so, can you provide a copy?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Clay for the question. The most recent strategic

asset management plan covering the Infrastructure Canberra asset portfolio in its entirety was active from 2018 to 2023, and it is currently in the process of being updated.

Infrastructure Canberra is implementing its strategic asset management framework through a phased delivery program of work. The phased delivery of asset management plans, asset class management plans and strategic asset management reports reflects the need for a risk-based prioritisation within Infrastructure Canberra's available staff and resources for asset management.

Assets that do not have a contemporary asset management plan have not been excluded from, or ceased to be part of strategic asset management planning and active asset management. Rather, they are scheduled for future phases of implementation consistent with the strategic asset management prioritisation framework.

During 2024-25, Infrastructure Canberra completed asset management plans for 45 depot facilities, together with asset class management plans for the depot asset class. Asset management plans were also completed for 13 entertainment and cultural facilities and seven aquatic facilities. Strategic asset assessment reports have also been completed for identified community-use assets.

All of this information was provided in a response to a question on notice from the Inquiry into Appropriation Bill estimates hearings, and a question that I took on notice on 21 July.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, when will a condition audit be carried out on the community facilities that have not had a condition audit to date?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Infrastructure Canberra is working through that process. I will take the detail of the question on notice.

Energy—plug-in solar panels

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water. Minister, Western Australia is set to become the first state or territory in the country to roll out plug-in balcony solar panels. This technology is widely used in parts of Europe to allow renters and other people living in apartments to access the benefits of cheap solar power. Last week, the Chief Minister posted on social media that the ACT Labor government is leading the nation on climate action. So why is Western Australia leading the nation on plug-in solar?

MS ORR: I thank the member for his question. "Leading the nation on climate action" goes to a range of activities, including having a commitment to reduce emissions, which is what we have been working to and what we have been leading on. With regard to the plug-in solar panels, I actually have this issue raised with me quite a bit. It is something that is being looked at through various different forums, including energy ministers meetings. A lot of the considerations go to how we make sure that the products, as they are importing into Australia, which is a responsibility of the national government, meet our standards; that we are providing a safe product, given it is electrical and requires electricity connections in it; and how we would implement that consistently across all

jurisdictions within the regulatory frameworks we have.

So, while it might not be something that we shout about publicly or that the Chief Minister puts on his social media feed—which, I must admit, I do no seem to follow as closely as Mr Emerson—I think it is fair to say that it is definitely an issue on our radar. It is one we are looking at. Plug-in solar panels for balconies might be a small component and there might be some states charging ahead on looking at how they could ensure compliance within their jurisdiction. That is also something that we can all take the learnings from, but it will not be the sole determinant in leading on climate action or reducing our emissions and achieving net zero.

MR EMERSON: Minister, if Western Australia can do this, why doesn't plug-in solar feature in the ACT's new Climate Change Strategy, noting it was recommended in my community-led submission to the consultation process and, as you mentioned, it has been raised with you quite frequently?

MS ORR: I would refer the member to my previous answer, because that will provide a lot of contextual information as to this question. The short answer if he wants one specifically to why it has not been included in the Climate Change Strategy is that we were looking at what would progress a broader transition. That does mean that it is necessarily the only thing that will ever be considered throughout this, and there are other forums where we are looking at things such as what Mr Emerson has raised.

MS CARRICK: Minister, why isn't the government doing more to address the current inequity in access to the benefits of the energy transition across our community?

MS ORR: I will take the member's question in the context of doing more to lead the way on plug-in balcony solar panels, which is what this question has been about and, again, refer the member to my previous answers. We also as a government continue to work across the National Energy Market and the national energy system on ways that we can bring consumer protections and consumer rights into what is a nationally consistent framework for transitioning the whole National Energy Market, of which we are a part, to a net zero future.

Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Minister for Health Infrastructure. Minister, in response to Senator Pocock's questions in Senate estimates yesterday, commonwealth officials confirmed they have not received a detailed cost breakdown for the scope of the proposed $10 million Burrangiri upgrade, despite the ACT government announcing that Burrangiri will close for between six to 12 months while the works are undertaken. Minister, has the ACT government completed a detailed cost breakdown for the Burrangiri refurbishment, and, if so, when will that breakdown be released so the Assembly and the federal government can understand which works are essential, which works are discretionary, and how the $10 million will be spent?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I refer Ms Carrick to the multiple reports that have been tabled in this place that demonstrate the need for additional work at Burrangiri to ensure that it can be appropriate for delivering the exact type of aged-care respite services it currently delivers into the future and avoid potential service interruptions due to

breakdown of ageing mechanical and other services. We have been through this many times in this place. The most detailed breakdown of the upgrades that are required is contained in the GHD report that was provided to the Health Directorate at the time, in relation to what would be required should Burrangiri be used as a temporary facility for the relocation of Arcadia House.

Subsequently, we got the report on the fire-safety upgrades that are required. That identified that $2.7 million would be required for urgent life-safety upgrades and fire safety upgrades for the facility. But the final report from GHD in relation to that process—a process that Ms Carrick explicitly asked us to undertake—also said, quite directly, that, while the facility was going to be closed for this purpose, it would make sense to undertake the other structural works, including works around heating ventilation and air conditioning systems, the demolition and rebuilding of some parts of the facility, and accessibility improvements—not a lick of paint and not new carpet but structural improvements to the facility.

MS CARRICK: Minister, what analysis has been undertaken to determine that Burrangiri needs to close for between six to 12 months, and what options were considered to reduce the length of the closure to minimise the loss of respite services?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Again I refer Ms Carrick to the reports that have been released and to my ministerial statement last week. Last week, I gave a ministerial statement about the agreement that we have reached with the commonwealth government, and that statement included extracts from the reports that I have been talking about—extracts that explicitly identify the upgrades that we are talking about. Of course, further work needs to be undertaken once there is access to a vacant building and the builder can get in there and understand what is going on behind the walls. Everyone in this place—even those who have been here for only a couple of years—should be very well aware that, as soon as you start going behind the walls of an existing building that was built in the 1970s or 80s, you are likely to find additional challenges. That is what will determine the ultimate timeframe and cost of what is required in this refurbishment process—the replacement of mechanical services, the replacement of gas assets with electrical for the heating, the ventilation and air conditioning system, the demolition of some of the extensions that now have a poor thermal envelope and poor flooring that needs to be replaced, and the accessibility upgrades to bathrooms, as well as the installation of a commercial kitchen. All of those things are detailed in the reports that Ms Carrick has had access to for quite some time.

MR EMERSON: Minister, how was the impact on the jobs of 40 staff at Burrangiri considered in the scope of works and the associated closure of the facility for six to 12 months?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: It seems like it is a very complex issue for people to get their heads around. There is a current contract with the Salvation Army to deliver the service at Burrangiri. That contract was due to expire on 30 June 2025. The very specific procurement advice from the directorate prior to that time was that, under the procurement rules, the directorate would be required to go to market and test the market should we want to continue to invest in that service. Subsequent to much discussion in this place at the beginning of last year, the directorate agreed that it could extend that contract for two years, but at the time, I was very clear that that was touch and go.

I initially provided advice to this place that I believed that this place was asking directorate officials to breach procurement rules by directing me and the directorate to extend that contract.

The directorate identified that, given the $10 million that the commonwealth government had allocated to the delivery of infrastructure to support future respite services and given the conversations that were ongoing, they could in fact—they got legal advice—justify a two-year extension. The Salvation Army has known that was a two-year extension on a contract that was already due to expire on 30 June 2025. There is no capacity to extend that contract, and I am sure that staff working for the Salvation Army are aware of that.

Public housing—waiting list

MS BARRY: My question is to the Minister for Housing and Homelessness. Minister, there are currently 3,652 approved applicants on the public housing wait list. Of those, roughly how many are women who have applied for public housing after leaving a situation of domestic and family violence?

MS ORR: I do not have that level of detail on me. I will have to take the question on notice.

MS BARRY: Roughly, how many are children on the public waiting list?

MS ORR: Mr Speaker, again, I will take it on notice.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, are the numbers trending upwards or down for these cohorts compared to where we were five years ago?

MS ORR: Mr Speaker, I will also take that on notice.

Yerrabi—major projects—deferral

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Planning. This year the government has deferred a number of Yerrabi projects, including the Casey emergency services facility, the Gungahlin police station and the north Gungahlin health centre. My understanding is that the Gungahlin Town Centre park will now join the list, with procurement by the SLA deferred until July 2028 at the earliest. Can the minister explain the cause of these delays and when the park will be complete?

MR BARR: I will take that on notice.

MS CASTLEY: Can the Chief Minister also tell us how much smaller the park is under the current design compared with the original design and why the government has reduced the size if they have done so?

MR BARR: I will seek some advice from the SLA and take that on notice.

MS CARRICK: Will the Chief Minister provide a breakdown of the $700 million that

was deferred in the last budget?

MR BARR: That is not a question for me; that is a question for the Treasurer. That has been provided, I understand, during the last estimates hearings.

Canberra Lyric Theatre

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Chief Minister and Minister for Major Projects. Chief Minister, can you please update the Assembly on the progress of the Canberra Lyric Theatre project?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the question. In short, the construction continues to progress very well. The project is, of course, delivering a new landmark cultural venue which will enable Canberra to host larger national and international productions that simply cannot be accommodated in our 1965 Canberra Theatre. The project is on track to top out early next year, with concrete slabs for the ground floor and the first floor already complete. The remaining concrete pours will occur over the summer. The structural steel frames for the upper levels are being installed early next year. Throughout 2027 construction will move into the fit-out phase with seating installed and stage and technical equipment set up. We are expecting completion in mid-2028.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Chief Minister, how will the Lyric Theatre strengthen Canberra's theatre and cultural precinct?

MR BARR: Well, it certainly adds a major new venue to what is already a successful theatre and cultural precinct. Canberra Theatre Centre already hosts around 600 performances a year and attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors. The new Lyric Theatre complements the existing venues—it is obviously significantly larger—allowing a broader range of productions to occur. All of the major musicals, ballets, opera and other large scale productions that simply cannot come to Canberra now because the Canberra Theatre is too small in stage, back of house and seating capacity, will now be able, once this facility is open, to come to Canberra.

The 1965 Canberra Theatre was the best theatre in Australia in 1965. It is not anymore. It has significant limitations with stage size and seating capacity. That is why the new theatre was needed. The new theatre addresses those issues with a larger, modern amenity and a seating capacity of up to 2,000 people.

MS BERRY: Chief Minister, what economic benefits will flow from the continued growth of Canberra's theatre and entertainment precinct?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Berry for the question. The project is, of course, supporting construction jobs right now and will create ongoing employment opportunities across the arts, events, hospitality and tourism sectors. A stronger theatre precinct means more visitors, more spending and more jobs. To put some perspective on this, the precinct is already active around 250 nights a year. The government's objective is to continue to grow that activity. More performances, of course, mean more people dining in local restaurants, staying in local hotels and supporting city businesses. By year 5 of operations, the Lyric Theatre is projected to contribute $33.7 million annually to the

territory economy, representing around 111,000 visitor nights.

Teacher Quality Institute—program accreditation

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Education. The ACT has taken important steps to limit the influence of fossil fuel companies in public schools through its corporate sponsorship policy. However, concerns have been raised that industry-backed organisations may still be reaching teachers, and potentially students, through professional learning programs marketed as government-accredited. For example, the Teacher Earth Science Education Programme (TESEP), which has documented support from fossil fuel companies including Glencore Coal and MACH Energy, is advertising professional development workshops in Canberra this December and describes them as ACT Teacher Quality Institute accredited.

Is the minister aware that organisations funded by fossil fuel companies are delivering professional learning to ACT teachers, including through ACT government recognised accreditation arrangements?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Nuttall for the question. I was not aware and I am happy to raise that with the TQI.

MISS NUTTALL: Does the minister consider this to be consistent with the intent of the government's ban on fossil fuel sponsorship in ACT public schools?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am not in a position to answer that question until I have got some further information from the TQI.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, will you commit to reviewing whether TQI accreditation requirements should include mandatory disclosure of industry funding and conflicts of interest?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Braddock for the supplementary, and I am happy to take the question on notice and consult further with the Education Directorate on this matter. Clearly, the Greens were able to access information about the involvement of particular companies in this, so I am not sure if that is already part of the process.

Roads—safety—Forrest

MR COCKS: My question is to the Minister for City Services. Minister, I understand that $611,600 has been allocated under the 2026-27 Black Spot Program to replace the give-way control at Arthur Circle and Monaro Crescent in Forrest with a small, mountable concrete roundabout. Minister, on what date will construction commence and when will the upgrades to this intersection be completed?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Cocks for the question. I do not have that detail in front of me, but let me see if I can get it by the end of question time.

MR COCKS: Minister, has detailed design and procurement commenced, and will you guarantee that the project will be completed by 30 June 2027?

MS CHEYNE: I will also take that on notice.

MS LEE: Minister, what interim safety measures will be installed, and why has Labor left this known black spot unresolved for so long?

MS CHEYNE: Black spot funding, obviously, is a federal initiative. The panel is chaired by the federal member for Canberra, Alicia Payne. We certainly have made representations through that as we have learnt about issues that have come up across our city and what meets certain thresholds. I will take the detail of the question on notice and come back to the chamber.

Jamison shopping centre—footpaths

MR CAIN: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. Minister, a recent social media post has brought to light a footpath defect at the Jamison centre that signage at the site claims was left outstanding for months before being repaired by a member of the public. According to the signs, the repair cost $21 and took about 10 minutes. When residents start fixing public infrastructure themselves, Minister, it raises serious questions about maintenance response times and confidence in the government's ability to address basic safety issues. Minister, does the government accept that, when residents start repairing public infrastructure themselves, it is a sign that the maintenance system is not meeting community expectations?

MS CHEYNE: I am aware of the social media post and that ABC Canberra was there this morning investigating, as Mary Goode does. It is something that I will be seeking some further advice on, and I will take that on notice.

But I would note that, in a general sense when it comes to repairing potholes, it really does depend on the overall condition and the use of an area. The Jamison car park is obviously very busy, but going through a car park, with the speeds that people travel through a car park, is very different to going through a major intersection, for example. I expect that it was assigned to a broader package of works that is usually delivered under a contract arrangement once a work order has been put together with a sufficient number of issues that need to be addressed together, which makes sense. But, regarding the specific pothole, I will seek some advice on exactly what Roads ACT had planned for it.

MR CAIN: Minister, what are the legal liability and insurance implications when a member of the public carries out repairs to government owned infrastructure?

MS CHEYNE: I think it depends on the infrastructure and the nature of it. Given I do not wish to mislead the Assembly, let me take that on notice and come back with an accurate answer.

MR PARTON: Minister, is it an indictment on the government that Canberrans have to resort to repairing potholes themselves?

MS CHEYNE: I reject that. Members would be aware that we had a serious issue back in 2022 when we had a period of substantial rainfall. Right across our city, we had potholes emerging everywhere and there was a considerable undertaking to fix those.

That included a major budget initiative that Minister Steele was able to seek and deliver on, and that has provided funding over a considerable period of time. Members would note that, regarding the condition of our roads across the ACT—and even the Auditor-General's report recently has flagged this—there have been major improvements overall. I appreciate that the pothole at the Jamison centre car park may have been particularly annoying for a particular person and they have taken it upon themselves to address it, but I suspect that there were good reasons it had not yet been addressed. If there were not, then I will be asking some further questions.

Community facilities—1 Moore Street—management

MS VASSAROTTI: My question is to the Minister for the Public Service and the Minister for Health Infrastructure.

The Auditor-General's report on the management of community facilities refers to a Strategic Asset Management Plan 2018-23 project which references asset management plans for a number of community facilities, including 1 Moore Street. That asset management plan identified structural asbestos and fire retardants used throughout the building and recommended removal at the cost of $1 million and decreased utilisation over a period of two years.

In June of this year, 1 Moore St was shut down because asbestos containing material was first identified in a plant room. But structural asbestos had been known to exist in 1 Moore Street in 2018. What action was taken to deal with asbestos in 1 Moore St between 2018 and June 2026?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I have a vague recollection that action was taken at that time, but I will take the question on notice and come back to the Assembly with further details in relation to that matter.

MS VASSAROTTI: How does Infrastructure Canberra identify what maintenance needs to be carried out at community facilities?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I spoke in the response to Ms Clay's question earlier about some of the work that Major Projects Canberra has been doing in relation to the management of its 243 property and land assets that it currently manages. In the response to the question on notice that I referenced earlier, there is an attachment that goes through every single one of these sites and when management plans have been created or whether they do not exist for those facilities.

As part of the 2026-27 budget, Infrastructure Canberra was funded to continue the implementation of the Strategic Asset Management Framework, and that funding will deliver additional asset management plans and asset class management plans as well as developing a new overarching strategic asset management plan for the directorate.

It is clearly the case, as the Auditor-General found, that there have been shortcomings in the way that strategic asset management has been undertaken, but I do want to recognise, very clearly, that this is not a reflection on any of the individuals involved. It is a reflection of the fact that the former Property Group was, and Infrastructure Canberra is now, managing a large portfolio of aging assets and that Infrastructure

Canberra inherited that portfolio of assets without the ICT systems and the tracking systems that we would necessarily expect to be in place and the asset management plans that we would expect to be in place. So, asset management and property services functions have now been brought together within one group within Infrastructure Canberra, and they are undertaking a four-stream reform program on structure, processes, people and systems, in order to build a simpler model with clearer accountability and role responsibility.

MS CLAY: Minister, how much did Infrastructure Canberra spend on the maintenance of community facilities in 2025-26?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I imagine that information is available in the Infrastructure Canberra annual report, but I will take the question on notice.

Sport and recreation—dryland ovals

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Minister, with summer sports starting back up, Canberrans are feeling the lack of playable sportsgrounds. That is why, on 11 June, the Assembly called on the government to develop an accelerated reactivation schedule for Canberra's 32 dryland ovals, but the government has identified just five for potential reactivation. Minister, can the government confirm whether they have ruled out reactivating any of the remaining 27 dryland ovals?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. A huge amount of work is going in by the sport and recreation team in the City and Environment Directorate to get the ovals and sportsgrounds ready for the summer season. Of course, there was a momentary shutdown in between the winter and summer seasons to allow them to undertake that work, and the grounds are looking very good around the territory. They have been engaging, I know, with many of the clubs, especially the cricket clubs that will be using the ovals over the summer season, and other sports as well.

In relation to the dryland ovals, there was a multicriteria analysis undertaken of the dryland ovals, many of which were switched off during the millennium drought. It has identified and shortlisted five of those ovals for consultation with the community, and we want to hear from particularly sports clubs about whether they want to use those ovals for formal uses. There is substantial investment required to bring dryland ovals back into use as high-quality irrigated ovals. We are seeing that when the government has invested in bringing other ovals back up to that standard, like Duffy oval, for example, in my electorate of Murrumbidgee. It can cost between $1.5 million and $2 million in order to bring them back online. That is a substantial investment, so we want to make sure that they are going to be well used.

We will not be activating every single one of them at once. We have to be targeted, and that is why the government has shortlisted five initially to understand from the community whether they would use those both for informal and formal use. We will be engaging with the community further before we make further decisions about the activation of dryland ovals, but we are keen to hear from the communities that are using our sportsgrounds. That is why we have a community infrastructure survey that has gone out to clubs and peak bodies.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, when will you fulfil the promise of the former minister to provide a reactivation schedule, including dates for bringing the five ovals back into use?

MR STEEL: Once we have consulted with the community.

MR COCKS: Minister, are any of the remaining 27 dryland oval sites currently being considered for rezoning, redevelopment or alternative uses?

MR STEEL: I understand that there is currently a major plan amendment that has been proposed by a private proponent in relation to the site at Lyneham for part of the use of that oval for a car park. Obviously that is something that will be considered. It is being assessed by the Territory Planning Authority. It will come through to me, as minister, in the future for a decision. It will no doubt come to the Assembly as well. That is the one that certainly I am aware of. It is not a government proposal. It has been put forward by a private proponent.

Generally speaking, we need to keep our sportsgrounds available for community use as our population grows, because we know that we need those sportsgrounds to be available for our growing population. That has certainly been recognised in the Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework, which envisages that, as we see the population within the Woden Valley grow, we will not only need to keep the sportsgrounds that we have but augment them. That is why it has also identified additional ovals beyond the five that we have been consulting on through this process in the future that may need to be reactivated at ovals like Lyons, Chifley and Farrer, in addition to Torrens, which has already made up part of the five that are being consulted on at the moment. We are certainly planning, with that population growth, for reactivation of the oval. One of the benefits that comes with densification is that we can get better use out of facilities and invest back into the community, so not only the new residents benefit, but the existing residents benefit too.

Transport Canberra—MyWay+

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, I understand the problem of installing MyWay+ readers on the Custom Denning buses has finally been solved. Minister, if that is the case, how much does this cost the ACT government, both for the installation and the forgone revenue whilst we have been waiting for those readers to be installed?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Braddock for the question and his ongoing interest in all things public transport. Well, I regret to let Mr Braddock down, but the installation is not yet complete. I am advised, just recently, that one of the four Custom Denning buses has been fitted. Transport Canberra has, however, instructed its installer to proceed with the remaining three. The advice I have is that the hardware and the fit-out kits for all four buses cost $7,748 and the installation of the first bus cost $3,645. The cost of installing the remaining three buses is still to be confirmed, as is the final cost after any credit under the NEC contract.

I do not have a reliable figure for the fare revenue forgone. I will attempt to give it, but

anything is going to be an estimate. This is particularly because with the Custom Denning buses, as I think Mr Braddock is aware, we need to be looking at the periods when each bus was actually carrying passengers while they did not have a functioning MyWay+ reader, but these are buses that spent considerable periods out of service for separate mechanical work. So that will need to be taken into account. So, I will take the reconciled installation cost, noting that I might not have it until that work is completed, and that revenue estimate on notice.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, what role did the contract between the ACT government and NEC play in determining those costs?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Braddock for the question. I will get to NEC, but the issue really, somewhat substantially, begins with Custom Denning. The Custom Denning electric buses that we procured had to be returned to the Sydney facility for maintenance and repairs on many occasions. Transport Canberra and Custom Denning have been working together to resolve those issues, but for significant periods of time they were not in the operational fleet, so they were not actually available for the fit-out.

To go to the actual fit-out and the contract with NEC, each bus requires an installation design suited to its dashboard and cabin, and the four Custom Denning buses have a different configuration from other buses in the fleet so they require a separate design and fit-out. They were included in the original MyWay+ installation scope, but they were not fitted in the main installation program, and then the installation operation was subsequently disbanded and since then Transport Canberra has engaged a local installer familiar with the fleet. The work order provides a credit for the installation labour originally charged under the NEC contract, and major MyWay+ equipment is also to come from existing contract quantities. I do not have those costs and the credit yet, but I am seeking a reconciliation of those so I can establish the final amount paid by the territory.

I do recognise that the installation has taken way too long. Progress has more recently been affected by waiting for installation instructions and an inspection from NEC, which is why we are proceeding with our own installer.

MS CLAY: Minister, has NEC reached the contract conclusion? And has it reached milestone 31 under the contract now?

MS CHEYNE: No, it has not, Mr Speaker. No, it has not. I know that remains incredibly disappointing, but I think it goes without saying that, as this place well knows and as has been canvassed many times, MyWay+ has consistently not delivered what Canberrans were promised and some issues have taken far too long to resolve.

I have been clear, as I made out in my response last week, with NEC including directly to its CEO that it is responsible for delivering an end-to-end solution and that means understanding the impact of a problem on customers and on Transport Canberra's operations, fixing it and demonstrating that the fix works. So deploying a fix is not enough, it has to be validated in a real operating environment before Transport Canberra can be satisfied that the issue is resolved.

What I can say is, while those milestones have not been completed, we are using the

contractual and governance mechanisms available to us much more deliberately, which I think is what the Canberra community would be expecting. Within government we are strengthening quality assurance through a risk-based approach and formal decision points so that issues are properly tested and decisions are made with clear evidence. Again, it is worth reiterating that ultimately the test that really matters is whether passengers and staff experience a measurable improvement and whether Transport Canberra can verify that NEC has delivered what it is required to deliver, which is an end-to-end solution.

Public schools—funding

MS LEE: My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, it was revealed that your directorate developed a multi-hazard risk assessment document and created a crisis management team to deal with the fallout from changes to school budgets, and assessed there being a medium risk of occupational violence as a result of the budget process.

Minister, have any ACT government principals or staff raised any work health and safety concerns with you or the directorate, either during the budget consultation meetings or any other meetings, as a result of the budget process?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Yes. Work health and safety notifications have been raised in relation to this process, by principals and others.

But I am not convinced about the way that Ms Lee has brought together the occupational violence risk that was identified in the risk assessment. My understanding is the risk in relation to principals in particular, which she appeared to be referring to, is in relation to psycho-social hazards and the stress that is placed on principals in managing through this process.

We have recognised the risk of that distress over time—throughout the process, I should say—including, as I quoted from my opinion piece that came out on 12 September, reassuring principals that they would be supported through this process. Among other things, the Education Directorate leadership has sought to work with principals. But we do know that this is a stressful period for principals.

We are trying to take a supportive approach. The point of a risk assessment process is to understand potential risks that can arise, and to ensure that action is taken to mitigate those risks. That is what the Education Directorate has been doing.

I read out yesterday, Mr Speaker, an email sent from the principal of Mount Rogers Primary School to the school community, clearly indicating that the inaccurate reporting, and the repetition of that, had created additional workload and additional demands for that principal to reassure their school community in terms of the facts.

MS LEE: Minister, what tangible actions have you or your directorate taken to, in your words, support the principals and take a supportive approach as a result of this process?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Well, as I have indicated, changes have been made to the process for the school budget processing. That has been a direct response to the feedback from principals in relation to some of the challenges that they identified in

terms of living within their Student Resource Allocation budgets, and that they needed more time and more support to work through those processes. And so, the process was slowed down.

Ms Lee, in her first question, referred to a crisis management team. That was established within the directorate. Now, it is really important to recognise that that was not because the directorate saw this as a crisis; it is a process that the directorate has for bringing together resources across the directorate—senior resources—to support the ongoing implementation of the 2027 school budgets process.

So, in term 3, the directorate was aware that this was a significant planning process for schools. And throughout term 3, the directorate sought to ensure that school leaders had practical support to work through their 2027 school staffing profiles— recognising that every year schools make decisions about staff they will need the following year, as well, as enrolments and student needs change.

They provided dedicated budget and staffing tools; direct support from executive education leaders, and people and performance; and regular opportunities for schools to work through their individual circumstances.

The proposed workforce profiles that were submitted in September gave a stronger evidence base and a clearer system-wide picture, but those profiles were only part of the planning process.

MR PARTON: Minister, how many reports have you received? Is WorkSafe involved?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take the detail of that question on notice. I did discuss it with the Education Directorate on Monday morning, but the numbers are likely to have changed since then.

I want to emphasise, though, that the changes that have been made to the process, including the changes that we are going through early in term 4, are a direct response to feedback from principals.

Principals received a budget planning tool in week 1. We are currently in the process of undertaking school budget assessments through a framework that has been established, which will consider the whole picture including each school's budget and financial position, workforce, timetabling and use of resources, school operations, curriculum needs, student support needs including support for students with disability, and work health and safety risk.

At the same time as that process is being undertaken, work health and safety staff consultations are occurring in weeks 3 and 4. So, consultation is taking place now, so that staff feedback can inform assessment before arrangements for school budgets in 2027 are confirmed.

I would just reiterate, as I have a number of times, that no ACT public school has had its budget finalised for 2027, and no final decisions have been made about staffing profiles or individual employees.

Those final projected budgets and workforce profiles are expected to be provided to schools in week 5. Just today I have seen a message from the Australian Education Union to its members, encouraging them to participate in this work to ensure that all of the implications of budgets can be understood.

National Multicultural Festival 2027

MS BERRY: My question is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Minister, could you provide an update on preparations for the National Multicultural Festival for 2027?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Berry for the question and, as always, her continuing support for the National Multicultural Festival. The National Multicultural Festival is the ultimate community celebration of cultural diversity and inclusion in Canberra. The festival will be held from 5 to 7 February and planning is well underway. The team are busy finalising the site plan, approving grant applications, allocating stalls, programming fantastic shows as well as making sure that the festival will have something for everyone.

I look forward to making further announcements about the programming in the not too distant future. What I can say now, though, is that we have made a call for Canberrans to put their hand up to volunteer at the festival. Applications are open until 1 December, and I would encourage everyone listening to jump on the festival's website and consider signing up, and I would encourage members to promote it on their social media channels as well.

MS BERRY: Minister, what types of volunteer roles are available at the festival and what skills or experiences are the organisers particularly seeking?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Berry for the supplementary. There is a wide variety of roles available, each of which presents a fabulous opportunity to enjoy the festival and an opportunity to meet people from across our great city. Our wonderful volunteers can help set up the stages and host performances as masters of ceremonies. They make the parade possible and they help attendees navigate the festival. We welcome people with a range of interests and skills to sign up, including those who enjoy helping people, working behind the scenes, supporting events or just sharing their language and their cultural knowledge. Volunteers who speak languages other than English are particularly encouraged to apply, so that we can support people from our diverse cultures and keep the festival as accessible as possible.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, why are volunteers so important to the festival?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the supplementary as well as his ongoing support for the festival. Volunteers are what make the festival such a strong community event. Their enthusiasm creates the vibrant atmosphere that attracts thousands of visitors and allows our multicultural community to showcase itself to our city and our nation. At its heart, the festival's success relies upon volunteers, our community groups sharing their culture through performance and stalls as well as the wider community coming together to celebrate diversity, inclusion and multicultural spirit.

Each and every year this brings together all elements of Canberra into one of our most loved events. I am sure all members in this place cannot wait for the 2027 festival, and I look forward to seeing all members there.

Mr Barr: Further questions can be placed on the notice paper, Mr Speaker.